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Dance Interpretation and the Cultural Institution

Exploring the condition(s) of British and French contemporary dance in the 1990s

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of Laban Centre London and City University for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

April 2001

by

Anna Pakes

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DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

This study examines what is intended and understood as the meaning of contemporary dance in its sociocultural context, in which the role of the state is a significant factor. It investigates the extent to which the structures and practices of public arts funding influence the production and reception of contemporary dance, focusing on British and French dance in the 1990s. By focusing on specific works in critically reflexive terms, it seeks to offer a basis for future ethnographic study of dance practices and dance audiences. The thesis employs a critical hermeneutic method, offering a philosophical reflection on dance as well as exploring the mutual implication of artistic practice, aesthetic response and their socio-political and economic contexts.

The philosophical grounding of the investigation is explored in detail, in order to support a reflexive engagement of methodological issues of broader relevance to the discipline of dance studies. The relation between verbal language and dance is critically examined: drawing from Saussure and Wittgenstein, the argument is made for the contextual determination of meaning in both these “forms of life”. A discussion of aesthetic and anthropological theories which recognise the mutual implication of artwork and context is followed by a reflection on the methods of dance analysis that most effectively explore the extent and character of that implication. Phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches are discussed, including methods derived and adapted from the study of literature which focus analytic attention on the reception rather than production of texts. An emphasis on spectatorship and dance interpretation seeks to redress what is argued as an imbalance in dance studies, namely the privileging of the perspectives of choreographing and performing subjects in dance analysis.

The empirical investigation explores the structure and development, since 1945, of what is termed the “cultural institution”, namely the set of conventions and practices which both enable and constrain the production and reception of contemporary dance art. It is argued that the state, through intervention via policy formulation and subsidy distribution, has played a key role in setting parameters within the “danceworld”, a subsidiary of the broader cultural institution and the environment which contexts contemporary dance performance. An overview of the politico-economic conditions of dance in the 1990s is presented, and four case studies then extend this discussion by exploring how those conditions are actualised on individual sites of dance production and reception. Four works are examined in detail (Kim Brandstrup’s *Crime Fictions*, Russell Maliphant’s *Unspoken*, Daniel Larrieu’s *Mobile* and Hervé Robbe’s *Id.*), in terms of their institutional context and the viewing experiences to which they give rise, arguing for a connection between the types of aesthetic response articulated and the institutional conditions in which the works are performed and received.

The thesis argues against a determinist relation between the politico-economic context and the aesthetics of dance, proposing instead that these two dimensions of contemporary dance practice need to be examined conjointly. It seeks to demonstrate that this is crucial, if the current condition of contemporary dance in Britain and France is to be both understood and critically appraised.

0. INTRODUCTION

0.1 Core Issues and Theoretical Approaches

The central question of this study can be defined as follows: in what ways, and to what extent, do the structures and practices of public arts funding impact on the production and reception of contemporary dance in Britain and France? The study seeks to locate and reflect upon concerns arising out of my own involvement in dance training, production and spectatorship in the two countries over the past decade. In particular, the thesis seeks to uncover and explore a developing conviction about the mutual dependence of artistic practice, politico-administrative practice and modes of aesthetic response to dance, and, on a broader level, to investigate dance art as a phenomenon always formed and experienced in relation to a social, political and economic context.

The study itself is contexted by the increasing incidence and visibility, since the mid-1980s, of critical dance scholarship, which, unlike its formalist and traditional historical precursors, is crucially concerned with “the operations of social power” and the “ideological underpinnings of aesthetic practices” (Desmond ed. 1997:1). Influenced by a variety of theoretical perspectives sheltering under the umbrella terms of structuralism and poststructuralism, this critical dance scholarship often draws from neighbouring disciplines (including literary studies and cultural studies in particular) to develop a reflection on dance practice and its modes of representation. Such recent work includes, for example: Foster’s seminal (1986) text, which explores the semiotics of diverse historical and contemporary dance practices; a variety of feminist-based investigations of ballet and modern dance (e.g. Garafola ed. 1997, Manning 1993); the dance sociology of Thomas (1995) and Prickett (1992); and the poststructuralist-influenced historical revisionism of Franko (1992, 1995) and Manning (1993). In addition to these book-length studies, a proliferation of shorter articles and essays by these and other critical dance scholars have appeared in edited collections, including Foster (ed.) (1995) and (1996), Thomas (ed.) (1993) and (1997), Goellner & Murphy (eds.) (1995), Morris (ed.) (1996), and Desmond (ed.) (1997)¹. While pointing up the diversity of interests currently operating in the field of dance studies, such texts argue broadly for a more socially and politically informed approach to the investigation of assumptions about the essence, autonomy and value of dance practice, as well as highlighting the lack of reflexivity with which traditional dance scholarship engages with the status of its own discourse.

¹ See also the journals Dance Research, Dance Research Journal, The Drama Review and Performance Research, which more or less regularly publish such work.

While some of this work has been published after the period in which the substantive research for this project was completed, this study shares both preoccupations and a cultural / academic climate with the emerging critical dance scholarship. Thus, the interest here in reception (explored theoretically in Chapter 2 and empirically through Chapters 4 to 7) parallels a generally renewed concern with issues of dance spectatorship, evident, for example, in Foster (1986), Manning (1993) and Franko (1995), as well as in many of the essays in the edited collections mentioned above. Certain features of the approach adopted here also distinguish this study from the work of these writers. Rather than, like Foster (1986), offering a largely abstract, semiotically-grounded account of the preferred readings to which different choreographic practices give rise, this study also seeks to account for the dance spectator as a social agent, whose interpretations are at least partly pre-structured (in recoverable ways) by her/his implication in a given culture and who, on this basis, can accept, reject or extend the parameters of the preferred readings which a structural-semiotic analysis elucidates.

This effort to ground more sociologically the concept of the dance spectator is also evident in other recent dance writing, as, for example, in the work of Manning (1993 and 1995) who uses a reader-oriented approach to explore how gender identity and ideologies of nationalism influenced aesthetic response to early modern dance in Germany. Other essays in the edited collections mentioned above also explore dance interpretation in relation to issues of gender, ethnicity and sexual orientation, fruitfully challenging the assumption that dance works are meaningful independently of their audiences and those viewers' historical and cultural contexts. While there are continuities between such writing and the analysis of spectatorship developed here, my own research operates at a different level, addressing the epistemological and ontological grounds of the viewing subject's social constitution. The aim is to enable a more dynamic perspective on the shifting parameters of social agents' encounter with art in which a range of different readings present themselves in any given situation, but the precise character of which depends at once on the predisposition and intentional engagement of the viewer, on the institutional frameworks which enable dance art's emergence in the public sphere and on the nature of the art "object" as a semiotic structure with its own peculiarities as a work. The study seeks to come to terms with the issue of interpretative variability (both within and between individual spectators' responses) rather than simply proposing alternative readings as available to viewers falling into pre-given socio-cultural categories.

The institutional framework of contemporary dance practice is thus posited as one set of factors that condition the experience of dance art. The character of this framework is explored through a developing political economy of the “danceworld”, viewed in relation to the broader historical, social and economic context and in terms of the way it inflects the production and reception of particular instances of dance practice. Again, this approach is broadly in line with emerging critical dance scholarship’s concern with operations of social power and ideology, although there is also here an effort to explore the extent to which such operations are themselves historically contingent on the constitutive action of social agents. One might also argue that, despite the declared interest in the social, political and ideological inflection of dance practice, critical dance scholarship does not, in its methodological procedure, always recognise the extent to which dance texts and their broader contexts are mutually implicated. There is still, perhaps, a tendency evident in the discourse of some new dance writers to maintain a rigid distinction between factors intrinsic and extrinsic to “the dance itself”. Thus, for example, Morris’s editor’s introduction to the (1996) volume formulates a core debate of current dance scholarship as the choice between “enlarging the foundation of the [dance] field [...] *or* placing dance within the wider context of culture (p.2, my italics). Similarly Jordan & Thomas (1994:7, and *passim*) emphasise the demarcation between intrinsic and extrinsic modes of dance analysis. Thomas (1995), meanwhile, proposes a sociology of American modern dance in two parts: an intrinsic account which addresses the “aesthetic components” of dance, and a discussion of the broader, extrinsic factors which “contains the sociological element” (23). While she argues that both perspectives are crucial to the sociological understanding of dance, she still notes that they “appear to be almost diametrically opposed” as forms of analysis (*ibid.*). From the perspective of this thesis (and as argued in Chapters 1 and 2 below), such a sharp division between the interiority and exteriority of the aesthetic object is both methodologically problematic and, ultimately, philosophically untenable. Rather, this study seeks to investigate how the aesthetic structure of contemporary dance practice is mutually implicated with its social, political and economic environment.

The emphasis on maintaining the visibility of “the dance itself”, manifest in the formulations of some critical dance scholarship, is perhaps evidence of a residual commitment to modernist conceptions of the dance medium as defined by certain essential characteristics which it is the task of dance writers (like their modernist artist counterparts) to bring to light. Such commitments are understandable in a context where dance and dance studies remain marginalised in relation to better established

art forms and disciplines; thus, claims about the specificity of the dance medium are one dimension of a bid for a general recognition of dance art as a valid and analytically interesting field of endeavour. They do run the risk, however, of militating against the development of a dance scholarship that can draw productively on multi-disciplinary resources. The issue of dance art's autonomy carries over into the new dance scholarship's disciplinary self-consciousness and emerges where suspicion is voiced as to the capacity of concepts and models, initially formulated elsewhere, to assist in probing dance phenomena. Morris's introduction to the (1996) volume, for example, questions whether dance needs to develop its own disciplinary specificity rather than risk colonization by other more established disciplines, and warns of the risk "that dance will be lost" in the mire of intertextual, interdisciplinary work (10-11). Recognizing the validity of Siegel's plea "not to forget dance in the rush to embrace theory" (11), Morris implies that the character and value of dance practice are already given and always already in tension with theoretical perspectives. From the perspective of this thesis, such claims are problematic, not just in their reliance on unacceptable generalisations about theory, but also in their unreflexive assumptions about what "the dance itself" is or might be. Clearly, there is a requirement on any form of empirical research which claims to be reflexive that the peculiarity of the material examined not be blindly subsumed under inappropriate theoretical paradigms (on this issue, see also Chapter 2 below). What is concerning about Siegel's and Morris's formulations, cited above, is the implication that "dance" as a general term unproblematically designates a particular, unified and autonomous mode of activity or experience, to be preserved inviolable rather than further investigated and differentiated analytically.

The emphasis on the specificity of dance also perhaps connects with a recently renewed interest in the body within the humanities. As both sociology, history and cultural studies have developed, in the last few decades, a concern with the body as a previously neglected site for scholarly investigation (Shilling 1993, Featherstone *et al.* 1991, Feher *et al.* 1989), dance studies has become increasingly conscious of itself as crucially concerned with embodiment and corporeality. This is a positive general development insofar as it opens to investigation a previously under-explored dimension of social experience and also, perhaps, since it accords new prominence to dance practices and dance studies within the humanities. It may also, however, skew some forms of dance scholarship anxious to exploit the emergent openings: the effort to distinguish dance as an embodied practice from other forms of art / social activity may translate into an unreflexive privileging of the experiential perspective of the dancer or choreographer (the most obviously embodied agents involved in the practice) as

constitutive of dance as such. Chapter 2 below explores a tendency to ignore or collapse the experience of other agents involved with dance into that of the performer, with reference to particular scholarly texts. Indications of a similar bias can be discerned in the repeated insistence of a variety of dance scholars that they are also performers and choreographers, as if their theoretical and verbal interventions in dance studies can ultimately be justified by the fact of their involvement as practitioners of dance art: see, for example, Morris (ed.) (1996: 8-9) and Desmond's claim (in Desmond ed. 1997: 13-14) that Foster's extensive "insider" experience of dance techniques makes for a greater than usual "ethnographic depth" in her analysis of different Western dance forms. This is not to suggest that it is not valid to investigate the experience of the performer or choreographer. The problem arises, however, when it is assumed to be definitive of dance as such.

Such issues are subject to scrutiny in Part I of this study that seeks to develop a sound, reflexive theoretical basis for the empirically-oriented analysis which follows in Part II. Chapters 1 and 2 thus explore a variety of relevant perspectives in aesthetics, sociology, anthropology and literary theory, beginning with an examination of the relation between language and dance, and the heuristic potential of linguistic analogies in opening dance to investigation. Both of these topics are key to the investigation as a whole. The thesis itself is a verbal, written document and is necessarily concerned with issues of interpretation and meaning in dance, in that it both develops its own account of dance's significance and makes claims about how contemporary dance is received by a broader public. Verbal language is the medium through which (at least as far as this study is concerned) reflection on experience becomes possible and publicly communicable; but it also, arguably, provides a model for investigating issues of interpretation and meaning in non-verbal cultural forms. Despite this, there is a tradition of scepticism concerning the capacity of linguistic methodologies, and even of language as such, to account for or productively probe the specificities of the dance medium. Chapter 1 critically engages with this tradition (and features of its more contemporary inflection in new dance scholarship), in the effort to lay the foundations for drawing from the philosophy of language, as well as linguistic-semiotic and literary modes of analysis in the study as a whole. It points to the crucial role of context in determining the meaning of any given stretch of discourse or instance of cultural practice, proceeding to explore the link between this argument and institutional, sociological and anthropological approaches to art phenomena, each of which furnishes useful analytical and methodological resources for Part II of this study.

Chapter 1 also, however, highlights the problems of exploiting such resources, centring on issues such as the degree of autonomy that the art institutional context enjoys and the extent to which the intentional action of human agents plays a part in determining that context and the dance works emerging from it. To claim (as the central research question implies) that art is conditioned by its social, political and economic context is not necessarily to argue for a simple causal determination of dance art by the social network in which it takes place. The concern here is with human action in the intersubjective realm, that is, with a world that is created, sustained and modified through human praxis. While the third section of Chapter 1 explores this idea with reference to anthropological and ethnographic perspectives on dance, Chapter 2 broadens the discussion to consider how various strands of phenomenological and hermeneutic enquiry formulate the categories of intentional action and agency. Phenomenology's insistence on the constitutive role of human consciousness's engagement with the world is particularly pertinent to an investigation of art phenomena. The latter, as argued in Chapter 2, are irreducible to a set of physical objects or products existing independently of consciousness. The phenomenological approach effectively reaches behind such objectifications to develop an interpretative understanding of the intentional dynamics of the cultural sphere. Chapter 2 argues that events and actions in the broader socio-political domain can be similarly investigated interpretatively to reveal the complex of intentions and social interactions from which they emerge as moments in the historical process. Chapter 2 also, then, aims to deepen the reflection on the epistemological basis of this study. In keeping with phenomenologically and hermeneutically inspired research in the humanities, it questions whether the objectifying, causal explanatory mode typical of the natural sciences is appropriate to the investigation of historical human action.

Like Chapter 1, however, Chapter 2 is also preoccupied with the potential dangers of intentionalism in analysis, which may both hypostatise the individual as a category and overestimate the capacity of agents to control social and cultural processes. One strategy for dealing with this problematic (proposed in Chapter 2) is to recognise ways in which social and cultural phenomena can assume an objectified form, crystallising as relatively autonomous structures, institutions or distinct events irreducible to the intentions and contexts from which they emerge. Where language, art and social action objectify themselves in discourse "produced as work displaying structure and form" (Ricoeur 1981:92), structural rather than linear causal explanation can be invoked as a complement to interpretative understanding. In the empirical study that follows in Part II of this thesis, this principle is applied in both the historical overview of the social,

political and economic context of British and French contemporary dance in general (Chapter 3), as well as in close readings of particular dance works (Chapters 4 to 7) the methodological and substantive parameters of which are discussed below (pp.15-24).

Through the reflection on method and its philosophical grounds, the thesis thus adopts what can be broadly categorised as a critical hermeneutic approach in formulating an answer to the central problem. Crucial to this approach is a reflexive awareness of how the research question itself embodies a range of assumptions and interests that will in part determine the selection, organisation and interpretative engagement with empirical material. The character of my own experience of contemporary dance art in the two countries and of my training in literary analysis and theory, also predisposes my interpretative engagement with the topic in a variety of ways which I hope will continue to be laid bare as the study proceeds. In general terms, meanwhile, the broad approach seeks to take account of this predisposition as an horizon of expectations that opens to interpretation the material under scrutiny: in line with the perspective of Gadamer (1975), this horizon is conceived as an essential prerequisite of understanding rather than an unhelpful bias that will distort the conclusions drawn, provided it is balanced by a dialectical openness to the variegated and contingent character of empirical experience and evidence. By endeavouring to retain such openness and simultaneously uncover the assumptions and interests that guide the research process, the critical hermeneutic perspective also emphasises that interpretative predisposition is itself also (at least partly) the embodiment of issues and problems implicit in the broader sphere from which it derives. The approach adopted in formulating and answering a question is thus not so much the “pure” product of an autonomous subject’s thought processes, but rather formed by and through the social, cultural and linguistic context which relativises the conscious control of the individual researcher.

0.2 A Political Economy of the “Danceworld”

Chapter 1 argues that the Institutional Theory of Art offers insights useful to this investigation by suggesting that art practice is made possible by a relatively autonomous network of social relations, a set of conventions, roles and established procedures, forming an “artworld” institution. Subject to structural analysis, an artworld’s principles of operation can be uncovered as a way of understanding and explaining the social phenomenon of the art institution itself, but also as a first stage in accounting for the status, meaning and significance of particular artworks. In Part II of this thesis and in line with the premise of the central research question, the structures and practices of public arts funding in Britain and France are considered significant elements of this artworld institution: by subsidising an art form, a government not only modifies the economic functioning of that form’s particular world or institution, it also implicitly or explicitly declares it to be worthy of public attention, altering the character of the relations between artist / artwork and audience on both a material and symbolic level. In this sense, then, the state arts administration exercises what Mann characterises as both “despotic” and “infrastructural” power (Mann 1986; Hall & Ikenberry 1989:13) through its policy formulations and selective funding practices, as well as in its interactions with the various other subsystems of the artworld institution.

For the purposes of this investigation, then, public arts funding is conceived as an institution in its own right, in triangular relation with the art economy / market and the “civil society” of participants in culture (including artists and audiences)², where each point of the triangle is only relatively autonomous, interacting dynamically with the other two. The investigation in Chapter 3 also posits the artworld as itself contingent on a set of social, political and economic conditions which transcend the boundaries of the relatively autonomous art sphere and which enable the emergence of the concept of autonomous art itself, as well as of the institution with the authority to confer art status. Thus the art institutional triangle (of state arts funding, the arts economy and the “civil” society of artists and audiences) is framed by a wider set of relations between State, Economy and Society which, in diachronic perspective and in the particular case of contemporary Western society, is here argued to have a substantial impact on the constitution and character of contemporary dance practice.

² characterised as a “civil society” to distinguish this set of relationships from that imposed by the system of (economic) exchange. Otherwise there would be a danger of reducing interpersonal relations to an economic norm (producer-distributor-consumer relations), where one of the central purposes of this study is to argue that a different model of social relations is possible and in evidence (if often masked) in the contemporary world.

According to this model, the State is granted a significant degree of autonomy and accorded a key place in influencing the dynamic relations between the economy and society, in general. The State structure thus assumes a weight and an autonomy it is not accorded in more society-oriented models of political economy, such as the classic Marxist and structural Marxist paradigms (Poggi 1990:93-99; Althusser 1984:14-22; Hall & Ikenberry 1989: 1-15). The classic Marxist perspective envisages the sets of relations described above more hierarchically, seeing society as divided into a dominant and dominated class, as determined by the relation of these groups to the means of production or economic power. The state or government would then be defined as both product and instrument of the dominant class, a superstructural expression of a given economic and social relation, which reinforces the subjugation of the dominated³. Pursuing the logic of this model in the context of the specific interests here, the state arts administration would become a part of the governmental superstructure, reinforcing by controlling the arts and cultural spheres the hegemony of the dominant class and the set of economic power relations on which its dominance depends. And art would be conceived as an essentially ideological phenomenon, as a vehicle for reinforcing and maintaining the domination established by other (economic and social) means.

There are a number of reasons why this hierarchical conception of how society, the economy and the state interact is problematic here. Firstly, shifts in the structure and constitution of the capitalist system, in its “advanced” phase, have profoundly altered the character of the divisions between social classes (have even, according to some, thrown into doubt the relevance of the concept of social class *per se*: see Calvert 1982 and Bottomore 1991). Any straightforward and / or rigid division between a dominant (ruling and middle) and a dominated (working) class is problematised by such developments, as are conceptual models that unreflexively adopt a classificatory framework of this kind. Secondly, the “simple” Marxist model underestimates the relative autonomy of the state and the political sphere in general, as well as the level of fragmentation and diversity that the state structure exhibits as it grows (Poggi 1990, Rosanvallon 1990:11-14). By claiming that the whole of the state (as a superstructural phenomenon) is geared towards the pursuit of the interests deriving from a singular dominant ideology (or from a homogenous dominant class) misrepresents the extent of the contradictions between, as well as the sheer variety of, different spheres of state

³ See Dyson (1980: 234-243) and Jessop (1982) for more detailed accounts of the emphasis of different Marxist theories of the state.

action. A number of political commentators recognise how, in Western societies of the twentieth century, the scope of state action - and the extent of the infrastructural network enabling this - has been significantly enlarged (Poggi 1978, 1990; Ashford 1986; Rosanvallon 1990), highlighting the development of welfare states in particular as an embodiment of this phenomenon. Recognising this growth of the State is important in relation to the investigation here because it has enabled the modern system of public funding for the arts to come into being.

There are also, however, several commentators who would question whether it is legitimate to posit the State as central in a model of the political economy of culture. A theorist such as Bennett (1992), for example, drawing on the work of Foucault (1980), is critical of an outdated tendency within cultural studies to conceive of power emanating from a single “monarchical” source, such as the State. Bennett proposes that his discipline should focus rather on the dispersal of power throughout social life, its “myriad operators [...] forms of subjection and the inflections and utilizations of their localized systems” (Foucault 1980: 102, cited in Bennett 1992: 398). Hohendahl (1983) also questions whether, within the cultural sphere, it is viable to conceive of power emanating from a central state: he is concerned that the art institution in particular will be misrepresented if aligned with models like that of ideological state apparatuses proposed by Althusser (1984:1-60). For Hohendahl (1983:126-131), such models underestimate the relative autonomy of cultural institutions, more effectively conceptualised by adapting more malleable concepts such as Habermas’ notion of the public sphere (Habermas 1989), which can take account of the ways in which artistic practice and its context both challenge and oppose, as well as being indirectly determined by, dominant ideologies and the broader structures of social, political and economic power.

While recognising the dangers of resorting to simplistic determinism in the political economy of culture, however, this study is crucially concerned with recognising the role that the state has assumed as legitimator and enabler of dance practice. In some cultural forms, such as literature (Hohendahl’s focus) and the visual arts, the state’s role may be very limited in setting the parameters of action (for example, through copyright laws, taxation, some control over print media and minimal interference in publishing); the performing arts in both Britain and France, meanwhile, have since the formal establishment of the state arts administrations in the immediate post-war period been privileged sites of intervention by these bodies. Modern and contemporary dance practitioners may have struggled to gain recognition from this sector of the public

administration (an issue examined in more detail in Chapter 3), but currently the state (broadly defined to include both local and central government) is still the single most significant funder of contemporary dance activity in both Britain and France. Without a conceptual framework which can recognise the state as a key player in this cultural field (or “danceworld” institution), its pervasive presence will either remain undetected or be underestimated.

This is not to suggest, however, that the state is itself a homogenous, monolithic structure with a simple determining influence on social action in the art and cultural sphere. The extension of the scope of state action has, arguably, been accompanied by an increased diversification of governmental structures (Rosanvallon 1990:11; Poggi 1990:121). From this perspective, state power itself appears dispersed in a series of governmental practices, conventions and subsystems which participate in various ways, rather than assuming an unassailable position of dominance, in political and social struggle. Thus, central government is divided into a series of departments which may operate according to more or less commensurate interests; the type of government in power is itself dependent on the electoral and party political processes; the latter also inflect, on a different level, the strata of regional and local government, often working in opposition to, as well as necessarily in conjunction with, their central counterpart; elected representatives themselves are dependent in their action on professional executives (the civil service, as well as arm’s length administrative organisations), which again may be working to a set of parameters not commensurate with the interests of a ruling party or parliamentary majority. In the arts sphere, in particular, the actions of central and local government are informed by the participation of semi-professional or non-professional advisory structures, often dominated by establishment figures who concurrently occupy also a different role elsewhere in the arts institution. The idea that the state exists as a coherent body that imposes the policy and subsidy decisions it has taken independently of the arts sphere, with a view to reinforcing a single definable ideological position, will distort the operations of power seen as more dispersed and riddled with tensions. This is not to rule out the possibility of identifying certain dominant principles of political and economic organisation within the form of life of a given historical period and culture; it is to suggest, however, that such principles can only be legitimately highlighted once the different state structures have been investigated in their diversity. But concepts of the state, and a model (or series of models) of state action, are necessary prerequisites if this range of tensions, as well as common traits, is to be elucidated.

If the notion of a monolithic state inappropriately skews an investigation of this kind, the idea that the artworld (or, in this case, the danceworld) constitutes a homogenous, internally coherent system is also problematic. As indicated in Chapter 1, Bourdieu's (1993) characterisation of the art sphere as a site of political and social struggle, in which different interests and interest groups compete, has greater explanatory power than an institutional art theory which conceives of that institution as a relatively static, purely enabling structure which endows the works produced under its aegis with an apparently unassailable status as art. The case of contemporary dance art in particular evidences this: this cultural form is now part of the state arts administrations' portfolio, attracting subsidy and subject to policy pronouncements from the governments of both Britain and France; where contemporary dance receives coverage in the national press and media, it tends to be aligned with the "high" arts rather than popular or commercial culture, and does, therefore, occupy a place in the artworld strictly defined as a sphere of "restricted" rather than "large-scale" production (Bourdieu 1993:53). But, equally, contemporary dance has not enjoyed high art status for very long and the empirical evidence suggests that its role within the artworld is still contested and shifting with the variety of transformations that high art practice currently undergoes. In this, contemporary dance may function as an interesting case study which raises to prominence the dynamics and tensions implicit in relations between the artworld institution and many more established art forms, but which are masked by the greater level of consensus which operates with regard to those forms' status and role in public life. An historical reflection on these tensions, their genesis and evolution, assists in understanding the peculiarity of the position of contemporary dance within social life, as well as the extent to which generalisations are possible from this specific case to art in general.

Chapter 3, then, proceeds on the basis that dance practice participates in a broader form of life which can be characterised by the two sets of triangular relations identified above (State - Economy - Society; State arts administration - arts economy - "civil" society of artists and audiences). It also posits that the character of these sets of relations is expressed and betrayed through the (verbal and non-verbal) language that mediates between them, articulated as discourse or as "work displaying structure and form" (Ricoeur 1981:92). Policy documents, criticism, the media in general, dance performances, their publicity material and programme notes are all examined as texts which may reveal the assumptions operative in the art/dance sphere at large. Recognising also that language is constitutive, rather than purely reflective, of social

life, the study considers how such discourse may both reinforce and shift the nature of the relations between the different points of the triangles.

The institutional analysis below (pp.105-154) also draws on secondary sources, i.e. on critical commentaries on the developments of arts administration and on the historical evolution of different forms of social, economic and political organisation as they impact on the arts sphere. As a further interpretation of a cultural practice in social and political context, the study negotiates a variety of accounts of British and French contemporary history as well as diverse explanations of the arts' place within that history. Contemporary dance remains the particular focus, even as the broader artworld context is also considered. Dance art has not been extensively investigated in the context of its institutional framework (especially in the period and countries which are the focus of study here). This analysis should, therefore, highlight points of discrepancy as well as continuity with other explanatory analyses of this period in cultural, social and economic history. While this investigation explores contemporary dance in the light of interpretative frames and perspectives developed in relation to other cultural formations, it also seeks to retain an awareness of the material's resistance to the imposition and importation of such sets of meanings. The hermeneutic contingency of any human "science", emphasised at the end of Chapter 2, cannot but be evident also here. But the process of arguing in favour of a given interpretation, while reflexively recognising its presuppositions and limitations, lends validity to that construction of meaning insofar as the series of justifications and contextualisations provided have the power both individually and cumulatively to convince.

0.3 Reading Closely Particular Dance “Texts”

Whilst Chapter 3 offers a contemporary historical account of the social, economic and political conditions of dance practice, Chapters 4 to 7 shift the focus of investigation to examine particular sites of cultural action by examining closely four contemporary dance works. The analyses of dance works are presented as case studies, illustrating how institutional conditions are actualised at specific historical moments. The conclusions drawn in relation to specific works are not generalisable to the contemporary dance sphere at large in any straightforward sense: indeed, the investigation proceeds on the basis of the principle (emerging from the philosophical exploration in Chapters 1 and 2) that individual works are relatively autonomous, objectified structures in their own right of which the peculiarity must be recognised. Despite this, the analyses of particular works do extend the discussion of the broader institutional context in examining the practical negotiation of the social, economic and political conditions elucidated in Chapter 3: the analysis of given works allows an opportunity for reflection back on these conditions and hence an exploration of how they in turn may be influenced by their actualisation on a variety of localised sites.

If general conclusions are to emerge from the analyses of particular dance works, they will partly depend upon, and be contexted by, the rationale for choosing those works. This is grounded in the variety of interests of the investigation as a whole. These interests include, on the one hand, those deriving from the philosophical material presented in Chapters 1 and 2, which deal with issues of meaning, representation and the linguisticity (or otherwise) of dance signification. The works selected play in different ways on the narrative, visual, expressive and emotive capacities of contemporary dance, eliciting different ranges of responses and possible meaning-constructions, and demonstrating the variety of signifying practices engaged in dance performance. On the other hand, key themes also emerge from the account in Chapter 3 of the institutional (social, political and economic) conditions of art: thus, the different choreographies examined each bring into play a particular set of material resources, are dependent on a particular configuration of the subsystems of the “danceworld” and, as such, acquire a particular symbolic status and position within the dance institution and the public sphere where a variety of dance discourses collide. Since the core question of this investigation engages with the issue of public arts funding, works have also been selected on the basis of their direct economic link with the system of state subsidy, the particular character of which is explicated on a case-by-case basis.

As suggested below (pp. 53-56 and 75-85), the concept of the artwork is itself theoretically problematic, especially in a performing art such as dance where it is difficult to pinpoint a determinate structure with a fixed identity that remains constant through its manifold instantiations. Moreover, structuralist and poststructuralist theories have launched a general challenge to the notion of the artwork as a unified and substantial totality: both Barthes (1977: 155-164) and Foucault (1991:103-105) argue that the concept of the work is a falsification, bound up with traditional intentionalist and individualist assumptions, and with the reificatory and commodifying characteristics of consumer capitalism; they propose rather that the “work” be treated as a text, a “methodological field” (Barthes 1977:157) or site where the diverse and indeterminate signifying strands of any cultural artefact can be investigated in their contradictions as well as their continuities. Provided the contingency of the artwork is recognised, however, the concept still retains an explanatory usefulness in designating a particular site of cultural action and artistic signification. As argued in Chapter 2, the work has an ontic foundation constituted in the intersubjective consensus by which its structure, meaning and value come into being. The social and institutional contexts of art are the sites on which such consensus is established and sustained. The analysis of those contexts also involves, therefore, an examination of how, at particular moments, this consensus emerges and inflects the process of reception, furnishing an objectified structure which can decontextualise and recontextualise itself in different spheres of meaning (see below, pp.59-61). The question of whether such objectification necessarily entails the commodification of cultural practice is itself an issue for discussion here, but one that runs the risk of being sidelined if the notion of the work is summarily abandoned.

By addressing specific dance works, Chapters 4 to 7 thus seek to take account of the contingency of the artwork as dynamic construction by recognising the status and contribution of the different types of evidence which ground the ethnographic reconstructions of particular events within a socio-historical process. The analyses draw on a range of resources: the researcher’s own memory of live performances and notes taken immediately following the event; the video record of this or another performance; in some cases, the televisual reworking of the piece; the choreographer’s articulation of his intentions and interpretations in a dedicated interview⁴; and the other

⁴ This kind of evidence is used partly to balance the perspectives of spectators with that of at least one of the artistic creators of the work. The choreographer is selected as representative of the latter because, in the contemporary socio-historical context, despite the collaborative and

verbal discourses which surround and define the work as such, including publicity, programme notes, title, and press articles (critical reviews of this and other works of the choreographer/company, interviews with the artists, etc.). These diverse traces already constitute readings and interpretations that raise to prominence different features of the work. The traces themselves embody a set of hermeneutic elections, made on the basis of particular interests, which, in turn, are subject to examination in the discussion of the works concerned. Chapters 4 to 7 thus also engage with how various discourses and types of evidence inscribe, and, in articulating, potentially transform, a range of assumptions deriving from the work's institutional and socio-political context. In that these discourses prestructure the response of the researcher and may also partly determine other spectators' constructions of meaning, a reflexive awareness of their status and parameters is crucial.

Each analysis, therefore, begins by locating the work in relation to the material examined in Chapter 3. It proceeds to offer an interpretative, "thick" description of a particular performance, viewed from the researcher's own perspective, partly determined by the interests of this investigation. Since a core concern of this project is the topic of meaning itself, this account also draws on the resources of semiology and reader-response criticism / reception theory to interrogate the basis of the interpretation (see Chapter 2 below which grounds and justifies this methodological approach). The researcher's own reading is then relativised through an engagement with other verbal concretisations of the work's signifying potential as articulated in criticism of the particular performances. Chapters 4 to 7 discuss at least two published reviews of each work, in order both to open to scrutiny the variability of response and to further examine how the communal categories of the socio-institutional context may prestructure dance interpretation. As suggested above, published reviews themselves inscribe a variety of assumptions, norms and values governing the institutional context of dance, allowing a link to be forged between this aspect of the discussion and the material of Chapter 4. Because critical response to choreographic work is taken into account when funding and policy decisions are made, reviews may also impact on the financial and political status of the companies concerned: consequently, these verbal positionings of the work, the choreographer and/or company have the potential, directly and indirectly, to influence the material and symbolic constitution of the dance institution.

collective character of dance production, he remains the individual who initiates and steers the development and exposure of dance work, as well as assuming ultimate responsibility for

Criticism also functions as a subsystem of the “danceworld” through which readings or interpretations of works are recommended to a wider public. Even in those cases where the review is published after the fact of a performance (i.e. when it may no longer be possible to see the work on stage) the critic’s interpretation furnishes a reference-point for other spectators who have seen the work, and who may thus dialogically revisit and revise their own interpretation in light of the other’s views⁵. Critical reviews also contribute to the symbolic status within the public sphere of the contemporary dance form in general, insofar as potential spectators of future works may read, be engaged or repelled by the form’s critical representation. An analysis of reviews opens up the wider question of how spectators in general receive contemporary dance, not because all spectators will inevitably be influenced by the “authoritative” interpretations of the institutionally powerful, but because the negotiation of such readings as well as of the non-verbal signifying material of dance performance allows the grounds on which interpretative decisions are made to be brought to light. The Conclusion to the thesis examines in more detail the wider question of how broader audience (and potential audience) constituencies respond to contemporary dance: it reflects on how the conclusions drawn in the discussion of responses to particular works (Chapters 4 to 7) can form a basis for investigating issues of reception in this wider context.

defining its semiotic constitution, if not the range of meanings constructed in other agents’ encounters with that semiotic fabric.

⁵ One of the arguments put forward in Chapter 3 is that, as in other realms, the extent to which there is a public sphere or forum for open debate on cultural issues has been constrained in modern Western society by a variety of political, social and economic developments. In contemporary dance in particular, which receives little exposure through televisual media, the press provides an albeit severely constrained forum which can at least initiate debate concerning competing interpretations.

PART I

CHAPTER 1:
DANCE AS LANGUAGE, TEXT AND WRITING

1.1 Art as Language; Art versus Language

The contention of certain aestheticians and dance writers that linguistic and literary theories are inapplicable or irrelevant to the study of art in general, and dance in particular, rests on the conviction that language cannot with validity be invoked as an analogue for art or dance. A comparison between language and art (or a particular art form) in terms of their respective essential features posits the two terms as abstract, discrete and equivalent (in that they are comparable) entities, and, according to these writers, reveals them to be largely contrastive and essentially irreconcilable. Margolis's (1983) critique of Langer (1957), Collingwood (1958) and Goodman (1969), who uphold in various ways the thesis that art functions (quasi-)linguistically, opens by suggesting the need, first and foremost, to specify the minimal requirements of a language. While recognising the difficulties of this task, he claims that the existence of certain "relatively indisputable features" undermine the art-as-language theorists' approach (376). For Margolis, a language must have a vocabulary, a grammar and an accepted way of linking elements of the vocabulary together to form utterances in the shape of sentences; linguistic analogies can only be said to hold in the case of art if attention is paid to these features or to "arguably suitable surrogates" (377). Similarly, Sparshott (1995:253-258) specifies twenty features of language for which he attempts, and in most cases fails, to discover counterparts in dance. In the case of both theorists, the discussion remains at the level of generalities, implicitly affirming the irreducible essence of each term of the comparison.

Although her central thesis derives from Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms, which holds that study of the forms of expression in language can elucidate the conceptual frames governing human experience, Langer (1953 and 1957) too is sceptical of direct analogies between language and art. Her theory does, however, claim to uncover a deeper connection between their symbolic functions. Drawing from Wittgenstein (1961)⁶, she posits verbal language as a discursive medium with the capacity to represent, or picture, and thus furnish knowledge of external realities; art meanwhile, employing as it does non-discursive or presentational symbols, expresses the internal reality of human subjective experience, not through any *self*-expressive endeavour on the part of the artist, but because of a logical congruence between the artwork's form and the structure of emotional experience. Art thus makes available a

⁶ "The logical theory on which this whole study of symbols is based is essentially that which was set forth by Wittgenstein, some twenty years ago, in his *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*" (Langer 1957: 79). Hagberg (1995:9, fn.2) maintains that the influence of the early Wittgenstein pervades Langer's work in general.

knowledge of the “rhythms of life, organic, emotional and mental” which is not amenable to discursive elaboration (1953: 241). But by formal embodiment of this “dynamic pattern of feeling” (*ibid.*), the function of art remains parallel to that of language: it expresses what cannot be verbally represented, or “picks up where language leaves off” (Hagberg 1995:9). Langer is anxious to stress that, in recognising the expressive character of music or art in general⁷, she does not mean to reaffirm the commonplace notion that it constitutes a “language of feeling”; music cannot be so described because of the distinction between the “independent associative symbols” of discourse and the presentationally symbolic character of art, the significance of which resides in the *totality* of the artwork’s form (1953:31). Artworks exhibit nothing like the divisibility into (word) units of discursive language, defined in terms of their “fixed association, and therewith a single, unequivocal reference” (*ibid.*).

In Margolis’ view, however, Langer’s inability to specify the constitution of a vocabulary of art, marks the defeat of her theory at the first of the hurdles he distinguishes: a “genuine” or “minimal” language “contains at least a vocabulary and a grammar and provides for some form of selectively linking elements of a vocabulary and other morphemic components, in accord with grammatical rules in order to form admissible sentences” (Margolis 1983: 376-377). Such a vocabulary need not be finite, but “what is necessary is that there be designata for relevant symbols or symbolic forms marked” (Margolis 1983:377). Langer admits as much with respect to verbal language but still maintains the quasi-linguistic function of presentationally symbolic art. In spite of their differences, then, both theorists employ a model of verbal language which emphasises the primarily denotative function of its components. They imply that the word-units constitutive of verbal language are meaningful in and of themselves, that their reference can be specified in a way the signified content of artworks (or the individual components of the latter) cannot; since this referential dimension is said to attach to particular words rather than larger units of linguistic expression, Margolis and Langer suggest that those words’ referential functions somehow transcend the multifarious contexts in which they are used.

⁷ The implications for aesthetics of Langer’s “philosophy in a new key” were first elaborated in relation to music (Langer 1957:204-265) and then extended to the other arts (1953). One of the few aestheticians to attend to dance as a form within the compass of a more general theory of art, Langer has been influential in the field of dance studies. Sheets-Johnstone (1979 and 1984), for example, draws heavily on Langer’s writings in formulating a phenomenology of dance: many of the difficulties with Langer’s theory are thus rehearsed in Sheets-Johnstone’s work (see below, pp.65-74).

Privilege is also granted to the denotative function of language by Sparshott (1995), although with less emphasis on the individual elements of linguistic vocabulary. He explores the notion of narrative to point up what he argues is a fundamental dissimilarity between language and dance. He argues that “[a] dance or a piece of music can only illustrate a story, it cannot actually tell the story - unless a form of actual linguistic description or narrative is incorporated in the presentation of the work [...], and repeats for additional emphasis the idea that “[a] dance [...], like a piece of music, can only illustrate a narrative, it cannot constitute it.” (1995:248-9).

Since, however, music, either played or heard, might be conceived of as a self-constituting narrative “that is its own subject” in that “one is for a time living in the music, even living as the music” (249), Sparshott concedes that the same could be true of some kinds of meditative dance. Yet, in both cases, the narrative refers only to itself and can hardly be considered a narrative in the true sense because it is “not a narrative *about* anything” (*ibid.*) without the addition of a linguistic supplement. Sparshott, Margolis and Langer all thus uphold, in their various ways, a view of language as an essentially referential or correspondential medium. Because it can convey a content, language can be used to tell a story and to represent or symbolise a reality external to it. Dance and art in general, meanwhile, are said to be largely and essentially self-referential (in the case of Sparshott), not necessarily symbolic (in the case of Margolis) or expressive of an internal reality rather than depictive of the external world (in the case of Langer).

In so generalising about verbal language, the theorists disregard those instances in which representational symbolism is not the primary function of linguistic expression, even though linguistics tends to relativise this conception of how verbal signs operate and highlight the diverse range of signifying functions that language may have in a variety of contexts: Jakobson’s (1960) discussion, for example, includes the referential or propositional as only one of six different linguistic modes, alongside the expressive, phatic, conative, metalingual and poetic. The poetic function in particular is said consistently to disrupt the straightforward equivalence between verbal sign and referential meaning, drawing attention to the linguistic medium itself: when it functions poetically, verbal language emphasises, on the one hand, its materiality by playing on the phonic and graphic qualities of verbal expression, and, on the other, its polysemic ambiguity by employing such literary devices as metaphor and metonymy⁸. Although

⁸ The Russian Formalist and Prague Structuralist schools of literary criticism emphasise this notion of poetic discourse as a distinct linguistic mode which grounds the possibility of literature

poetic language and dance art could be said to share an aesthetic ground in the way “ordinary” language and dance art do not, that parallel is largely ignored by the writers critical of dance-language analogies. Their work includes little discussion of literary or poetic uses of language, beyond Sparshott’s brief excursion on narrative (1995:248-249). Sparshott does admit also the possibility of analogy between literary art and dance works, but he argues that the dance-literature analogy holds only insofar as dance is in the first place “language-like” (243), implying that, for a poetry-dance analogy to hold, dance first has to prove itself to be parallel to language operating in its ‘ordinary’, or representationally symbolic, mode. And Sparshott’s detailed exposition (253-258) of the contrasts between dance and the model of ordinary language he privileges, works to exclude the possibility of the analogy’s validity on a different level.

But the linguistic model which the essentialising discourse of the three theorists upholds is not only problematic in relation to what could be considered extra-ordinary instances of language use, like the poetic, since even “ordinary” language is irreducible to the function of conveying or mirroring a pre-defined content. This is already implied in Jakobson’s discussion of the sheer variety of linguistic functions⁹, and is also one of the insights developed in the Wittgenstein’s later revisions (1958a and 1958b) of his early Tractarian views and further elaborated in subsequent linguistic philosophy. Austin (1976), for example, is critical of a general tendency in philosophical discourse to succumb to what he terms the “descriptive” or “constative” fallacy, thus ignoring the diverse kinds of actions embodied in linguistic expressions which are not fundamentally propositional (1-4). Austin’s own work is an elaborate attempt to account for language use and types of meaning which exceed the constative dimension of a literal, indicative language of facts; indeed his (1976) discussion begins by introducing a dramaturgical metaphor (the notion of “performative” language) precisely in order to shift attention from language’s referential dimension to its active use¹⁰.

in general. Jakobson’s work is contextualised by that of his Russian Formalist and Prague Structuralist colleagues (Erlich 1965; Hawkes 1997:59-87). See also the discussion of aesthetic signification, below p.58-59.

⁹ and in his insistence that the poetic function of language is evident also in discourse outside of sphere of literary art: see Jakobson (1960: 377).

¹⁰ As Austin’s (1976) discussion proceeds, the performative-constative distinction is abandoned with the realisation that all linguistic expressions, including statements, have some kind of performative aspect. The analysis moves instead to argue in terms of the locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary acts embodied in any given utterance (see p. 94 onwards). Nonetheless, the dramaturgical metaphor employed by Austin has inspired theatre and performance studies to adopt and elaborate various sections of his argument in theorising dramatic action: see, for example Fish (1980: 197-245), Felman (1980), Parker & Kosofsky Sedgwick (eds.) (1995) and Carlson (1996: 59-75).

If the early writings of Wittgenstein maintained that the meaning for language resides in its function of mirroring or picturing the facts that constitute the external world, his revised position is emphatic about the inadequacy of this approach to linguistic phenomena. The *Philosophical Investigations* introduce key concepts in order to challenge the assumptions of the earlier view, a version of which appears to be operating in the writings of Sparshott, Margolis and Langer. One such concept is that of the “language-game”, a notion presented as a corrective to any analytical separation of “language and the actions into which it is woven” (Wittgenstein 1958a:5). It suggests the paramount importance of the context of linguistic usage and that the reference or meaning of linguistic expression both is determined by, and should be analysed in relation to, that context. According to this view, there is no pre-defined “designatum” for each individual word-unit; rather words and their combinations have a function and a use as utterances within the particular language-game. In highlighting the relational rather than intrinsic value of elements within a language system, this conception of linguistic units finds a parallel in that developed in Saussure’s structural approach (Saussure 1983; Harris 1988). For Saussure, the meaning of any given instance of speech or utterance (*parole*) is constituted only in relation to the system (*langue*) in which it participates. Linguistic units (words, sentences and texts) thus acquire a differential value on two axes: the syntagmatic, or set of linear relations between the unit in question and those which precede and succeed it in the particular combination, formulated according to grammatical and syntactical rules furnished by the *langue*; and the paradigmatic, or associative relations between the element actually selected and others in the system which could have been used but were not.

Although Wittgenstein draws no such distinction between the twin dimensions of the linguistic context, both theorists, as Harris points out (1988:24-26), resort to analogies between language and games in challenging nomenclaturist views about the simple correlation or intrinsic connection between words and their referents. The game analogy suggests at once the self-containment of particular linguistic contexts, the structural links between the elements that go to make up the game and the way in which these links set the parameters for the variety of possible rule-guided combinations of the game-elements in the act of playing. This conception of the way language operates undermines the assumption (evident in the writings of Sparshott, Langer and Margolis) that language is primarily denotative, referential or correspondential, and that its units possess meaning independently of their contexts of use. It is also suggestive of a number of levels on which the dance-language analogy

might serve a heuristic function in opening to scrutiny the signifying and social systems dance practice brings into play.

This heuristic function and explanatory power of models derived from verbal language is underplayed by the dance-versus-language theorists, partly because of an underlying, unexamined assumption that, if the dance-language analogy holds, it will hold on the level of a movement-word equivalence. This is evident in their decision to highlight the contrast between the relatively stable vocabulary of verbal linguistic units with a fixed symbolic reference, and the components making up a dance, less clearly identifiable as single units (since it is not clear where one movement begins and ends) and in terms of their reference. But if verbal language is conceived according to the late Wittgensteinian and Saussurean models, as a system of differential values, a series of equivalences beyond that of the word-movement level, may be brought to the fore. A dance work itself, for example, could be conceived as self-contained *langue* or language game: any sequence or element of that work (including the movement material, but also setting, costume, lighting, etc.) becomes meaningful through combination and association with other passages and elements, forming a set of relations which a structuralist or semiotic approach can access and explore. Alternatively, an established dance form could be said to constitute a particular system (language-game or *langue*) with a relatively contained set of elements from which individual works (utterances or *paroles*) draw and in relation to which the individual work's significance is constituted. Or, the whole socio-cultural context from which the dance emerges as a particular *parole* could be conceived as a conventionalised system, which sets the parameters and furnishes the resources for the way meaning is produced through the work¹¹.

But Wittgenstein's late work also throws into doubt the validity of the whole analytical approach adopted by the theorists critical of dance-language analogies. That approach posits the two terms of the analogy as discrete entities, then seeks to define the essence of both language and dance in order to compare and bring out the similarities and contrasts between them. Wittgenstein's insistence on the multifariousness of actual and possible language-games, meanwhile, suggests that

¹¹ The discussion of these applications of the dance-language analogy is continued in Section 2 below, pp.37-49. The extension of the analogy to the socio-cultural level is of particular interest to this investigation which seeks to develop an understanding of contemporary dance practice in relation to its historical and social background. Other possible applications of a Wittgensteinian language-game approach to art are explored in Hagberg (1994: 9-44). The latter work and his (1995) discussion address a variety of issues relating to the impact of Wittgenstein's linguistic philosophy on the traditional problems of aesthetics.

one cannot hope to formulate generally adequate answers to such questions as “what essentially is language?” (see Wittgenstein 1958a:11-12, 43¹²). Similarly, the diversity of actual and possible forms of dance can be said to problematise claims regarding its irreducible essence. The emphasis of writers such as Sparshott on the essentially non-linguistic character of dance tends to forestall consideration of both the specificity and variousness of the signifying practices dance puts in play. Sparshott’s comments on dance and narrative reveal a confusion born of the essentialism to which he seems committed: he claims, on the one hand, that “dances all over the world embody impersonations and convey narratives” while asserting, on the other, that “[a] dance or piece of narrative can only illustrate a story, it cannot actually tell the story” (1995:248).

The methodological implications of grounding dance analysis philosophically in essentialist notions are further illustrated in Prickett’s (1992) analysis of 1930s American realist modern dance. Anxious (like Langer 1953) to avoid conflating linguistic with dance signification and meaning Prickett, draws a distinction between fundamentally denotative verbal language and the nonverbal “symbolic” form of dance movement¹³: the latter produces solely connotative meaning and does not signify at a primary denotative level (see 65-70). But the type of dance performance which is the focus of her study existed on the premise that it was able to convey a message and give rise to a preferred reading. Initially Prickett invokes dance’s resistance to Barthes’ theory of myth as a second-order semiological system¹⁴ (66); later she admits the same theory’s pertinence to the analysis of these particular ballets, where the inclusion in the performance of linguistic components (such as backdrop slogans or words spelt out in floor patterns) concretise the signified content of the dance (92). Having affirmed dance’s irreducible essence as a “symbolic” system and that “[t]he essential nature of art resides in it being untranslatable into any other form”, she is forced to conclude the failure of such instances as dance because they create meaning linguistically “at the level of signs instead of symbols” (91-92). To claim, however, that politically motivated realist dance ultimately failed owing to inconsistencies internal to its aesthetic project, imposes an aesthetic norm on a type of practice conceived according to a quite different model of signification.

¹² On this issue and its relevance to discussions in aesthetics, see also Hagberg (1994:32-33 and 54).

¹³ Prickett uses the term “symbol” in a particular sense: “[s]ymbols [...] resist definition in th[e] correspondential sense, the words in which they are formulated are constitutive of their meaning which remains open, its boundaries flexible” (1992:65). There are continuities between this definition and the term as used by Langer (1953 and 1957) in her discussion of presentational symbols, and by Sheets-Johnstone (1979).

¹⁴ see Barthes (1972)

Margolis at least recognises this difficulty of generalising about art by qualifying his conclusions concerning the indefensibility of the dance-language analogy with the assertion that “[this] is not to deny that works of art may be made to perform linguistic or symbolic functions or that particular works may possess the property of serving some linguistic or symbolic function” (1983: 386-7). He does not, however, develop this idea, nor does he justify explicitly his decision to foreground in his earlier comparison dance which does not perform a linguistic function. And, as previously suggested, in adopting a model of language as representationally symbolic, Margolis’s discussion severely limits the scope of any investigation into the potential of linguistic analogies to reveal the variety of signifying functions that both language and dance put in play¹⁵. In fact, he is decidedly sceptical about broader notions of signification and their heuristic value in opening new avenues of semiological investigation. He writes disparagingly of the way in which Morris’s (1939) broad conception of signification relativises language’s representational function, rendering the notion of the sign “very nearly vacuous” by widening it to include the sense “in which anything discriminated may be a sign (even as [*sic*] iconic sign) of itself, and the sense in which, in any ‘sign situation,’ *whatever* leads us to take account of something, existent or not, itself or something else, thereby functions as a sign” (Margolis 1983: 377-378). Margolis fails to acknowledge that semioticians may define signification broadly precisely because the signifying processes of language, or of any other medium of communication, are not exhausted in the function of representational symbolism.

When they attend to actual instances of dance practice, Sparshott (1995), Prickett (1992) and Margolis (1983) all imply (sometimes inadvertently) that the production of meaning in different forms of dance, even different dance works, is governed by different sets of codes, conventions and rules. This is precisely the range of features of language and sign systems which an anti-essentialist Wittgensteinian or semiological approach would open to investigation. But Sparshott, as well as Margolis, is decidedly sceptical about the relevance and validity of semiological investigation into art phenomena (Sparshott 1995: 258-263). The term “semiotics”, in Sparshott’s view, is

¹⁵ Johnstone’s (1984) discussion, while it adopts a more circumspect position with respect to the dance-language analogy than the other theories examined here, falls prey to a set of similar difficulties. He proposes a taxonomy of different types of dance, functionally more or less like verbal language, but still bases his discussion of the latter on a correspondential model. His work tends to displace the problem of essentialising discourse to another level. Each type of dance is still characterised in terms of its determining features, assumed to be definitive of that form’s signifying potential. A number of empirical studies of modern and new-modern dance, for

used “as a label for the preferences of fashionable theorists” misguided in their attempts to impose indiscriminately the model of Saussure’s general linguistics on “everything that can be thought of as conveying a meaning” and in their “aspir[ation] to deal perfectly generally with all symbol systems alike” (1995:262). To have any value, semiotic investigation would, for Sparshott, have to reconstruct itself as a loosely conceived semantics, “a kind of interest, a topic, the topic of meaningfulness and the fullness of meaning”, abandoning all pretensions as a research programme seeking systematically to analyse signification as such (*ibid.*).

Sparshott’s critique fails to recognise that the disciplines of structural linguistics and semiology, while they may be related, are distinct, and he thus assumes that the semiology is confined to verbal linguistic paradigm¹⁶. But semiotics does not simply impose the categories generated to analyse verbal language on all kinds of sign. In fact, Morris (1971), Peirce (1940) and Saussure (1983) each distinguish theoretically between different sign-types and, in doing so, suggest that the verbal symbol is only one of a number of possible categories. The same is true of those who more recently have developed theories of semiotics or semiology from their premises such as Barthes (1967) and Kristeva (1986). This is a condition of the applicability of their methods both to non-representational linguistic modes and non-verbal phenomena. Partly to emphasise this feature of semiotics, Barthes claims to be conceiving the objects of his investigation as “systems of signification” rather than as languages (1967:9); Eco holds that his topic of investigation is a general, rather than linguistic or verbal, process of semiosis and he is careful to elaborate his definitions accordingly (1976:3-29); while Kristeva urges that “[s]emiotics must not be allowed to be a mere application to signifying practices of the linguistic model” (1986:26) and conducts her preliminary analysis of gestural signification on this basis (1969: 90-112).

As section 2 will argue, Sparshott’s mistrust of a normalising semiology is partly justified, even if not for the reasons that he himself specifies. Yet, as shown above, there is also a sense in which the kind of essentialising distinctions proposed by Sparshott and others in their emphasis on the *disanalogy* between dance and language operate to foreclose consideration of the specificity and variousness of dance as signifying practice. The contradictions inherent in the arguments of theorists like Sparshott do betray a certain discomfort with essentialist definitions of both art and

example, have shown (Banes 1987, Foster 1986, Franko 1995), how the diversity of work produced within either genre transcends the strict categorisation that Johnstone proposes.

language, even as they refuse to adopt the alternative course of relativising these essentialist notions. Any definition of dance which posits its immanent and irreducible essence will problematise the study of particular dance objects which somehow elude or contest those parameters; and any definition of dance as essentially disanalogous with language will not be able to account for the full variety of signifying practices which may be engaged in dance performance. Linguistic philosophy and semiology, meanwhile, both provide theoretical tools which can assist in investigating such phenomena. In shifting attention away from the idea that language is essentially defined by its capacity for representational symbolism, and towards the notion of language as a system of differentially defined values, the work of both Saussure and the later Wittgenstein suggest the possible heuristic value of dance-language analogies in investigating how dance is constituted as an intersubjectively meaningful activity.

Both Langer and Margolis suggest that linguistic analogies are inappropriate in the art context in general, not just in relation to dance. And their resistance to assimilating *dance* art to language is perhaps sharpened by the fact that dance is, or has always been conceived as, a primarily non-verbal art. There is a lingering scepticism in dance studies not just about the applicability of linguistically-derived theories and methodologies to dance phenomena, but about the very capacity of verbal discourse to account for a predominantly non-verbal art¹⁷. Since this issue has implications for the validity of this, and any discourse (academic or otherwise) which claims in some way or another to describe, understand and explain dance phenomena, it will be further explored in the next section and in Chapter 2.

¹⁶ Saussure (1983) lays the ground for the development of semiology as a discipline of which “linguistics is only one branch” (15-16).

¹⁷ See, for example, Siegel (1988). Further examples are discussed below, pp.53-54 and pp.66 - 68.

1.2 Institutional and Semiological theories of art and dance

Awareness of the difficulties of formulating a definition of art as such has led some aestheticians, under the influence of Wittgenstein, to deny that all artworks share specifiable essential characteristics. According to Ziff (1953), Weitz (1956) and Kennick (1958), there are no necessary and sufficient conditions fulfilled by all works of art. These theorists draw instead on the notion of family resemblance, a concept which can link diverse artworks by virtue of their similarities with one another without maintaining that all works are alike in respect of essential features. This strategy posits art as a loose or “open” concept and the identification of artworks as an inclusive rather than exclusive undertaking: by extension, the concept of dance art could be similarly characterised to include under its general umbrella the diversity of forms and works which trouble the theories explored in section 1. But the very looseness of the concept of family resemblance is also problematic in that it collapses too easily into a notion of simple resemblance: as Dickie (1992:18) has suggested, all phenomena could be said to resemble one another in some respect, and thus to be classifiable, in the terms of the family-resemblance theory, as art, or dance, works by virtue of this resemblance. Whether or not any object, however unlikely, can come to be considered an artwork is a separate question from whether, as the family-resemblance theory seems logically to imply, all phenomena might already in some way be artworks.

Dickie also challenges Ziff, Weitz and Kennick in respect of their denial that works of art can be defined in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions. According to Dickie, it is a valid procedure to seek to uncover these conditions, provided one looks not so much towards the intrinsic properties of the objects themselves as to their “non-exhibited” characteristics, and in particular to the way in which they emerge and participate in particular networks of social relations. Dickie’s “institutional theory of art” (1974) posits the existence of a social institution or framework, termed the “artworld”, constituted by a set of established practices, conventions and roles which make possible the presentation of individual artworks. With reference to this artworld context, Dickie is able to offer a definition of an artwork as “an artefact [...] a set of the aspects of which has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation by some person or persons acting on behalf of a certain social institution (the artworld)” (1974:34). In Dickie’s view, then, it is the action of conferment, contextualised and

validated by the artworld system, which allows an object to be categorised as art rather than any essential features it exhibits.

Although the institutional theory of art might appear initially to focus more on the mechanisms by which art is produced than on the conditions governing its reception and meaningfulness, Dickie is mainly concerned with what Bourdieu (1993:37) terms the “symbolic” rather than “material” production of art: in other words, he is interested primarily in how art comes to be recognised, received and valued as such and less in the material activity which contributes to the forming of artefacts¹⁸. The claims of the institutional theorists thus have important implications for an analysis of the symbolic currency of art in the intersubjective realm. Dickie’s theory aims to counter the emphasis of psychological and subjectivist aesthetics which locates the pre-conditions of aesthetic experience in the isolated mind of the individual. A large section of Dickie’s (1974) work is devoted to a critique of Kantian aesthetic attitude theory¹⁹. According to Dickie, “weak” versions of this theory maintain that it is possible to direct a particular mode of attention to objects which reveal aesthetic qualities not accessible in any other way, while “stronger” forms go further down the subjectivist path, claiming that the aesthetic attitude actually constitutes its objects (58). But for Dickie, the idea that aesthetic experience is contingent upon adopting an aesthetic attitude (which divorces our interest in the object from any form of practical concern) is problematic in that it ignores the sets of conventions which govern the presentation and appreciation of different art forms. Aesthetic attitude theories imply that it is possible for an individual mind to operate the transformation which determines an object’s art status, whereas Dickie’s account emphasises the allegiance to a social institution of the individual conferring this status. Only when such an individual acts on behalf of the artworld can her/his choices carry any weight and it is thus the “institutional” rather than “individual” powers of that person which are significant. Similarly, the individual’s aesthetic experience becomes a function of the knowledge s/he has, as a member of a particular

¹⁸ Indeed Dickie takes the artefactuality of art as a given, allowing that in some cases (e.g. that of Duchamp’s *Fountain*) the artist may not be responsible for forming and transforming material into a physical object; where such instances are concerned, Dickie maintains that the artist still uses found physical objects as media to create more complex artistic artefacts. Bourdieu’s distinction between symbolic and material production is itself problematic in introducing a binary opposition which rehearses familiar divisions between mind and body, form and matter, etc. An alternative conception of the material and symbolic as twin dimensions integrated in concrete human action is developed later with reference to Williams (1977, 1981) and anthropological approaches to dance, discussed in section 1.3.

¹⁹ See Bullough (1979) and Stolnitz (1969) for typical formulations of this theory.

society or social institution, of how to act in art situations, and not of her/his particular kind of psychological engagement with a given object.

In suggesting that an object can only be considered as an artwork in relation to its socio-institutional context, the institutional theory offers one model of how the language-game analogy explored in section 1 might be developed in the art sphere. The artworld itself can be conceived as a kind of language-game constituted by the conventions, roles and established practices in relation to which the particular artwork appears as meaningful action²⁰. This emphasis on the conventional and institutionalised character of art production and reception also then suggests a link with semiological approaches which, following Saussure, posit the contingency of meaningful individual utterance on a system or *langue* which provides the resources from which the utterance draws. Ability to understand such an utterance thus becomes a function of the knowledge one has in relation to the whole system, of one's capacity to employ the requisite codes established by social convention, and not a question of how one's individual psychology privately experiences the utterance. But in its proximity to the language-game and semiological models, the institutional theory also opens itself to critique on a similar basis to those models; indeed a more thorough exploration of both the semiological approach and the institutional theory helps to highlight some of the problems associated with adapting these conceptions to the analysis of art.

Firstly, both the language-game as conceived by Wittgenstein and the *langue* or sign-system posited by Saussure and his followers are conceived as autonomous and self-contained structures (Harris 1988). As previously suggested, the notion of the language-game can be extended by analogy to an individual artwork, or to an artistic style, form or genre, which provides the set of conventions that make sense of individual works. Several dance writers have adopted this kind of approach to dance analysis, drawing from the semiological rather than the Wittgensteinian model. Foster (1986), for example²¹, performs a structuralist-semiotic analysis on four paradigmatic

²⁰ One could also trace a parallel between Dickie's position and Austin's analysis of performative language, by conceiving of the art scenario as a kind of performative situation, dependent for its "happiness" on certain key, intersubjectively recognised conditions being fulfilled, rather than solely on the intentions of the speaking subject (1976:14-20).

²¹ See also Jordan & Thomas (1994) and Sánchez-Colberg (1992).

types of choreographic practice conceived as autonomous and internally coherent signifying systems. The individual elements and sets of relations of each choreographic project are viewed as significant in the light of their consistency with the system as a whole: thus Foster argues that “the form the dances take is consonant with each choreographer’s creative process, with each one’s philosophy of the training and rehearsing required for dance performance, and with each one’s expectations concerning the viewers’ responses” (2). Foster chooses “to pass over the marked changes in the choreographers’ careers” (3) since the purpose is not to provide a historical account of the artists’ trajectories, or of particular works, but to “articulate a theory of representation” (*ibid.*). Foster’s approach is entirely consistent, then, with Saussure’s commitment to synchronic rather than diachronic analysis²² and to an investigation of *langue* rather than *parole*, in that she seeks to understand the parameters and conventions governing the different aesthetic projects or the contexts in which individual works take shape.

One limitation of this perspective, and of any approach that emphasises the closed nature of the systems or language-games it investigates, is that it allows for no overlap between the various sets of codes and conventions. The theory thus provides no methodological route whereby the continuities between different works or styles (depending on whether the work or the style is posited as equivalent to Saussure’s *langue*), can be uncovered and explored. A choreographer or dance company which creates a work, establishes a particular style, mode of performance or type of dance-language-game, could not be engaged in a wholly original creative enterprise since, without conforming to some pre-existent parameters of choreographic practice, their work would not be recognised as a “new” dance or choreographic form at all. And yet if language-games, and by analogy dance styles or forms, are conceived as closed systems, there can be no account within this theoretical paradigm of how such “new” systems relate to other already established language-games. Neither would this paradigm permit an exploration of how, in particular acts of art reception, there may be overlap between various systems’ sets of conventions and codes. One can imagine, for example, a dance spectator with extensive knowledge of the *langue* of classical ballet

²² This emphasis carries over into her exploration of historical approaches to dance composition (1986:99-185) in that, although she locates paradigmatic types of dance practice in relation the context of their time, Foster does not propose an account of changing historical dynamic and evolution of dance styles. Each type of practice is analysed in isolation, as a relatively closed system: some parallels between different systems are drawn, but Foster avoids claiming strands of influence and historical continuity between the various modes.

applying some of this knowledge in viewing a post-modern dance work, but also drawing on her/his familiarity with everyday movement and/or verbal drama in order to make effective sense (albeit a different kind of sense to the performers or choreographer) of relatively unfamiliar post-modern dance material. Foster does admit that the viewer of a particular dance work might “invoke one set of choreographic assumptions in order to view the dances made using another set”, but implies the illegitimacy of this procedure in claiming that it produces “interesting but often misguided critical commentary” (1986:55). Such methodological limitations are a feature of a closed-system model, confined as it is to synchronic and abstract analysis, because focused on the invisible theoretical entity of the *langue* rather than manifest utterance or *parole*²³.

The emphasis on the self-containment and autonomy of language-games also therefore permits no exploration of how, historically and materially, those systems themselves emerge, are sustained and develop. When transposed to the art context, then, the Saussurean and language-game models tend to rehearse the traditional insistence of philosophical aesthetics on the autonomy of art and artworks, and their immunity from social and historical change. The institutional theory of art partly avoids this bind by refusing to effect an analytical separation of artworks from at least their social context. In this respect, the theories developed by Dickie and, following him, McFee (1992) in relation to art and dance respectively, parallel the sociologies of art proposed by writers such as Becker (1974) and Bourdieu (1993)²⁴. But institutional theories also diverge from their sociological counterparts in respect of the extent to which they explore the specific mechanisms and social practices that constitute the artworld system. The institutional theory of art is, after all, designed as a way of resolving a perennial problem in traditional aesthetics, namely the question “what is art?”, and not as way of philosophically grounding a thoroughgoing method of institutional analysis. Rather than fully resolving that question, however, the work of Dickie (1974) and McFee (1992) tends to displace the problematic onto another level

²³ Arguably, Foster’s difficulty accepting a variety of possible meaning constructions, formed on the basis of applying other codes than the choreographer intended, also shows a latent intentionalism not consistent with the structuralist-semiotic approach. This idea is suggested in Siegel’s (1988) critique of Foster’s work, although Siegel mistakenly assumes that intentionalism is a characteristic of the structural approach. The issue of structure and agency is addressed in more detail later in this section and 1.3 below.

²⁴ Bourdieu (1993:215-237) develops a sociological theory of art perception along semiological lines which elaborates and extends the ideas in Dickie’s work about the conventional, culturally

by shifting the focus from the attempt to define what an artwork is to investigating the nature of the artworld system which legitimises and renders meaningful individual instances of art practice. And the outline of the artworld system proposed by Dickie and McFee is too schematic to respond to this revised challenge.

This is manifest in the fact that, although the institutional theory challenges notions of the self-containment and autonomy of the artwork, it does not subject to sustained investigation the assumption that the artworld is an autonomous structure with rules and a logic of its own. From a sociological perspective, meanwhile, that investigation is crucial. Although Bourdieu's analysis of the "field of cultural production" (1993) is also concerned with the logic specific to that field, he is also more disposed to relate the art institution and its agents directly to the wider social context: while recognising the need to account for the particular history of the artistic and cultural field, he claims that "it is not possible [...] to make the cultural order [*épistème*] a sort of autonomous, transcendent sphere, capable of developing in accordance with its own laws" (33). He thus draws attention to the ways in which the structure of the artworld reflects and subverts the broader economic and social structure, to how the interests of different class and occupational groups operate in the production and reception of art as well as in other domains. Moreover, he sees the wider economic and social context as a significant determining force in the artworld, indeed as a force which determines that there should be an artworld in the first place. And in this, Bourdieu's writings draw attention to a significant lack in the institutional theory of art: although Dickie and McFee do suggest a relativisation of the art concept, by making it contingent upon an institutional system, they do not develop the historical dimension which would permit an analysis of how art practices and their systems emerge and are sustained.

Dickie is keen to stress that the concept of the artworld is inclusive rather than exclusive: the institution is not monolithic but rather loosely incorporates a variety of cultural subsystems, to which further such can be added, effecting an extension of the system as a whole. Although this feature of the artworld, in Dickie's view, "provide[s] the elasticity whereby creativity of even the most radical sort can be accommodated" (1974:33), no detailed explanation of how the term "art" can or does expand and

constructed character of aesthetic reception. Like Dickie, Bourdieu also offers a critique of subjectivist Kantian perspectives (1986: 1-7 and 485-500).

contract through history is forthcoming. Any investigation which recognises the shifting boundaries of the very notions of art and culture (see, for example, the analyses proposed in Williams 1977:11-20 and 1988) and which seeks to explore a cultural practice such as contemporary dance, of which the legitimisation by the artworld system is a relatively recent and still contested phenomenon, will need some way of accounting for the processes and competing interests involved in achieving and maintaining art status. That account will also be crucial if the investigation aims to uncover the extent to which the artworld's development impacts on a micro-level on how individual artworks are perceived and understood. But without a more detailed and systematic examination of social and historical forces which transcend the art sphere itself, this dimension of analysis will be cut short.

This raises the issue of the extent to which the conventions and rules governing a particular language-game are binding, especially when viewed in a diachronic rather than synchronic perspective. And this opens to critique the application of the closed-system model in the art sphere on a second count. As previously suggested, the theorists discussed in section 1.1, who deny that dance art can be assimilated to language, imply (sometimes inadvertently) that the production of meaning in different forms of dance, even different dance works, is governed by different sets of codes, conventions and rules. They are, however, reluctant overtly to characterise dance in these terms because of a resistance to the very idea that art is a rule-governed or convention-bound activity. Margolis claims that the sheer inventiveness of art overflows any such constraint: works are “not simply novel expressions of some sort *in a language*” but rather “institute new conventions that are not readily collected as admissible expressions formed from a relatively stable vocabulary and finite grammar” (1983:378). Langer too is anxious to stress that the artistic symbol “does not rest upon convention, but motivates and dictates conventions” (1953:22). In Sparshott's case, resistance to the idea that dance art is conventional or code-bound is one aspect of his broader critique of semiotic approaches to dance description and analysis. For Sparshott, semiotics' use of the terms “code” and “encoding” in relation to dance is particularly misleading. And this is not just because those terms suggest that a pre-existing message is somehow encoded into the appropriate dance form (260-1), which is, from his perspective, impossible since dance cannot convey a content. He also declares that, even in the eventuality of consensually established artistic codes existing, the actuality of dance performance would necessarily overflow their limits. The

diversity of audience response, the “very condition of public performance”, is too great to be analysed in terms of codes; the responses of the audience and the intentions of choreographers, dancers, and promoters are by no means identical, and “the dance is not less than the totality of what they do” (261).

These objections to the very notion that codes govern artistic practice are problematic, particularly if one holds, with the institutional theorists, that art is a form of social institution and that, as such, its production and reception at least partly depends on the conventions which make possible the very category of the artwork. From this perspective, Margolis, Langer and Sparshott cannot but admit that conventions are operative in dance art, since how else could a dance performance even be recognised as such? It is also difficult to see how one could account for the common principles constituting a particular form, genre or style if artworks are considered by definition to be wholly transcendent of conventions. Once again, the theorists’ argument seems based on an essentialist assumption, this time the Romantic conception that art is by its very nature original and spontaneous, and subverts rather than conforming to social norms. But even if one refuses to characterise all art in this way, it seems necessary to admit of the possibility of degrees of conformity to convention within artistic practice. And in this, the closed-system model again proves problematic: it becomes increasingly difficult to develop any significant notion of human agency, when the system is characterised not only as dominating the particular utterance but also as severely constraining on the choices and actions of the individual agent operating within the language-game. For Williams, this tendency to conceive of language “as a fixed, objective, and in these senses ‘given’ system, which ha[s] theoretical and practical priority over what were described as ‘utterances’ (later as ‘performance’)” theoretically reduces “the living speech of human beings in their specific social relationships in the world [...] to instances and examples of a system which l[ies] beyond them” (1977:27). And one could, with Williams, recognise an affinity here between the structural linguistic paradigm and those determinist institutional, sociological and Marxist analyses that assert the dominance of the social system over all “ ‘individual’ acts of will and intelligence” (28)²⁵.

²⁵ Williams himself does not give specific examples here, although one suspects a covert reference to Althusserian Marxism (see, for example, Althusser 1971). One could cite also some aspects of Bourdieu’s work in this regard: see (1986) and (1992), although the latter is more nuanced in carving out a circumscribed space in which individual action can impact on the structures of the cultural field.

Sparshott recognises this theoretical difficulty of balancing systemic constraint with free agency when he affirms that those involved in dance practice “are code-using rather than code-bound” (1995:261)²⁶. He is mistaken in inferring that semiology as such suggests the opposite, since Saussure’s *langue / parole* distinction was itself formulated (and adopted by his followers) partly to guard against the complete subordination of individual speech acts or *paroles* to the norms of the *langue*. There are, however, at least two senses in which the normalising tendencies of (particularly) structuralist semiology might be considered to hamper consideration of specific instances of signifying practices. Firstly, if, following Saussure, semiologists do focus on analysis of *langue* to the exclusion of *parole*, and on the synchronic to the exclusion of the diachronic dimension of language, then, as shown above, then they are unlikely to attend to the issue of how the rules and conventions constitutive of the systems can be challenged, changed or revised. Secondly, there is the problem identified by Kristeva (1986:25) as semiotics’ “discovery” that a general social law operates in all practices through the symbolic order instituted in language²⁷. The danger arises that restriction of semiotic investigation to the disclosure of this law will result in an unquestioning submission to that law itself, rather than providing a basis for critical challenge of the dominant order: art and its systematic investigation may thereby be forced to “do no more than subserve the principle of social cohesions, of the social contract” (1986:26).

This acceptance of the dominion of the verbal is perhaps a tendency characteristic of the semiology derived from Saussure and emerging from the discipline of linguistics, rather than the semiotics which draws mainly on Peirce and Morris, whose work on sign systems as a branch of logic and philosophy is less dominated by the linguistic paradigm (Eco 1976:30; Culler 1981:22-24; Giraud 1975:2; Morris 1964:60-62). Working within the Saussurean semiological tradition, Barthes (1967) does stress that the notion of a system of signification is not commensurate with that of language (see above, p.35), although he proceeds to express scepticism about whether there are “any extensive systems of signs outside human language” (9). Formal similarities or dissimilarities between linguistic and other signifiers aside, meaning is always constituted for Barthes within the linguistic-symbolic order: “to perceive what a

²⁶ on this issue, see also the discussion below, pp.50-52, on art and language as “forms of life”

²⁷ In formulating this idea, Kristeva draws on Lacan’s formulation of the symbolic dimension which constitutes the subject on entry into language, and on his central contention that the unconscious is structured like a language. See Lacan’s “Rome discourse” (1977:30-113)

substance signifies is inevitably to fall back on the individuation of a language: [...] the world of signifieds is none other than that of language" (10)²⁸.

McFee develops a perspective similar to that of Barthes, but through a synthesis of the institutional theory of art with a conception of meaning deriving from Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy. While Dickie defines an artwork as an object that has had conferred upon it the status of candidate for appreciation, McFee (1992: 67-87) maintains that an object put forward as a candidate for appreciation also needs to be recognised and valued by others in order to qualify as art. McFee thus accords a more prominent role and greater institutional power to critics within the artworld since "these are the people who, first will be chiefly involved in the other-acclamation of putative works and, second, will be involved in the kind of public relations task that shapes taste" (1992:84)²⁹. Critics are thus not only responsible for according art status but also for setting the parameters within which works are understood and valued, and, as McFee later suggests, for actually determining the meanings of particular dance works: "the explanations of the Republic [...] count as contributions to the meaning of dances" (117). This argument about dance meaning is based on a slogan from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Grammar*, "meaning is what explanation of meaning explains" (McFee 1992:113; Wittgenstein 1974: 59, 69). Like Dickie, McFee is suspicious of subjectivism in the aesthetic domain, and the tendency of subjectivist theories to conceive of meaning as "something inherently private" or to equate it with the idiosyncratic associations "that might be triggered in my mind by a certain word" (McFee 1992:114). Meanwhile an equation of dance meaning with the way in which it is explained has, according to McFee, the advantage of rendering meaning public, a function of the linguistic and institutional context in which the work appears rather than something experienced or constructed in the isolated mind of the individual observer. Since explanations of dance meaning are typically given "in dance criticism and the like", the logical consequence of McFee's argument is that "the meaning of dances is identified with, roughly, the sum of criticism of these dances" (114).

²⁸ Barthes later writings bear witness to a disruption of the linguistic systematization characteristic of his (1967) work: the seminal essay "From Work to Text" (1977:155-164), rather than stressing the relation of signifier as "material vestibule" to a linguistically determinate signified, urges a liberation of the signifier, conceived "in complete opposition to this, as its deferred action" (158). See also Barthes (1990).

²⁹ McFee defines the category of critics broadly, as seen in his comment about the constitution of the "Republic of Dance": "the 'Republic' will be composed of choreographers, producers, dance-theatre owners and so on, and, in particular (other) dance critics and dance theorists" (1992:72).

An important issue is raised here, as in Barthes' claim (1967:10; see above, p.45), even if McFee's argument is somewhat confused. He is at once anxious to develop a conception of meaning as something publicly constituted in language, rather than a purely private experience, and concerned to avoid a charge of reducing dance works and their signifying functions to verbal explanations of significance. He thus modifies (and arguably distorts) the initial, radical emphasis of his argument on several fronts. Firstly, he claims that explanations of dance meaning may involve means of expression other than words (such as gestures), a fact, he declares, that "reinstates the claims of the non-linguistic" (1992:122). Secondly, as an extension of this idea, he asserts that "[a]fter all, the only complete realization of the meaning of a dance is that dance itself" (*ibid.*). The former claim is contingent on his broad definition of the category of "critic", the consequent conceptual vagueness of which problematises the relation established between meaning and the institutional context of art production: while it may be true that explanations of dance meaning can be articulated gesturally in face-to-face dialogue, it is hard to see how this privilege could be extended to the more confined category of professional critics who, through written reviews, fulfil a designated role within the institution of the artworld. McFee's second assertion, that "the only complete realization of the meaning of a dance is that dance itself", is surely contradictory of the earlier argument according to which such a complete realisation is in the sum of criticism of the work, not "in" the work itself at all. But ultimately, McFee does stress "conceptual supremacy" of verbal language via the claim that, although the reverse is not the case, any non-verbal gestures used in the explanation of dance meaning can still be described in words (*ibid.*).

The theoretical stance implicit in the claims of both Barthes and McFee is one that tends not to be addressed by writers who posit a radical contrast between language and dance: namely, that although dance may itself be a predominantly non-verbal practice, it is only constituted as such and only exists within a social context where verbal language is the dominant mode of communication or locus of intersubjective relations. Sparshott touches on this issue when he discusses the mediation by language of some dance meanings: he admits that "[i]t can be made out that all meanings are indirectly mediated by language, in that our whole way of handling information is moulded by and saturated with language-use"; but he side-steps detailed examination of this possibility with the claim that "[s]o pervasive a truth would defy articulation" (1995:244). Instead he falls back once again on an essentialising discourse which takes as given "the simple fact that some things have to be explained and some don't, some things can be put into words and others can't" (*ibid.*). Both

Barthes and McFee, meanwhile, draw attention to the embroilment in verbal language of dance practice, analysis and explication and thus imply that any theoretical account of dance, like any methodology elaborated to examine particular dance works, should be capable of investigating or uncovering this relation and its implications³⁰. On a broader level (although they do not develop any sustained philosophical treatment of this theme), Barthes and McFee both question the extent to which verbal language shapes and pre-structures the operations of human consciousness in understanding and interpretation of its world³¹.

And yet the confusion evident in McFee's exploration of such issues (1992:112-125) perhaps also highlights a deep tension fundamental to any investigation of the dance-language relation. On the one hand, if dance analysis disregards the way dance art is implicated in verbal discourse and vice versa, it ignores a crucial dimension of dance as social practice; it thereby neglects the role of the verbal in mediating between the matter of the dance performance itself and the socio-institutional context which makes possible the production and reception of dance as meaningful activity. On the other hand, if analysis loses sight of the predominantly non-verbal character of dance artworks themselves, it risks ignoring also the specificity and peculiarity of some dance forms as signifying and performance practices. To return to Kristeva's account of the potential inherent in semiotic enquiry (1986: 74-88), it may be precisely by pushing the verbal linguistic paradigm to its limit in the investigation even of non-verbal phenomena that semiotics has the potential also to develop a reflexive critique of itself as theory and method. While recognising the "scientific and ideological limitations which the phonological model risks imposing on a science that aims to offer a model for translinguistic practice" (76), Kristeva also sees as analytically productive the confrontation between semiotics and signifying practices "irreducible to the level of an object for normative linguistics (which deals with the codified and denotative word)" (86). For Kristeva, literature is a prime site on which the problematics of meaning production come to the fore: semiotics develops and applies a range of formalized models, which are themselves challenged and revised in the encounter with their object of investigation.

³⁰ by, for example, highlighting and exploring the range of verbal discourses surrounding dance art practice (publicity, programme notes, dance work titles and dance criticism, etc.), and through reflexive attention to the character and status of the analyst's own verbal intervention. Both these dimensions of dance analysis are examined in more detail in section 1.3 below, and in Chapter 2.

³¹ The methodological implications of this conception of language are further explored in section 1.3 below, its epistemological and ontological implications in Chapter 2.

Arguably, a non-verbal form such as dance has the potential for pushing even further the reflection on signification, provided both the usefulness and limitations of the linguistic models employed are recognised, and those models thus subject to reflexive critique. Certainly, the writings of Barthes (1967), McFee (1992) and Kristeva (1986) on the dominance of, or threat of domination by, the verbal point up the need for dance analysis to engage reflexively with its own status as verbal intervention. The failure to do so is one further difficulty with the closed-system models of the Wittgensteinian language-game and “classical” semiological approaches which immerse themselves “in the plurality of language games without being able to justify the language of analysis itself” (Habermas 1988:143). The general issues of the conditions surrounding meaning production, and of that process of production itself, can be further explored only by recognising and relativising the production of meaning in which an investigation of this kind itself engages. The following section develops this idea, as well as suggesting how particular approaches which take on board the issues discussed above might furnish a theoretical and methodological route for a contextual analysis of contemporary dance.

1.3 Art and Language as “Forms of Life”: the Ethnographic Approach to Dance Analysis

It was suggested in Section 1 that the art / language-game analogy can serve a heuristic purpose in opening to investigation the internal relations between elements of a dance work and also between works which participate in a common genre or style. The institutional theory of art and its sociological counterpart suggest a further extension of the analogy in highlighting the relation between a dance work or form and the broader cultural, social, political and economic context: the latter can be conceived as the system which sets the parameters within which the dance work or form appears as meaningful action. But this already seems to extend the language-game analogy too far, in that the model of the latter as a closed-system has difficulty accounting for the dynamic relations between the variety of contexts in which dance practice is implicated and for that practice's historical evolution and transformation. A different, related notion developed in Wittgenstein's late philosophy, namely that “to imagine a language is to imagine a form of life” (Wittgenstein 1958a:8), suggests itself as a potentially more productive idea through which to conceive the social dimension of dance activity.

Wollheim (1980), who extends the notion of a “form of life” by analogy to art (104-153), characterises Wittgenstein's formulation as “invocatory of the total context within which alone language can exist: the complex of habits, experiences, skills, with which language interlocks in that it could not be operated without them and, equally, they cannot be identified without reference to it” (104). And he charts its development via Wittgenstein's critique of two false views of language: the idea (examined in Section 1.1, pp.27-32 above) that language consists essentially in names connected unambiguously with the objects they denote; and the view that pre-constituted and independently identifiable experiences in the minds of language users are what endows derivative linguistic expression with meaning³². Wittgenstein's notion of language as a form of life implies that analytical procedures which sever linguistic action (and, by analogy or extension of the concept of language, other forms of semiotic action) from the complex of social conventions, institutions and collective modes of thought and feeling in which they are embedded, distorts and obfuscates the operations of language-in-use. Symbolic action is constitutive rather than purely reflective of the “form of life” in which it is implicated, something which the reduction of such action to a mere function of copying or representing an already constituted reality (external or internal) ignores .

But Wittgenstein's formulation has a relevance for this investigation beyond its application in terms of an *analogy* between language and art. In suggesting the fundamental inter-relation between verbal language and various kinds of social action, the notion of language as implying a "form of life" provides a basis on which to explore the social dynamic which cuts across both dance art and the verbal discourses which surround, context and delimit such practice. It may also furnish a starting point for examining how these discourses in turn are implicated in the forms of social, political and economic organisation which characterise the culture in question. One can trace a parallel between Wittgenstein's conception of a "form of life" and Williams's anthropological sense of the word "culture", or the "fundamental social process which shapes specific and distinct 'ways of life' " (1977:17). For Williams, as for Wittgenstein, language is constitutive in the sense of being indissolubly related to practical consciousness and practical activity which creates and maintains the social as such. Language is also, as Williams maintains, drawing on Volosinov's emphasis on the materiality of the sign as "a part of a (socially created) physical and material world" (Williams 1977:38), a "practical material activity [...] indeed, literally a means of production" (*ibid.*). According to Williams, structural linguistics loses sight of the real social dimension of language, and its historical and practical variability, by objectifying and formalising sign systems, rather than conceiving of the latter as "living evidence of a continuing social process, into which individuals are born and within which they are shaped, but to which they then also actively contribute, in a continuing process" (37).

Williams' perspective emphasises how particular *paroles*, the interventions of human agency, contribute to the historical development of sign systems³³. While he indicates the inextricability of symbolic activity and (other) kinds of material social practice, Williams is anxious not to resort to sociological methods which establish a simple correlation between culture and society, based on an idea of reflection. His (1977) work includes a critique of the base-superstructure model central to many Marxist approaches to cultural phenomena which posit the latter as simply responding to and reflecting developments in the "real" arena of society and the economy. Language, art and culture are instead accorded a constitutive role in that "real" arena

³² This view is touched upon in the discussion of the institutional theory's critique of subjectivist aesthetics and will be further explored in this section and Chapter 2.

³³ In this respect, Williams' work finds a parallel that of Kristeva (1974 and 1986:74-136), which draws on both Freud and Marx in uncovering the productive character of semiosis. Kristeva is more critical than Williams of humanist conceptions of the subject but she still stresses transformative agency as revealed in the production of meaning. This investigation develops a discussion of this issue through phenomenology and hermeneutics in Chapter 2.

of material production. Williams' work thus opens on a conception of dance as symbolic activity which is also a material practice in the sense of actively intervening in, challenging or maintaining (rather than passively reflecting) a social order which simultaneously transcends the individual human agent. This perspective is thus of interest to the investigation here, because of its dialectic approach to how cultural practice is both determined by and determines the social context in which that practice emerges and is understood. Such an approach will therefore allow examination of, on the one hand, the systemic parameters which make possible the production and interpretation of dance works, while also exploring, on the other hand, the potentially (but not necessarily) subversive interventions constituted by particular productions and interpretations of those works.

In their development of an agent-centred ethnography, the dance anthropologists who contribute to Farnell's (1995) volume conceive of dance action as symbolic activity in Williams' sense. Their approach to dance analysis can therefore, perhaps, be adapted to this investigation of contemporary theatre dance. These writers maintain that sociality is constituted through agents' use of a variety of sign-systems, including the gestural and danced. At the centre of their ethnographic accounts is a conception of the "person" or socially constructed embodied actor, an individual human agent who is also the product of her/his environment. These anthropologists thus highlight the determination of subjectivity by its context. But they are similarly emphatic about not reducing the particularity of individual "utterances", speech- or movement-acts either to the codes, conventions and norms which constitute the linguistic, semiotic or cultural system, or to the status of typical actions conceived in the light of an interpretation imposed from "outside" of the agents' meaning-contexts. In her introduction to the (1995) volume, Farnell associates the focus of her contributors' work with a theoretical and methodological shift in anthropology "from an empiricist and observationist view of human movement to an agent-centred perspective" (2), linking the essays which follow with a general reaction against non-reflexive approaches which fail to recognise their own cultural and theoretical biases. The agent-centredness championed in Farnell's introduction and Varela's (1995) essay (which explores the conceptual grounding of the ethnographic approach adopted in the volume as a whole), also emerges as a strategy for countering the systematising tendencies of a structuralist approach which places more emphasis on conditions and constraints than on the particularity of human action itself (c.f. Jackson 1983: 327-328). This focus may thus be of use in this investigation in overcoming the deficiencies of the closed-system model discussed in section 2. The general orientation of dance ethnography allows dance- or movement-action to be

considered as a relatively autonomous structure, while also permitting an investigation of how it is contexted in the experience of the agents involved by a variety of other kinds of discursive and material praxis.

The emphasis on agent-centredness in the Farnell (ed.) (1995) volume also has other implications for the methodological procedures favoured in the dance ethnographic writings featured there. Such writings make extensive use of movement notation, incorporating transcriptions of individual movement acts in the ethnographic account. One of the counts on which Varela criticises phenomenological approaches to dance analysis³⁴ is their failure to appreciate the value of what are termed “movement literacy” and the “rigorous textual methodologies” furnished by dance notational systems. (1995: 221). By way of existential phenomenology and the notion of the lived body, Sheets-Johnstone and Jackson have learned to speak “of” the body (experienced or felt) rather than “about” the body (observed). Yet, Varela claims, they are still unable actually to give voice to the embodied agent, to talk “from” the enacted body, because they rely on word glosses rather than movement notation (*ibid.*). Notational scores meanwhile would ensure that “the movement itself is transcribed and the movement itself is read” (*ibid.*). Like musical scores dance notation constitutes for Varela a form of non-intellectualist literacy, which allows the anthropologist “not only to experience the body as a lived organism but also to enact the movement of the body and thus to elect to articulate the experience of it” (287). Movement scores, then, are said by Varela to be “ethnographically superior” to word glosses: they function as pure transcriptions of the actor’s movement, which is in turn a system of action-signs produced intentionally by the agent; “[t]his enactment is in the first person standpoint of an author’s creating and using the semiotic of an action-sign system” (287). Notation thus appears as the transcription, or ‘writing’, of the original speech that is movement³⁵, and there is a suggestion that notation can explore dance signification as such, without necessarily interpreting meaning by falling back on the verbal individuation of a signified³⁶.

In suggesting that a score should replace verbal description of a particular series of movements, Varela implies that notation allows its readers direct access to the person’s embodied action where a verbal account would not. This has a number of important consequences. Firstly, it reinstates the division between embodied

³⁴ Phenomenological approaches to dance study are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

³⁵ See below, pp.66-68 for further discussion of this problematic notion and also Derrida’s sustained critique of the conception of writing as the sign of a sign (1976:6-26 especially).

experience and the social-semiotic context which constitutes that experience as meaningful, a division challenged elsewhere in Varela's text and in the volume of essays as a whole. Indeed, Farnell's introduction to the (1995) work stresses the importance of combining contextual explanation with observational description if ethnographic sense is to be made of the dance under scrutiny. A notational score can "never be sufficient as an explanation of [the] movement" because it cannot convey a sense of the elaborate contexts within which the action occurs (4): as the volume's subtitle ("the Visible and the Invisible in Movement and Dance"³⁷) implies, the contention is that the ethnographer must seek to understand invisible intentions or the action's hidden cultural meanings as well as taking account of the actor's visible movement; only once these implicit meanings have been elucidated, can movement notation contribute to our understanding of intentional action³⁸. Varela's claims concerning the ethnographic superiority of notational as opposed to verbal description do not articulate this as a condition of that model: indeed the validity of his claims is undermined as soon as one recognises the necessity of supplementing the notational score with a verbal explanation of underlying motivations and contextual factors.

Even if the use of notation rather than word glosses constitutes an alternative form of literacy which allows one to speak directly "from" the body, explanation of the embodied action in cultural context still depends upon linguistic and, more specifically, literary competence. It is this type of explanation which, according to Geertz (1993:6), characterises the "kind of intellectual effort" involved in ethnography as such, an endeavour which Geertz describes by borrowing from two essays by Ryle (1971a and 1971b) the term "thick" description. In both Ryle's and Geertz's formulations, thick description is the discursive elaboration of the "stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures" in terms of which individual movement- or speech-acts are "produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not [...] in fact exist" as specific and comprehensible actions oriented towards particular goals (Geertz 1993:7). Arguably (and, as noted above, Farnell's introduction makes a similar point, 1995:4),

³⁶ See the discussion of Barthes (1967), McFee (1992) and Kristeva (1986) above, pp.45-48.

³⁷ This subtitle again invokes the later work of Merleau-Ponty, especially (1968).

³⁸ This is a point also made by McFee who voices reservations about the value of notational transcription in dance analysis (1992:49-66). McFee draws a distinction between two different contexts of meaning and types of explanation available for any action, suggesting that while "causal" explanations would be expected from the natural sciences, "reason-type" explanations are necessary to elucidate human motivations, choices and decisions. In McFee's view, systems of notation can function as a way of causally describing movements but, because they are not "context-sensitive", they can provide no "reason-type" explanation for what the embodied agent does in dancing (61)

notational scores offer “thin” descriptions of dance movement, but fail to provide the necessary contextual explanation that makes sense of such action.

There remains a question, however, as to whether the inclusion of notational transcriptions in ethnographic analysis still serves a useful purpose in highlighting the particularity of individual dances: does a notational score effectively represent the signifying substance of a dance work where a verbal description, focusing on contextual factors, tends to obscure its unique identity? Nelson Goodman, working within the analytic tradition of aesthetics, considers the abstraction of the movement content of dance from its context of production as a crucial manoeuvre in identifying the immanent essence of dance works. Goodman’s (1969 and 1983) thesis posits dance as problematically but fundamentally “allographic”, claiming that it depends for its reproduction upon the existence of a notational score³⁹; the establishment of an adequate notational system and its employment in transcribing the movement material of a given dance thus marks, in Goodman’s view, the difference between “the constitutive and the contingent properties of a work” (1983:403). Notation achieves a “definitive identification of works, fully freed from history of production” (404), from the conditions upon which autographic arts are dependent, and by implication, from the intentional and historically determinate action of the agents, choreographer, performers and spectators, involved in the ‘original’ production.

This distinction between the contingent and constitutive properties of dance works has been challenged by both Armelagos & Sirridge (1978 and 1984) and Margolis (1981). Margolis, whose critique of Goodman is more trenchant (Armelagos and Sirridge being prepared to adopt a modified version of Goodman’s thesis), is concerned to emphasise the fundamentally autographic character of dance alongside the other arts. Goodman fails, for Margolis, because he “tends to separate questions of identity from questions of aesthetic interest” (1981:426) and thus to appreciate that the aesthetic texture of individual works is inextricably linked with the fact of their cultural emergence and historical determination. Goodman, in this view, “ignores the profoundly intentional character of all art” (*ibid.*), where, as in the social anthropology of Varela, the term “intentional” does not denote the psychologically deliberate (although

³⁹ Goodman’s distinction between autographic and allographic art is formulated by him as follows: “[l]et us speak of a work of art as *autographic* if and only if the distinction between original and forgery of it is significant; or better, if and only if even the most exact duplication of it does not thereby count as genuine. If a work of art is autographic, we may also call that art autographic. Thus painting is autographic, music nonautographic, or *allographic*” (1983:400). For a more detailed discussion of this issue see Goodman (1969:177-221).

this dimension might also be included) but is used “in a sense grounded at once in the biologically and culturally shaped forms of historical human expression” (*ibid.*). According to Margolis, dance makes this essential intentionality visible because it relies on the body as its primary expressive vehicle: the *person’s* movement is the product of both an individual and a cultural history, and the particular configuration of this movement in an individual work makes the dance what it is. For Margolis, then, Goodman’s emphasis on the allographic character of dance dismisses as a contingent what is in fact crucial to its aesthetic impact. From this perspective, choreography thus inscribes the performing body in a particular performing context, but that body is always already inscribed, and will be read as such, in the surrounding general culture. Notation tends to reify the movement it represents, obscuring the intimate connection between dance works and the whole process of culture. Because notational systems (which are also historical products in dynamic relation with dance history) inevitably prioritise certain features of the dance over others, any work or form which is not essentially defined by those features will be misrepresented in a score⁴⁰.

This also raises the issue of whether any description or explanation (notational or verbal) can simply and transparently reflect the nature of dance movement as such. Another consequence of Varela’s claims regarding the ethnographic “superiority” of notational scores is a tendency to deny the interpretivity of notational transcription by not making explicit how the notator and his/her system offer only one of many possible versions or representations of the dance action. The notational score already constitutes a reading rather than a transparent description of movement, and in that sense mediates rather than purely articulating physical experience. Again, Geertz’s comments about thick description are relevant here in highlighting the essential interpretivity of the ethnographic enterprise, or the fact that “what we call our data are really our own constructions of other people’s constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to” (1993:9). Geertz thus points to the fact that any kind of description (the anthropologist’s, the actor’s, the ‘neutral’ observer’s) furnishes an account of action from a particular perspective. This is the case even with “thin” description which still has a thickness to the extent that it reveals an interested quality, privileging certain features of the action and a certain standpoint over others. In this

⁴⁰ The choreutic parameters of a dance work are not necessarily definitive of its essence: for example, the narrative structure is more crucial to the identity of some works of Romantic and classical ballet where the choreography can change provided the narrative focus does not. Similarly, the kinaesthetic motivation of the dancers or the idea at the centre of a contemporary dance work may be considered by its creators to be the crucial defining factor rather than the patterns of movement they generate. In relation to the general problems of essentialist paradigms in dance writing, see pp.29-30, 33-34 above.

sense, then, the notational scores used in dance analysis could be seen as a type of description thickened according to the set of parameters which the notation system itself imposes and according to the notator's understanding of the movement through this frame.

Recognising the hermeneutic character of the score integrated in a dance ethnography radically problematises Varela's claims about notation's capacity to speak "from" the body (1995:221, see p.53 above). But even the premise on which such claims are founded, that access to the performer's perspective allows fuller understanding of the movement action as such, is problematic in relation to performance dance. Even if the notation did offer the chance of enacting the movement "in the first person standpoint of an author's creating and using the semiotic of an action-sign system" (Varela 1995: 287), the privileging of this standpoint presupposes that the action is authored by the performing individual. This ignores the character of performance dance as (like any complex social action) a collective endeavour which may embody the not necessarily commensurate intentions of all agents involved in its production: those, for example, of the choreographer, the other performers, the designer, the theatre promoter and the funder, as well as the audience which approaches the movement action from a different perspective again. While it is perfectly legitimate for an ethnographic description or analysis to foreground the perspective of some of these agents rather than others, problems arise when the interpretative basis of that decision is not made explicit or when the meaning-context of one agent is assumed to be definitive of that of others also involved.

In performance dance analysis, as in literary criticism, there has been a tendency to offer intentionalist accounts of meaning which rely on what artists say about what they do to the exclusion of the interpretations of other agents involved with the work / text (see Wimsatt & Beardsley 1970; Manning 1993:13; Franko 1995:xii). Intentionalism tends both to obscure the materiality of the work's semiotic fabric by reducing it to a set of pre-existing ideas or impressions in the minds of the creators, and to occlude the dimension of audience response and interpretation from the analytical picture. Uncritical adoption of an agent-centred ethnographic model runs the risk of rehearsing such manoeuvres and thus points up the limits of the applicability of this model to the analysis of dance art. Those limitations depend partly on how broadly an analysis reflects the diversity of perspectives of the agents involved. Geertz's (1993) account of ethnography draws attention to the fact that "what we inscribe (or try to) is not raw social discourse, to which, because, save very marginally or very specially, we are not

actors, we do not have direct access, but only that small part of it which our informants can lead us into understanding” (20). To the extent that a writer proposing to analyse a dance work may have participated as spectator in the event of performance, and certainly engages with the remaining traces of that event to construct an interpretation, s/he *does* constitute an actor whose meaning-context and interests will partly determine the nature of the reading produced.

There is a sense in which intentionalist assumptions are endemic to the kind of agent-centred ethnographic model developed in Farnell (ed.) (1995), based on an essentially communicational model of language. A model of social action in general is extrapolated from the notion of the speech act in dialogue: actions are considered to be intended to communicate a message and to be interpreted by others as vehicles of that message. The ethnographer can intercept the communication and understand its author's intentions like a partner in dialogue provided s/he has sufficient knowledge of the cultural context in which the actors operate to be able to understand their action on their terms. Because of this shared context, actions which initially appear polysemic assume the univocity essential to effective dialogic communication: one interlocutor knows what the other means because both inhabit or are knowledgeable about an environment which determines what it is possible to mean.

Arguably, however, it is not the case that the interpretation of performance dance or art in general, by either audience member or the analyst / critic, depends on a comparable dialogic situation being established. A minimum competence in relation to artistic codes and conventions is required for it to be understood what kind of action the artwork constitutes and, to that extent, choreographers, dancers and spectators must share a general cultural context for art to be interpreted as meaningful. But the fabric of the work itself retains a degree of polysemy not exhibited by the dialogic speech act. A number of semioticians have recognised how aesthetic signification problematises the model of intentional communication, eluding the categories elaborated to explain the transmission of other types of messages. Eco (1976: 261-276), for example, drawing on Jakobson's notion of the “poetic” function of language, characterises the aesthetic text as “ambiguous and self-focusing” (262): it constitutes a “violation of norms on both the expression and the content plane” (264), encouraging its readers at once to interpret the message which the author seems to have intended to communicate and to discover an “unexpected flexibility” in its sign systems (263). In foregrounding the materiality of signification and not suppressing ambiguity, the aesthetic realm is arguably a privileged site for staging the capacity of language and signification in

general to elude linguistic norms and conscious control, disrupting any ideally dialogic or communicational situation (see also Kristeva 1986:86-87).

In the view of Ricoeur (1981), this essential ambiguity is what distinguishes all forms of writing from dialogic speech. Drawing on distinctions between *langue* and *parole* or schema and use (formulated by Saussure and Hjelmslev respectively), Ricoeur recognises the difference between language as a system and its realisation in the event of discourse. In verbal language, discourse is instantiated in either speech or writing. Writing, however, is not secondary to speech in that it is not the fixation of an anterior spoken discourse. Rather “[w]hat is fixed by writing is [...] a discourse which could be said, of course, but which is written precisely because it is not said” (1981:146). Fixation of discourse in writing “takes the very place of speech, occurring at the site where speech could have emerged” directly inscribing the “said”, or meaning, of discourse (*ibid.*). It is in this sense that writing constitutes a fixation or objectification of discourse. As such, writing is not, like speech, dependent for its reference on the particular shared context of the interlocutors, but can decontextualise and recontextualise itself in situations other than that in which the original inscription occurred. It is through this “emancipation” that texts acquire autonomy, transcending the context-dependency of dialogue. The text, according to Ricoeur, is autonomous on three different levels: “with respect to the intention of the author; with respect to the cultural situation and all the sociological conditions of production of the text; and, finally, with respect to the original addressee” (91).

If choreography is conceived (in the way the word’s etymology suggests) as a form of inscription, and thus as analogous to writing rather than verbal speech, it can be characterised, like a verbal text, as an objectified (in Ricoeur’s sense) and relatively autonomous construct. In the process of objectification through choreographic inscription, dance opens itself to a variety of interpretations which transcend the intentional horizon of the creating and performing agents. If an essential ambiguity thus characterises the mode of being of artworks or aesthetic texts, then the audience is actively encouraged by performance art to sift and evaluate the work’s semiotic fabric, and to *construct* an interpretation, rather than simply recovering or reconstructing a pre-constituted meaning intended by the creator / performer. And this notion has a particular relevance to the focus of this investigation. Contemporary dance is subsidised by the state in both Britain and France on the basis that it can be (physically

and conceptually) accessible to a broad-based public⁴¹, that it can transcend the context of its emergence and remain meaningful in relation to the kind of diverse audience one would expect in the large-scale, complex and pluralist societies of Western Europe. On neither the aesthetic nor the sociological level, then, is it a question simply of an audience dialogically engaging with the artists in order to understand a given dance practice in relation to a shared context: rather the wide range of social, cultural and political interests governing the actions of different individuals and groups are likely to produce a correspondingly diverse range of aesthetic responses within the performance situation. It is this process of recontextualising in order to interpret dance practice which is the focus of the theoretical discussion in Chapter 2 and the empirically based analyses of Chapters 4 to 7.

Ricoeur's conception of writing as a "liberation" from the context-dependency of dialogue also has significant implications for the epistemological status of this investigation itself. For Ricoeur, as previously suggested, objectification through writing ensures its autonomy "with respect to the intention of the author; with respect to the cultural situation and all the sociological conditions of production of the text; and, finally, with respect to the original addressee" (1981:91). This autonomy is the embodiment of a distance between the original event and the subsequent interpreter, bridged through the recontextualisation that an interpretation effects. Firstly, then, Ricoeur's perspective points to the importance of recognising the fully hermeneutic character of dance analysis which, as argued above, is always based on *mediated* access to its object. Dance events are only ultimately accessible to the analyst through traces in, for example, a notated score, a film or video record, written accounts of varying province, or even the memory of a performance held in an individual's consciousness. Where a number of sources are used as the basis for a dance analysis, the object of investigation is irrevocably textual in the sense of being constituted by a complex of traces or objectifications in (different forms of) writing of various aspects of original action. These traces do not simply, as Varela implies about notational scores, make present again the event as originally experienced. But they do provide a basis on which recontextualised understanding of dance phenomena can be developed.

⁴¹ See below, Chapter 3, for a more detailed discussion of this theme.

Secondly, Ricoeur's account of writing suggests a tension which lies at the heart of the ethnographic enterprise and which is touched upon in Geertz's (1993) essay when he considers thick description as itself a writing of the action studied in ethnography: such description, for Geertz, fixes the meaning of fleeting events so that it is liberated from the immediate context of the action and can be retrieved at a distance (spatial, temporal or cultural) (1993: 19). In distinguishing between event and meaning, Geertz claims to be borrowing (and, he says, "twisting") a notion from Ricoeur which sees writing as the fixation of "the 'said' of speaking, where we understand by the 'said' of speaking that intentional exteriorisation constitutive of the aim of discourse thanks to which the *sagen* - the saying - wants to become the *Aus-sage* - the enunciation, the enunciated" (cited in Geertz 1993: 19; see Ricoeur 1981:199). The ethnographer, in Geertz's formulation here, articulates the "said" rather than the "saying" of social action. Thick description objectifies cultural action through inscription and on this basis can extend its analysis to wider contexts of anthropological and sociological explanation.

Geertz's comments here do, however, tend to downplay the fact that ethnography is also crucially concerned with the action as event, and with reconstructing the original context in which the action occurred as well as recontextualising its meaning. So ethnography is, perhaps paradoxically, concerned on the one hand with the fixation of meaning through writing and the relation of this fixed meaning to a broader context of understanding, and on the other with a reanimation of existing textual evidence in order to re-present the original action as dynamic event rather than objectified meaning. This tension is also evident in this investigation. A contextual analysis of contemporary dance as a cultural phenomenon will in part be seeking to reconstitute or represent that phenomenon as an event which emerges from and is tied to a complex of intentional action and social convention, conceived as a dynamic process. But it also recognises that, for such phenomena to emerge as distinct at all, they must, in Ricoeur's sense be "written" and hence objectified, if understanding of them in terms of other contexts (including the disciplines of academic enquiry) is to be possible. But this objectification also renders the phenomenon under scrutiny essentially ambiguous or polysemic and highlights the hermeneutic contingency of any particular reading or interpretation thereof. This range of tensions is further explored in Chapter 2 through a reflection on phenomenological and hermeneutic approaches and their relevance to this study.

CHAPTER 2:
THE PHENOMENOLOGY AND HERMENEUTICS OF DANCE

2.1 Phenomenology and Dance

The dance anthropologists discussed in Chapter 1 are anxious to develop an agent-centred approach to ethnography in which the intentional basis of movement action, its significance in relation to the meaning-contexts of the actors concerned, is recognised and laid bare. Geertz's (1993:17-18) essay too, while maintaining the importance of a semiotic concept of culture to the ethnographic enterprise, is also emphatic about not reducing cultural action in its meaningfulness to the structures and principles of a symbolic system conceived, as in Saussure's structural linguistics, as an object accessible to the methods of scientific enquiry. Geertz's appeal to Ricoeur suggests that, even if the objectification of discourse in writing and action is a necessary prerequisite for ethnographic investigation, the latter can uncover the constitutive principles of this objectification in order to reveal the living meaning of the actor's real interventions. This notion rests on the conviction that, in anthropology as in the other human sciences, the "object" examined by the researcher is distinct from that of the natural sciences because it concerns human agents who create their own reality, and not an already given, pre-constituted world existing independently of human intervention. Excavating the historical basis of this conviction, Habermas (1988) claims that "the distinguishing feature of the *Geisteswissenschaftler*" has, since Dilthey, been recognised "as the relationship within them of the epistemological subject to an object domain that itself shares the structures of subjectivity" or, in more idealist terms, "as spirit encountering itself in its objectifications" (90).

The investigation presented here is concerned not only with the systems of signification and forms of life which make dance art as such possible and meaningful, but also with the status and implications of particular actions within this domain which may (but do not necessarily) challenge, subvert or revise the conventions operating at a given moment in time. This raises the issue of subjective human agency, through its manifestation in particular dance works and interpretations of those works and via the researcher's own implication (as spectator, reader or interpreter) within the domain of enquiry. The question then arises here, as for Habermas, as to whether even an attempt to establish a basis for the enquiry within traditional methodological paradigms would be misplaced, in that "scientific" methods assume a stable relation and a clear-cut division between the investigating subject and the object s/he analyses. Since the *Geisteswissenschaften* problematise such assumptions, they also point up the need for a philosophical examination of the process whereby human subjectivity comes to be expressed and understood through the cultural products and actions which constitute

the domain of enquiry. Insofar as this investigation of contemporary dance in relation to its social, political and economic context deals with such cultural phenomena, it constitutes, like the *Geisteswissenschaften* and *verstehen* sociology, an interpretive enterprise which can discover a secure grounding only through “epistemological investigations of the transcendental-logical structure of the world of possible subjects and the conditions of the intersubjectivity of understanding” (Habermas 1988:90).

Phenomenological philosophy opens up this epistemological dimension behind the empirical by offering a transcendental reflection on knowledge, perception and action. Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology (see Husserl 1931; 1960 and 1964 and Macann 1993:1-55) both works within and seeks to supersede the tradition of Cartesian Rationalism: it aims to understand the foundations of knowledge by uncovering the basic structures of consciousness and investigating the essences of phenomena as they are apprehended in conscious lived experience. The method of phenomenology is essentially descriptive rather than theoretical: it does not formulate hypotheses which can be tested experimentally, but claims rather to lay bare the foundation on which all such theoretical and empirical procedures rest. A prerequisite of this descriptive endeavour, at least in the transcendental guise it assumes in Husserl’s work, is the suspension of the natural attitude of everyday interaction and empirical science, known as the phenomenological reduction or *epoche*: only once the preconceptions and assumptions governing our habitual ways of ordering and categorising reality have been set aside can the direct experience of consciousness be revealed in its pre-objective, pre-objectifying state.

Phenomenology posits consciousness itself as fundamentally “intentional”, that is, as actively constituting its objects rather than passively receiving impressions of an already given reality. Thus, traditional conceptions of subjective interiority versus exterior reality are undermined since it is only in their capacity as contents of consciousness that worldly phenomena are meaningful and comprehensible as such at all; and, since phenomenology “brackets” the question of the real existence of phenomena, it is as much concerned with the non-material, non-existent (e.g. dreams and fantasy) as with the phenomena of the “real” world. This partly explains the appeal of phenomenology to aesthetics: if art is a culturally emergent phenomenon, and as such irreducible to its material and objective existence, a philosophy of art will need to open to examination the whole complex of conscious activity and experience involved in artistic production and reception. A phenomenological approach effectively does this

by focusing on the constitutive interpretative activity of consciousness rather than the already given objects of the real world.

Both dance and theatre studies have appropriated the descriptive techniques of phenomenological philosophy in investigating the fundamental nature of performance phenomena⁴². The phenomenology of dance receives its most extensive elaboration in the work of Sheets-Johnstone (1979, 1981 and 1984). Following Husserl's affirmation that philosophy's focus should be the essences of things themselves as they are apprehended in consciousness, Sheets-Johnstone promises to return us to "the experience of dance itself" through a rendering of its essential features (1984:124-145). She aims to elucidate the foundational lived experience of dance, as it emerges in the pre-reflective, pre-objective encounter between consciousness and the world revealed in the phenomenological reduction (1979:10). She claims, therefore, not to be formulating a theoretical system which "reflects upon what the man-world relationship is as the convergence of two objective units", but proposes instead a technique of description, "a systematic method which illuminates the lived experiences of man in-the-midst-of-the-world" (11). To this end, she also draws on the tradition of existential phenomenology, which rejects the primarily epistemological emphasis of Husserl's transcendental model and moves to consider ontological questions thrown up by his investigations. The concern of Heidegger (1962), Sartre (1969) and Merleau-Ponty (1962) with human being in its facticity and concreteness leads them to stress the thrownness of consciousness into the world as a precondition of its lived experience: the embodiment of consciousness, as well as its insertion in a history and a language, emerge as fundamental facts which structure its sense-making activities. In thus recognising the significance of corporeal experience, the existential tradition allows the body a theoretical privilege not normally accorded it within the Cartesian tradition, and gives the phenomenologist the opportunity of appropriating this privilege, by association, for dance.

Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenology is concerned with the meaning of dance as a signifying phenomenon, but on a more fundamental level than is explored in semiological analysis which objectifies and fragments phenomena in its discussion of how meaning is produced. Her early work (1979) posits performance dance as essentially symbolic in nature and, in this respect, she draws on Langer's (1953) characterisation of performance dance as symbolic of virtual force. For Sheets-

⁴² A phenomenology of theatre is developed, for example, by Garner (1994) and States (1995).

Johnstone, this virtual force is the primary illusion of the dance, sustained by consciousness throughout the duration of the performance. The dance is an “elusive moving form” (1979:14) which is always in the process of becoming and is “never the dance at any moment” (22) since the form’s significance emerges only in relation to its totality, revealed in a description effected via the phenomenological reduction. Sheets-Johnstone adopts Langer’s term “import” to denote the “kind of meaning which suffuses a whole and is inseparable from that whole” (Sheets-Johnstone 1979:62). And, as with Langer, the symbolic dance form’s significance is thus distinguished in kind from linguistic meaning which attaches to the individual components of any given expression (see above, pp.27-28). For Johnstone (1984) and Prickett (1992) phenomenological description⁴³ thus provides an alternative to semiological methods which, through objectification, encourage the fragmentation of the dance phenomenon, dividing and categorising its signifying components in the process of analysis. Both writers seek to counter hypostatic notions of the dance object as a system of individual, self-contained signifiers with stable relation to their signifieds and referents (Johnstone 1984:168; Prickett 1992:71-72).

For Sheets-Johnstone and her followers, then, the essential meaning of dance is only revealed by exploring how dance is apprehended by intentional consciousness in the vivid present of lived experience. And Sheets-Johnstone emphasises that ordinary verbal descriptions of dance meaning, contaminated as they are by empirical premises, are incapable of representing the dance’s true import. She distinguishes her own discourse from such descriptions by characterising the linguistic mode of phenomenology as “a very particular process of re-languaging” (1979:xv) which reconstitutes the pre-reflective lived experience of consciousness. The (1984) essay claims that “one must come to grips linguistically with the phenomenon as it gives itself in experience”, thus “forging a new language that captures precisely the quality - the physiognomy - of the phenomenon in question” (135). Sheets-Johnstone’s (1981) description of the lived experience of dance improvisation, suggests how this re-languaging can be accomplished by replacing the literal language of “facts about the experience” with a metaphoric language fore-grounding their “felt reality”: while this new metaphorical discourse “may first appear to be self-indulgent jargon, precious or fanciful verbal excesses”, it actually makes possible “a first person account of the world as it is lived”, thereby leading to the heart of the phenomenon in question (402). The

⁴³ Johnstone calls the method he employs a “quasi-phenomenological” technique of

suggestion here is that ordinary language is irrecoverably factual in its association with the natural attitude that Husserlian phenomenology aims to suspend, and that this language of facts consequently clouds the essential experience of consciousness. A metaphorically re-languaged discourse, meanwhile, achieves a transparency which offers direct, unmediated access to that experience much in the way that dance notation was said by Varela (1995) purely to articulate the “first-person” experience of the moving agent (see above, pp.53-54).

This formulation of the role and status of language is as problematic in Sheets-Johnstone’s work as in that of the anthropologist, in denying the interpretivity of the phenomenological enterprise. Formulation of the linguistic problematic in these terms neglects both the role of language in the pre-structuring or constitution of that experience, and the fact that phenomenological discourse itself necessarily inhabits “the hazards of language” (Merleau-Ponty 1973:17): existential phenomenology has been at pains to stress that the subject’s insertion in language is, like its corporeality, an aspect of its situatedness in the world and, as such, inescapable⁴⁴. The conventional associations of natural language and the natural attitude cannot be so completely suspended in phenomenological investigation as to abolish those indicative structures of everyday language which ensure the intersubjective comprehensibility of phenomenology’s own verbal descriptions. There is a sense in which Husserl’s transcendental phenomenology lays claim to the kind of descriptive purity to which Sheets-Johnstone aspires (Husserl 1970; Derrida 1973). But the eidetic status of Husserl’s phenomenology is also contingent upon a series of philosophically elaborated distinctions and exclusions, which can only be established through engaging with the philosophical tradition and, in the process, maintaining a certain reflexivity regarding phenomenology’s relative position within that tradition. Sheets-Johnstone’s (1984) essay, meanwhile, tends rather to dismiss such reflexive engagement as inessential to phenomenology by distinguishing between two types of phenomenologist: those concerned, on the one hand, with the elucidation of the nature

“experiential description” (1984:168)

⁴⁴ Extended passages from the writings of Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists could be invoked in contradiction of Sheets-Johnstone’s claims: see for example, Merleau-Ponty (1962:174-199), (1964:39-44 and 84-97) and (1973:17-38); Schutz (1967a) and (1967b) also explores the ways in which experience is linguistically pre-structured in an effort to clarify the foundations for a theory of intersubjective understanding. The linguistic problematic was also extensively analysed by Husserl: the first of the *Logical Investigations* (1970) is concerned primarily with the possibility of linguistic presentation of subjective experience (see Derrida 1973 for a comprehensive account and critique of Husserl’s theory of signs).

of phenomenology itself; and, on the other, those engaged in existential description of lived experience and the revelation, in the process, of essential structures or truths. Her own preference is for the latter type of investigation, and she similarly encourages others not to indulge in philosophical speculation about phenomenology's foundations, or "the possibility of essence grasping" *per se*, but rather to "plunge into phenomenological accounts themselves and let one's experience speak for itself in the light of those descriptive accounts" (1984:139). And yet to claim the very possibility of an experiential reflection uncontaminated by pre-established factual or theoretical suppositions, requires a careful negotiation of, and reflexivity in relation to, those presuppositions⁴⁵.

Arguably, many of the difficulties of Sheets-Johnstone's phenomenological approach stem from her problematic combination of existential and transcendental modes of enquiry. The comments about language which ground her own descriptive procedures, in pointing to a radical separation of two linguistic modes, posit a more general distinction between fact and lived experience. This distinction echoes the Husserlian emphasis on the difference between empirical and eidetic sciences⁴⁶, but, like the Husserlian view of language, is challenged by existential phenomenology. In Merleau-Ponty's view, the distinction between fact and experience is ultimately untenable since, from an existentialist perspective, factual, empirical existence, or Being-in-the-world, is an aspect of the essential experience of consciousness⁴⁷. Yet despite drawing on Merleau-Ponty in other respects, Sheets-Johnstone does not, at least initially, question the distinction between the *de facto* and the *de jure*⁴⁸. Instead of following through the implicit challenge to this distinction that her work seems to pose, she falls back on the conviction that her perspective is eidetic and transcendental in its

⁴⁵ Sheets-Johnstone seems to recognise this in her criticism of "present day encroachments upon the word 'phenomenology': " insofar as "the term [...] does seem stretched beyond its limits when it is used to denote either more repertorial renderings of perceptible behaviors and actions, or *any* descriptive rendering at all of perceptible behaviors and actions" (1979:xv). She is also emphatic about the term "phenomenology" denoting "a method of eidetic analysis invariably associated with the name of Edmund Husserl" with "a rich and particular philosophical history that it might be well to recognise" (1984: 137).

⁴⁶ see Husserl (1962:56-57) and Schmidt (1985:39-40)

⁴⁷ Merleau-Ponty also argues that Husserl himself came to question the distinction in the correspondence with Lévy-Bruhl: see (1962:221) and (1964:107-8) and Schmidt (1985:40).

⁴⁸ In the introduction to (1979) as well as (1978), Sheets-Johnstone notes that, subsequent to her original formulation of a phenomenology of dance as symbolic form, there has been a qualitative shift in the mode of choreographic practice which reveals her essential descriptions as only contingently applicable to American modern, rather than postmodern, dance. She thus recognises that the empirical fact of historical change cannot but impinge on the eidetic endeavour of transcendental phenomenology.

concern with essence uncontaminated by fact. For the researcher seeking to ground an empirical investigation in a form of transcendental reflection, this creates severe difficulties since it offers no route of return from transcendental to empirical realms as long as they are held to be radically distinct. Despite this, Sheets-Johnstone (and following her, Prickett 1992 and Thomas 1995) maintains that phenomenological eidetic investigation can be combined unproblematically with an empirical “scientifically ordered gathering of information” (1984:134). In the same essay, however, she claims to give voice via the phenomenological reduction to an “original, pristine [...], preobjective or preobjectivized body” apprehended “prior to any theoretical or objectivating processing of the experience” (1984:133), while simultaneously holding, even more problematically, that in order to verify the appropriateness of phenomenological descriptions, what amounts to an empirical operation can be performed, “assaying them within the crucible of one’s own experience” (144) to discover “a concordance or discordance of the description at the heart of our own experience of the phenomenon in question” (141). This rides roughshod over the Husserlian distinctions upon which the eidetic endeavour depends.

The problem of integrating transcendental reflection with empirical investigation is not confined to Sheets-Johnstone’s work or to the phenomenology of dance. Habermas (1988:108-117) points to a comparable difficulty in Cicourel’s and Garfinkel’s applications of Schütz’s transcendental-logical analysis of the structures of the social lifeworld. Garfinkel works with the notion that the transcendental structure of a person’s lifeworld is manifest in what s/he considers to be “perceivedly normal”: by pinpointing certain apparently normal situations, systematically violating the conditions on which that normality seems to depend, and assessing the extent to which disorientation and chaos in everyday interaction ensues, the researcher can determine the true principles of stability on which such interaction rests (Habermas 1988:109-110). Cicourel, meanwhile, makes this kind of “experimental comprehension of the transcendental structure of lifeworlds the precondition for any reliable measurement in social research” but thus argues in a circular fashion since the validity of measuring techniques themselves depends on the structures elucidated as fundamental to the realm of intersubjectivity (110-111). For Habermas, work of this kind founders on a misinterpretation of the status of phenomenological research “which draws its strength from the reflective representation of constructive subjectivity and cannot be turned outward in experiments” (111). The structures of consciousness uncovered via phenomenological enquiry could only be tested by experiment “if all the experimental subjects were trained phenomenologists who brought their own interpretive rules to

awareness under varied conditions” (*ibid.*). Only insofar as the transcendental rules are altered under empirical conditions, becoming integrated in a natural attitude that phenomenological enquiry suspends, do they become accessible to empirical investigation.

For an empirical investigation to proceed on the basis of a transcendental enquiry, therefore, the character of the natural attitude and the processes by which it is sustained must also be revealed rather than simply suspended and excluded from phenomenological account. This is recognised both by the later Husserl (1960) and by Schutz (1967a and 1967b) who develops Husserl’s premises concerning the intersubjective dimension of conscious experience⁴⁹. In exploring the essential constitution of the world of everyday interaction or the “lifeworld” (*lebenswelt*), Schutz also claims to account also for the context from within which any sociological investigation emerges, even as it distinguishes itself in kind from the immediate experience of subjectivities unreflectively immersed in the natural attitude. Sheets-Johnstone, meanwhile, by-passes investigation of the essential structures of the natural attitude and the lifeworld, with the consequence that her work tends to elide lived experience of transcendental consciousness, revealed via the *epoche*, with the immediate experience of the subjectivities involved in dance creation. For example, her discussion of how the essential significance of dance only emerges if the symbolic illusion of virtual force is maintained, seems to posit this as a task for both dancer and audience member as well as the phenomenological description itself. For the dancer, maintenance of the illusion involves a symbolising transcendence of the body’s material reality (1979:33-34): as soon as the dancer reflects upon what she is doing, becomes aware of individual movements and the process of their physical execution, the illusion is shattered. The audience too can break the dance’s continuity by perceiving the dancer as a physical body separated from the dance: “movement becomes actual effort, actual exertion, actual force, taking place in an objective space-time” (41). Both parties can thus “interrupt the flow and fragmentize its inherent totality”, obscuring its “unique significance” (6), whereas a lived experience is only achieved (and dance meaning only emerges) when “[w]e are spontaneously and wholly intent upon the continuously emerging form which appears before us, thoroughly engrossed in its unfolding” (4). Unless Sheets-Johnstone were to argue that the performance situation itself effects a kind of *epoche* in relation to the material it puts on display (an

⁴⁹ see especially Husserl’s fifth Cartesian Meditation, which attempts an “Uncovering of the sphere of Transcendental Being as Monadological Intersubjectivity” (1960:89-151).

idea which is not articulated explicitly in her accounts⁵⁰), she cannot logically claim the equivalence of the immediate experience of empirical agents, immersed as it is in the natural attitude, to the foundational lived experience of consciousness revealed by the phenomenologist.

Sheets-Johnstone's tendency to collapse the experience of empirical agents into that of transcendental consciousness also points to a concomitant propensity of phenomenologically-oriented dance writing problematic in relation to the investigation here, namely the tendency to assume that the experiences of performer and spectator, in their encounter via the dance work, are essentially similar. This is a consequence of the failure to problematise (in the way other existential phenomenologists do) the Husserlian emphasis on transcendental consciousness as an abstracted essence. It could also be traced to an unquestioning acceptance of Husserl's account of intersubjectivity, which describes the understanding of the other's action as based on an "analogizing perception" of the other body: in recognising the similarity of that other body to my own, a transfer is effected to the other animate body of the meaning fundamental to my sense of self (Macann 1993:48), and hence I interpret the others actions by assimilating them to my own lived experience. In the phenomenologically-inspired writings of Fraleigh (1987), a similar idea takes an ontological turn. Drawing on existential phenomenology's insistence on corporeality as a fundamental structure of human existence: Fraleigh declares intersubjective communication through dance to be "rooted in the kinesthetic, or the feeling of being a body-of-action" (61). Because both dancer and viewer are embodied, they share a capacity for kinaesthetic intuition so that the viewer empathetically understands the dancer's kinaesthetic sensations: "[t]he dance itself, made visible by the dancer, passes between the dancer and the audience and binds them together" (*ibid.*). This level of intuitive apprehension is said to be "first and foundational" (*ibid.*), transcending or grounding all semiotic and hermeneutic operations of the dance and its receiver⁵¹.

⁵⁰ This notion is developed in some phenomenology of theatre: see for example States (1992).

⁵¹ Fraleigh's notion of the spectator "perpetually enact[ing] the dance" on the basis of a kinaesthetic experience (60-61) is taken even further in Martin's (1990) theorisation of the politics of performance, which also employs (and critiques) the insights of Merleau-Ponty's existential phenomenology. In his view, the body's lived experience is a source of potential political resistance to a dominant symbolic order but only in its nonsymbolic, nonrepresentational materiality which he claims is revealed in performance. He thus goes so far as to deny altogether the performing body's status as a signifying entity, maintaining that the performance event effects a direct transfer of kinetic energy from dancer to spectator.

The notion of kinaesthetic empathy is current in dance discourse generally, not an idea developed only or always in phenomenologically-oriented writing⁵². But Sheets-Johnstone's tendency to collapse the immediate experience of empirical agents into the lived experience of transcendental consciousness, does imply a degree of reflexivity between the perspectives of dancer and viewer: she stresses the need for a "synthetic view of dance as a formed (dancer point of view) and performed (audience point of view) art" (1979:30), but as her description unfolds, the suspicion arises that this synthesis is only achieved by equating qualitatively distinct forms of conscious engagement with the dance phenomenon. The difficulty with Fraleigh's position resides in the assumption that the body is an originary and universal essence, and that dance, as a corporeal practice, permits a return to a primordial and pre-rational mode of being which transcends the petty limitations of mind and language. A long tradition in dance writing supports such a view (see, for example, Ellis 1983; Martin 1983 and 1965) according primacy to the body as the fundamental level of experience, while reason, language and signification are subordinated as separate from and secondary to the physical. Commonly held by dance artists and writers (as argued by Foster 1986:xiv-xvi, and Moore 1988, for example), but by no means confined to this field⁵³, such notions can culminate in an automatic association of the 'natural' body with a 'natural', universal dance, the reception of which is posited as "intuitive, visceral and preverbal" (Siegel 1988:30).

Such a conception of dance practice deproblematizes its comprehensibility both within and across cultures and has consequently been subject to a sustained critique within dance anthropology (see Kaeppler 1978:33; Hanna 1983; Farnell ed. 1995⁵⁴).

⁵² See, for example, Martin (1983) who claims that "[b]ecause of the inherent contagion of bodily movement, which makes the onlooker feel sympathetically in his own musculature the exertions he sees in someone else's musculature, the dancer is able to convey through movement the most intangible emotional experience" (22). See also Martin (1965:47-55). For philosophical critiques of the notion of kinaesthetic empathy, see Best (1974:141-152), McFee (1992: 264-273) and Pakes (1999).

⁵³ The anthropologist Michael Jackson, for example, denounces the dominance of semiological methods because they reduce the meaning of body praxis to "cognitive and semantic operations" (1983:329): he claims that "[w]hile words and concepts distinguish and divide, bodiness unites and forms the grounds of an empathic, even a universal understanding" (341).

⁵⁴ Farnell criticises theories such as that of Jackson (1983) which is phenomenologically derived and which implicitly posits "a reality sans language, sans culture, sans history" (5). Varela's (1995) essay, in the same volume, suggests that while the phenomenological 'lived body' may establish the actuality of the subject's experience of embodiment, it simultaneously individualises and internalises human agency and cannot, therefore, constitute the basis of a social science. By positing the existence of an intellectual / linguistic 'superstructure' separate from the existential essence of the body revealed in movement, the work of Sheets-Johnstone and Jackson is, Varela claims, incapable of accounting for movement as intentional social action (218-221). See above, pp.53-57, for further discussion of Varela's position.

While the latter remains largely concerned with how such misconceptions impact on writing about non-Western dance, some work highlights how a similar set of assumptions distorts analysis also of Western theatre dance (Novack 1990). The perceived historical shift from modern to postmodern forms, some practitioners of which claim to reach behind and beyond narrative and expressionist symbolism by returning the spectator to the originary experience of movement itself, revives notions of a non-signifying universal corporeality. Thus Sheets-Johnstone (1978) claims that postmodern dance effects “[a]n astounding rapprochement between the cultural and what, in a broad sense, might be called the *biological*” (198, my italics); while Dempster (1995) holds that postmodern dance “stresses the materiality, the fleshiness - and therefore the vulnerability and mortality - of all bodies: the dancer’s and, *by a reflexive action*, the spectator’s” (33, my italics). Such accounts, like that of Fraleigh (1987), continue to imply that dance permits a circumvention of cultural and linguistic difference and offers a return to an originary, universal physical experience.

In adopting this stance, the writers concerned tend to ignore the semiotic fact of the dancing body in performance along with the complex of interpretive activity whereby the observer makes sense of the dance concerned: rather, the body becomes a transparent medium through which the dancer’s own sensations make themselves felt in the corporeality of the receiver, irrespective of the particular perspective governing that viewer’s attention and regardless of the conventional associations to which the body as signifying entity may give rise within a particular cultural context. In basing her account of dance communication on such assumptions, Fraleigh distorts to an unacceptable extent the thrust of both existential phenomenology and the Husserlian account of intersubjectivity based on the notion of analogizing perception. This is revealed by attending to the detailed elaboration of this notion offered by Schutz (1967b). In Schutz’s description, the other’s bodily movements carry with them an implicit reference to another consciousness only insofar as they are interpreted as *signs* of the other’s lived experience, not simply perceived as physical events (101). But the subjective meaning an action has for the consciousness of the agent is necessarily non-identical with its meaning for the observer, who can only understand approximately both the actor’s intentions and experience. Moreover, performed actions also have an objective meaning dependent on their indicative rather than expressive function: signs become ideal objectivities insofar as they can be repeated and repeatedly understood in relation to the meaning attributed to them consensually or conventionally. In their capacity as ideal objectivities, movement signs, like verbal signs, transcend the intentional horizon of the subjective consciousness which employs

them. And in this sense, phenomenology cannot avoid an investigation of the semiotics of dance performance by confining its investigation to the realm of monadological transcendental consciousness, or by assuming that the common corporeality of performer and spectator abolishes the mediation of meaning by signs⁵⁵.

The phenomenology of dance as it is developed in the work of Sheets-Johnstone and Fraleigh thus tends to avoid questions which are of fundamental interest to this investigation, in particular the issue of the nature of audience perception and interpretation in relation to dance art. A phenomenological approach which fails to distinguish adequately or convincingly between the lived experiences of performing and viewing consciousnesses, adopting a model of transcendental consciousness which subsumes all empirical differences, closes off the avenue of enquiry into the particular mode of engagement of the receiving consciousness in the performance situation. It also tends to sideline questions of how choreographic intention comes to be embodied in the matter of dance performance, by not developing an analysis of how the ideal objectivity of the dance work emerges intersubjectively on the ontic level of the social lifeworld. This also means that the peculiarity of the performance situation in relation to the ontically constituted everyday world is not explored. This is not to say the phenomenology *per se* will always effect such a closure, since the notion that a contextual investigation of dance performance (as a branch of the *Geisteswissenschaften*) requires a philosophical reflection on its foundations still holds good. The following section will therefore explore other developments in aesthetics and literary studies which draw in different ways on the phenomenological tradition, in an effort to examine their relevance in grounding an analysis of contemporary dance art.

⁵⁵ In this respect, see the discussion of Gadamer's conception of language (pp.89-91).

2.2 Reader-Response Criticism and Dance Reception

It was suggested in section 2.1 that while artworks, like other signifying phenomena, are embodied as entities in the material world, they are nonetheless irreducible to material objectivity since they depend on the active engagement of human consciousness. The insights of phenomenological philosophy were thus seen as relevant to this investigation in that phenomenology can conceive of the work of art as a special instance of the more general constitutive activity of consciousness in intending its world. Ingarden's (1973a and 1973b) analysis of literature adopts this kind of phenomenological approach in elaborating an ontology of the artwork, conceiving of the latter as an object theoretically distinguishable from its material embodiment, "an object whose pure intentionality [is] beyond any doubt and on the basis of which one [can] study the essential structures and the mode of existence of the purely intentional object" in general (1973b:lxvii). But Ingarden also goes beyond locating the origins of this object in the operations of the monadological transcendental consciousness. In this, he differentiates his approach from the transcendental idealism of Husserl by considering literary works themselves (and not just the verbal signs they put in play) to be ideal objectivities which, like ideal concepts, ideas and essences, have "an ontic foundation [...] that enables them to have intersubjective identity and an ontically autonomous mode of existence" (lxviii).

Drawing on Ingarden's ontology, Iser's reader-response criticism (1978 and 1980) develops a model of literary analysis focusing on the interaction between the receiving consciousness and the artistic text through which the artwork is constituted as such. By deliberately re-orienting critical attention towards the receiver, Iser's reader-response model opens a route for this investigation whereby it can avoid the residual transcendental idealism of Sheets-Johnstone's approach (see above, pp.68-74). Since, following Ingarden's formulation, the ideal objectivity of the artwork has an ontic foundation, it is not reducible to an intentional object of monadological consciousness but exists as an intersubjective phenomenon. But the intersubjective identity of the artwork does not preclude different modes of engagement on the part of the various empirical subjectivities involved in the work: the focus of reader-response theories in this regard also therefore helps to counter the problematic assumption, inhering in adaptations of existential phenomenology to dance analysis, that, on account of their shared corporeality, the experience of performing and receiving consciousnesses are essentially similar. Iser is clear that, in its engagement with an artwork, conscious experience is always mediated by the semiotic structure of the artistic text, a fact which

renders deeply problematic conceptions of the act of reception as a simple recovery of an originary intention or experience on the part of its creators⁵⁶. Rather, he emphasises the creative and constructive activity of the receiver in constituting the work as a virtual entity: the text “simply offers ‘schematized aspects’ through which the subject matter of the work can be produced; that production takes place through an act of concretization” in the reading consciousness and, consequently, the work itself “cannot be reduced to the reality of the text or to the subjectivity of the reader” but is “situated somewhere between the two” (1978: 21).

Reader-response critics are not alone in conceptualising the encounter with art in this way. The notion that the work of art emerges only through the dialectical relation between artist, audience and object has also been developed in Anglo-American philosophical aesthetics, Margolis (1980) and Danto (1981) both explore this possibility, the former through the notion of the artwork as a culturally emergent entity, the latter in his emphasis on how aesthetic interpretation, against a background of art theory and history, constitutes the artwork as such. And many critical approaches which posit the artwork as a semiotic phenomenon tend in a similar direction, envisaging the reader’s role as creative in actualising the text’s potential and constructing (rather than recovering) the work’s meaning. Indeed, one can locate the project of reader-response theory within a broader movement in literary and cultural studies which foregrounds the essential interpretivity of cultural phenomena and problematises, in order to analyse, the processes of signification and meaning-construction. The renewed attention directed to such matters by semiology and structuralism has, according to Culler (1983), given rise to a plethora of “stories of reading” of which the varieties of reader-response criticisms are individual instances (31-83)⁵⁷. The notion of art as text, or as the site on which the production of meaning is performed, is central to this broader movement in literary and cultural studies. Barthes (1977) describes this shift of critical attention, to the ways in which reading constructs meaning, as an “epistemological slide”: in his account, the shift has rendered obsolete

⁵⁶ As such, reader-response criticism aims to counter the intentionalist bias of traditional models literary analysis. For a seminal discussion of this kind of bias, see Wimsatt & Beardsley (1970). The phenomenologists examined in Section 1 tend to emphasise the performing subject’s conscious experience as definitive of dance meaning, rather than the originary intention of the choreographer, but a structural parallel can be drawn between intentionalist bias in literary criticism and the notion that meaning is reducible to the lived experience of the dance performer. Pakes (1999) elaborates this parallel.

⁵⁷ The diverse perspectives sheltering under the umbrella terms of “reader-response criticism” and “reception theory” are outlined in Tompkins (ed.)(1980) and Suleiman & Crosman (eds.)(1980): the essays in these anthologies are united in their attempt explicitly to refocus

the traditional categories of literary criticism and displaced focus from the work of literature on to the text as “a methodological field [...] experienced only in an activity of production” by the reader or critic (157).

Barthes’ own work (see, for example, 1975 and 1990), like that of many other semiologists and poststructuralists, tends to remain centred on the elucidation of the codes and signifying systems which the text brings into play. Implicitly, such analysis may refer to a range of possible reader-constructions based on the structures of the text but there is a reticence to explore explicitly the identity of the reading subject and the nature of her/his activity in relation to those structures. This stems, arguably, from the anti-humanist legacy of structuralism which problematises conceptions of the subject as an autonomous agent with a stable and individual identity⁵⁸. One consequence is the apparent theoretical abstraction of the textual analyses offered by many semiological and poststructuralist approaches, criticised by a number of writers for their textual formalism (see, for example, Lentricchia 1980, Eagleton 1981:131-142, Jameson 1988 and Mowitt 1992, who offers a general discussion of this issue). Iser’s reader-response theory differentiates itself from parallel poststructuralist perspectives by openly declaring an allegiance to the concept of the reader, but grounding this concept in a phenomenological notion of intentional consciousness which actively constitutes the artwork as it does reality in general. Iser’s (1978) work thus aims to describe both the verbal structures which embody the range of possible effects a literary text may have, and the “affective” structures through which the receiving consciousness realises a portion of those effects (21).

Although he thus seeks to refocus critical attention on the reading experience, Iser remains emphatic about the epistemological status of his theory: he claims to elaborate a phenomenological *Wirkungstheorie* (or theory of aesthetic effect) rather than an empirical *Rezeptionstheorie* which would deal “with existing readers, whose reactions testify to certain historically conditioned experiences of literature” (x). His theory aims to explore the productive character of the encounter with literature, the way in which aesthetic response brings into existence an object which did not previously exist (the artwork), or “how a hitherto unformulated situation can [in principle rather than empirical practice] be processed, and, indeed, understood” (*ibid.*). Because of its phenomenological status, Iser’s approach is, he declares, not subject to empirical tests

critical attention on the factors conditioning aesthetic response and interpretation, and the nature of the reading experience itself.

which would assess the validity of the theoretical parameters outlined against what real readers do in relation to actual texts. Rather, the concept of the reader which Iser (1978) foregrounds is an abstract and functional category, a hypothetical or “implied” reader, distinct at once from the real or contemporary reader (reconstructed via sociological and historical documentation in studies of the history of reception) and from other versions of the hypothetical reader formulated by reader-oriented literary critics⁵⁹. Iser’s implied reader “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect - predispositions laid down not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself” (34).

The language of the text plays a crucial role in embodying these predispositions. Schutz’s description of natural language as an integral dimension of the social lifeworld assists in illuminating this point which is not elaborated in detail in Iser (1978). According to Schutz (1967a: 260-286), natural language embodies and inscribes social values and norms in that it constitutes a typicalisation or “non-essential empirical generalization” of experience of the *lebenswelt* (285). It is the “outcome of the prevailing system of relevance” (285), of the position that we always already occupy which causes our attention to turn only “to those experiences which for one reason or another seem to us to be relevant to the sum total of our situation as experienced by us in any given present” (283). As such language furnishes “a treasure house of preconstituted types and characteristics, each of them carrying along an open horizon of unexplored typical contents” (285). As suggested in Iser’s (1978) model, literary language elaborates and extends, but still partially depends on, the shared assumptions embedded in the linguistic horizon of social actors. Literary interpretation always occurs in relation to the typical patterns of ordinary language on which everyday interpretation and interaction depend.

That Iser’s approach is grounded in this kind of phenomenological understanding of language has implications for a version of dance analysis deriving from his reader-response model. To the extent that the analogy holds between verbal and non-verbal language, one could also claim that the range of human movement inscribes

⁵⁸ See in this regard the critique of structuralism and its problematisation of human agency developed in Chapter 1, pp.19-20 and pp. 26-27.

⁵⁹ The implied reader is distinct at once from Riffaterre’s “superreader” (representative of a group of informants whose common reactions to certain features of the text establish the existence of its stylistic facts), from Fish’s “informed” reader (a real reader, coextensive with the critic himself, who possess the linguistic and literary competence required to actualise the text’s potential and remain reflexively aware of his activity) and from Wolff’s “intended” reader (the author’s notion of the reader to whom his work is directed) (see Iser 1978: 30-34).

assumptions, values and ideologies which orient the observer's interpretations in the same way as the reader understands a verbal text with reference to the values embedded in natural language as characterised by Schütz. In that dance movement, like literary language, has its own techniques and conventions, it is distinct from, but could still be said to be elaborated on the basis of, the postural and gestural languages through which intersubjective communication in the everyday lifeworld is effected. The interpretation of dance movement would thus, like the interpretation of literary texts, partly depend on the observer-reader's stock of knowledge-at-hand about her/his social and cultural context, embedded in non-verbal or verbal linguistic competence. But transposing this conception of literary understanding to the dance context also raises a further issue concerning the relation between verbal language and movement in performance, which moves one beyond the parallelism that can be established through analogy. If verbal language dominates the lifeworld as a mode of communication or locus of intersubjective relations, then the conscious engagement of receivers with a dance work is likely to be predisposed or prestructured in terms of the very categories of verbal language itself. The assumption itself that a dance performance is something to be understood and interpreted, that it has a meaning which is articulable in discourse, could be considered an instance of the receiving consciousness's linguistic predisposition, despite the predominantly non-verbal constitution of a dance work.

Schütz's account of language tends to emphasise the implicit reference of verbal discourse to the "form of life" in which it participates. Iser's account of the grounds of literary interpretation (1978: 53-85) focuses, meanwhile, on how response is pre-structured by the *explicit* reference of the language of the text to patterns of social organisation and other historical, cultural and artistic conventions. In this, Iser foregrounds language's function as a representational and narrative medium which reflects (rather than embodying) a "repertoire" of such norms, requiring the receiving consciousness to bring to bear its knowledge thereof in the act of comprehension. The text organises those norms via what Iser terms "strategies" (*ibid.* 86-103): the latter structure the narrative, allowing some elements of the repertoire to stand out or recede (the structure of fore-ground and background, in Iser's terminology) and encouraging the selection of particular perspectives on the action over others (the structure of theme and horizon) at different points in the temporal unfolding of the text. Again, insofar as dance movement can also function as a representational and narrative medium, Iser's categories here can be relatively easily transposed to the dance context. Even where the signifying fabric of a dance work does not explicitly develop in linear narrative terms

or appear to refer to, denote or comment on an external reality, it may imply a structural relation to the external world through its patterns of organisation⁶⁰.

Moreover, because a (traditional) dance performance unfolds temporally like the narrative texts on which Iser focuses, the categories he uses in developing his “phenomenology of reading” (*ibid.* 107-159) seem applicable in describing the essence of the dynamic activity of the viewing consciousness as well as the reader. Iser’s reading consciousness is said to adopt a “wandering viewpoint”, ranging over the text as a whole, evaluating and re-evaluating events in the narrative in relation to what precedes them as well as expectations for the future. The connections between the text’s diverse elements are established through the activity of “consistency-building”, an effort in which the reading consciousness always engages even when the ideal of consistency is not achieved. As the viewing consciousness moves through the experience of a dance performance, it can similarly be characterised in terms of its wandering viewpoint, evaluations, re-evaluations and consistency-building in relation to the choreographic material on display. Iser also writes of the conscious activity of “image-making” through which the reader fleshes out imaginatively the schematic indications offered by the text’s language. In this respect, the reader’s imaginative creativity does seem qualitatively distinct from that of the viewing consciousness in that the moving image of the dance performance already provides the visual material which the reading consciousness is required to furnish in imagination. The viewing consciousness may, however, may be provoked by the visual, auditory and (in some cases) tactile stimulus of the performance into the imaginative association of the choreographic material presented with ideas and remembered images. This process of imaginative association parallels what Iser calls image-making in literary reception.

Iser considers the literary work itself to be constituted through these interactions of text and reader, but he also maintains that its meaning is a product of the encounter. Meaning, in Iser’s model, is not predefined or formulated prior to the textual interaction by either the author or the work. Rather meaning is commensurate with the work’s effects on the reader: it is “a dynamic happening”, a “performance” or an individual, variable realisation of the textual schemata. The task of the analyst cannot, then, be to uncover the one true and objective meaning of the literary work; his function is rather to elucidate the text’s potential meanings, the range of its possible effects and the conditions for their actualisation. That range of possible effects is not confined to the

⁶⁰ Foster (1986) explores the representational dimension of a variety of choreographic practices on this basis.

work's formalist, "purely" aesthetic appeal; the experience of reading may incorporate also a political and social dimension. The relative indeterminacy of the text itself requires the reader to fill its blanks and vacancies by supplying the context for understanding. As part of this process, the text's repertoire of norms may be called into question when a textual "negation" forces the reader to re-assess initial assumptions in the light of the reading. It is in this sense that the act of reading, in Iser's model, has a socially formative function: the encounter with literature provides a space within which familiar norms can be questioned and revised to such an extent that this process impacts on the reader's social behaviour (163-231).

Although Iser (1978) thus points to the social dimension of literature and literary study, a certain imbalance subsists in his work which acts as a barrier to its further sociological development. Iser pinpoints the socially formative function of art and literature, but he avoids exploring the possibility that literary texts and their reception may also be socially determined. This imbalance is evident in the lack of a comprehensive argument (like that put forward, for example, by Schütz) concerning how language itself comes to inscribe the norms and values of the social context in which text and reception are embedded. In this sense, Iser's model fails to examine in detail the process whereby human subjectivity, and the framework of intersubjective relations in which it participates, is expressed and articulated linguistically, or objectified in language. One consequence is a certain petrification of the literary text as object and a concomitant tendency to confine his reader-oriented criticism within the parameters of an immanent and formalist textual poetics. Although Iser seeks theoretically to reorient critical attention to the phenomenologically-conceived reading consciousness, in practice his work remains focused, like much semiotic analysis, on the text as the ultimate arbiter of meaning: the objectified text, rather than the text in combination with, or even as the product of, its context of emergence, determines the conditions of meaning construction.

While Iser emphasises that a literary work has no single meaning, this focus on the determinate structures of the text renders his discussion of interpretative variability severely limited in scope. This limitation may also be partly attributable to Iser's anxiousness to avoid charges of subjectivism, of embracing a position which appears to legitimate any reading of a given text, relativising the latter to such an extent that interpretations emerge as the pure products of the subjective vagaries of individual readers. Moreover, in grounding his model in Ingarden's notion of the literary work as ideal objectivity, Iser arguably commits himself to an elucidation of determinate textual

structures over and above paying attention to the extent of textual indeterminacy. By taking the ideal objectivity of the literary work as a given, Iser assumes the intersubjective consensus which constitutes its ontic foundation. He does not problematise the establishment and sustainment of that consensus, and hence does not explore the role of the individual reading consciousness in actually constituting the determinate structure of the work. Rather the reader is accorded a measure of creativity after the fact of the text. Iser thus appears to adopt a compromise position which fails to resolve or lay bare the tensions inherent in the encounter between consciousness and the literary work.

This set of issues is the focus of Fish's (1981) critique of Iser's (1978) model, which argues that the latter shows a lack of theoretical nerve in failing to push its phenomenological and hermeneutic insights to their logical conclusion. The popularity of Iser's "capacious and liberal theory" is, Fish claims, assured because of the compromise position it adopts by steering a middle course "between the poles of objectivity and subjectivity" (3). Iser challenges the notion that the literary text has a singular, objectively retrievable meaning while simultaneously denying that it can be read in as many different ways as there are readers. He emphasises that the work emerges only through a dialectical interaction, but then retreats into an insisting on the "brute fact" of the text and on the control it exercises over its respondents. Fish himself relativises this notion of the text by claiming that the very structure of the literary work is itself the product of an act of constructive perception, and hence interpretation, on the part of the reader. For Fish, it is fundamentally mistaken to assume that the text is given and exists prior to the act of interpretation: there can be "no distinction between what the text gives and what the reader supplies; he supplies everything" (7), since "[p]erception is never innocent of assumptions, and the assumptions within which it occurs will be responsible for the contours of what is perceived" (8).

Fish's objection here carries additional weight when Iser's model is transferred to the dance context. The intersubjective consensus that forms the ontic foundation of the literary work (and of any linguistic entity) as ideal objectivity is well established. But this condition of textual determinacy is more problematic in the case of dance artworks. Dance-language and movement-language analogies may be said to hold to some extent, but it remains difficult to argue that dance and verbal language are equally conventionalised semiotic systems⁶¹. Moreover, the time-based, ephemeral character

⁶¹ Arguably, it is the very conventionality of verbal language that ensures its dominance as the locus of intersubjective, communicative relations.

of dance performance compromises the stability of its signifying fabric: with each performance of a dance work, the work's textual structure may change in a way the words on the page do not themselves change with each reading; the ability of the receiving consciousness to check and re-check its interpretation against an apparently objective textual structure is evident in the encounter with literature but compromised in the dance situation. Even if a notated score or video record determines certain features of performance as criteria of identity of the dance, such a text is not commensurate with the artwork itself. Any investigation of dance reception must therefore take account of variability of perception in relation to the dance object.

This is not to argue, however, that dance reception is inerradicably subjective. Fish's (1981) critique of Iser is also useful in pointing out that the charge of subjectivism, which troubles the project of reader-response criticism, is, in a sense, hollow at the core. The very idea of a subjectivist hermeneutics would posit a humanist subject as a primary category, assuming that its interpretations spring from a uniquely individual perspective on the text. While Fish claims that perception may never be free of assumptions, and that assumptions are responsible for the "contours of what is perceived" (Fish 1981:8), he argues that these assumptions are themselves conventionally and socially constructed. Perception and understanding are thus prestructured by categories that are "public and communal rather than individual and unique" (11). Individual readings and meaning-constructions cannot then be purely arbitrary because they rest on the foundations of interests held in common by particular groups of readers. By implication, then Fish's position launches a challenge to develop a more sociological understanding of aesthetic reception through further analysis of the public and communal categories which pre-structure response: such an analysis would need to address questions concerning how these categories come to be constituted, how they are maintained and to what extent they are shared by members of a given "interpretative community"⁶². On another level, Fish's criticisms demand of literary criticism a much greater degree of reflexivity than is exhibited by Iser. In Iser's model, according to Fish, the distinction between the text's determinate and indeterminate structures is a precondition for the interaction with the reader; but "the distinction itself is an assumption which, when it informs an act of literary description, will *produce* the phenomena it purports to describe" (Fish 1981:7). Iser's literary text, in Fish's view, is the product of, rather than simply base material for, his interpretative strategies: Iser's

⁶² Fish's own theory (see, for example, 1980) points in this direction but tends to shy away from detailed sociological elaboration. He has been criticised in this regard by Easthope (1991:47-51). For Iser's response to Fish's challenge, see Iser (1981).

account of the text's essential structure is not a neutral description of an objective reality but a particular perspective emerging from a scholarly discipline with its own set of values and interests. Unless the analyst of a literary or dance work develops a self-consciousness with regard to the presuppositions of the very categories of analysis, s/he runs the risk of assuming her/his own perspective on the text to be definitive of the text *per se*, thus of ignoring the contingency of her/his own hermeneutic elections.

Despite its potential usefulness in some respects to this investigation, then, Iser's reader-response criticism is also riddled with tensions that it has difficulty containing. These are generated on the one hand, by the way Iser applies phenomenological insights to the analysis of literary reception; but they also follow from the philosophical premises which ground Iser's project. The phenomenology of both Ingarden and Iser, even as it challenges Husserlian transcendentalism by focusing on the ontic foundation of the artwork's ideal objectivity, retains an eidetic emphasis in positing consciousness as an abstract, generalised and normative category. They leave intact the division between fact and essence on which eidetic analysis depends, as evidenced by Iser's distinction between his own *Wirkungstheorie* and more empirically-based *Rezeptionstheorie*. And yet a phenomenological perspective, stressing as it does the mutually constitutive character of relations between consciousness and the world, does have the philosophical resources to challenge the distinction between fact and essence, and thus to investigate how, in aesthetic reception as in other spheres, the activity of consciousness is oriented by its prior immersion in history, language and physical existence⁶³. The development of Husserl's premises by existential phenomenology (see Heidegger 1962, 1982; Merleau-Ponty 1962, 1968; Sartre 1969) works in this direction. And the insights developed via the existential turn have been incorporated into philosophical hermeneutics which adopts as a central premise Heidegger's notion that the ontological basis of investigation should be "the facticity of there-being, existence, which cannot be based on or derived from anything else, and not the pure cogito as the essential constitution of typical universality" (Gadamer 1975:225). The following section will therefore explore the relevance of hermeneutic approaches to issues of understanding, meaning and social significance in the context of dance art. In the process, the methodological elaboration of Gadamer's philosophical position by the literary theorist Jauss (see 1978, 1982a, 1982b) will be

⁶³ In this regard, an existential or hermeneutic approach thus also has the potential to challenge the traditional division between aesthetics and the sociology of art: see section 2.3 below for further discussion of how this investigation seeks to articulate such a challenge and also Wolff (1975) and (1993).

considered in view of the implicit critique it offers of Iser's position and in light of its possible adaptation to dance analysis.

2.3 The Hermeneutic Turn

Philosophical hermeneutics, as developed by Gadamer (1975), revisits and develops the reflection on the essential nature of the *Geisteswissenschaften* to which the opening of this Chapter referred: in particular, Gadamer explores the distinction between human and natural sciences as conceived by thinkers such as Dilthey, while also drawing on Heidegger's phenomenological ontology and its characterisation of understanding as a fundamental structure of *Dasein*⁶⁴. A key theme of Gadamer's *magnum opus* is thus the misplaced emphasis within the study of culture on methods which uncritically adopt the paradigm of scientific objectivism. In Gadamer's view, this paradigm masks its own derivative character in failing to point up the prior immersion of the interpreting consciousness in a social, historical and linguistic environment. Gadamer argues that, far from negatively impinging on the mode, character and validity of understanding, the interpreter's predispositions actually make comprehension of the thing at hand (be it text, artwork or historical event) possible. As such, the primordial relation of belonging, which unites the interpreter and the matter to be interpreted in a continuous common tradition, is posited as the foundation of all understanding, including that of the natural sciences. For Gadamer, the subject-object division derives from (rather than grounding), but also falsifies and distorts, this fundamental relation of belonging, positing the world as a reality independent of and external to consciousness, and as such subject to technological manipulation and domination. Philosophical hermeneutics, meanwhile, aims to restore a sense of the profound involvement of human being with its world, and a notion of truth which transcends and envelops the narrower conceptions operative in traditional epistemology and scientific thinking: it is through examining how this involvement and this truth emerge in the experience of art and the interpretation of history that the broader implications of Gadamer's hermeneutics also become apparent.

The broad sweep of philosophical hermeneutics thus covers many issues and themes of relevance to this investigation. Firstly, Gadamer's work emphasises the fundamental connection between human action, interpretation and cultural context, and, like many of the theorists discussed in section 1.3, sees intentional action always

⁶⁴ For Heidegger (1962) human beings have implicit understanding of Being as such which derives from the particular character of human being (or *Dasein*) as an *ek-stasis* (a standing-out): man is at once thrown into the world and can stand at a distance from himself in order to question the nature of his being and of his relation to world. The capacity to understand both its own being and the world into which it is thrown is thus fundamental to *Dasein*: according to

in terms of its immersion in, and emergence from, a whole historical complex of activities and discourse. In this sense, a hermeneutic approach allows a conceptualisation of dance practice as a sphere of activity (a language-game, perhaps, or system of signification) which is only relatively autonomous in that it participates also in the wider “form of life” of the given culture: as a result, a whole range of social, economic, political and cultural interests materialise in the production of particular works, and can be uncovered through an analysis grounded in a perspective that highlights the constructed character of social reality. A key advantage of a hermeneutic approach over the closed-system models examined in chapter 1, is its emphasis on the historical dimension of cultural practice. This emphasis assists in avoiding a synchronic petrification of cultural action and a corresponding neglect of how the dynamics of human agency and historical change shape the nature and significance of the event, text or action in question⁶⁵.

Secondly, Gadamer’s focus on understanding and interpretation (in general, but also specifically in the experience of art) opens up a philosophical perspective on readership, spectatorship and the whole dimension of audience involvement in dance practice. This perspective already displays a sociological orientation. Gadamer’s work on interpretation departs significantly from the concern of Iser, Ingarden and other Husserlian phenomenologists with a normative or transcendental consciousness and its interpretative actions in their abstracted essence. Instead, he emphasises the instance of interpretation in the midst of the world, how understanding is influenced by the predispositions and prejudices of the interpreter, predispositions which are in turn shaped by the social, cultural and linguistic environment in which the individual moves. Grounding an analysis of the audience dimension of contemporary dance in a philosophical position of this kind opens the possibility of exploring how the different facets of the subject’s construction, the variety of interests embedded in the identity of the individual reader, participate in the production of textual meaning. A hermeneutic approach, therefore, seems to offer an alternative route which avoids both the essentialism highlighted as problematic in both Chapter 1 and section 2.1, and the objectivism of a scientific semiotics which treats of signification without explicitly locating its foundations in conscious lived experience. Habermas (1988) suggests that

Heidegger, this primordial understanding literally “stands-under” or grounds processes of cognition, human action and more superficial forms of understanding and interpretation.

⁶⁵ Critics such as Habermas (1988) would claim, meanwhile, that philosophical hermeneutics manifests an inherent conservatism in its emphasis on the continuity of tradition and the consensual communicative understanding which characterises human social existence. See below, pp. 95-100, for further discussion of this issue, and also Ricoeur (1981) and Norris (1985).

both phenomenological and linguistic approaches “fall prey to objectivism, for they claim a purely theoretical attitude for the phenomenological observer and the linguistic analyst when in fact both of them are bound up with their object domain through communicative experience” (153). The hermeneutic approach meanwhile foregrounds rather than masking this involvement.

Consequently, hermeneutics also suggests a reconceptualisation of the relation between the researcher and her/his material which may help to clarify the epistemological status of this investigation itself. According to a phenomenological or hermeneutic approach, the analyst-researcher is engaged in constructive interpretation, constituting the artwork under scrutiny rather than simply accessing an already given, objective reality. Since philosophical hermeneutics foregrounds the interpretative character of the study of culture (indeed of all research), it topicalises this intimate involvement of the researcher with the matter under investigation. Against the paradigm of scientific objectivism, Gadamer argues that such involvement is not an unhelpful bias which will distort and problematise the validity of the conclusions drawn, but is in fact an essential prerequisite of any understanding. The interests and predispositions governing an interpreter’s approach to the text constitute a horizon of expectations which functions to open that text to interpretation and enable the application of its meaning: “[t]o interpret means precisely to use one’s own preconceptions so that the meaning of the text can really be made to speak for us” (Gadamer 1975:358). To approach a text in the first place, suggests that the prospective interpreter considers that it will furnish answers to her/his questions. But the nature of these answers will depend upon the question asked, in the same way as the interpretation will depend upon the aims, prejudices and interests through which the text was approached.

Similarly, the interpretation of historical events is, in Gadamer’s view, necessarily but productively bound up with the horizon of the present⁶⁶. But this is not to suggest that the historian simply imposes her/his contemporary horizon and its categories on the historical material under examination. Where true understanding is concerned, the

⁶⁶ Gadamer develops the concept of “effect-historical consciousness” or *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* to account for the productive involvement of the historian’s present horizon in the historical evidence under scrutiny. A properly reflexive historical practice will, for Gadamer, recognise its own interpretative character, admitting that any account of the past is shaped by present interests and that, far from being a negative limitation, this bias is what gives historical writing its interest and validity. Ricoeur (1981) thus comments that the *Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein* is not a category which pertains to historical methodology as such, but rather to “the reflective consciousness of this methodology” (73).

process of bringing the researcher's prejudices to bear on that material is dialectically balanced, according to Gadamer, with a certain openness whereby the material itself is allowed to speak and challenge the approach of the interpreter. Understanding thus involves a fusion of horizons (that of the interpreter with that of the text or historical event), the outcome of which is transformative both of the material interpreted and of the interpreter. Any answer the text provides enables the asking of new questions or a reassessment of the initial demands made by the interpreter of her/his material. Openness to what the matter of interpretation itself can yield allows even the researcher's unconscious prejudices to be brought to light in the interpretative encounter: the researcher's interests and predispositions are brought to critical consciousness, thus ensuring through reflexivity the validity (or in Gadamer's terms, the "truth") of the interpretation.

The hermeneutic approach outlined by Gadamer (1975) also incorporates a reflection on language which raises to the level of self-consciousness the mediated character of understanding, description and analysis. This is particularly significant where dance is concerned. As was suggested in Chapter 1, there is a lingering suspicion within the dance sphere about, not only the applicability of linguistically-derived methods and research paradigms to the analysis of a predominantly non-verbal phenomenon, but also concerning the very capacity for verbal language to account for, or do justice to, the singularity of dance. Such scepticism emerges both in Varela's comments on how dance notation allows direct ethnographic access to the experience of being a body in action where a "word gloss" would not (see above, p.53-55), and also in Sheets-Johnstone's claims concerning the necessity of metaphorical re-languaging if an appropriate verbal means is to be found to convey the essential experience of the dance phenomenon (see above, pp.66-68). Yet, as the critique of the two theorists' respective positions sought to show, such claims are misleading in positing the possibility of a purely transparent symbol system which can represent phenomenal essence without interpretative distortion. Both a notational score and a phenomenological description still constitute readings of the dance in question; if the hermeneutic elections of notator and phenomenologist are to be comprehensibly articulated at all, they have no choice but to resort to public and communal categories furnished in the different linguistic media through which they choose to represent the experience in question. Philosophical hermeneutics, meanwhile, turns this problematic on its head by arguing that the mediation of understanding by language is not a bias which compromises the purity of our access to phenomena, but rather, like the general predispositions of the interpreting consciousness, essential if understanding is to occur

at all. For Gadamer, “[t]o understand what a person says is [...] to agree about the object, not to get inside another person and relive his experiences” and, according to this perspective, “[l]anguage is the middle ground in which understanding and agreement concerning the object takes place between two people” (1975:345-6).

Language, as the medium of hermeneutical experience, is thus central to Gadamer’s thinking on interpretation, but it is also the subject of further-reaching ontological claims elaborated in the final section of *Truth and Method* (1975:397-447). In common with such thinkers as Humboldt and Wittgenstein, Gadamer posits a fundamental connection between world view and language, considering verbal discourse to be interwoven with the whole range of other social institutions and forms of action. This connection is not considered a limiting factor within human experience, however, but rather an essential and enabling structure of human being-in-the-world. It is the linguistic quality of experience which, for Gadamer, actually constitutes the human world as such: “[n]ot only is the world ‘world’ only insofar as it comes into language, but language, too, has its real being only in the fact that the world is represented within it” (401). There is a power of transcendence implicit in the development of language which enables a mode of reflection on the human environment not available to other, non-linguistic species: “[t]o have a ‘world’ means to have an attitude towards it”, and to have an attitude towards the world implies a freedom from the “pressure of the world”, from the constraints of the habitat immediately surrounding us (402). This power of reflection and linguistic self-consciousness is foregrounded in textual hermeneutics, but implicit in all kinds of research. According to this perspective, then, it is not so much that language, in representing, entraps, constrains and distorts by imposing a form on all experience; instead, experience only emerges as something to be explored by virtue of the reflective power inherent in the linguisticity of human being. The capacity for language is thus essential to the understanding and analysis of even non-verbal phenomena, in making them available for reflection: “[t]he hermeneutical experience is the corrective by means of which the thinking reason escapes the prison of language, and it is itself constituted linguistically” (363).

By extending the key themes of the hermeneutic tradition into the realm of ontology, both Gadamer (1975) and his predecessor Heidegger (1962) radicalise and deepen the philosophical import of insights initially arising out of the reflection on method in

textual interpretation that hermeneutics has traditionally furnished⁶⁷. The implications of those insights in relation to the interpretation of dance certainly have a radical edge because of the fundamental role accorded to language within both phenomenological and hermeneutic ontology. Thinking dance in line with this philosophical approach involves a wholesale shift in perspective. On the one hand, if dance is indeed a kind of language, it acquires the same status as its verbal counterpart in constituting the medium or ground of agreement in understanding. The fundamental linguisticity of human being, or *Dasein's* capacity to "have" a world in the sense of ek-sisting in relation to it, would thus be embodied in movement and dance as well as verbal expression: dance could thereby be considered one way in which human beings establish distance from, by reflecting upon, on their immersion in physical, material existence. On the other hand, focusing on the relation rather than the analogy between (verbal) language and dance, such an approach challenges the assumption that verbal language dominates and constrains the dance phenomenon as consciously experienced, and suggests, in contrast, that the capacity for linguistic expression actually makes possible a reflection on dance, in that it establishes human being's relative freedom from, and thus self-consciousness in relation to, its immediate environment. This approach therefore provides a strong alternative to the problematic conceptions of the dance-language relation, and concomitant ideas about the nature of dance, previously discussed.

It remains difficult, however, to trace in more pragmatic terms what might be the methodological implications of Heidegger's and Gadamer's positions for an empirical investigation of this kind. The work of each philosopher is highly suggestive in relation to art but does not elaborate in any detail how the study of artworks and artistic practice might proceed on the basis of the ideas explored. Gadamer, certainly, is more interested in how the general condition of understanding can be modelled on the art situation. By claiming, with Heidegger, that understanding is a structure of being itself, Gadamer moves away from epistemological concerns and shows a resistance to the very idea of method as bound up with the false objectivism he is seeking to overcome. A problem similar to that highlighted earlier in this chapter thus emerges here too, namely the problem of how to return from transcendental or ontological reflection on the conditions of understanding to the realm of the empirical and methodological. Ricoeur (1981) comments that "[w]ith Heidegger's philosophy [and that of Gadamer,

⁶⁷ On the issue of how philosophical hermeneutics radicalises and ontologises the hermeneutic tradition see Ricoeur (1981), Palmer (1969) and Bruns (1992:213-228) as well as Gadamer (1975).

insofar as he adopts the same strategy as his mentor] we are always engaged in going back to the foundations, but we are left incapable of beginning the movement of return which would lead from the fundamental ontology to the properly epistemological question of the status of the human sciences” (59).

Despite this, there are precedents for grounding a method of art analysis in philosophical hermeneutics. Perhaps as a result of the latter’s emphasis on language, Gadamer’s work has appealed to literary theorists and scholars, and in particular to reader-oriented critics such as Jauss (1978, 1982a and 1982b). Jauss builds on Gadamer’s insights in order to effect a general reappraisal of the social significance of literary art and scholarship, but also to develop a series of methodological principles to reorient literary analysis in the light of this reassessment (see especially 1982b, pp.3-45). Through the categories Gadamer articulates in his discussion of interpretation in general, Jauss seeks to account for aesthetic response and communication through literature. His focus on the reader-dimension of literary practice links him with other literary theorists such as Iser⁶⁸, but the grounding of his theory in philosophical hermeneutics rather than either phenomenology or semiology also distinguishes it in kind: whereas Iser develops a *Wirkungstheorie*, a phenomenological theory of aesthetic response, Jauss formulates a *Rezeptionstheorie*, dealing with the historically conditioned experiences of actual readers of literature. Because he thus moves beyond the transcendental and normative approach criticised in section two of this chapter, and because his approach consequently shows greater potential for sociological elaboration, it can perhaps be adapted as the basis for a contextual, audience-based analysis of contemporary dance.

The primary concern of Jauss’s early theoretical work (1982b) is literary history and historiography: he seeks to revivify what he considers to be the stagnant discipline of literary historical scholarship, dominated by positivist and historicist paradigms, and thereby to launch a challenge also to formalist literary theories which implicitly posit the absolute autonomy of the literary work from society and history. On the one hand, he emphasises that any historical account of past events or artworks is necessarily bound up with the interests and perspective of the contemporary historian her/himself: consequently, the onus is on the historian to recognise, and develop a reflexive awareness of, the situated character of her/his own discourse in relation to the material

⁶⁸ Jauss was also professionally associated with Iser via the Konstanz school of literary studies, based at the University of Konstanz and bringing together a range of scholars with a

under examination. On the other, he stresses the importance of conceptualising the literary work not as a self-contained, autonomous object with intrinsic meaning or significance, but rather as an event within a dynamic social and historical process the impact of which resounds beyond the confines of the work itself.

According to Jauss, the link between the aesthetic and historical dimensions of the literary work (severed in the methodological approaches he criticises) can be recovered if attention is directed to the reading public's experience of literature. Literary reception is characterised as an eventful dialogue between work and audience, renewed each time a particular work is re-read and reassessed from a different historical perspective. Each work embodies the horizon of expectations operative within the literary sphere of the time in which it was written; but each reader also brings with her/him a horizon which is fused with that of the work in the process of understanding. It is not the case, then, as proponents of Marxian reflection theory assume, that a literary work simply reflects the socio-historical conditions pertaining when it was produced: there exists a much more complex and dynamic relation between art and society in which the fusion of the work's and the interpreter's horizons may generate new perceptions and new knowledge which challenge prevailing ideologies. As in the work of Iser, the reader has an active role in actualising the literary text and the encounter with literature may result in a reassessment of the norms and assumptions governing her/his approach not just to the text but also to everyday social interaction. Indeed, Jauss claims that "[t]he social function of literature manifests itself in its genuine possibility only where the literary experience of the reader enters into the horizon of expectations of his lived praxis, preforms his understanding of the world, and thereby also has an effect on his social behaviour" (1982b:39). This idea is grounded philosophically in the Heideggerian understanding of *Dasein* as an *ek-stasis* which incorporates, fundamentally, a reflection upon, rather than unreflective immersion in, the conditions of being. Through the hermeneutical experience of literature (and, one might claim, of dance and other performance arts), the reader is brought to critical consciousness of the assumptions, expectations and norms embodied in the perspective or horizon through which s/he approaches and operates in relation to the everyday social lifeworld.

This conceptual category of the “horizon of expectations”, derived via Gadamer (1975), from Husserl’s phenomenology of perception⁶⁹, is central to Jauss’s early work (1982b). As it is formulated in Jauss’s essay “Literary History as Challenge to Literary Theory” (1982b: 3-45), the category bears a striking affinity to Iser’s “implied reader” (see above, p.78): it is conceived as a structure embedded in the language of the text itself which orients and conditions response. The a-historical character of Iser’s eidetic and normative analysis is, however, apparently rejected in favour of a more hermeneutically-oriented understanding of the text as the embodiment of social and historical process, rather than a petrified object: the horizon becomes the “objectifiable system of expectations that arises for each work in the historical moment of its appearance” (Jauss 1982b:22). Because it materialises in the language of a literary production, the horizon also appears as the text’s “constitutive motivations and triggering signals” which, Jauss claims, “can be described by a textual linguistics” (23). Where a particular text seems lacking in explicit signals, Jauss claims that the horizon can still be discerned by attending to “the immanent poetics of the genre [...], the implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings” and “the opposition between fiction and reality, between the poetic and practical function of language” (24). Once the horizon of expectations of a past text has been recovered via these means, the disparity between the assumptions governing its production and initial reception, and those of the subsequent audiences (including the modern-day literary historian) can be fruitfully brought to light.

These ideas are problematic on a number of counts and a variety of tensions are embedded in the category of the horizon as elaborated in Jauss’s early work⁷⁰. There is an instance of confusion, for example, in Jauss’s passing comment on the horizon as “the specific disposition toward a particular work that the author anticipates from the audience” (Jauss 1982b:24). While it is reasonable to assume that the author and his contemporary readers operate, broadly speaking, within the terms of a similar set of expectations, it does not necessarily follow that the author is conscious of this horizon in the sense of anticipating an audience reaction according to its parameters. The contemporary horizon of expectations, embodied in language, in this sense transcends the author’s meaning-context and explicit intentions. While this difficulty with Jauss’s formulation may be simply attributable to theoretical sleight of hand, a more serious problem emerges in the apparent conflation between the horizon of the literary work

⁶⁹ Jauss also recognises how the concept has been developed in the sociology of knowledge by Mannheim and Popper (Jauss 1982b:40).

and that of the reader, which emerges whenever it is suggested that the latter can be unproblematically recovered through the former. At times, Jauss seems to posit the existence of a single horizon of expectations, shared by the work, its first readers and the subsequent historian: if literary historical understanding is made possible by the mediation through “the [singular] horizon of expectations of the literary experience of contemporary and later readers, critics and authors” (22), then, it seems, there is no need for any fusion of horizons since all operate according to same set of assumptions. And yet the perspective of hermeneutic historiography takes as a central premise the notion that the temporal distance between an artwork, text or event and its subsequent interpreters is such as to effect some kind of break in such continuity. Otherwise no effort at interpretation would be necessary, since the meaning would be clear as a function of the shared context in which text and interpreter, like interlocutors in face-to-face dialogue, participate. This is one reason why both Gadamer (1975) and Habermas’ (1988) explication of his work focus on translation rather than face-to-face dialogue as a paradigm instance of hermeneutical experience, because it “reveals a form of reflection that we perform implicitly in every linguistic communication” (Habermas 1988:146) but which is concealed in the dialogic situation, where a shared context deproblematises lacunae in understanding: “in reliably institutionalized language games understanding rests on an unproblematic basis of agreement”, whereas “[h]ermeneutic understanding [...] is only articulated in situations of disturbed consensus” (146-148)⁷¹.

There is, of course, a sense in which, according to the tenets of Gadamerian hermeneutics, a degree of continuity between the different recipients’ perspectives is indeed a precondition for mutual comprehension: that continuity is assured by common participation in history and in language (Gadamer 1975:235-366). But for hermeneutics to have any process of interpretation to investigate, such continuity must be dialectically balanced against a sense of the otherness of the matter to be interpreted. While philosophical hermeneutics makes a point of recognising how this dialectic operates with respect to the temporal distance between interpreter and artwork, text or action, it is less forthcoming with regard to other kinds of cultural distance or difference (on this issue see Wolff 1975, pp.102-128, as well as Habermas 1988). And a similar disregard is evident in Jauss’s application of Gadamer’s philosophical premises which, even in assuming a continuity between the text’s horizon and that of its contemporary

⁷⁰ See also Holub (1984) for an account of several difficulties with Jauss’s formulation of this category.

reader, is problematic in that it fails to take account of how interpretation is, or might be, affected by the sheer variety of interests and prejudices, particularly social and cultural differences, which transcend the literary sphere in which the text moves⁷². Because both Gadamer and (following him) Jauss emphasise the absolute centrality of language as the horizon of hermeneutic ontology, they imply that a linguistically and historically mediated consensus underlies all operations of the understanding. In places, they may stress the dialectic between belonging and otherness in the process of interpretation, but often this dialectical conception is overridden by an emphasis on a fundamental continuity (ensured by human beings' common participation in tradition) which outweighs the discontinuities and differences between past and present or interpreter and text.

In the context of this investigation, philosophical hermeneutics' emphasis in this respect throws up a number of difficulties. Not least of these is the assumption that common tradition of core values unites all subjectivities involved in the art situation; an analysis which confines itself to uncovering those relations of belonging seems to commit itself to a political and ideological conservatism which recuperates (in order to reinforce the tradition) any potentially subversive productive or interpretative intervention. A conception of the artworld as the institutional articulation of this common tradition would thus, once again, fall prey to the limitations of the closed-system models examined in Chapter 1 or, indeed, exacerbate considerably those limitations by ontologising the consensus at the heart of that conception. In that hermeneutics might also claim the researcher's own perspective is bound by same tradition of core values, the possibility of a critical engagement with and reflection on those premisses is foreclosed. Philosophical hermeneutics thus risks glossing over, or prematurely subsuming, the cultural and political differences that separate the kinds of interpretative engagement with artworks of different groups and individuals: despite its potential to contribute to a contextually aware perspective on the production and reception of dance, therefore, the danger remains that this philosophical approach will de-problematise discontinuities and disagreement on a fundamental level.

⁷¹ For further development of the translation situation as a paradigm of hermeneutical experience, see pp.100-101.

⁷² According to Holub (1984: 121-134), this is a key theme of the Marxist critique of Reception Aesthetics developed by Träger, Barck, Weimann and Naumann: they argue that Jauss's theory retains an individualistic and normative conception of the reader grasped simply as a reading individual rather than also in terms of social class, origin or related factors. Partly in response to such criticisms, Jauss subsequently (1978) reformulates the concept of the horizon by subdividing into "intrinsic" and "extrinsic" horizons, but still maintains the methodological priority of the intrinsic horizon, recoverable by attending to the objective structure of the text (see 1978:140-142 and 1982b:22).

The assumptions about consensus and continuity which ground the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics are the focus of Habermas' critical engagement with Gadamer's work (Habermas 1988). Habermas argues that Gadamer underestimates the critical dimension of hermeneutical reflection, the significance of the element of distancing, the break in understanding, which generates the need for interpretation in the first place. The reflexivity of the hermeneutic process means, for Habermas, that both the tradition itself and the interpreter's relation to it must be called into question wherever interpretation takes place: "when reflection understands the genesis of the tradition from which it proceeds and to which it returns, the dogmatism of life practice is shaken" (1988:168), while a prejudgement "[m]ade transparent [...] can no longer function as a prejudgement" (169). In bringing to consciousness presuppositions and values previously buried in the action and discourse of the everyday lifeworld, hermeneutic experience opens the possibility of challenging and revising those presuppositions. In the context of this investigation, then, interpretative practice could represent a truly critical engagement with the norms and assumptions governing both the spectator's and researcher's approaches to the dance text.

If Gadamer's work compromises its critical dimension through an absolutisation of language as the site of the social, the critical hermeneutics proposed by Habermas claims to point up how "this metainstitution of language as tradition is dependent in turn on social processes that cannot be reduced to normative relationships" (1988:172). Language may constitute the medium in which social life itself takes shape through effective communication, but it is also through the ideological and deceptive operations of language that relations of domination and coercion are established and sustained. If such operations are to be brought to critical consciousness and challenged, in line with the emancipatory interest that governs Habermas' own philosophical project, then other facets of the context of social action than the linguistic must be recognised and explained, so that a sense emerges of how "[t]he process of tradition is relativized both by systems of labor and by systems of authority" (174). In equating the knowledge furnished in the appropriation and revisitation of the linguistically founded cultural tradition with authority itself, Gadamer, meanwhile, renders questions of power (issues concerned with how political, economic and social domination is established and sustained) marginal to the operation of understanding in and through human culture and, worse, ontologises modes of language which embody the distorted communicative competence of ideology and false consciousness (Ricoeur 1981:86).

Both Habermas (1988) and Ricoeur (1981) suggest that the perspectives of critical theory and philosophical hermeneutics can be articulated to develop an interpretative sociology with a critical materialist dimension. It seems viable to ground a critical hermeneutic analysis of cultural phenomena in this theoretical possibility. Such a method could take account of the material and ideological constitution of the artworld as an institution, recognising the interface between the institutional constraints it imposes (through the ideological commitments embodied in concrete practices) and individual instances of production and reception of dance works. But, rather than seeing the artworld context as a purely constraining and determining force, it would relativise this institution in its turn: on the one hand, by asserting its historical contingency; on the other hand, by allowing an examination of the series of potential subversions of institutional conditions clustered around particular dance works as events in a dynamic process⁷³. Such an approach would exploit the resources of both explanatory and interpretative approaches (distinguished by Dilthey as modes of analysis particular to the natural and human sciences respectively: see Ricoeur 1981) and might thus articulate them dialectically. Although the objectivist bias of explanatory models is subject to critique in both phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions (which emphasise, as shown above, the constitutive relations between consciousness and the world preceding “scientific” objectification), the introduction of a critical theoretical dimension in hermeneutic analysis does presuppose that an objectifying distance can be established between consciousness and the world. The emphasis within Marxist and Marxian theory (Marxist theories of art and literature being no exception) is on the objective dynamic of history and society, a dynamic which comes to transcend the understanding and meaning-contexts of the subjects participating in the lifeworld, and which can be fruitfully analysed and explained in that transcendence.

Ricoeur (1981) does emphasise the philosophical difficulties of articulating philosophical hermeneutics with critical theory. The hermeneutics of tradition and the critique of ideology each, in his view, speaks from a different place and has a different perspective on what the “fundamental gesture of philosophy” is: where philosophical

⁷³ Hohendahl (1983) proposes a comparable revision, and superseding of, reception aesthetics in the literary sphere: he claims that a materialist and functionalist approach to literature can effectively account for “the institutional premises of reading” which are highlighted, while remaining underdeveloped, in the reader-oriented literary criticism of Jauss, Fish and Culler (119). In particular, he suggests that recourse to the work of Althusser, Gramsci and Benjamin on the relations between social institutions, ideology and history can assist in making up the shortfalls in more formalist textual approaches: Marxist critical theory provides the conceptual categories and methodological resources to uncover the concrete material structures which themselves ground subjective behaviour and on the basis of which a historical materialist reflection on cultural phenomena becomes possible.

hermeneutics constitutes “an avowal of the historical conditions to which all human understanding is subsumed under the reign of finitude”, the critique of ideology sees philosophical reflection as “an act of defiance, a critical gesture, relentlessly repeated and indefinitely turned against ‘false consciousness’, against the distortions of human communication which conceal the permanent exercise of domination and violence” (1981:63). As Habermas argues, and Ricoeur concurs, however, philosophical hermeneutics (and its grounding in Heidegger’s analysis of *Dasein*) already implies the possibility of a critical dimension, which Gadamer neglects to develop because his project is itself governed by an overriding interest (not brought to critical consciousness in his work) in the continuity and consensus of the cultural tradition. This possibility is implicit in the very notion of the distantiation of the text (action or artwork) through writing (see Ricoeur 1981, and above pp.59-60) and in the idea that there is a power of reflection inherent in the linguisticity of human being as *ek-stasis* (again, see above, pp.89-91).

If Gadamer absolutises language as the site of the social, both Habermas and Ricoeur recognise how verbal language is itself bound up with constraining social norms and presuppositions, even as they posit also the possibility of critically reflecting on those norms through language. Ricoeur, in particular, emphasises how the latter process can be set in motion through a semiological approach to phenomena. Semiology offers, for Ricoeur, another route whereby the Diltheyan dichotomy between understanding and explanation can be overcome⁷⁴: semiological models do, in one sense, seek to explain “scientifically”; but because they are structural rather than causal in their approach, and because they have emerged from the domain of language itself rather than being imported from the natural sciences, they avoid imposing inappropriately scientific categories on the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Semiology allows the analyst to recognise the relative autonomy of texts by recognising the objectification of language in discourse “produced as work displaying structure and form” (1981:92). It is this autonomy which enables the text to decontextualise and recontextualise itself in new and radically different contexts of meaning; but if this capacity and its implications are to be properly elucidated, a structural analysis of the text as object becomes a pre-requisite. “It is”, according to Ricoeur, “necessary to have gone as far as possible along the route of objectification, to the point where structural analysis discloses the *depth semantics* of a text, before one can claim to ‘understand’

⁷⁴ “I wish to lead hermeneutical reflection to the point where it calls, by an internal *aporia*, for an important reorientation which will enable it to enter seriously into discussion with the sciences of the text, from semiology to exegesis” (Ricoeur 1981: 43).

the text in terms of the 'matter' which speaks therefrom" (92-3). And he points out that "[t]he *matter* of the text is not what a naïve reading of the text reveals, but what the formal arrangement of the text mediates" (93).

This conception of the value of a semiological approach is relevant to the investigation of dance and the discussion of dance-language relations in Chapter 1. While contemporary dance is a predominantly non-verbal art form, it is necessarily embroiled in a range of verbal discourses: in analysing dance as a social practice, one is forced to engage with these discourses on some level as well as to recognise that the analysis itself is a verbal intervention in its own right. This leads some theorists (see the discussion of Barthes 1967 and McFee 1992 above, pp.45-48) to conclude that dance meaning can only ever be articulated and conceptualised through the verbal, that the significance of dance resides in the sum of its verbal explanations. As suggested above, this idea runs the risk of restricting dance signification as such to the general social law operating through the symbolic order instituted in language, allowing dance as semiotic practice to "do no more than subserve the principle of social cohesion, of the social contract (Kristeva 1986:26). Kristeva herself, meanwhile, proposes to avoid this bind by exploiting to the full the reflexive, even self-deconstructive, resources of semiotics: the latter is "an open form of research, a constant critique that turns back on itself and offers its own auto-critique" (77) because the models it employs can be always be challenged and revised by the semiotic fabric of the phenomena they are intended to analyse.

While a reception aesthetics grounded in philosophical hermeneutics does demonstrate the potential to be critically adapted as a methodology for dance analysis, it is worth recognising the contribution semiological perspectives and methods can make to this kind of investigation in reflecting on the semiotics of the signifying process rather than the semantics of interpretation. De Man's (1982) critical introduction to Jauss (1982b) points up a number of issues in this regard and, like the work of Ricoeur and Kristeva, suggests how semiotic approaches both challenge and complement the perspective of philosophical hermeneutics. Like the Marxist and Marxian critiques already discussed (although he comes from a very different perspective), De Man also questions the premisses on which Jauss's synthesis of textual and socio-historical analysis rests. Jauss's work, he argues, appropriates categories from the phenomenology and psychology of perception (the "horizon of expectations", "horizontal fusion", "foreground and background") which are applied to the process of literary interpretation and which allow Jauss to establish a far-reaching synthesis between the

private experience of reading and the public and social dimension of literature's reception and influence. But this also, De Man claims, leads Jauss to gloss over key features of literary language which would disrupt the overarching interpretative synthesis established between the meaningful matter of the text and the socio-historical world.

To highlight this phenomenal bias of *rezeptionsästhetik*, De Man invokes Benjamin's essay "The Task of the Translator". By declaring that a work's translation, rather than the process of its reception, reveals the conditions of understanding, Benjamin draws attention to obstacles to interpretation which belong specifically to language rather than to the phenomenal world⁷⁵. He highlights the relation between one linguistic function and another rather than the relation of subject and object prevailing in phenomenal cognition, and thus brings to attention a significant lacuna in Jauss's approach: namely, the tendency to suppress the rhetorical dimension of language, or the disruption through the "play" of the signifier of the link between meaning and the devices which produce it. This refusal to admit of the irreducible ambiguity of literary language points up a limitation to which a "genuine semiology" would not fall prey. In this, Jauss's theory is one instance of a general tendency in literary studies to avoid the critically reflexive engagement with language that semiological models embody. The "resistance to Theory" on which De Man's (1986:3-26) essay centres "is a resistance to the use of language about language" (12) or to the possibility, highlighted in literature, that "language contains factors or functions that cannot be reduced to intuition" (13). These factors are necessarily encountered in reading a text as "the grammatical decoding [...] leaves a residue of indetermination that has to be, but cannot be, resolved by grammatical means, however extensively conceived" (15). Because they gloss this ambiguity, meanwhile, a certain "resistance to reading" (15) is paradoxically evident in reader-oriented approaches which adopt a phenomenal rather than semiological model.

The problematic which interests De Man and which, in his view, dogs Jauss's hermeneutic project, seems to involve difficulties peculiar to verbal language which

⁷⁵ Although De Man does not comment upon this fact, hermeneutics also, as noted above (pp.94-95), posits translation as a paradigm instance of interpretative situations. The translation model is preferred over that of face-to-face dialogue by both Gadamer and Habermas because it foregrounds the disruption of understanding on which hermeneutic experience is contingent. Translation thus reveals in an exemplary way how the obstacle of that disruption may be overcome by the elucidation and application of a text's meaning in terms of the parameters of the interpreter's own framework of interests, even as the otherness of the material to be interpreted resists "full" appropriation in this way.

dissolve when attention turns to a largely non-verbal art form such as contemporary dance. Categories deriving from the phenomenology of perception may seem more applicable in the analysis of live performance than in an investigation of literary texts: the dance audience's interpretations are, after all, contingent on directly *perceiving* the theatrical event on stage; the model of phenomenal cognition appropriately highlights the basis on which dance understanding proceeds by emphasising how the dance object only emerges through the perceptual engagement of consciousness. But dance understanding (as argued in sections 2.1 and 2.2) also, like literary reading, involves selective and constructive conscious processes on the basis of a dance object which is, in Ricoeur's sense, "produced as work displaying structure and form". This formal and structural arrangement of dance work mediates understanding in the same way as a relatively autonomous text mediates literary interpretation. And in mediating understanding, that dense structure of the literary or dance work can also disrupt attempts to arrive at a consistent and apparently definitive meaning-explanation, the otherness of the work's semiotic fabric resisting hermeneutic appropriation⁷⁶.

This is not to argue (as De Man makes clear) that neither language nor dance have a referential function, are not capable of representing the world outside of the literary sphere. But it does point up the dangers of assuming that artworks can be unproblematically interpreted in terms of representational meaning: "because it is not *a priori* certain that language functions according to principles which are those, or which are *like* those, of the phenomenal world", it is also for De Man "not *a priori* certain that literature is a reliable source of information about anything but its own language" (1986:11). There is a political dimension to thus insisting on the distinction between the kinds of knowledge made available through literary works: for De Man, it is precisely the confusion of "linguistic with natural reality, of reference with phenomenalism" that creates and sustains ideological mystification. A "genuine semiology", or the "the linguistics of literariness", therefore becomes "a powerful and indispensable tool in the unmasking of ideological aberrations, as well as a determining factor in accounting for their occurrence" (1986:11; see also Norris 1988).

⁷⁶ For De Man (1986) this rhetorical dimension of even non-verbal art forms has tended to be neglected in traditional aesthetics which exhibits a phenomenal bias like that of Jauss's approach. Semiology, meanwhile, confronts that rhetorical dimension head-on and can serve as a valuable corrective: "Literature involves the voiding, rather than the affirmation, of aesthetic categories. One of the consequences of this is that, whereas we have traditionally been accustomed to reading literature by analogy with the plastic arts and with music, we now have to recognize the necessity of a non-perceptual, linguistic moment in painting and music, and learn to *read* pictures rather than to *imagine* meaning" (10).

De Man insists, therefore, that close textual readings of artworks should not be pre-empted by interpretative approaches which impose uncritically a set of interests on the matter for interpretation. The ambiguity of the artwork should be recognised as fundamental to its character as an objectified (in Ricoeur's sense) structure, always available for interpretative recontextualisation or hermeneutic appropriation in a different way. The investigation here seeks to recognise the validity of this claim. The analysis which follows in Chapter 3 does propose a general overview of the socio-institutional factors which, it is argued, impact substantially on the production and reception of particular works and those works are, in turn, interpreted as revelatory of the conditions of their emergence. But the analysis also examines the dance works as relatively autonomous structures in their own right. The close textual readings thereof (in Chapters 4 to 7 below) are designed not simply to provide illustrations of the general conclusions drawn about the dance-artworld and its relation to the wider social context, but to allow those works' structures and semiotic fabric to challenge the assumptions associated with the interests governing this project. This attempt to retain a reflexive openness in the empirical study below points up the necessarily non-definitive and contingent character of any truths which emerge.

PART II

CHAPTER 3:
POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE DANCEWORLD

3.1 The Scope of State Action and the Emergence of State Arts Administration

As suggested in the Introduction (above, pp.15-20), this Chapter seeks to outline the social, political and economic conditions of dance production and reception, with particular reference to the institution of public arts funding. The investigation as a whole argues that the state has a key role within the institution of contemporary dance art or “danceworld”: it functions to modify the economic environment of dance practice, as well as its symbolic significance in the wider public sphere. The purpose of this Chapter is to explore in more detail the processes and mechanisms whereby the state’s role in this regard is both defined and fulfilled; the Chapter thus aims to outline, in historical perspective, the politico-economic and institutional context of particular dance works examined in Chapters 4 to 7.

As a first step, a working definition of what the state is and what it does in Western European societies helps to contextualise the fact of state intervention in the arts in Britain and France. Hall & Ikenberry (1989) note general agreement amongst social scientists about how the state can be broadly defined, as the set of institutions at the centre of a geographically-bounded territory which monopolise rule-making within that area (1-2); they also recognise that the scope of the state’s activity (the variety of spheres of social life in which state can impose its rules) shifts historically in parallel with the different conceptions and rationales that define the extent and legitimacy of the state’s exercise of power (1-15). While the latter, in any state formation, can be posited as ultimately dependent on the capacity to exercise coercion through violent means, representational democratic government in the West also claims legitimacy on the grounds of popular support, expressed through an electoral system based on universal suffrage. The electoral system provides a country’s population with a collective voice (or set of voices) whereby it articulates preferences and needs through its voting decisions: the latter bring one set of political actors to power over others on the strength of their manifestos, policy commitments and personal appeal to the voters; regular elections ensure a continuous process of appraisal and review of government action, which results in frequent shifts of power between political parties.

Poggi (1990), following Popitz (1986), suggests that the emergence of the state as a form of political power is one modality of the broader phenomenon of power relations’ institutionalisation. The latter has three dimensions: depersonalisation, whereby functions and positions come to transcend individual actors and constitute an enduring structure of government; formalisation, in which “the exercise of power becomes more

and more oriented to rules, procedures and rituals” (Popitz 1986:69, cited in Poggi 1990:18); and integration, whereby these conventions embed themselves in the social order with which political power is in a mutually supportive relationship. In contrast to evolutionary and Marxist accounts of state formations as determined by, and reflective of, social and economic forces, Poggi proposes an account of the state’s relative autonomy constituted through its mode of institutionalisation of political power: thus, the state becomes “a distinctive social force [in its own right], vested with interests of its own, which affect autonomously, and sometimes decisively, the state’s own arrangements and policies” (98). He also notes that a feature of liberal democracy in the Twentieth Century has been the growing size and diversity of state institutions and the spheres of social life with which they are concerned, partly attributing this enlargement to the internal dynamic of the state formation. Poggi and other commentators (see Lowe 1993; Ambler 1991) also recognise the impact of wider social, economic and political forces on changing conceptions of the proper role of government: all these factors contribute to the enduring consensus about extensive state intervention in social life, embodied in the dominance of the “welfare state” model in the second half of the twentieth century. Characterised by Lowe as “a society in which government is expected to provide, and does provide, a wide range of services (economic as well as social) which affect the welfare of its citizens” (1993: 13), this model contrasts with older, liberal views concerning the need to minimise state interference in a free-market economy (Lowe 1993; Hall & Ikenberry 1989: 1-15; Rosanvallon 1990: 203-268).

Despite reports of crisis in the welfare state and ideological challenges to some of its premises in recent decades, all major political parties in both Britain and France, in the post-war period, have accepted a conception of the state as legitimately intervening in a variety of spheres of social life (Kavanagh & Morris 1994). And the infrastructural network and high levels of social spending that the welfare state model implies have continued to expand and rise (Lowe 1993). Within these parameters, however, different parties and governments rationalise large-scale state intervention in different ways. Lowe (1993: 16-18) and Ambler (1991) attribute to the welfare state’s founders, in Britain and France respectively, an essentially technocratic, reluctantly collectivist vision in which state action seeks to restore the health of the national economy. This liberal, conservative view contrasts with the democratic socialist conception of the state’s duty to engineer a more equal and fair society, by actively redistributing resources amongst sections of the country’s population (Lowe 1993: 18-23; Rosanvallon 1990: 139-195). The democratic socialist perspective posits access to

adequate housing, education, security of income against employment instability and health care as a right of citizens, to be provided for and respected by the state structure. According to Furniss and Tilton (1979), two types of welfare state can be distinguished along the lines of this ideological division: the social security state, where government seeks merely to guarantee a national minimum of civilized life; and the social welfare state, which requires a centralised government actively to reduce inequalities in income, property and power (see also Lowe 1993: 12).

A discussion of the welfare state model is relevant to government involvement in culture because the development of state cultural administration is linked historically and conceptually to notions of the wider state's interventionist role. Similarly, the expansion of state power into the cultural arena is attributable both to the gathering internal momentum of the state structure itself, and to broader social, political and economic forces. British and French state cultural administrations were formally constituted in the 1940s and 1950s, during the period of welfare state expansion and consolidation. The establishment of the Arts Council of Great Britain (ACGB) in 1946, and the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles (MC) marked out the arts as another national policy domain in which central government was legitimately involved, and to which public expenditure would henceforth be systematically committed. This signalled a significant shift away from *ad hoc* state involvement with the arts through patronage and censorship (see Minihan 1977; Laurent 1983; Bennett 1995 and Ory 1996), and towards an unprecedented institutionalisation of culture and its environment sustained in contemporary life (Beck 1992; Ory 1996).

This shift embodies changing conceptions of the proper role of government (like the emergence of the welfare state as a whole), but also of culture itself and its relation to other domains of social and political life. On the one hand, the state's increased formal involvement in the arts appears as a response to broad cultural transformations occurring in the West during the first half of the twentieth century. Linked to the extension of suffrage and the development of the mass media, state intervention is the means by which the establishment can exert some form of control over a cultural landscape characterised by rapid and dramatic change. McGuigan (1996), for example, suggests that early and mid-twentieth century state intervention was driven by an imperative of social control, which recognised organised culture's role in the education and enlightenment of a newly enfranchised mass public (55-6). The state's efforts to provide cultural opportunities may also represent an attempt to take account of changing patterns of employment under advanced industrialisation, and the resultant

increased leisure time of large sections of the population (see, for example, Jackson's 1988 account of the French *Front Populaire* government's cultural policy).

The liberal-conservative conception of the organised culture as a means of social control and a civilizing influence is also, however, paralleled by an alternative, democratic socialist vision of culture as a right that the state has a duty to provide for and protect. Ory (1996) traces precedents in France for this alternative view in the cultural awareness of the political left in the 1920s and 30s: from a radical perspective, he argues, the acquisition of culture was considered a politically enabling process, a way in which social classes marginal to centres of power could re-appropriate knowledge and history, and thus further their political influence by demanding equal access to the national cultural tradition (10). A conception of culture as a guaranteed right appears also in the new constitution of the French IVth Republic: "[l]a nation garantit l'égal accès de l'enfant et de l'adulte à l'instruction, à la formation professionnelle et à la culture" (cited in Ory 1996: 10) and again in the founding decree of the Ministère des Affaires Culturelles, by which the state undertakes to "[r]endre accessibles les oeuvres capitales de l'humanité, et d'abord de la France, au plus grand nombre de Français, assurer la plus vaste audience à notre patrimoine culturel, et favoriser la création des oeuvres de l'art et de l'esprit qui l'enrichissent" (cited in Wangermée 1988: 29). The Royal Charter of ACGB places comparable stress on the importance of accessibility to culture, with the new administration aiming to encourage "a greater knowledge, understanding and practice of the fine arts exclusively, and in particular to increase the accessibility of the fine arts to the public [...], and to improve the standard of execution of the fine arts" (cited in Redcliffe-Maud 1976: 72). The founders of the state cultural administration in both France and Britain thus enshrine the principle of the arts as a collective good, which it is the responsibility of government to make available to the population at large.

But, as with the varying and sometimes conflicting rationales for the development of the welfare state, other preoccupations than the notion of culture as a right are embodied in the extension of state power into the cultural realm. The latter process is also bound up with nationalism and the conviction that culture functions to express and consolidate national identity. In both countries, the genesis of the state arts administration is linked to the particular circumstances of the Second World War. ACGB was the peace-time successor to a war-time government-sponsored initiative,

the Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts (CEMA)⁷⁷, which sought to encourage participation in the arts as a means of reinforcing a sense of national identity and boosting the population's morale (Baldry 1981:12-14). In France, under the Occupation, partition and the cultural policies formulated by the Vichy government threatened to undermine the one-nation ideology central to the country's Republican heritage (Looseley 1993:219). The post-war reaction, as part of the effort at reconstruction, was to reassert a unified French culture as a symbol of national identity, with specialist offices created within the new government to pursue cultural initiatives (Ory 1996:10-11). Similarly, on the collapse of the IVth Republic, the Vth Republic under de Gaulle emphasised the importance of establishing a strong nation and a strong state to ensure the success of its modernising project. The first culture Minister, André Malraux, considered the creation of his department in 1959 to be a manoeuvre integral to the wider socio-economic project of the government (Girard 1996:13). The emphasis within the Ministry's founding decree (cited above, p.109) on the *national* character of the culture to be sustained is coherent with Gaullist nationalism in the political arena. While culture is still described as a collective good, this nationalist emphasis moves the state's cultural vision in a different direction, beyond the notion of culture as a form of social provision that all members of the population are entitled to enjoy. It binds intervention in the arts to the state's own image of itself and the nation it represents, and to the face it assumes in relation to the outside world. Thus a state-sponsored culture becomes a visible mark of an enlightened, civilized or forward-looking mission in which the state looks beyond the satisfaction of its population's material needs, towards their intellectual and spiritual fulfilment⁷⁸.

These varying conceptions of culture and its role in socio-political life are embodied in the material practices, as well as the rhetoric, of state cultural administration (a phenomenon explored in more detail in Section 3.2 below). They also inflect the way in which that administration is formally constituted and where it is placed in relation to the governmental structure as a whole, which in turn sets the parameters for state cultural action. The high profile of culture in relation to the wider socio-political project of the French Vth Republic is reflected in the creation of an autonomous state department, or

⁷⁷ CEMA was first set up as an independent organisation funded by a charity, the Pilgrim's Trust. The government intervened with financial aid in 1940 on the initiative of Lord Macmillan, head of the Ministry of Information as well as Chairman of the Pilgrim's Trust (Hewison 1995:29-31).

⁷⁸ Evident in the Malraucian approach to culture under de Gaulle, this conception of national culture as enhancing the image of the state is also apparent in the policy and discourse of the Lang / Mitterand government of the 1980s (see below, pp.122-123), which, in turn, is paralleled

Ministry, which sits alongside, on an equal footing with, other departments responsible for different areas of state action. Between 1945 and 1959, smaller specialist arts offices existed under the jurisdiction of the *Direction Générale de l'Éducation*, subsuming state cultural initiatives under a more general programme of developing opportunities for self-improvement of the population. The establishment of an autonomous Ministry, meanwhile, shifts the balance towards a conception of culture as contributing also in other ways to national life. Renamed the *Ministère de la Culture* in 1974, the state department has remained autonomous of other ministries, although its brief has also changed to include *Communication* (broadcast media and the press) and, at various times, also *l'Environnement*, *la Francophonie* and, again (briefly), *l'Éducation Nationale*⁷⁹.

The constitution of the Arts Council of Great Britain, meanwhile, as an administrative structure at arm's length from government, both removes publicly subsidised culture from direct political control and effects the institutional marginalisation of culture in relation to the broader welfare state⁸⁰. Although ACGB initially received the grant-in-aid, on which its action is dependent, direct from the Treasury, its autonomy in this respect has been gradually eroded, along with the arm's length principle (Pick 1991:71-72). The shifts towards closer integration with core government concerns once again indicate evolving conceptions of culture's social and political usefulness. On the establishment in 1964 of a government Office of Arts and Libraries (OAL), within the Department of Education and Science, ACGB came under the jurisdiction of that Office; the latter assumed shared responsibility with the Council for the elaboration of arts policy, but under the broader umbrella of education policy. The OAL was, in turn, granted independence from the Department of Education and Science in 1983, as the level of direct interference with ACGB on the part of the Minister for the Arts also increased. An autonomous ministry of state with responsibility for culture (and for the Arts Council which has continued to exist as a structure mediating between government and artists) was not created until the establishment of the Department of National Heritage in 1992⁸¹. But the move in the British context towards granting

by the cultural preoccupations of the British New Labour government from 1997 (see below, p.124).

⁷⁹ The creation of a "super-Ministry" in 1992 united the domains of culture and education under the direction of Jack Lang. The victory of the right-wing alliance in the Parliamentary elections the following year resulted in a re-structuring which once again separated the two spheres (Looseley 1992:211-2 and 1993a:201-2).

⁸⁰ For a general discussion concerning the advantages and disadvantages of the arts council model compared to cultural policy / subsidy systems centred around a dedicated ministry, see Sweeting (ed.)(1982) and, especially, Girard (1982).

⁸¹ renamed the Department of Culture, Media and Sport in 1997: see below, p.124.

culture an autonomous direction within the state executive (bringing the British model into line with its French counterpart) indicates a growing institutionalisation and politicisation of cultural concerns.

Poggi (1990) argues that, as states become increasingly functionally differentiated, the growing specialisation of government departments tends to some extent to isolate their action and focus their attention on internally defined concerns: “the specialised part, in the end, conducts its relations to the whole which had instituted it as a means to the more effective pursuit of its interest, less in the light of those interests than of others specific to itself” (122). This is evident in the state cultural administrations of both Britain and France, as they institute particular administrative practices which sustain themselves in spite of a sometimes increasing divergence from the state’s original aims. Thus Williams (1989) suggests that the creation of dedicated administrative bodies may actually undermine the possibility their broadly defined missions being fulfilled: he claims, in particular, that ACGB has been disabled in its attempt to formulate and execute a long-term and comprehensive strategy of broadening access to culture because of the absence of involvement with government departments in charge of, for example, Education and Broadcasting. Accounts of the French funding system indicate that the isolation of cultural policy has also proved problematic in France (Looseley 1995), even if the concept of culture defining the scope of its action was much broader than the notion of art governing ACGB’s practice. Minister of Culture, Jaques Duhamel, sought to counteract the isolation of his department from neighbouring concerns, but was hampered in his short-lived and only partially effective administrative reforms by the institutionalised fragmentation of the system (Girard 1996:14-15). Other instances of the state cultural administration defining its mission in relation to its own internal dynamics are discussed in section 3.2 below.

The profile of cultural affairs in relation to other areas of state intervention does, however, affect the responsible body’s ability to negotiate effectively with sister departments, especially the Treasury or Ministry of Finance, for a share of public expenditure. The twin dimensions of the cultural administration’s activity – formulation of cultural policy and distribution of subsidy – depend on economic resources put at its disposal: financial resources and restrictions enable and limit the administration’s infrastructural power, by partly defining the number and range of cultural activities in which the state is implicated. While the extent of that power is linked to the level of available resources, it is not simply a case of more influence accruing from more

money. Restrictions on resources also tend to concentrate the symbolic force of the administration's decisions. Since their establishment in the 1940s and 1950s, the budgets of ACGB and French Ministry have remained circumscribed, falling well short of the resources enjoyed by other state bodies in charge of core welfare concerns⁸². This engenders a wide divergence between the ambitious objectives publicised by such documents as ACGB's Royal Charter or the Ministry's founding decree (which continue to claim that they exist to promote "the arts" and "culture" in general), and the restricted financial means available to them. The state arts administrations are thus necessarily selective in their support, choosing to subsidise and encourage certain cultural practices and organisations over others. This fact, as much as the "despotic" power the administrations explicitly claim in defining cultural policy, has helped to consolidate the state arts administration's role as a legitimator of cultural practice. As both Hutchison (1982:13-14) and Wangermée (ed.) (1988:131-2) recognise in their accounts of Arts Council and Ministry respectively, the funding structures continue to derive much of their power from this selectivity that, in practice, translates into a capacity to confer art status. This symbolic power operates on the macro-level of art forms in general and on the micro-level of particular individuals or groups, as suggested in section 3.4 and Chapters 4 to 7.

According to Poggi (1990: 128-137), another feature of the increasing institutionalisation and differentiation of state structures is the closing down of opportunities for a country's population to participate in the government's decision-making process. Thus politics "more and more rarely consist in the open confrontation in the public sphere between organised bodies of opinion, competing for public support for alternative policy proposals" (128); as the weight of the administrative and regulatory framework increases, that structure becomes more and more opaque, and less transparently inflected by "inputs of political preferences originating from the society at large and assessed and balanced by against one another according to the rules of the public sphere" (*ibid.*). In the cultural domain, this is the case with respect to the citizenry at large whose enlightenment is envisaged in cultural policy, and for whom direct channels to the cultural decision-making process do not exist. Rather, they remain reliant on the state administration's executive, its specialist advisors and the diverse range of arts professionals with whom the state body is in contact to guide the state's cultural action; and on elected representatives in parliament (usually elected for

⁸² See PSI (1990a) for a comparative analysis of European governments' expenditure on culture, which includes an assessment of that expenditure in relation to GDP and government expenditure overall.

reasons not explicitly cultural) to monitor this process. While the public's right of access to culture is enshrined in the state administration's mission, that public has no direct influence over either the mode of access nor the mode of culture concerned. This creates an imbalance within the state cultural environment, where the interests of the cultural bureaucracy and of arts professionals take precedence over other concerns. Some of the implications and effects of this situation are explored further below (pp.148-154 and in the Conclusion).

3.2 State Intervention in the Arts: Strategies and Shifting Rationales

The texts of ACGB's Royal Charter and the French Ministry of Culture's founding decree (cited above, p.109) highlight the duality of the two organisations' aims. On the one hand, in line with the notion of culture as a right and the need to extend the availability of cultural provision to the population at large, the development of accessibility is emphasised as a core objective; simultaneously, however, the state arts administration's role is to enable and support excellence in artistic activity. This duality complicates the welfare state model of government because it pinpoints two different groups as prospective beneficiaries: artists *and* their (actual or potential) public, or the providers *as well as* the receivers of culture. As Williams (1989) suggests, the multiplicity of aims which comprise the mission of the incipient state arts administration creates a series of confusions and tensions, which have continued to bedevil government intervention in culture and which resurface at various times in debates about the form such intervention should take. The evolving strategies and rationales that justify government involvement also reflect historical, political and economic contingencies. The latter, in turn, can be said to inflect the relation between state, artists and public, as it is envisaged in state administrative discourse and practice and operationalised on the sites of particular art forms and works.

In the immediate postwar period, the state arts administration established priorities and precedents for its subsequent modes of intervention, including a focus on the professional performing arts as privileged sites of state cultural action. ACGB, like its predecessor CEMA, concentrated its support on music and drama (Baldry 1981:13; Hewison 1995:43-45). This focus is partly explained by the aim of both organisations to reinforce national identity, morale and social cohesion: the performing arts presuppose an audience in which individual spectators are unified in an embodied collectivity with a common focus, which thus symbolises a broader sense of a national public's participation in a common culture. In its early years, CEMA further emphasised the participatory dimension of the performing arts through promoting amateur work, or "music-making and play-acting by the people themselves" (Baldry 1981:13). Such inclusiveness was short-lived, however: Hutchison (1982:44-59) notes that lobbying by figures such as J.M. Keynes, concerned with the economic health of the professional arts, resulted in CEMA shifting its attention primarily to the professional sphere; similarly, ACGB had withdrawn its limited support for amateur activity by 1952, expressing a wish to "reserve its formal association for a select number of professional undertakings" (ACGB 8th Annual report, cited in Hutchison 1982:49). ACGB's Royal

Charter itself points to an exclusivity of focus in its implied emphasis on professional “standard[s] of execution” and its claim to be concerned with “the fine arts exclusively”⁸³.

This professional orientation was borne out by the funding practice of the early ACGB, which concentrated resources on prestigious (largely metropolitan) arts institutions. Keynes’ position as ACGB Chairman, held while also Chair of the Board of the refurbished Royal Opera House (ROH), cemented a close association between the two organisations that has subsisted into the 1990s. The ROH, considered as a flagship institution representative of the peak of professional artistic excellence, was given symbolic and financial precedence over both regional organisations and initiatives to improve access to the arts (Hutchison 1982: 60-81 and 117-136). Baldry (1981) links this development to the evolution of a *laissez-faire* approach, whereby ACGB responded to developments and demands from within the professional arts, eschewing its formal policy-making function (15-19). The capacity of prestigious institutions in the capital to articulate a demand for subsidy and be heard by the political establishment⁸⁴, ensured that they became dominant in the Council’s portfolio of clients. This growing exclusivity of ACGB’s practice also embodies one of the perspectives on state intervention outlined above (pp.109-110), whereby the state’s action in respect of the arts is designed to enhance the externalised image of the state itself and the nation it represents. The prestige-based performing arts favoured by ACGB have a capacity for spectacular display, whereby the product, in its conspicuous consumption of resources in a non-permanent material manifestation, presents an image of national wealth; meanwhile, the concern for the artistic heritage, which these institutions uphold, reflects back on the state that supports them the glow of cultural, in addition to economic, capital.

ACGB’s status as an institution at arm’s length from government appears to have contributed to this *laissez-faire* conception of its role, removing the direct imperative to formulate policy in line with the democratising goal embedded in the government’s

⁸³ Hewison (1995:43) remarks that, while Keynes (one of ACGB’s architects) would have agreed that the Council should focus on supporting professional, high art practice, the phrase “fine arts exclusively” had been inserted by him into the Charter so that ACGB buildings would qualify for rate relief. Williams (1989:144), meanwhile, notes that a distinction between serious art and popular entertainment was already written into the co-existence of the two wartime cultural organisations, CEMA (Council for the Encouragement of Music and the Arts) and ENSA (the *Entertainments* and National Service Association)(my italics).

⁸⁴ See Hutchison’s (1982) examination of the close links between prominent politicians and statesmen on the one hand, and the leading figures in Council-favoured arts practice on the other.

vision of culture. In France, where the incipient Ministère des Affaires Culturelles was more closely linked, politically and institutionally to the core state concerns, proactive cultural policy remained a priority. Nonetheless, a prestige- and heritage-based orientation, comparable to that in the British context, developed in the early form of systematic state intervention in culture. This is evident, for example, in the evolution of regional French theatre. Looseley (1993) explores the activity of theatrical *animateurs* in the pre-war decades and the precedence this set for subsequent state intervention. The *animateurs* shifted their focus from developing new work in collaboration with local populations to disseminating an already existing national theatrical heritage, albeit with the aim of developing that repertoire's accessibility to a wider public (see also Caune 1992: 49-108). This work was relayed after the war by emergent forms of systematic state support that similarly conceived its task as one of upholding the theatrical tradition, or, in the words of Jean Vilar, Director of the publicly subsidised *Théâtre National Populaire*, "imposer au public ce qu'il désire profondément" (cited in Looseley 1993:219), namely the mainstream repertoire traditionally reserved for an elite audience. Professional, regionally based drama companies were established (under Jeanne Laurent, head of the central government's *Direction des Spectacles et de la Musique*) to fulfil a similar purpose, later evolving into the *Centres Dramatiques Nationaux* (CDNs)⁸⁵.

Such developments in the French theatre do bear witness to the long-standing commitment of the French state to cultural decentralisation⁸⁶. Similarly, the plan to build a *Maison de la Culture* in each major provincial town was a key dimension of the early Ministry's action, linked politically to de Gaulle's national modernisation project whereby the benefits of growth would be spread outside the capital through the creation of "métropoles d'équilibre" (Deakin 1993:102). Despite their geographical location, however, both the CDNs and the *Maisons de la Culture* were dominated by the preoccupations of the central state, becoming flagship state-funded institutions, presenting work that conformed to a centrally-defined or metropolitan notion of "excellence" and consuming the bulk of public arts subsidy in the process (Busson 1986; Looseley 1993)⁸⁷. Under Malraux, the French Ministry emphasised *création* as a policy priority, signalling a proactive approach to the promotion of the avant-garde in

⁸⁵ The CDN model was adopted in the progressive institutionalisation of contemporary dance during the 1980s and early 1990s: see Frétard (1995) and below, pp.145.

⁸⁶ Cultural decentralisation did not become a priority for the British arts administration until the 1960s and 1970s.

⁸⁷ Malraux's declared cultural aim was to delete from the French vocabulary "le mot hideux de province" (cited in Saez 1996:31).

addition to the artistic heritage: the *Maisons de la Culture* were envisaged as providing sites for the development and dissemination of new work (Girard 1996:14; Saez 1996:31). But this perspective intensified, rather than challenging, the professional and high arts bias of the state cultural administration in supporting experimentation only within the parameters of recognised art forms, by artists of consecrated standing (Looseley 1995:40-42). It was professional practice of this kind that would be subject to the *diffusion* and *démocratisation* also envisaged in Malraux's policy. Despite its rhetorical emphasis on increasing the accessibility of artistic heritage and the avant-garde, the French Ministry (like ACGB) failed to elaborate a distinct and effective democratising strategy: "[Malraux] semble avoir pensé que, pour convertir les non-pratiquants et les entraîner à la reconnaissance de la valeur des oeuvres d'art, il suffisait de les leur présenter" (Wangermée ed. 1988: 31).

In their focus on prestigious professional arts practice, the policies of both ACGB and the Ministère de la Culture thus characterised the art-public relation in terms of a conventional aesthetic paradigm, whereby cultural artefacts are expected spontaneously to reveal themselves and their significance to the observer, regardless of her/his social position, level of education and cultural capital. The cultural product was emphasised over and above a vision of culture as process of interpretation, education or development (Caune 1992), with such products' value assumed to be universal and permanent, in that they were consecrated parts of an artistic heritage that it was the state's duty to protect. This paradigm, and the prestige-oriented strategies associated with it, has arguably endured in subsequent years, despite challenges from various artistic and political constituencies.

The British state shifted towards a more directly interventionist approach to culture under the Labour government of the 1960s, with the creation in 1964 of the Office of Arts and Libraries (OAL) and of a post of Minister for the Arts, and the development of British government's first comprehensive policy document (HMSO 1965). The rhetoric of the latter breaks decisively with the exclusivity characteristic of the early Arts Council: it extends the definition of culture to cover advertising, the media, popular music and consumer goods, as well as traditional art practices, and speaks of "bridging the gap between what have been called the 'higher' forms of entertainment and the traditional sources" (15-16)⁸⁸. The threefold increase in arts funding over five years

⁸⁸ Hewison discusses this broader approach as it is reflected in the action and discourse of the first Minister for the Arts, Jennie Lee, and the Arts Council Chairman of the time, Lord Goodman. The "permissive" openness to new forms is associated by Goodman in particular

(McGuigan 1996:57), enabled augmentation of support for young artists, greater attention to be paid to emergent art forms (evidenced in the 1968 establishment of a “New Activities Committee”), and a programme of expenditure on capital projects through ACGB’s “Housing the Arts” fund (Hewison 1995:121). The practical outcomes of these initiatives, however, belie the rhetoric of openness characterising the period: Hutchison (1982:105-116) and Hewison (1995:151-152) note the very limited resources dedicated to “New Activities”, the short life of the committee⁸⁹ and the fact that the “Housing the Arts” fund was used essentially for the purpose of expanding and reinforcing the network of prestigious performing arts institutions.

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the French state’s discourse also evidences a shift to a conception of culture as an organic and quotidian process in which every individual is necessarily engaged. The *Commission des Affaires Culturelles* of the Sixth Plan (1971-75) declares the need for a “dépassement de l’ancienne culture réservée à une minorité de privilégiés” and a recognition of how culture enhances the individual’s autonomy and capacity to control her/his own, as well as society’s, destiny (cited in Girard 1996: 14). Accompanying these declarations was a more explicit commitment on the part of the Ministry, under Jacques Duhamel, to develop grass-roots animation activity and to link state cultural action with education and leisure policy through a closer integration of the relevant government departments. Concern at the costs incurred by the *Maisons de la Culture* resulted in the network being developed through smaller *Centres d’Action Culturelle*, adopting a lighter, more flexible structure that would facilitate openness to a plurality of professional and amateur arts practices (Looseley 1995:45). But, as in Britain, the maintenance costs of existing as well as new such building-based organisations consumed a substantial proportion of increases in public arts subsidy (Busson 1986; Dressayre & Garbownik 1995; Hutchison 1982:101-102). This pinpoints a structural difficulty outlined in section 3.1 above (p.112): extension of a state-supported cultural infrastructure enlarges the network of resources, but also increases the weight and autonomy of that institution, narrowing its concerns within an essentially internalised focus.

The social democratic basis of the state’s vision of culture during this period remains in line with the socialist orientation of the governments concerned, emphasising equally distributed individual as well as social benefits accruing through culture, rather than

with the “general libertarianism of the period” (Hewison 1995:141). See also McGuigan (1996: 57-59).

more abstract conceptions of national prestige and artistic excellence. In France, the increased pluralism of the state's attitude was also a response to the political crises of the late 1960s, in which the Malraucian cultural vision (in parallel with the nationalism, imperialism and authoritarianism of Gaullism generally) was subject to radical criticism (Ory 1983:68; Looseley 1993b). The *Maisons de la Culture* and other state-subsidised institutions were the focus of some of the 1968 protests, with some (particularly theatre) arts practitioners associating themselves closely with oppositional politics. The development of community art in Britain parallels the more overtly politicised approach of these French cultural actors. Both movements called into question the paradigm of art reception enshrined in the state arts administration's practice: Kelly (1984) explores how cross-art collaborative practice and community-based work challenged artist / audience and professional / amateur distinctions (9-12)⁹⁰. In both countries, however, these challenges were gradually absorbed. In France, the radical force of the arts protestors was dispersed as a number of them assumed positions of responsibility within the existing institutional framework of subsidised theatre (Busson 1986)⁹¹; moreover, the guiding conception of (metropolitan, high art) standards of "excellence" was reinforced by the Liberal regime on its accession to power in 1974 (Looseley 1995:53-55). Kelly (1984:15-40) records that ACGB gradually delegated responsibility for alternative and avant-garde art to its existing departments; it also began to fund Community Art, but at the expense of its early radicalism, appropriating community animation as part of a more conventional and paternalistic strategy of increasing art accessibility.

Lowe maintains that the social democratic ideals underpinning Labour governments' approach to the welfare state were premised on an assumption of economic growth, as well as a notion of the state as a beneficent force (1993:23). The healthy economic situation of the 1960s gave governments freedom to devote large portions of their income to social spending, including an increased proportion to cultural funding. Recession and economic crisis in the Europe of the 1970s halted this trend by calling into question the viability of the social democratic project and its vision of the state's capacity to intervene positively in social life (Gamble 1988: 1-20). According to Poggi (1993:139-140), advanced Western states in general develop in the direction of subordinating "the allocation of burdens and advantages amongst major social groups"

⁸⁹ The "New Activities Committee" was given £15,000 in 1969. Abolished in 1970 to be replaced by the "Experimental Projects Committee", the latter had also folded by 1973.

⁹⁰ The emergence of the new dance movement in Britain has been linked with developments in both performance art and community arts: see Devlin (1989: 20), Brinson (1991:107-136).

⁹¹ See, for example, Looseley's (1990) analysis of Jack Lang's career (13-15).

to “the promotion of industrial growth” (140). Lowe (1993:14) suggests that this engrossing effect of economic concerns is partly a function of the welfare state’s own massive consumption of resources which cannot but affect the workings of the economy as a whole: recognising this, the state is obliged to concern itself with the economy’s health and play an active role in restoring positive economic conditions. Hall & Ikenberry (1989:81) similarly argue that the state sector’s own expansion has had the effect of limiting resources as well as the strategic possibilities of government in responding to wider economic and political forces such as globalisation.

From the late 1970s, a sense of crisis in the economy and the welfare state inflects the discourse and mode of operation of the state cultural administration. As suggested above, the French cultural administration of the later 1970s narrowed its outlook once more to focus on the traditional high arts, while, under the liberal regimes of the d’Estaing presidency, the Ministry of Culture was demoted to the status of a state secretariat: successive ministers also sought to reduce the proportion of state investment in culture by tapping new sources of funding, including private sponsorship deals and more extensive partnerships with local government (Looseley 1993b:228-230 and 1995:52-55). In Britain, similar economic concerns are evident in ACGB’s Annual Reports from the later 1970s (see below, p.122), with the sense of crisis intensifying on the accession to power of the first Thatcher government in 1979. The New Right’s strategy of economic management was centred on a greater control over the money supply, inflation and public expenditure; it envisaged a reduction of the public sector, introduction of free-market imperatives into traditionally state-governed concerns and an enhancement of traditional sources of authority (the state, its repressive apparatus, the nation and the family) (Lowe 1993:23-27; Kavanagh 1990:9-17). In breaking, at least rhetorically, with the post-war consensus about the positive and beneficent character of state intervention in social life, and also challenging the tradition of state ownership of collective goods, the New Right eroded the apparently secure grounding of state cultural intervention in the welfare state consensus.

Although the Thatcher governments of the 1980s chose to limit increases in arts spending rather than imposing drastic cuts, developments in the arts sphere have been associated with the broader Thatcherite project of “rolling back the state” to liberate the economy (Beck 1989; Bennett 1995; McGuigan 1996:59-67). Both Gamble (1988:20-26) and McGuigan (1996:60-62), however, point out that this objective was more apparent in the government’s rhetoric than in its practice. In many domains, Thatcherism worked to reinforce rather than weaken the power of the central state. The

organisation of public arts subsidy during the 1980s embodies that contradiction (McGuigan 1996:60-61). Several developments⁹² actually served to increase the direct intervention of central government in cultural affairs during the 1980s (Beck 1989 and 1992), this process culminating in the unprecedented creation of a dedicated culture ministry, the Department of National Heritage, by Thatcher's successor, John Major, in 1992. The title of that department also harks back to an older conception of state intervention as essentially supportive of the cultural tradition (see above pp.108-110), and to the goal of state-subsidised culture reinforcing and representing the national identity.

Throughout the 1980s, British government and ACGB discourse stressed that the arts sphere should reduce its dependence on central state funding, diversify its sources of income and become more responsive to commercial pressures and considerations. ACGB's annual and special reports place great stress, during this period, on the economic potential of the arts, their capacity to generate income through the box office, to attract foreign tourists, their value in promoting Britain's image overseas and their status as exportable commodities. In ACGB (1984a), for example, the arts in London are described as "a great national and international asset" (4), a theme explored at greater length by ACGB's (1985) promotional document and by Palumbo in ACGB (1990) who characterises British artistic talent as paying "handsome dividends upon the capital employed both in terms of invisible earnings, and in the prestige and standing of our nation in the eyes of the world" (3). In addition, Council texts highlight the desirability of artists becoming more accountable for the money they receive, on their using modern management and marketing techniques to enhance productivity and profitability and to deliver quantifiable return on taxpayers' money (see, for example, ACGB 1987: 3, 7-8 and 1992: 10)⁹³.

ACGB's increasingly managerialist and commercialist discourse is often attributed to the pervasive influence of Thatcherist ideology in social and political life (Beck 1989; Bennett 1995; McGuigan 1996:51-73). But such emphasis on the economic dimension of culture is also evident in the discourse of France's Socialist governments of the 1980s. The French Ministry justified the large increase in the culture budget under the Socialist regime of 1981-1986 in terms that recognised the pressures of the economic

⁹² such as the abolition of the Metropolitan Councils which resulted in the Arts Council assuming responsibility for their client arts organisations from 1986, and the reorganisation of the Regional Arts Associations into Regional Arts Boards from 1989 (see below, p.133).

⁹³ See Beck (1989), Pick (1991), Bennett (1995) and Hewison (1995) for more extended discussions of these discursive shifts.

climate and the beneficial impact a cultural revival would have in alleviating them (Looseley 1995: 81-90). Minister Jack Lang's first speech to the National Assembly claimed that "[u]ne société qui retrouve le sens de l'invention et de la création pourra redonner à chacun de nos pays l'idéal mobilisateur dont nous avons besoin pour convaincre la crise" (cited in Looseley 1995: 82). With this association of artistic creativity with a spirit of commercial enterprise, there was renewed emphasis on culture's usefulness to the state and the nation, as well as a reiteration of the Malraucian principle of support for "création". The Socialists also accorded enhanced status to the *créateur* as a valuable and significant partner of the state: Pinto (1987) maintains that, as the Socialists' increasingly pragmatic approach to economic affairs from 1984 cemented their alienation from the leftist intelligentsia, the cultural creator replaced the intellectual as the key cultural interlocutor and contributor to the government's economic and political mission (219).

The utilitarian strain in the Ministry of Culture's discourse grew more pronounced as the government's general economic pragmatism increased, with the state-subsidised arts described as part of a broader leisure industry which can stimulate a consumer-based economy, and promote job creation, investment and trade (Looseley 1995:89-90; Caune 1992:299-334). Lang's Ministry was also vocal in its support of the commercial media and sought to broaden the range of cultural practices in which it was involved to include film, television, popular music, fashion and *bande dessinée*, all envisaged as legitimate dimensions of the national cultural repertoire alongside the traditional arts (Looseley 1995: 113-134). In promoting commercial forms, the Ministry signalled its new awareness of the economic value of culture in general and aligned practitioners in the traditional arts with their more financially-aware and marketing-conscious counterparts in commercial forms. The Ministry's art-organisation clients were expected to be more accountable for the subsidy they received, with the cumbersome national institutions especially improving their flexibility to demand and their economic viability. Contracts were re-negotiated with existing performing arts organisations, the *Centres dramatiques nationaux* (CDNs) and the *Etablissements d'action culturelle* (EACs)⁹⁴, which defined three-year plans-of-action thus tying the award of public money to specified undertakings (a certain number of performances, new productions, educational and access initiatives). The contracts also required overheads to be minimised and a much larger proportion of the institutions' income to be generated through the box office (Looseley 1993: 232 and 1995:105-110; Busson

⁹⁴ an umbrella term covering both *Maisons de culture* and *Centres d'action culturelle*

1986). Looseley comments that the status of EAC directors, responsible for fulfilling a carefully defined contract with the state, thus shifted as they became managers of “enterprises culturelles” (1995:108-109).

In both countries, this dominance of economic concerns in the state arena seems set to continue, having remained constant through the late 1980s and 1990s despite changes of government (Driver & Martell 1998; Suleiman 1990). The way culture’s role in social life is conceptualised and articulated in official discourse shifts according to particular ideological and general policy commitments, but the stress on accountability, economic viability and good managerial practice in the arts remains. This is coupled in the discourse of Britain’s New Labour government with emphasis on broadening the sphere of culture to include popular and commercial activities, symbolised in the new regime’s renaming of the Department of National Heritage as the Department of Culture, Media and Sport on its accession to power in 1997; a new ideology of creativity is also prominent, whereby cultural actors are held up as paradigms of innovation and enterprise (Smith 1998), in a manner strongly reminiscent of French Socialist rhetoric in the early 1980s. In line with New Labour’s declared support and concern for education as a core domain of the welfare state (Driver & Martell 1998), the drive for accessibility is highlighted as a keynote of cultural policy (Robinson 1998; Smith 1998:1-27, 34-47). In France, governments of the Right and Left during the 1990s have continued to stress the importance of heritage and access; they also envisage the social potential of cultural activity in its capacity to integrate deprived or underprivileged populations.

In neither country does there seem to be any serious threat to the concept of systematic state intervention in culture, in the same way as the public and political consensus concerning the principle of welfare statism remains essentially intact (Driver & Martell 1998; Ambler 1991; Cameron 1991). Despite the high profile of cultural concerns in the early years of New Labour government in Britain, there is, perhaps, a danger of cultural issues being sidelined by its growing emphasis on the core welfare issues of health and education: thus the National Lottery, established under the Major government as a source of income exclusively dedicated to culture, has seen a proportion (20%) siphoned off by New Labour to form the New Opportunities Fund increasing subsidy for more conventional welfare purposes. Ambler (1991:27-28) notes that the principle of the welfare state in France is challenged by continuing high levels of unemployment and the growth of anti-immigrant sentiment which questions the premise of welfare benefits being available to all. However, France is also a European

leader in social spending (Cameron 1991) and it is difficult to envisage its vast, entrenched public sector being dismantled in the near future. Moreover, the principle of state intervention in culture is also firmly ingrained and materially embodied in an extensive institutional network: different parties may have different views on how and where resources should be spent, but even extremist ideology incorporates a cultural policy dimension (see Pakes 2000).

In both countries, however, there has been a shift towards encouraging arts organisations to diversify their sources of income and reduce their dependence on central government. Business sponsorship has been promoted as a supplement to public subsidy, especially in the British context where the Association of Business Sponsorship for the Arts (ABSA, now Arts and Business) has sought, since 1976, to establish and sustain partnerships between public and private sectors in the arts domain. Its counterpart in France, the *Association pour le Développement du Mécénat Industriel et Commercial* (ADMICAL)⁹⁵ was established in 1979 (Rigaud 1990:182-186). Both organisations have developed incentive schemes whereby matching public funds are accorded to organisations which attracted private monies (for examples, see ACGB 1989:34-35 and ACE 1996b). Qualms are still voiced by some commentators about how the state's growing enthusiasm for business sponsorship results in further neglect of the arts' public service role in favour of their more immediate promotional pay-off (see, for example, Shaw 1993). Where a primary purpose of the sponsor is to achieve exposure for his/her product or services, this necessarily affects the kinds of work which attract support: established companies and forms (guaranteed a stable and sizeable public) are likely to be favoured over experimental and small-scale work, and the immediately spectacular over more nuanced and "difficult" practice (see Roberts 1995/6 on the implications for contemporary dance).

But, in each country, business sponsorship has tended to be seen as a means to expand and diversify arts funding rather than as a way of phasing out public subsidy and privatising the cultural sphere. Similarly, in Britain, the National Lottery was introduced as a source of new funds for the arts in 1993, with the principle of additionality rather than substitution enshrined in legislation (Schuster 1994a)⁹⁶. The

⁹⁵ In French a distinction is drawn between "mécénat", meaning patronage or philanthropic donation, and the Anglicism "sponsoring", equivalent to the British notion of sponsorship. The fact that patronage has come to seem an outdated concept in the British context perhaps testifies to a more extensive commercialisation of the arts sphere in Britain than in France.

⁹⁶ The introduction of the National Lottery is an interesting topic for investigation in its own right, which there is unfortunately insufficient space to develop properly here. Since the Lottery has thus far impacted only marginally on contemporary dance, it is only mentioned briefly (and

integration of these new forms of subsidy as additional sources of income rather than substitutes for state financial support, does point to a relatively new characteristic of the contemporary arts funding environment: the dominance of the model of partnership funding, based on the idea that a series of cultural bodies (the state, its arms' length and regional organisations, sub-national government and private partners) share both the burden and advantages of supporting cultural activity. Since this phenomenon cannot be properly understood without reference to issues of decentralisation and the sub-national tier of state administration, the following section will explore this dimension of the state cultural institution.

3.3 Sub-National Government and Cultural Decentralisation

Sub-national government has a dual role in both Britain and France: it functions as an alternative layer of democratically-elected *government*, with the capacity to define and implement policy according to preoccupations which may differ from those of the central state; but it is also the structure whereby policies formulated at the national level are *administered* at the grass-roots level, and remains subordinate to the will of central government in the sense that the latter can, through national legislation, change its constitution and functions⁹⁷. The influence that central government retains, in Britain and France, over its sub-national counterpart reveals that both countries remain highly centralised in their form of political and governmental organisation, in contrast to other states (such as Germany and the U.S.) adopting a federal structure. The involvement of sub-national authorities in culture points up the ambiguity of their role in general, as well as the centralisation of political power in the two countries. Many local authorities, in both Britain and France, have a long history of intervention in culture embodied in their willingness financially to support regional cultural organisations and institutions (Redcliffe-Maud 1976:102-107; Saez 1996:29-30). But the contemporary organisation and extension of these funding practices responds, to a large extent, to the consolidation of state intervention in culture at the central level. In Britain, local government was formally empowered to intervene financially in the arts only following the establishment of ACGB⁹⁸. Rizzardo (1996:45-46) notes that the cultural initiatives of the central state in France were important in setting a precedent for the expansion of local government intervention. Similarly, the extent of local administration's financial resources is largely controlled by the central state, of which the grants-in-aid to local authorities form a substantial part of the latter's income; moreover, the ability of local authorities to raise local taxes is controlled and monitored by the national legislative body. In that the availability of financial resources generally impacts on the possibility of local public expenditure on culture, debates within the central state executive and parliament thus impact significantly on regional cultural intervention.

This infrastructural power held by the centre over the sub-national environment is paralleled, in the cultural sphere, by directive policy from the state arts administration.

⁹⁷ Spectacular instances of the central state exercising this power include: in Britain, the abolition of the metropolitan councils by the Thatcher government in the 1980s; and in France, the introduction, in 1972, of an additional layer of subnational administration through the division of the country, and the allocation of its *départements*, into 22 regions.

⁹⁸ The 1948 Local Government Act permitted district and municipal councils to spend a part of their income on the arts and entertainment in their areas (Redcliffe-Maud 1976).

As indicated above, the core missions of both ACGB and Ministère de la Culture involve a commitment to making cultural opportunity available to the population at large. This implies that cultural intervention should operate over the whole geographical spread of the national territory, ensuring that deliberate or inadvertent discrimination in cultural provision does not operate on the grounds of where a given section of the population lives. To a certain extent, then, the imperative of cultural decentralisation is enshrined in the core objectives of the state cultural administration. But it also partly conflicts with the freedom of different regions to set their own cultural agenda, or not, according to the preferences of the population concerned. Since the central state also assumes the power to define and legitimate the kind of culture it promotes, it will impose that vision of culture on the geographical areas to which it seeks to extend provision; unless, that is, there exists a mechanism for feeding back regional cultural preference into decision-making at the central level. The devolution of cultural decision-making to the local level has been suggested as a way of ensuring closer collaboration between the public and government in the definition of cultural preference and provision, because local politicians and their executives conventionally operate at a more grass-roots level than their national counterparts. This situation is complicated, however, by the questions as to the representational legitimacy of local administration: the class of local councillors, at least in Britain, has tended to be less representative of the wide variety of social demographic and interest groups than its national counterpart (Budge *et al.* 1998:461), and the turnout is traditionally much lower for council than for national elections. This is not to deny the work of individual councillors in canvassing opinion through other means as part of their political work; but it does pinpoint a structural difficulty in the representational system, relevant to the constitution of power relations in the cultural arena.

Such tensions inflect the history of regional state intervention in culture and testify to the limits of the consensus between political bodies regarding the role of government as well as the conception of culture and its uses in different political and social contexts. While it is true, as Myerscough (ed.) (1984:xi-xii) maintains, that a trend towards decentralisation is characteristic of Western European arts funding systems during the 1980s (continuing through the 1990s), it is less clear that this has resulted in a fundamental shift in the balance of power and challenge to the central state's long-standing political and symbolic dominance of the arts sphere. A more detailed examination of the development of the "decentralised" cultural environment and its development highlights the problems with this view.

As suggested above, the French Ministry of Culture has from its inception explicitly declared a commitment to cultural decentralisation. This is embodied, for example, in the plan to build *Maisons de la Culture*, evenly distributed geographically, increasing the physical accessibility of “high” culture beyond the capital (see above, pp.117-118). Assessments of the failure of this initiative (Losseley 1993b, 1995:40-46; Girard 1996) are based on the perception of two key problems: the character of the cultural values that the Ministry attempted to impose, in its privileging of professional artistic activity and avant-garde experiment; and the resource-hungry weight of the material facilities established. Conflict between national and sub-national governments centred around their different conceptions of the artistic heritage and culture’s social role. Saez (1996) notes that the Ministry’s aesthetic preferences went against the grain of some municipalities’ traditions of cultural involvement, which envisaged their role in terms of “une offre confinée, intéressant un public limité, la bourgeoisie, qui conçoit la consommation culturelle comme un loisir distinctif” (29). He also highlights an alternative local authority tradition which stressed the role of cultural facilities in their broader programme of social regeneration: the construction of *équipements socio-culturels* as part of the projects was intended to provide inhabitants with opportunities for “activités sociales, de loisir culturel et sportif, de rencontre, compléments éducatifs, exercice de leur sociabilité et de leur citoyenneté” (Saez 1996:30) ⁹⁹. As local authorities grew accustomed to planning and administering these facilities, their alternative mode of cultural policy was integrated much more closely with social planning and premised on broader acceptance of a plurality of cultural forms. In both respects, the urban authorities’ priorities contrast markedly with the bias of the early Ministry and its subsidised institutions.

Municipal councils, however, were expected to contribute financially to the *Maisons de la Culture*: the Ministry’s limited budget made it dependent on collaboration and funding partnerships with the local authorities. And yet the latter had little influence over the way the institutions, led by Ministry-appointed directors, were run. The resultant resentment was compounded by the financial burden of maintaining new, elaborately equipped buildings. Ultimately, the Ministry was forced to modify the project and only 9 of the 22 *Maisons* planned were actually built (Girard 1996:14). During the late 1960s and 1970s, the project was superseded by a plan to construct lighter, less costly institutions, the *Centres d’Action Culturelle*, which conceded greater power to the

⁹⁹ Again, the short-lived *Front Populaire* régime had been instrumental in establishing a link between leisure practices, government cultural policy and subsidy and the extension of facilities at grass-roots level (see above, pp.108-109 and Jackson 1988).

local authorities to determine the direction of their policies (Looseley 1993:227; Saez 1996:31). Reforms were also introduced at the level of the state cultural administration itself with the creation of *Directions régionales d'action culturelle* (DRACs), or regional branches of the central Ministry, designed to mediate, and resolve conflicts between, central and local authorities over cultural policy (Looseley 1993b). They were also intended to play a coordinating role in encouraging co-operation in cultural affairs between the many diverse forms of local government in France.

A three-tier system of local administration operates in France, sub-divided into 36,400 *communes*, 96 *départements* and (since 1972) 22 *régions* (Mazey 1990:153). The *préfets*, the central state's local representatives, form a layer of bureaucracy in addition to the locally elected administrations and ensure that the state remains closely involved with some aspects of local affairs. Local branches of the central Ministry, the DRACs remain the cultural equivalent of the *préfectures*. Although they did not assume the extended role they currently play in the state's system of arts administration until the early 1980s, their establishment laid the foundations for the entrenchment of central government influence in many spheres of regional cultural development, providing the Ministry with an opportunity to assert its own policy priorities. The development of the DRACs reveals a tendency of the traditionally centralist French system to opt for administrative "déconcentration" rather than devolution in the cultural domain: this has recently allowed central government to retain "de larges compétences dans le domaine artistique et culturel, même si ses moyens financiers ne sont plus en expansion" (Rizzardo 1996:46)¹⁰⁰. More recent moves by the French state to reorganise cultural funding by devolving responsibility for its distribution to the DRACs follows a similar pattern by empowering the regional structures representing the Ministry and the Prefects who supervise, rather than local government itself, although in the longer-term the autonomy of regionally-based decision-making may thus be enhanced.

In Britain, there were also clashes of priorities between regional and central bodies, but as a result of the Arts Council's withdrawal from the regions rather than any

¹⁰⁰ Studies of French government have traditionally laid considerable stress on the centralisation of administrative structures and their origins in the "one nation" ideology of the immediately post-Revolutionary and Napoleonic eras. More recent work maintains that the subtlety and complexity of local and central government structures and relations transcend any simplistic centralist model (see Mazey 1990; Stevens 1992:141-164; d'Arcy 1993). Arguably, however, the evolution of state cultural policy in France does show a strongly centralist orientation, linked perhaps to the renewed emphasis on national culture and its functions: see above pp.109-110 and p.116., and below, pp.121-123.

proactively decentralising strategy. Despite the “extreme decentralisation” of the early activities of CEMA (Hutchison 1982:117), ACGB scaled down its involvement in direct regional promotion following the war and, during the 1950s, closed its regional offices (118). To compensate for this withdrawal, federations of local arts organisations formed in some areas: the Regional Arts Associations (RAAs) emerged to assume the co-ordinating function abandoned by the central Council. They also developed arts initiatives that placed greater emphasis on consolidating a regional rather than national cultural identity (122-126). And this focus was sharpened with the extension of local authority involvement with the new associations. Following the establishment of North Eastern Arts Association in 1960, the link was consolidated between RAAs and local rather than central government. The associations became consortia of artists, local government and private sector representatives, functioning as regional arts councils to decide on the distribution of money received from local authorities and through ACGB.

Although the first English RAAs emerged as a result of a regionally-based initiative, they were appropriated into the cultural institution dominated by ACGB and the new OAL, with the latter’s recognition that the parties could “act with and for the Arts Council in a mutually beneficial relationship” (HMSO 1965, cited in Redcliffe-Maud 1976:91). This resulted in the central structures positively encouraging the formation of new associations in regions that had not developed such initiatives of their own accord, in order to establish a network of RAAs across the country (Redcliffe-Maud 1976:91). Although Redcliffe-Maud comments on the diversity of these organisations in terms of their constitution and aims (92-93), he also notes criticism of the RAAs’ administrative structures as too closely modelled on that of the central Arts Council (94): in each case, a general panel of volunteers functioned as the main decision-making body, supported by a professional executive and advised by specialists in particular art forms¹⁰¹. Redcliffe-Maud also recognises that the proportion of the RAAs’ funding provided by the central Council has grown steadily from the time of their establishment. But he notes that this is partly as a result of ACGB’s efforts to devolve responsibility for subsidising some organisations to the regional associations (1976:95). This decentralising process was thus premised on a general acceptance of the central state body’s power to define certain arts institutions as worthy candidates for subsidy, the

¹⁰¹ As is the case at the level of the central agencies, it is debatable how much influence such panels actually have in arts funding decision-making, given the more hands-on role of the professional executive in filtering applications according to previous experience and/or choosing specialist advisors and consultants: certainly Fawkes (1984), Kay (1984) and Nash (1986), in their discussions of the relationship between dance practitioners and the RAAs, emphasise the important role of the association’s dance officer over and above that of the panels.

administration of which was then passed over to regional associations. All these factors suggest that the central structures' influence on the regional associations has been pervasive, culminating in central government's wholesale reorganisation of the RAAs in the early 1990s (see below, p.133).

In both countries, cultural decentralisation and its tensions are contexted by developments in the administrative organisation and distribution of power on a broader level. In France, the extensive decentralising reforms of the Socialist government between 1983 and 1986 devolved political power and enhanced the autonomy of local government in many spheres (see Mazey 1990; D'Arcy 1993). Yet, although devolution was thus established as a political principle and was supported by a significant transfer of financial resources, central control over cultural policy remained tenacious. The Ministry of Culture under Lang negotiated special conditions whereby local bodies could still be required by central government to spend devolved resources in a particular way: the *dotation culturelle* was a grant accorded to the local authorities for the specific purpose of subsidising Ministry-favoured cultural practices. The position of the DRACs, was also strengthened during this period (Pongy 1996:38-39): on the one hand, their role is to inform the central authority of a particular region's cultural "needs"; but they also advise local government of the kinds of activity likely to attract the financial and political support of the Ministry, because in line with its national policy (Wangermée ed. 1988:103). During the 1980s and 1990s, these structures and strategies have thus ensured a degree of continuity in national cultural policy, which arguably undermines the state's rhetorical emphasis on local autonomy and cultural identity (Looseley 1995: 114-116). They testify to how the notion of a single national culture, defined, promoted and subsidised by the central state, has endured.

Like the French Ministry of Culture, the British Arts Council also declared a strategy of decentralisation in the 1980s (ACGB 1984b). But backed by neither the requisite transfer of financial resources nor the political voluntarism to effect devolution in the broader political arena, the policy had little impact initially (Pick 1991: 77-82; Hewison 1995: 254-256). The local government reforms proposed by the British state sought to curb rather than increase local government expenditure and to homogenise regional administrative structures and practices (Gray 1994: 51-78). Central government's financial control of local authorities was tightened through rate-capping and, subsequently, the introduction of a nation-wide community charge: both had an impact on the spending power of local government, its ability to levy funds, choose priorities and allocate resources accordingly. Moreover, by abolishing the metropolitan councils

in 1986, the Thatcher government dispensed with a tier of local administration that contributed substantially to the subsidy of regional arts and culture. While partnerships between RAAs and other tiers of local administration assumed financial responsibility for some Metropolitan Council-funded arts organisations, the Arts Council itself intervened to subsidise others (particularly in Greater London), thus extending rather than diminishing its role¹⁰².

Gray (1994) notes how the subsequent reorganisation of arts subsidy following the Wilding Report (1989), in turn reduced the Arts Council's management role in the arts nation-wide but reinforced the influence of central government itself (135-140). The impulse behind Wilding's report was central government's concern at the imbalance between the relatively small proportion of funds accorded to RAAs by local government and the power of local authority representatives within the associations (Wilding 1989:7). Wilding's recommendations involved a major re-structuring of local arts administration, which insisted that Arts Council and RAAs abandon their sponsor-client relationship and become partners with a common budget, both under the jurisdiction of the OAL (from 1992, the Department of National Heritage). In order to ensure the independence of the RAAs from local authorities, they were reconstituted and reorganised as Regional Arts Boards (RABs): this weakened the special links with local government which had existed since the RAAs emergence in the 1960s (see above, p.131). The status and constitution of the organisations changed: ostensibly, these transformations established greater equality between central Arts Council and Regional Arts Boards as funding partners, but they also arguably reinforced the state's direct control of the whole system (Brinson 1991:143-144; Beck 1992; Gray 1994:135-140; Sinclair 1995:311-333).

These are direct strategies for bolstering centralised control. Pick (1988) and Gray (1994) recognise that the centre's dominance has been extended also in more subtle and insidious ways. For Pick, this is betrayed by the style of regional authorities' arts policy documents, which have increasingly adopted a generalised and anodyne terminology typical of the central state bureaucracies, in order to attract financial support from centralised sources (1988: 97-109). According to Pick, this discursive hegemony results in an elision of differences between localities. Their particular cultural identities and traditions are subsumed under priorities defined and expressed by the

¹⁰² The impact of the Greater London Council's abolition on arts funding is discussed in McGuigan (1996:81-86) and Hewison (1995: 237-242). For an account of its expected impact on dance, see De Marigny (1984).

centralised administration. Gray's case study of the arts funding system, meanwhile, explores how certain key themes of New Right discourse and the economically orthodox approach of the state sustained following the fall of Thatcher are embodied in the changes to local government structure and practice (1994: 135-140). Like Pick, he suggests that the emphasis on business-like management and accountability, as well as economic rationales for continuing cultural funding, extends also to regional authorities, variously compelled and encouraged to adopt a similar style in their administration of the arts.

One way in which this development is manifest is the increasing emphasis even at regional level on the arts' promotional function, which parallels the focus of both British and French national governments on the economic role of culture: cultural events and institutions become a way of demonstrating the region's vivacity and enhancing its attractiveness to tourists, business and investment. This kind of thinking is embodied in the strategies for regional dance development in France, where the national and international status of the CCNs appears as important as, if not more important than, the relationship established with a more localised public. In appointing CCN directors, the Ministry and its local authority partners, did not expect choreographers to have any pre-existing connection with the regions in which they were implanted. In the case of the CCN in Montpellier, for example, although Dominique Bagouet had worked for some time in the region, his institutional promotion to the CCN directorship was based on the strength of his national reputation as a leading figure in contemporary choreography. Negrier (1993) maintains that, through such appointments, culture in the city "took on an 'image' aimed as much at the outside world as at the local population" (142). The comments of the Mayor of Montpellier on the opening of the city's international dance festival in 1987 corroborate this, suggesting that the national and international visibility of regional cultural actors is paramount: "[w]e have made of contemporary dance one of the torchlights of the cultural politics of our city [...] Montpellier's political economy is closely linked to its cultural life. All of the business interests which we try to attract to our city demand of us an academic and cultural environment" in which dance, alongside music and the other arts, plays a key role (Georges Frêche, cited in Adolphe 1990: 72, 182).

Despite the argument that the central state has bolstered rather than actually devolving its authority to the regions, the administrative evolution of national / sub-national relations has impacted significantly on arts organisations' interaction with state funding and policy-formulating bodies. The increasing dominance of the model of

“partnership” funding (Myerscough ed. 1984:xiii) or “financement croisé” (Wangermée ed. 1988:121-124) suggests closer collaboration between national and regional administrations, as well as lending credence to the perception that a new consensus operates based on a common focus on the economic dimension and potential of culture: without that consensus the partnership model would prove more politically problematic than it does. The diversification of arts organisations’ sources of income, however, has problems as well as advantages for the artists concerned. A much greater administrative burden¹⁰³ is placed on the artist or cultural institution, now forced to cultivate and meet the expectations of a series of different subsidising partners. The artist or institution is also forced to spend considerable time and effort applying for funds from a greater number of potential sources: normally, this process will require specialist administrative assistance which must, in turn, be paid for even before an award of subsidy has been made. The diversification of an arts organisation’s sources of income may also negatively affect the security of its financial position: although no longer dependent on only one subsidising body, each funding partner is likely to be less engaged, financially and politically, in supporting the project and hence more easily able to withdraw (Wangermée ed. 1988:122). Where funds have been promised on a matching basis, the reticence of one partner may result in the demise of a whole project. The implications of this situation for dance companies and organisations is explored further in section 3.5 below.

¹⁰³ Potentially, this burden also has an aesthetic dimension insofar as the artist will be expected to produce the kind of work on the basis of which the subsidy was granted. This issue is explored further below, p.152 and through the case studies in Chapters 4 to 7.

3.4 The Integration of Contemporary Dance in the Cultural Institution

Although the performing arts in general have been privileged sites of state intervention, the relation between dance and the cultural institution has been problematic. Partly attributable to the marginalisation of the body and bodily practice in late modern society, the marginalised status of dance within the high art repertoire inflects the institutional situation of contemporary dance forms. In contrast to the long history (dating back to the seventeenth century) of French state involvement with ballet, even classical dance in Britain was slow to embed itself in the structures of established art practice: institutional recognition of British ballet was only cemented through its involvement with ENSA and CEMA during the Second World War, and the subsequent move to the reopened Royal Opera House of the Sadler's Wells Company. Subordinated within the broader structures of the Paris Opera and Royal Opera House respectively, however, the national ballet companies of the two countries still did not enjoy autonomous control over material resources furnished by the state.

The integration of modern and contemporary dance forms into the state cultural institutions has been even more problematic for reasons which connect with many of the more general developments outlined above. Ambivalent in their relation to the classical dance heritage, contemporary forms can trace a line of descent, historically, from both choreographic experiment within the ballet tradition (such as the modernism of the Ballet Russes, successful in the early twentieth century in both Britain and France) and from oppositional early modern dance movements. The latter (as evidenced in the practice of Rudolf Laban, Mary Wigman, Isadora Duncan and their followers) often rejected the classical aesthetic paradigm, the particular hierarchical organisational form of ballet institutions and the strict division between the professional artist and audience member. Tending rather to emphasise the integration of their performance practice with a broader conception of dance as a process of physical culture, early modern dancers developed roles as pedagogues and *animateurs* alongside work as choreographers and performers, moving towards a more symbiotic relation between artist and spectator¹⁰⁴. Early modern dance, then, did not fit either the emphasis on unambiguously high art professionalism or emerging priorities of the state arts administrative structures (see above pp.115-118; Robinson 1990). In the absence

¹⁰⁴ These aesthetic and political orientations of early modern dance practitioners themselves stem partly from the economic situation of the individuals concerned. Lacking resources of establishment recognition and financial backing, they were forced to adopt a more flexible *modus operandi* in which money earned through teaching could be used to finance theatrical performance.

of high-profile modern dance companies consistently producing recognisably artistic products within the paradigm adopted by the state, modern dance remained excluded initially from the expanding cultural institution.

In Britain, it was only following the introduction of American modern dance during the 1950s and 1960s that contemporary choreography began to attract attention from ACGB (coinciding with the increased, but still limited, openness of the state administration highlighted above, pp.118-120). Given the relatively high degree of professionalisation of American dance during the period¹⁰⁵, the decision to fund such work was broadly in-keeping with the Council's prioritisation of professional, "high" performing arts: subsidy was still centred on larger-scale organisations rather than small, experimental companies, including Ballet Rambert following its 1965 reconstitution as a contemporary company (White 1975:151-2), and the London Contemporary Dance School and Theatre from 1970 (Jordan 1992:45). During the same period, the French state, began to involve itself with experimental dance forms, but centred attention on those emanating from the already institutionalised classical sphere rather than the modern tradition or emergent new forms associated with the political radicalism of the late 1960s (Michel and Ginot 1995: 176; Dupuy 1991; Michel 1980; Louppe 1989). State support for the Paris Opera's *Ballet Studio* (from 1966), and the decentralised *Ballet Théâtre Contemporain* and *Théâtre du Silence* (from the 1970s) follows this pattern. In setting a precedent for the subsequent extension of the contemporary dance infrastructural network (see below, pp.145-146), these developments were significant; but they did not challenge fundamentally the existing bias of the state cultural administration. Robinson (1990) maintains that many of the choreographers associated with these companies, "n'étaient pas d'authentiques modernes" (304). Michel and Ginot (1995: 177-178) argue that these dancers' classical background "leur donne une crédibilité et un sérieux [in the perspective of the state structures] que les danseurs modernes mettront des années à acquérir" (178). During the 1970s, the government arts administration in France was also interested in American modern dance: Alwin Nikolais, Viola Farber and Carolyn Carlson were appointed as directors of key organisations in the forefront of choreographic development¹⁰⁶; Guy & Maheu (1975) highlight US practitioners as "incontestablement

¹⁰⁵ See Thomas (1995) for an extended account of the development of American modern dance.

¹⁰⁶ the *Centre National de Danse Contemporaine*, Angers and the *Groupe de Recherches Théâtrales de l'Opéra de Paris*

les maîtres de la danse moderne” (53), whose techniques native dance practitioners should be encouraged to learn through state-sponsored courses.

The extension of intervention in dance beyond these parameters was effected through the expansion of the state’s administrative structures themselves. ACGB established a specialist Dance Advisory Panel in 1978 and an autonomous Dance Department two years later, in acknowledgement of “the quality and quantity of [Dance’s] achievements” (ACGB 1978:15). In 1982, the French Ministry of Culture set up its *Division de la Danse*, expanded to form the quasi-autonomous *Délégation à la Danse* in 1987¹⁰⁷ (Schneider 1989/90; Michel 1987). A special committee to advise on the attribution of dance project grants was set up in 1984 (Ministère de la Culture 1984) and was supplemented, also in 1987, by another panel advising on the attribution of subsidy to dance companies (Michel 1987). Such moves are significant because they signal a recognition on the part of the administration that dance specialisation is necessary and viable within the current cultural climate. They establish an advisory structure through which the development of dance policy and subsidy will draw from the expertise of the profession (in its broadest sense, i.e. including the “support” personnel of theatre managers, festival directors and programmers as well as choreographers and dancers); and they bring into being a relatively autonomous executive, concentrating state action in dance, and thus the power to affect the dance environment, around this body.

To an extent, these shifts reflect the progressive professionalisation of the contemporary dance sphere: they respond to demands articulated by new dance practitioners, the number of which increases as dance educational and training environments begin to produce a new generation of artists. The latter are concerned with maintaining status as arts professionals, and thus with arguing that their rights and needs should be respected by the state subsidising body; they also point up that their own forms of experimental choreography are subsidised to a far lesser extent than classical and neo-classical companies (Brinson 1991:29-32; Mackrell 1992: 35-37; Michel 1980 and 1981). This growth in both the size and the professionalism of the new dance sphere is highlighted in the contemporary discourse of the state arts administration, also inflected by the economically-oriented rationales which begin to dominate state pronouncements on culture during this period. ACGB documents

¹⁰⁷ The *Délégation à la Danse* has remained a sub-section of the *Direction de la Musique et de la Danse* (now the *Direction de la Musique de la Danse du Théâtre et des Spectacles*) until the

present the increase in dance activity through the 1970s and early 1980s in terms of an economic metaphor, as a spontaneous “dance boom” (Devlin 1989: 19). Whether through the proliferation of aesthetic forms and companies, the growth in demand for new types of dance performance or the increase in audience numbers for dance in general, it is the *quantifiable* growth of dance that appears to interest the state administrators. ACGB (1980) comments on the “burgeoning enthusiasm” of the dance scene (29). Similarly, ACGB’s (1983b) *Opera and Dance* report declares that “[n]ot only is [dance] an art form in its own right, but in the last few years the growth in audiences and audience appreciation has been astonishing” (7). Drummond and Thompson (1984) explicitly link the notion of the dance explosion to the expansion of modern dance and, in particular, the transformation of its audience from “a tiny band of devotees” to “a sizeable public” (7).

In some places, these documents attempt to account for the transformation by characterising contemporary dance as the accessible art form *par excellence*. ACGB (1983b), for example, comments that there is little evident change in the social composition of the audience for other forms of dance, and speaks, in turn, of the Arts Council’s general failure to fulfil its role in enhancing accessibility. Modern dance, meanwhile, is said to be capable of spontaneously attracting new audience constituencies, who are undeterred by the usual barriers to arts appreciation: “[d]ance, particularly modern dance, has begun to bridge differences of background and education, as it has for long bridged differences of language” (7). These sentiments are echoed by ACGB Chairman, William Rees-Mogg when he claims that dance “has proved to be one of the greatest growth areas over the last 5 years, crossing many barriers of age, race, class and, indeed, language” (cited in Drummond & Thompson 1984: foreword). ACGB (1983b) is also emphatic on the subject of the appeal of modern dance to young people. Applauding the work of the two major contemporary companies, Ballet Rambert and LCDT, the Report claims that their efforts and “innovative marketing techniques” have “led [...] to a new appreciation of dance as creative theatre, attracting a young generation of devotees who have gone on to participate in a host of residencies, workshops and classes, etc. which have since blossomed” (8). The Report also maintains that there is a continuity between the world of professional dance performance and that of youth culture which has significantly enhanced the popularity of contemporary forms: “[d]iscos, where they themselves participate in spectacular dance activities, have become very popular with young

people. These same young people now begin to be attracted to seeing performances on stage” (8). Such rhetoric is remarkable in its enthusiasm to conflate the appeal of different body-based practices and in its unjustified assumption that the development of social dance results in contemporary dance art attracting more widespread interest¹⁰⁸.

ACGB discourse in this respect contrasts markedly with that of its French counterpart. Similarly impressed by the “engouement croissant pour les différentes formes de danse” (Guy & Maheu 1975) or “l’essor de la danse” (Commission d’Etude pour la Danse 1983), the latter report recognises the impact of an “attention nouvelle apportée au corps”, but distinguishes the artistic inflection of this from its “secular” manifestation on the grounds of its political force: “dans la crise actuelle de la société [...] on voit d’un côté se développer un goût frénétique pour l’aerobic qui propose, à son tour, les fantasmes d’un corps canonique, tandis qu’ailleurs fleurit la danse contradictoire, riche de propositions de rapports virtuels des individus dans le groupe sociale” (Commission d’Etude pour la Danse 1983:9)¹⁰⁹. The same text stresses that new dance is aesthetically radical in being more concerned with choreography and the choreographic message than with technical virtuosity in performance, the preoccupation with which has traditionally prevented dance from being taken seriously as art (7). While it notes a growing number of dance amateurs, the report sees them as only a potential public which can be developed if the institutional conditions are right (6). This and other texts of the period (Ministère de la Culture 1984 and 1985) also stress the need to redress the imbalance between levels of dance funding and public subsidy available to other forms, particularly in view of the youthful image and appeal of contemporary dance¹¹⁰. But a much clearer conception of the aesthetic and political character of new dance as a movement emerges than in ACGB texts of the period. This is partly attributable to the Socialist regime’s interest in associating itself with the

¹⁰⁸ As in so many Arts Council documents, no evidence for the claims made concerning arts audiences is supplied, nor does the text make reference to relevant research. Contrast the extensive research resources devoted by the French state itself to cultural matters. Guy (1991) is one dance-specific product of this research base, which casts serious doubt on the assumption that those who dance in social or amateur context will naturally be attracted to art dance or find it more accessible.

¹⁰⁹ The document also recognises the significance of the political colour of the regime taking an interest in dance: the Socialist government of the 1980s institutionalised a number of the premises of the oppositional cultural ideology of the late 1960s, with which new French dance has also been aligned (Michel 1980; Louppe 1989; Dupuy 1991; Michel & Ginot 1995).

¹¹⁰ On this theme, see also: Michel (1981), who describes the contemporary dance scene as characterised by “une prolifération anarchique de jeunes groupes qui trouvent instantanément un public, également jeune” (16); and Louppe (1989), who declares that contemporary dance is “one of the privileged expressions of contemporary French consciousness” and that the art form “is now thought to be the meeting point of an entire generation, identifying and expressing itself through dance” (4).

dynamic, progressive and subversive image of contemporary dance, hence to a more pronounced politicisation of cultural concerns in the French context¹¹¹. The new dance movement's rebuttal of American influence, dominant before the 1980s, and assertion of itself as distinctively French also matches the Socialists' general concern with French cultural expression escaping the hegemony of the U.S., and establishing itself independently (Looseley 1995:76-80; Pinto 1987).

British and French contexts also contrast in respect of the dance funding practices that follow from administrative and rhetorical recognition. In Britain, ACGB's discursive enthusiasm is juxtaposed with a pragmatic acceptance of its inability or unwillingness substantially to increase subsidy. While emphasising that dance is booming, ACGB (1983b) declares that, in the context of the contemporary economic climate, "there should be no major additions to the present list of opera and dance companies in receipt of revenue subsidy" (27), even if the Council should assist in developing a long-term strategy of expansion with an "extension of funding to a *limited* number of dance companies" (37, my italics). But by maintaining that dance can and has flourished in spite of the small sums of public subsidy it has received hitherto and in spite of the crisis in the arts economy as a whole, the text also implies that substantial increases in the dance budget are not urgently necessary. The Report recognises the problem of poor pay and conditions for dancers but still emphasises the "value for money in terms of performances" that dance offers (27). Moreover, the comments about dance's ready and spontaneous accessibility (see above, p.139) imply that subsidised audience development initiatives are also unnecessary.

The bulk of subsidy available to contemporary dance artists during the 1980s was distributed via limited fixed-term funding for some larger-scale companies (Ballet Rambert and London Contemporary Dance Theatre in particular) and a proliferation of one-off "Awards to artists" or "Project" grants. The reliance of most new choreographers and small-scale contemporary practitioners on project funding allowed little opportunity for such artists to consolidate their position or develop their work in relation to a forward-looking artistic policy (since there was no guarantee of subsidy from year to year). Early (1984) remarks that only two small-scale companies graduated from project to revenue funding between 1977 and 1984; and he points out

¹¹¹ There has been a substantial degree of continuity in dance policies since the early 1980s, despite changes of government. In line with the argument in section one above (p.112), this may be attributable to the gathering momentum of institutional structures themselves, once established, which develop in line with an internal dynamic which in some cases transcends external political forces.

that project grants, in the early 1980s, are awarded only for *new* productions, forcing companies seeking financial support to create new work each year. Each production is evaluated by ACGB advisors, who recommend that subsidy is either continued or curtailed in the following year: “under the project system, no act of faith is made in artists and their ability to develop over a number of years, despite ‘failures’, mistakes and variations in quality” (14).

The situation shifts in the early 1990s following the publication of the Devlin report (1989), which lays the foundations for the current system of grant distribution in dance. Devlin notes the insufficiency of the British state’s investment and suggests this as one reason why the dance “boom” has been followed by “bust” in the late 1980s. While he criticises the lack of a clearly directioned policy and funding commitment from the state structures, he also makes critical observations concerning the aesthetic development of contemporary dance; as in ACGB (1983b), however, aesthetic evolution is described in terms of fluctuations in audience demand and numbers. Devlin’s vocabulary contrasts markedly with that of ACGB (1983b), in highlighting perceptions of contemporary dance as “esoteric” (37), limited in audience appeal and “deliberately ‘elitist’, ‘cool and passionless’ “ (67). He attributes the explosion in contemporary dance’s popularity during the early 1980s to a combination of a trend for body awareness, fitness and aerobics with a fashion for performance art. Both fads having passed, the “core” following for contemporary dance turns out, he maintains, to be very small. The problem of sustaining and enlarging the once flourishing audience for contemporary dance is labelled “The Contemporary Dilemma”, an issue which must be resolved if public subsidy is to remain justifiable.

Devlin (1989), therefore, recommends that intervention be rationalised to reverse the downward trend in demand. He suggests that the number of the Arts Council’s client dance companies and project-grant recipients be limited, allowing more realistic sums of subsidy to be attributed to particular groups with a successful record. This “rationalisation” will encourage the select number of companies to develop “clearly delineated identities and strategies, thereby strengthening their artistic policy and their marketability” (26). Devlin suggests that this select group of middle- to large-scale companies “of acknowledged quality” (69) will function as flagship groups, each fulfilling a well-defined role in the contemporary dance landscape and helping to develop the particular audience group for the genre in which its work is based (“in mainstream dance traditions, in dance-theatre forms, in experimental techniques and in areas that bridge cultural divides - whether in terms of ethnicity or merely in terms of

the classical / contemporary split”, 77). The implementation of Devlin’s recommendations in the early 1990s thus helped to establish a hierarchy of funding categories still in evidence during the mid 1990s, that is the period in which the works discussed below (Chapters 4 and 5) were produced.

ACE (1996a) lists four levels of dance subsidy, linked to the symbolic status of the companies and institutions concerned. At the top of the scale is the only “national company” in dance subsidised by ACE: the Royal Ballet based at the Royal Opera House, London¹¹², which still consumes over 50% of the Council’s total dance budget. The second tier is occupied by the four “revenue-funded organisations”, indefinitely receiving a guaranteed income, of which only Rambert Dance Company works consistently with contemporary choreographers and techniques. The third category, of “fixed term funded organisations”, is a relatively new development and embodies Devlin’s recommendations: a number of contemporary dance companies are thus granted subsidy over a specified number of years to fulfil specified undertakings; they include companies that have developed distinct, “marketable” identities during the 1980s and early 1990s, such as Adventures in Motion Pictures, The Cholmondeleys, DV8 Physical Theatre and Shobana Jeyasingh (and also the National Dance Agencies: see below, pp.146-147). These organisations are therefore more secure in their income from the state than the companies benefiting from project funding, the fourth category listed in ACE’s report whereby resources are provided to carry out a one-off undertaking or single production; indeed, fixed-term funded organisations are able to compete for project funding with companies and choreographers not subsidised on a sustained basis. In addition to or in place of funding from central sources, companies can apply to local authorities or Regional Arts Boards for support: the type of grant awarded depends on the nature of the project, range of provision in the region concerned and the way in which it organises the allocation of subsidy¹¹³.

There are contrasts as well as parallels between the French and British contexts in respect of dance funding practice. In France, discursive recognition of the increasingly high profile of contemporary dance was backed by a substantial expansion of the dance budget which increased fourfold between 1982 and 1986 (Ponsard 1996: 100).

¹¹² responsibility for subsidising other national companies, such as the Birmingham Royal Ballet having been devolved to the regions.

¹¹³ The more recent re-organisation of arts subsidy, through which responsibility for allocating project monies and development grants was devolved to the RABs, has altered this pattern and may have long-term implications for the hierarchical organisation of dance funding. This development occurs after the period in which the works discussed below (Chapters 4 and 5) were produced, and is therefore not discussed in more detail here.

This paralleled a substantial overall increase in state cultural funding by the Socialist government in 1981-2¹¹⁴, an exceptional government action in the context of Europe as a whole (the much-vaunted *exception française*). Hall (1990:176-183) notes the French Socialist government's general increase in public spending in the early 1980s, and its Keynesian response to economic crisis: only after 1984, did the government adopt a more pragmatic economic policy in line with those of other European nations (*ibid.*; Pinto 1987). In the dance sphere, the increase in available subsidy allowed a substantial proportion to be devoted to new dance companies to enable the development of new choreography, hence the development of new funding categories to take account of this extension of the state's involvement.

In the mid-1990s, the categories of dance subsidy distribution in the French context constitute a hierarchy similar to that evident in ACE's practice (Ministère de la Culture 1994). Those dance institutions designated as "Etablissements Publics" enjoy the highest level of secure state funding: they include the Opéra de Paris, Centre National de la Danse and the educational structures of the Opera Ballet and two national *conservatoires* (Direction de la Musique de la Danse du Théâtre et des Spectacles 1999). The second category (prior to the reorganisation and deconcentration of subsidy in the late 1990s) gives support for the *Centres Chorégraphiques Nationaux* (CCNs), implanted in a particular region, with a local mission to develop their practice and its public, as well as their profile on the national circuit¹¹⁵: in 1995, there were 18 such CCNs, 14 led by high profile contemporary dance choreographers. The third tier awards subsidy to maintain "compagnies indépendantes" on an ongoing basis, irrespective of the particular creative projects they might be engaged in at any given time (Direction de la Musique et de la Danse 1995; Ministère de la Culture 1982). The French state's support for both CCNs and "compagnies indépendantes" highlights a significant contrast with the British context: where 40 contemporary choreographers are recognised institutionally as either leaders of national institutions or of companies operating on a nationwide basis (Direction de la Musique et de la Danse 1995), there are only 11 contemporary dance companies across ACE's revenue and fixed-term funding categories, and none of them run national institutions. The French Ministry also devotes a proportion of its dance budget to the equivalent of project funding (*aide aux projets de création chorégraphique*) and supports long-term residencies in regional locations by "chorégraphes / compagnies associés", linked to a particular theatre space

¹¹⁴ The Ministry's budget passed from 0.47% of total central government expenditure in 1981 to 0.76% in 1982 (see Lephay-Merlin 1996:25; Wangermée ed. 1988:67). See PSI (1990a) for a cross-national comparison of levels of state arts subsidy in the mid 1980s.

(Ministère de la Culture 1994 and 1995; Direction de la Musique et de la Danse 1995). Contemporary dance companies are also able to seek financial assistance from any of the three tiers of local government, although legitimisation by the state structure has often proved indispensable in inspiring local authorities to contribute subsidy (as with the establishment of the CCNs: see below, p.145): the model of partnership funding formalises this tendency on an institutional level, by rendering the contribution of one partner contingent on that of another (see above, pp.125-126, 134-135)¹¹⁶.

The budget increases of the early 1980s were accompanied, in the French context, by a voluntaristic approach to policy, manifest in the efforts to establish an infrastructural network for contemporary dance, of which the new *Centres Chorégraphiques Nationaux* (CCNs) would be the cornerstone. Built on the model of the *Centres Dramatiques Nationaux* (see above, p.117) in the state-subsidised theatre (Frétard 1995a), the CCNs are similar to the other decentralised cultural institutions in France (discussed above, pp.117-118) in their concern to promote avant-garde artistic practice in the provinces. Prominent choreographers and their companies are implanted in regions outside Paris and, through partnerships between state and local authorities, given the financial resources to develop their performance work and a local public. Signing three-year contracts, the choreographers undertake to produce a specified number of works, perform them a specified number of times and engage in a determined number of accessibility initiatives during that that period. Announced in 1984 (Ministère de la Culture 1984), the CCN initiative was expanded through the 1980s and 1990s to create 18 such organisations, 14 of them under the directorship of contemporary dance practitioners, personalities of *la nouvelle danse française* emerging during the 1980s¹¹⁷. According to Jean-Marc Adolphe, these figures and their companies also fulfilled a promotional function for central government, creating “une sorte de vitrine de la créativité de l’État” (in Kuypers 1993). The policy thus reflected

¹¹⁵ See below, pp.145-146, for an account of the emergence and constitution of the CCNs.

¹¹⁶ The substantial reorganisation of subsidy distribution in 1999 has seen the task devolved from the central Ministry to the regional DRACS, although similar categories operate to distinguish between company role and level of funding. The long-term effect of this reorganisation, in fragmenting the previously highly centralised system, may challenge the hierarchical patterns in evidence in the mid 1990s. Again, though, since this reorganisation happened after the period in which the works discussed in Chapters 6 and 7 were produced, it will not be discussed in detail here.

¹¹⁷ The first wave of nominations included Dominique Bagouet (Montpellier), Maguy Marin (Créteil) and Jean-Claude Galotta (Grenoble), followed by Régine Chopinot (La Rochelle) and Joelle Bouvier and Régis Obadia (Le Havre). The second wave has seen the appointment of artists including Karine Saporta (Caen), Claude Brumachon (Nantes) and Daniel Larrieu (Tours), whose work *Mobile* (1995) is discussed in Chapter 6 below. Bozzini (1986), the series of articles by Marmin (1990) and Frétard (1995) offer more detailed accounts. For more recent descriptions of the constitution and problems of the CCNs, see Martin (1996) and Müller (1998).

the administration's more general emphasis on the cultural *créateur* as a partner of the state (see above, p.123); it also parallels Devlin's (1989) recommendation that dance artists with distinctive choreographic styles and proven "marketable" identities should form the vanguard of audience development for the form in general.

The Ministry thus sought, from an early stage, to establish an institutional framework for dance in the regions, by encouraging artists to develop and sustain relationships between their companies' work and particular regional publics. Meanwhile, throughout the 1980s, the British system placed heavy emphasis on the importance of touring by metropolitan companies (see, for example, ACGB 1983b and Early 1984), with neither ACGB nor the RAAs showing a high level of support for regionally-based artists¹¹⁸: those regional groups that did exist found it increasingly difficult to survive in an economic climate which restricted the subsidy available from local as well as central government sources (Early 1984; Kay 1984). In many areas, companies were superseded by individual dance *animateurs* who, because they took on a plurality of roles (teacher, choreographer / performer, administrator, promoter and publicist), provided a more economical means of stimulating dance awareness (Kay 1984 and Early 1984:15). The development of a more institution-based, decentralised dance infrastructure dates only from the early 1990s, and, again, follows the recommendations of Devlin (1989). He proposes that a series of institutions, subsequently named as *National Dance Agencies* (NDAs), should be established to function as focal points for dance activities in their areas (1989: 39-43; see also Venner 1990).

One function of the Dance Agencies, according to Devlin, would be to develop a regional context for professional dance performance with a view to informing the stagnating aesthetic of contemporary dance: "[i]f it is true that much of the work developed in London is too introspective to communicate outside a coterie audience, might not a working process that takes place in a less pressured atmosphere produce more 'accessible' work?" (Devlin 1989: 40). But elsewhere, he is sceptical about the capacity of much existing contemporary work to appeal to a regional public: and he suggests that "difficult" and experimental new dance should only be shown in "safe" regions and venues that have already demonstrated their demand (84). The NDA policy subsequently developed by Devlin (1989) and Venner (1990) is therefore

¹¹⁸ A similar reticence proactively to extend the dance infrastructure, is apparent in the failure of ACGB and government to act on the recommendations of Drummond and Thompson's (1984)

focused on dance animation and community activity, not professional choreographic creation and performance as with the French CCNs¹¹⁹. ACGB's policy stresses the need to develop, first and foremost, a regional context for dance performance, whereas the CCN initiative trusts to individual choreographers and companies to stimulate demand as a by-product of their creative agenda, which participates also in a national circuit of flagship companies at the cutting-edge of the dance avant-garde. The NDAs still exist (as fixed-term funded organisations; see ACE 1996) and, according to their regional roles defined on a case-by-case basis, function as bases for dance training at various levels (including the professional), and as centres for research, rehearsal and development of professional choreographic work, but generally on a short-term residency basis rather than via implanted companies.

The dance Institutional environment, then, varies across the two countries, both in terms of the aims and rationales it embodies and in terms of its practical functioning. Despite these divergences, the two systems share common problems, attributable (as the next section will argue) to the structural constitution of the state cultural institution as it has consolidated over time, as well as to the political and economic circumstances peculiar to dance art. The institutional environment affects contemporary dance production by determining its conditions, but also, arguably, relations between dance work and its actual or potential audiences. These issues form the focus of the concluding section of this chapter.

feasibility study towards the establishment of a national dance house, intended to stop the gap in dance theatre provision and raise the profile of dance nation-wide.

¹¹⁹ Devlin (1989) does suggest that ACGB give priority in considering applications for project grants to those companies working outside of London. But he denies the viability of the French practice of *implantation* within the British context, largely on the grounds that the financial organisation of the arts and subsidy in Britain render it unworkable, rather than on principle: he mentions the much smaller proportion of subsidy accorded to dance by the local authorities, the lower fees paid by hosting theatres to dance companies and the details of musicians' union arrangements as militating against an implantation policy in Britain (35). The notable exception to the British system's refusal to implant dance companies in the regions was the relocation of the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet to Birmingham in 1992.

3.5 Enduring Tensions and Structural Problems of the Contemporary Dance Sphere

One problem of the contemporary dance institution relates to the number and range of its administrative personnel. The latter include the employees of state bodies (Arts Council and Ministry executives as well as elected politicians within both central and local government) as well as the volunteer advisors who contribute to policy formulation and the subsidy distribution process. Because the scope of the dance institution is narrower than that operative in the more established art forms such as music and drama, decision-making power tends to become concentrated in the hands of particular individuals. Thus, the advisory panels draw from experts within the field (including dance artists, educators, critics, theatre managers and institutional chiefs) who also have a role in producing and distributing dance, outside the parameters of their formal advisory involvement with the state bodies: this select group (albeit relatively fluid in membership) controls both the financial and infrastructural resources of the contemporary dance sphere¹²⁰. Moreover, the decision-making personnel of the state structures necessarily consists of people who have already been recognised as having a certain importance within the existing dance institution. Their decisions are thus likely to be pre-structured according to its paradigm, and (consciously or not) may perpetuate the status quo rather than bringing radically different visions of how state intervention in dance might be effected. Other interested parties outside the core of the institution may lobby for alternative practices to be instituted, but the extent to which their voices are heard will depend on the willingness to listen of those holding actual decision-making power¹²¹.

The hierarchical organisation of subsidy distribution (see above, pp.143-145) is a second issue around which a set of problems clusters. In France, the level of financial support for the major institutions has increased faster than the subsidy for independent companies and the dominance of institutionally established figures has thus been ensured. Similarly in Britain, since the late 1980s and on the recommendation of the

¹²⁰ See, for example, Marie Lenfant's comments with respect to the constitution of the *commissions consultatives* for French state intervention in dance: "[j]e crains pour l'avenir de certaines compagnies que les diffuseurs aient non seulement le choix de nous acheter mais aussi celui de nous subventionner" (Gallotta *et al.* 1998). An additional problem with the small number of specialist dance personnel arises with the reorganisation of subsidy distribution, and the devolution of more responsibility to regional bodies for supporting dance development. The number of dance specialists within those bodies remains relatively small, prompting concerns that the new system will further marginalise dance practice in relation to other, better established art forms (Espace Commun 1997; Wallon 1998).

¹²¹ See the lobbying by choreographers currently excluded from positions of institutional responsibility of the French Ministry of Culture (Espace Commun 1997; Libération 1999).

Devlin Report (1989), fixed-term financial support for well-established companies has been reinforced where the number of smaller project grants has been limited¹²². In both countries, the fact that public funding for dance has increased overall has given rise to a greater demand for financial support from the profession as a whole; the profession itself, meanwhile, expands as more students graduate from training structures expecting to be able to follow a vocation or career in dance. Within the current economic and political climate, where support for dance is unlikely to rise substantially in the short-term, it is impossible for the institutional network and funding system to grow quickly enough and large enough to accommodate this demand. The established career path, whereby an emerging artist begins on the small scale with sporadic funding and graduates to more sustained, higher level support and institutional recognition, has been problematised by the stasis of the institutional network. Provided three-year contracts with funding partners are honoured, there is normally no reason for the director of a CCN to step down; and if the performance of a fixed-term funded company is satisfactory, support is likely to be renewed as part of a longer-term investment by the state bodies. Consequently, emerging contemporary dance artists may reach a certain stage of development but, finding that high-profile institutional openings and available funding are already spoken for (that “les places sont prises”, as Fabrice Dugied suggests in De Nussac 1989a), not be able to expand and develop their work on a different scale¹²³.

In both countries, a dance economy, based around the largely closed circle of established companies and institutions, has been created. This group of established companies, guaranteed (or at least likely to receive) subsidy year-by-year, is able to create relatively favourable working conditions, produce work regularly and benefit from the legitimacy which follows from state recognition. These companies are also in a better position to tour, to apply for additional touring subsidy or command higher fees from host theatres and to interest programmers and venues (including municipal theatres, EACs in France and NDAs in Britain) in their “product”. By appearing in a growing number of dance programmes across the country, such companies also become more visible within the dance constituency, attract more widespread critical attention and hence become more established and secure in their identities and income. These groups are also, then, better placed to sue for renewal of funding when

¹²² As suggested above, the recent devolution of responsibility for subsidy allocation to regional bodies may, in the long-term, fragment and restructure the hierarchy evident in the mid 1990s. In the short-term, however, the central state’s maintains substantial power in determining which artists are legitimately subsidised.

¹²³ On this issue, see also Espace Commun (1997) and Vernay (1998).

their contracts expire: their sustained visibility already indicates a measure of the success on which such renewal depends. On the strength of their reputations, the companies concerned are also more likely to be able to muster support from a variety of sources in funding partnership.

The restricted network of performance spaces compounds these difficulties within the hierarchical dance economy. The number of specialist dance theatres, with a tradition of support for contemporary dance is relatively small, and their specialism often dependent on the dance interest of an individual programmer or director. Because such theatres often derive the majority of their funding from local authorities rather than the central state, the latter does not have direct influence over their programming policy, so it is possible for such venues negatively to affect distribution opportunities for dance work even as the state continues to express its policy commitment to dance and its development¹²⁴. As concerns multi-disciplinary venues, the marginalisation of dance within the professional performing arts repertoire may affect its presence within seasonal programming. In France, this issue has become increasingly contentious as the dance profession has questioned drama's continuing dominance of the "scènes nationales" and other high-profile performance arenas (such as the *Maisons de la Culture*) supposed to be multi-disciplinary in their focus. Traditionally, theatre directors have often had control of such facilities; the higher profile of choreographers within state policy has not resulted in dance appointments to the directorships of these multi-disciplinary venues¹²⁵. Nor have even high profile dance companies been given as many opportunities to perform within these spaces as their counterparts in drama. Even if a theatre-oriented programmer has an interest in dance, there remains a question as to whether her/his expertise extends sufficiently far to make informed decisions regarding which companies and contemporary forms to present. Thus, the dominance of the "grands noms" of contemporary dance is frequently reinforced by distributors who focus on their work to the exclusion of less well known, smaller-scale practitioners¹²⁶.

As the political and economic climate of arts subsidy puts a greater burden on theatres to prove their economic viability, these difficulties intensify. Despite effusive

¹²⁴ Note, for example, the concern expressed in *Espace Commun* (1997) concerning the demise or cut in financial resources of dance theatres in Paris.

¹²⁵ with the exception of Jean-Claude Gallotta's nomination to lead the *Maison de la Culture* in Grenoble, a position he subsequently relinquished as untenable within an arts climate dominated by text-based drama (see Gallotta *et al.* 1998)

¹²⁶ See Mendoza (1998).

commentary within the specialist press and some government / Arts Council policy documents regarding dance as a flourishing and accessible art form, empirical studies suggest that general perceptions of contemporary dance in particular are often negative (Guy 1991). Multi-disciplinary performance venues may thus deliberately choose not to include a strong dance dimension within their seasons of work precisely because they fear that it will not bring in sufficient box office returns. Moreover, commentaries by French dance writers as well as Devlin (1989) discern a certain aesthetic stagnation of contemporary dance since the enthusiasm and diversity of forms characterising the scene in the early 1980s (Kuypers 1993; Michel & Ginot 1995: 193-195). This is attributed by some to the fact of institutionalisation itself. A dance company which enters a longer-term partnership agreement with the central state and/or local government (by assuming revenue or fixed-term status, or by establishing itself as a CCN or “compagnie associée”) takes on a heavy load of responsibilities which leave little time for research and development of the choreographer’s aesthetic concerns. Practitioners work under pressure constantly to produce new choreography, to perform or distribute existing works and to develop access initiatives alongside their creative project, in order to maintain their status within the contemporary dance scene.

What is more, the existing funding system for dance, which took shape during the 1980s, places heavy emphasis on dance organisations’ accountability and on the artistic “product” justifying expenditure of taxpayers’ money. Even French artists not responsible for a prestigious choreographic institution find it necessary continuously to push their work on the dance scene. Where state funding is attributed yearly, its renewal depends on a dance company’s previous year’s activities being assessed as successful. If a company decides not to apply for funding and/or produce new work in one year, that action may be negatively interpreted by the state structures as a lack of commitment and seriousness; in turn, the company may find that, in the following year, subsidy is no longer available. This is also a problem for companies in Britain, whose applications for grants are assessed partly on the strength of their performance (judged by Arts Council and RAB assessors) and on press reports concerning their work, both of which depend on a sustained presence on the performance circuit. This means that, even if choreographers are ill-prepared or disinclined to create new work each year, they are in a position where failure to do so can have considerable impact on their reputations and future income. With the increasingly close co-operation between Arts Council and RAB officers and advisors, a company or production adjudged to have failed by one funding body will have increased difficulty convincing others of the viability of its project.

Devlin's (1989) recommendations concerning the "rationalisation" of contemporary dance subsidy emphasised the need to promote contemporary dance companies with distinct "marketable" identities into the vanguard of dance development. This raises issues concerning the space and opportunity such artists have to experiment outside of the parameters of that identity, when the latter is the basis on which they have been awarded fixed-term subsidy. Thus, the absorption of contemporary dance into an institutional environment dominated by concerns of viability and commercialist / managerialist discourse militates against the possibility of artistic experiment. The French dance writers interviewed in Kuypers (1993), meanwhile, argue that the progressive institutionalisation of contemporary dance has resulted in the dance "product" becoming standardised. Of the key companies circulating in the dance market, all have similar resources in terms of numbers of dancers, availability of designers, musicians and technical support. Theatres, in their turn, tend to programme works of a particular length, expecting established and artistically mature choreographers in particular to produce evening-length programmes (i.e., of 1 to 1¾ hours duration) and setting a scale of performance fees accordingly. Companies that have already consolidated their status on the dance scene are expected, moreover, to perform in larger-scale performance venues all of which tend to provide similar technical facilities in accordance with an accepted set of production values and to expect dance to manifest a technical virtuosity in line with conventional paradigms. These factors contribute to the creation of works of similar type, scale and look across the top end of the dance spectrum. Emerging artists seeking more widespread acceptance for their own work must to some extent conform to put themselves forward as candidates for success.

In short, the existing state funding system in each country places great emphasis on the dance "product" and its circulation within the dance economy. The notion of dance artists selling their "product", to programmers (in the first instance) and (ultimately) to audiences, sets the parameters for dance reception. Companies are encouraged to develop marketing techniques and strategies that will boost interest in a particular production and also their audience base. Because dance marketing seeks to stimulate demand for performances directly, it tends to present contemporary dance as spontaneously appealing and consumable, often emphasising its modishness rather than complexity. This tends to obscure both the peculiarities and difficulties of dance spectatorship. Moreover, when financial resources are limited and there is pressure to render a project financially viable, dance marketing tends to be targeted to existing

rather than new audience constituencies: theatres and companies fall back on reactivating the demand from people with a proven interest in contemporary performance, rather than seeking a new public. Or, if they seek to extend the audience, they do so by targeting proven spectators of the other arts to encourage them to diversify the range of cultural forms they patronise. Neither form of marketing strategy addresses the difficulty, often recognised but rarely resolved, of the interest in “high” culture being confined essentially to a minority of the population, with a relatively high level of income and education (or economic as well as cultural capital). And yet, empirical studies (e.g. Guy 1991) show that this bias remains a characteristic of arts audiences in both Britain and France.

As suggested in section 3.1 of this Chapter, the state’s capacity to impose a vision of culture on a national or regional population is not balanced by direct, formal channels whereby that public can input into the decision-making process. The means are lacking for that public both to reflect on and articulate its cultural preferences, other than through buying some cultural products or through attending some sorts of cultural events rather than others. Where the state intervenes proactively to promote a particular minority art form, such as contemporary dance, it lays itself open to the charge of not tailoring its provision to the population’s demands. There is an alternative line of argument that new cultural forms first have to be given a chance to develop, to establish themselves aesthetically and in relation to an audience, before publics can make informed decisions about whether or not they are interested. The difficulty with the cultural institution in its current form is that, often, it impedes both artistic development and skews the evolution of dance art’s relation to actual and potential audiences.

The chapters that follow examine four dance works (two by British and two by French choreographers) in the light of the philosophical and political material considered thus far. Each chapter seeks to trace the particular institutional conditions in which the works concerned were produced and also to offer a close reading of the work itself that highlights some of the processes involved in its reception. A descriptive account of each work is based, initially, on my own experience as spectator: while it thus adopts a partial perspective, the account also seeks to lay bare the basis for the interpretative decisions. This is intended to elucidate the semiotic structure of the work in question that exists to be recontextualised in other meaning contexts. The approach to spectator response is also broadened through an analysis of published criticism of each work: critical reviews typify at least some types of audience reaction, and also

have a directive function in prestructuring the response of a wider public to this and other instances of contemporary dance practice. An attempt is also made to lay bare the interpretative parameters of critical discourse and thus to further raise awareness of the conditions of dance reception within the current institutional environment.

CHAPTER 4:
Kim Brandstrup / Arc Dance Company: *Crime Fictions*

4.1 Dance, Narrative and Accessibility: Arc and the Cultural Institution

The publicity for *Crime Fictions* declares Arc Dance Company's reputation in the dance world to be "unique": "combining the virtuosity and spectacle of classical ballet with the imagination, power and energy of contemporary dance", Brandstrup's choreography¹²⁷ is promoted as accessible, "appeal[ing] to audiences everywhere" (Sadler's Wells 1996; Arc Dance company 1996a). Certainly, Arc's performance venues are relatively large in size, suggesting that the company's work has proven its viability by attracting a correspondingly large and varied audience. Founded in 1985, Arc has, since the early 1990s, been operating at the "middle-scale" level: Brandstrup generally works with 8 to 14 dancers, sells evening length programmes of his choreography to theatres both nationally and internationally, and (according to Burnside & De Marigny 1994) maintains a "consistency of style and quality" in production values through the "harmonious integration" of dance, design and musical composition¹²⁸. Sadler's Wells Theatre, the host venue for London performances of *Crime Fictions*, had (prior to its rebuilding in 1997-8) an audience capacity of approximately 1500 and a diverse programme combining musical theatre, opera, and dance in different idioms (such as classical, modern and flamenco) performed by both national and international companies. The theatre's extensive technical facilities permits the high level of production values associated with large- and middle-scale, mainstream performance artworks and the kind of "spectacle" promised by Arc's publicity.

That Arc Dance Company was the only British-based contemporary dance company to perform at Sadler's Wells Theatre during the Spring (January to June) 1996 season, reflects a number of institutional factors affecting contemporary dance production¹²⁹. Drummond & Thompson's (1984) discussion of dance theatres in the British capital recognises the major role in dance distribution that the Sadler's Wells Theatre has historically played: it is described as "the one medium-scale theatre generally available for Dance", which "draws large and appreciative audiences" for the variety of

¹²⁷ Kim Brandstrup is the founder and artistic director of Arc Dance Company, and the sole choreographer of its work.

¹²⁸ *Crime Fictions* fits the pattern of Arc's general concern with integrating choreography, music and design: its creation involves collaborations between Brandstrup and three partners who have worked with him also on other productions: composer Ian Dearden, set designer Craig Givens and lighting designer Tina MacHugh.

¹²⁹ The only other contemporary dance company appearing during the season was Brazil's *Grupo Corpo*. *Les Grands Ballets Canadiens* also featured, performing works in both classical and modern styles. Flamenco figured prominently in the season through *Corazón* Flamenco and the dance version of *Carmen* by the Compania Antonio Gades. The publicity brochure also lists English Touring Opera, the Kodo Drummers, Penn and Teller and the Leicester Haymarket's production of *Calamity Jane* as part of its programme (Sadler's Wells 1996).

companies programmed (31); in particular, the theatre has been instrumental in the audience development of Ballet Rambert and London Contemporary Dance Theatre. These two companies are highlighted by Devlin (1989) as key to the middle-scale mainstream of the British modern dance scene and to its role in widening the dance public (70-74). Conscious also of the aesthetic and institutional difficulties of LCDT in the late 1980s, Devlin suggests that the paucity of middle-scale companies creates a problematic discontinuity in the dance spectrum, which thus swings from the extreme of a few large-scale, classical companies to a multiplicity of poorly-funded small contemporary dance groups (Devlin (1989:19-28, 66-70). The promotion of certain contemporary choreographers to fixed-term funding status is a strategy designed to redress this balance, by encouraging a select number of contemporary companies with proven and marketable appeal to graduate to larger venues and develop wider audiences (see above, pp.142-143). In line with this shift, the configuration of the dance theatre infrastructure in London has altered: the Queen Elizabeth Hall on the South Bank assumed an increasingly prominent role in the staging of the new middle-scale contemporary companies, as preparations were made for the closure and rebuilding of Sadler's Wells Theatre during 1997 and 1998.

This development has paralleled the declining force of the traditional "mainstream" of contemporary dance in Britain, manifest especially since the demise of LCDT in 1994. As the programming of *Crime Fictions* at Sadler's Wells suggests, Arc Dance Company is aligned by reputation with the traditional rather than new generational strand of contemporary work. The funding status of Arc also reflects its marginalisation from the group of companies (such as DV8, The Cholmondeleys and Adventures in Motion Pictures) gaining institutional prominence on the strength of Devlin's recommendations. Brandstrup still (in 1996) remained dependent on project funding. The company's work has attracted higher levels of financial support than most other companies in the same category, which indicates the middle- to large-scale ambition of its productions; yet despite ACGB's efforts following Devlin to "stop the gap" created by the lack of middle-scale companies, Arc has not been promoted to revenue or fixed-term status in the same way as many of the other contemporary groups now performing in theatres of comparable size (and the QEH in particular). Brandstrup (1997) notes that his employment of a relatively large number of dancers, as well as the maintenance of the company's production values, puts strain on Arc's limited financial resources; he declares that the additional funding gleaned from private sources, as well as its commercial viability in terms of box office returns, is crucial to

the company's continued existence¹³⁰. The institutional situation of Arc Dance Company, in particular the economic imperative embedded in its mode of operation, distinguishes it from other contemporary groups more directly dependent on the relatively secure, high level of state subsidy that fixed-term funded status furnishes¹³¹.

The aesthetic choices of Brandstrup also render him marginal to the emergent contemporary dance scene¹³². Arc has a reputation for producing work in a recognised dance idiom, exploiting the resources of classical and codified modern (especially Graham) techniques rather than experimenting formally, in the manner of many smaller-scale companies on the independent circuit, to break conventions in favour of a self-consciously individualised movement style. This traditional, "mainstream" focus of the company's work is highlighted by Mackrell (1992a) who considers Brandstrup's *White Nights* for the English National Ballet within the context of an article about new ballet in *Dance Now* (a specialist magazine with a predominantly ballet-oriented readership). She declares the work "not, in pure dance terms, particularly experimental", but claims that "he gave certain classical steps an extra weight and simplicity of line". Burnside, too, comments on the neo-classical linear clarity of Arc's company style, pointing out that Brandstrup "does not use the weighted angularities of Graham's movement vocabulary to produce a psychodrama but rather uses its sharply defined lines to universalise the emotions of his characters" (in de Marigny & Burnside 1994). As Burnside's description of the company suggests, its Graham-oriented basis is partly a function of Brandstrup's own training background within London Contemporary Dance School (after its experimental period of the early 1970s), in choreography, under the teacher Nina Fonaroff. But it also indicates an aesthetic decision to subordinate movement experimentalism for its own sake in favour of exploring the narrative potential of the dance medium. Brandstrup himself (1997) stresses that his primary interests concern the exploration of particular narrative structures, characters and stories through dance, rather than purely formal experiment.

¹³⁰ The Spring 1996 tour of *Crime Fictions* and a supporting programme from the company repertoire was sponsored by Daniel Katz Ltd. and Marks & Spencer. In the mid 1990s, it was still relatively unusual for a contemporary company to attract private monies (see above, p.125).

¹³¹ Since 1996, Arc has successfully bid for funds from the National Lottery. Since this allows the company to enjoy the benefits of its own capital assets, this development has now altered its financial and institutional status (Brandstrup 1997).

¹³² Brandstrup (1997) admits to feeling isolated from the network of independent dance companies and their aesthetic concerns: while recognising that revenue or fixed-term funding status would aid help to secure and facilitate his company's work, he claims to feel fortunate that he receives sufficient state subsidy to make his preferred style of work despite its non-conformity with contemporary dance fashion.

His choice of movement vocabulary is thus, he claims, shaped by its capacity to tackle the subject matter of the work in question.

All Brandstrup's works for Arc and other companies manifest a concern with modes of story-telling and the presentation of character¹³³. In Burnside's promotional summary, Brandstrup is described as "a major force in the revival of narrative dance works on the contemporary British dance scene" (de Marigny & Burnside 1994). This renewed interest in narrative is also described as a feature of contemporary dance development during the 1980s by Brinson (1991:25-51), Jordan (1992:1-9, 33) and Mackrell (1992b:64-67), and, given its clear narrative orientation, it is tempting to place Arc's work, as does Burnside, within this historical framework¹³⁴. Yet Brandstrup's choreography is also at odds with contemporary trends. During the 1980s, many experimental companies were concerned with politically contentious issues, explored through series of thematically linked fragments of text and movement (Brinson 1991:32; Mackrell 1992b:64-8; Jordan 1992:58-87). These fragments formed a narrative in the sense of being united by a common thematic thread: logical, linear progression from one fragment to the next was, however, disrupted in the attempt to encourage spectators to decipher the connections and reflexively confront the thematic issues in their engagement with the work. Brandstrup's choreography, meanwhile, adopts much more "classical" modes of story-telling than those of his new dance contemporaries, as well as focusing on subject matter out of kilter with their preferred political themes. Frequently derived from literary or mythical source material, Brandstrup's narratives appear far removed from embroilment in the contemporary world and its politics: *Orfeo* and the more recent *The Garden of Joys and Sorrows* (1997) create dance versions of Greek myths, while *Antic* (1993) and *Othello* (1994) are based on Shakespearean drama. In this sense too, Brandstrup's work recalls the classical tradition: its narrative orientation suggests a stronger link with mainstream ballet than with the more experimental developments elsewhere on the contemporary dance scene.

¹³³ Work as a freelance choreographer includes productions with London Contemporary Dance Theatre (LCDT), Rambert Dance Company, English National Ballet, Geneva Ballet and the Royal Danish Ballet (see Arc Dance Company 1996b). Brandstrup's best-known work, *Orfeo*, was originally created for LCDT in 1989, winning the 1989 Lawrence Olivier award for Most Outstanding Achievement in Dance. The work was revived in 1994 and again in 1997 by Arc Dance Company itself.

¹³⁴ This parallels developments elsewhere: see, for example, Banes (1987) discussion of the new generation of US choreographers' search for "ways to reinstall meaning in dance" (xxiv), as well as Foster's characterisation of "post-objectivist" dance (1986: 186-227); Louppe (1989), Adolphe (1990) and Febvre (1995) discuss the 1980s reaction against formal abstraction and

The subject matter of *Crime Fictions* (1996) to a certain extent departs from this pattern in drawing on detective fiction and film *noir*¹³⁵. The work's title already suggests this debt to twentieth century literary and cinematic genres, as does the publicity's characterisation of *Crime Fictions* as a "suspense-filled new ballet [in which] Kim Brandstrup's choreographic camera captures a shadowy world of guilt, suspicion, truth and lies" (Arc Dance Company 1996a). In keeping with the conventions of the source genres, the work disrupts the linear progression of classical narrative. The audience is informed by the programme notes that the dance "borrows the one location setting and the closed circle of characters from the classic 'whodunit' " (Arc Dance Company 1996b); characterised by Todorov (1977:42-43) as always a dual narrative of the crime and the investigation respectively, the whodunit conventionally moves in flashback from effect to cause, rather than vice versa, to constitute a "story in reverse" (Brandstrup 1997). Similarly *serie noire* novels and their cinematic counterparts disturb the equilibrium and even flow of traditional linear narrative structures with unexpected twists and a multiplication of stories within the story (Borde & Chaumeton 1955; Palmer 1994). The *Crime Fictions* publicity leaflet suggests that this will occur in Brandstrup's ballet, which shows the same fictional action several times "each from a different character's perspective" (Arc Dance Company 1996a). Each different version of the same basic plot carries a different truth-value within the fictional world of the work: "one [version is] a premonition, one a lie – and one, perhaps, the truth?" (*ibid.*). In this way, the structure and content of *Crime Fictions* problematises the referential transparency of the classic linear story-telling mode.

The work's reference to detective fiction and *film noir* is made explicit in the title, text and photographic image that appear on the publicity leaflet¹³⁶ as well as in the brief press previews appearing around the time of the performance¹³⁷. By appealing to the prospective public's interest in popular cultural forms and curiosity as to how they might be translated into dance, the framing of the work in this way are symptomatic of Arc

turn to theatricality and narrative as a key feature of the French contemporary dance environment.

¹³⁵ although it also corresponds to a long-term interest of Brandstrup who has a university education in film studies and a particular interest in Alfred Hitchcock (Arc Dance Company 1996; Brandstrup 1997).

¹³⁶ On the cover of the leaflet is a photograph of a dark-suited male dancer jumping with arms raised in a stylised pose of surprise or shock, while an ominous shadow is cast on the dark grey-blue background. The play of colour and light contrasts is evocative of the black-and-white *noir* films of the 1940s and 1950s.

Dance's Company's efforts to attract a broad audience. While Burnside suggests that the narrative mode of Arc's work, like its frequent references to the broader cultural sphere, enhances its accessibility, Brandstrup (1997) acknowledges that "you don't automatically get an enormous theatre-going or crime-story reading audience" if dance is mentioned in the publicity at all. Conversely, Brandstrup suggests that the framing of *Crime Fictions* in relation to popular fiction and film traditions may have functioned to alienate also classical and contemporary dance publics. Happy that his work has wide appeal, Brandstrup is critical of the conventional mode of dance reception. He comments on the dance spectator's resistance to engaging actively with choreography: s/he either expects to be able to "sit back and watch something that looks nice" or to be aggressively forced to confront issues of concern to the choreographer. In either case, he argues, the viewer remains relatively passive and too much involved with the dancers' performance. Dancers and choreographers, in his view, seem remarkably unconcerned with creating fiction: "you always feel that it's about them doing something - whether it's beautiful or powerful or strong - that it's them, opposite you, doing it, saying 'look at this'. There's no [...] suspension of reality. There's no feeling that both they and me go somewhere else" (Brandstrup 1997).

Embodied in Brandstrup's (1997) comments is a notion of dance as a narrative medium, which, like literature and film, can achieve all the effects we expect of *Crime Fictions'* source genres: build suspense, establish intrigue and mislead its audience through "red herrings" rather than simply gradually leading them to the truth at the heart of the story. In fact, this moves one step beyond the notion of dance as narrative by playing, like detective and *noir* fiction on the very idea of story-telling, thus introducing a reflexivity within the work whereby the audience is encouraged to reflect on the mechanisms of the story's construction. *Crime Fictions* thus seeks to involve the viewer in solving the murder-mystery set out at the beginning, through a close analysis of the characters and action that constitutes the plot. But it also foregrounds the choreographic devices out of which this fictional scenario is built. Such reflexivity (and the element of Brechtian alienation on which it is premised) in one sense conflicts with Brandstrup's declared aim of creating a self-contained fictional world with which the spectator can identify and into which s/he can escape, since the audience's process of

¹³⁷ *Crime Fictions* is billed as a "ballet *noir*" (*The Independent Metro*, 23/2/96:19 and 1/3/96:19), and as inspired by Raymond Chandler (*The Independent Metro*, 23/2/96:19 and *The Daily Telegraph*, 24/2/96).

suspending disbelief is disrupted by the work's self-conscious artifice¹³⁸. The ways in which this issue is tackled in critical response to the work are discussed further below, p.173-177.

The programme notes (Arc Dance Company 1996b) guide spectator response in a general sense by citing the work's influences, but they also give specific indications to facilitate the construction of the fictional world and the work's scenario. A list of *dramatis personae* defines the characters according to broad types and stereotypes: the patriarch, his young wife, his daughter, his sons, his daughter-in-law, the servants and a priest. An outline of the progression of scenes also directs perceptions of the work's flow and the nature of its plot. The outline divides Part 1 into five stages: "The Scene"; "Father and Son"; "The Daughter"; "The Young Wife and Her Stepson"; "The Act". Part 2, meanwhile is constructed around a tripartite division between "Funeral and Suspects"; "The Truth"; and "Dénouement: The Lie". On initial reading, prior to the performance, these indications do not allow the audience to envisage the plot and its substance in detail, but they do furnish a reference point for the spectator while viewing the work, especially in the pauses between sections. The text of the programme notes also suggests that the work has a deeper significance beyond simply "satisfying our passion for riddle-solving, suspense and surprise". Locating *Crime Fictions* and its choreographer within a canon of artists working around similar themes (Sophocles, Dostoyevsky, Raymond Chandler and Alfred Hitchcock), it encourages the spectator to focus on the complex moral issues raised in the whole network of actions and reactions surrounding the murder. The notes thus hint at a serious flipside to the work's playful manipulation of narrative artifice, in keeping with the *noir* tradition¹³⁹.

¹³⁸ Brandstrup's aim inflects the text of the Sadler's Wells publicity that raises audience expectations by describing *Crime Fictions*' universe as "an imaginary world that is compelling and evocative" (Sadler's Wells 1996).

¹³⁹ The *whodunit* and *film noir* genres themselves, even though they may touch upon serious issues, were conceived, according to Palmer (1994), primarily as forms of entertainment; their intended effect was to provide an ultimately pleasurable narrative experience rather than to shock the audience into recognition of painful truths. While in some contexts they may have functioned, as many *film noir* critics declare, to disorient the spectator and confound her/his established beliefs and moral certainties, they also fulfilled expectations sufficiently to become popular successes as entertainment. The tendency not to take the films entirely seriously seems likely to be even more pronounced amongst a contemporary audience further distanced from *noir* preoccupations and conventions. Similarly, the audience of *Crime Fictions* seems more likely to be disposed to enjoy the play of references and cleverness of the choreographic construction than to take the programme notes' moral injunction seriously.

4.2 Viewing *Crime Fictions*¹⁴⁰

As the house lights fade and stage lights go up, the stage curtains remain closed while a solo clarinet melody is played on the recorded soundtrack. Evocative of both of jazz and film music, the score sets the scene (as it will throughout) by pointing up the work's reference to film *noir*. When the curtain rises, costuming and set offer a similarly stylised reconstruction of the ambience of this cinematic genre. The decoration is sparse, but the venetian blind effect on the cyclorama and the partly obscured vision of a Californian landscape resonates with the film-literate spectator. Upstage right, a group of characters, dressed in suits or 1950s tops and skirts according to gender, is huddled over what is revealed, only several seconds later when they draw away, as the corpse of the murder victim. One female dancer, dressed as a 1940s maid stands downstage left, isolated from the group, her arms raised in surprise or horror: she lowers them slowly, looks swiftly and sharply towards, then away from, the other characters and turns to step hesitantly in their direction. The Butler, identifiable by the style and colour of his costume (predominantly black with white gloves), breaks off from the group and moves hesitantly to meet her, punctuating moments of suspension in a low arabesque with small furtive steps. The Butler's gloves add expressive weight to his hand gestures, which evoke a feeling of anxiety, like the initial freeze-frame of the group of children as they move back to reveal the corpse: each reaches a hand out to the corpse which, deposited from a chair on a raised part of the stage, is sprawled in the shape of an inverted crucifix down the steps, upstage right.

They then move to compose a second freeze-frame, with Maid and Daughter-in-law reaching in off-centre arabesques away from the corpse, their weight counterbalanced by Butler and Son respectively. All return to the corpse, but shift back again to stage left, dividing into pairs, on the entry of a woman whom they watch as she strikes a provocative pose downstage right. With hips slightly off-centre and forearms raised, one hand touching the other wrist, the woman's head turns sharply to face the other dancers, and she completes a full turn slowly in the spotlight that has focused on her and illuminates the brilliant yellow of her costume. The lights fade on the other side of the stage as the woman's hands briefly touch her head before sliding down her hips; she shifts her weight to stage left, twists sharply and exits, the spotlight continuing to glow for a few seconds in the space she has vacated. The woman's gestures and

¹⁴⁰ *Crime Fictions* was first performed on 2nd February at the Wycombe Swan (High Wycombe, U.K.), and first performed in London on 27th February at Sadler's Wells Theatre. The latter performance and its video record form the basis of the analysis here.

incongruous costume (the colour of the other dancers' costumes is subdued by comparison) is emphasised by the scene's lighting, while the spatial configuration of the stage image strongly associates her with the corpse: both occupy the right half of the stage while the others stand on the extreme left; the two dancers in each pair are touching, their proximity contrasting with the isolation of the woman in yellow. The spatial organisation encourages the spectator to focus initially on the servants, then on the group of dancers, and to identify with these characters' perspectives on the action. The tableau struck following the intrusion of the woman in yellow thereby conveys the idea that the other characters suspect her of the murder and the impression that she should also be the audience's prime suspect. Given the generic conventions by which the work claims to operate, however, such indications are likely to be second-guessed. The emphatic suggestion (at this very early stage in the work) that the woman in yellow is suspect paradoxically indicates that she is almost certainly *not* the murderer, or at least not involved in the crime in the way this scene would have us believe.

Although the two servants are distinguishable as characters by virtue of their distinctive costumes, the other dancers' character roles remain unclear during this scene¹⁴¹. Having read the list of *dramatis personae* in the programme notes, however, the spectator may already deduce their identities from the indications of costume, manner and actions: the group appears young, or at least younger than the heavier-built corpse sprawled on the steps, suggesting that the victim is the patriarch and the surrounding characters his children. The woman in yellow, then, must be the Young Wife, whose isolation from the rest of the group and provocative gestures and costume mark her out as a stereotypical *noir femme fatale*¹⁴². The performers' roles become much clearer in the passage which follows: this is a flashback sequence which establishes the general ambience and set of relationships constituting the patriarch's household; it does so through a movement vocabulary drawing on everyday gesture, but which exaggerates its dynamics and manipulates its timing and spatial focus to allow apparently simple, ordinary actions to assume significance as narrative functions. The manner of the dancer playing the Patriarch (Mark Ashman) succinctly suggests the nature of the murder victim's temperament and lifestyle. The lights reveal him standing upstage left, with his back to the auditorium, one arm raised and leaning against the window frame. He turns and stumbles forward with a drunken swagger, glass in one

¹⁴¹ Also, the relatively well-known (ex-LCDT) dance performer, Kenneth Tharp, is listed as playing a servant in the programme notes. The experienced dance viewer may therefore recognise his character role on the basis his distinctive appearance.

¹⁴² See Palmer (1994) for a discussion of this and other archetypal characters of *noir* fiction and cinema.

hand, and executes a swift turn and step towards stage right, pausing to drink from the glass before turning and stepping left. When the servants enter upstage left, carrying jacket, coat and scarf, he commands them to approach by pointing forcefully to the ground before him, a gesture repeated on the successive entries of his children (still not distinguished beyond their gender difference). Having helped the Patriarch into his jacket, the Butler is dismissed with impatient gesticulations; compelled to look their father in the face by his forcing their heads back, daughter and son are then dismissively shoved away; each son is cuffed on the shoulder, and one is the target of feigned punches thrown in apparent playfulness belied by their sharp and aggressive brutality. This exaggerated forcefulness conveys a sense of an overbearing and ostentatious personality, reinforced by the clear marking of the spatial pattern that will dominate the rest of Part 1: having donned coat and scarf, an authoritative Patriarch strides the diagonal towards the upstage right corner, taking his hat from the hands of the Butler and dextrously flipping it over onto his head; he climbs the steps and exits upstage right with the children continuing to gaze after him as they move into line upstage left.

Despite their exaggerated theatricality, the Patriarch's movements retain a functionality and economy of movement, especially in comparison with the children's successive short dance sequences following his exit. Performed on the dominant diagonal, these sequences are grounded in a codified, neo-classical dance vocabulary, of *pirouettes*, *arabesques*, *jetés* and *glissades*. The spectator shifts from deciphering the relatively explicit referential meaning of gestures to a more diffuse appreciation of the dance as a series of codified variations on a theme. The swift, staccato dynamic of the dancers' movements suggest their anxiety, frustration and fear of the dominant father figure but do not at this stage go much further in delineating their character traits and motivations. Their dance is interrupted by the Patriarch's return, leading his Young Wife (still dressed in yellow) by the hand down the steps. Each child is commanded to approach, with a characteristically forceful pointing gesture, and then kiss the hand of the Patriarch's bride before resuming the frenetically anxious dance quartet downstage left. This pauses as the Patriarch sits the Young Wife down in the chair, bends ostentatiously to kiss her on the lips, before repeating this action as the children gather round the chair. The scene is observed by the Maid who enters upstage, is briefly distracted by a duet with the manservant, then beckoned to approach by a now seated Patriarch, left alone by the exit of children and Young Wife.

Initially stepping back in fear or revulsion at the Patriarch's invitation, the Maid walks to stand and curtsy before him. He grabs her chin and, although she pulls away twice, is drawn back into close proximity. The Patriarch reaches a lascivious hand to touch the Maid's leg, beneath her skirt. Partially turning towards him before she pulls sharply away, the Maid is released by her employer. Meanwhile, the manservant has been watching the encounter, pacing slowly in a circle and standing one hand behind his back. This hand stretches out, then tenses to form a fist, his gesture emphasised by the white glove which contrasts with the otherwise black costume. When the Maid is released by her employer, the Butler comforts her and a short duet ends with a close hug, upstage left. Audience sympathy here gravitates towards the Maid and servant, whose revulsion at the Patriarch's actions is paralleled by spectator's dislike of his manner and disapproval of his actions: this revulsion grows throughout the flashback sequence and the accumulating impressions of an unjust, overbearing, unpleasant personality. The spectator also, however, remains conscious of the stereotypical dimension of his persona and enjoys the skill and economy with which the performer, Mark Ashman, evokes the domineering father-figure: an awareness of his virtuosity as a performer (in dramatic rather than purely dance terms) is thus mixed with enjoyment of the developing narrative.

The scenes listed as 2, 3 and 4 in the programme notes' outline of the scenario continue the flashback to a period before the murder, working through each member of the Patriarch's family to establish a possible motive for committing murder. One son is humiliated and rejected, in front of his wife; the Daughter is spurned in favour of the Patriarch's new bride; the sexual promiscuity of the Young Wife is suggested by her seductive, provocative gestures in the presence of the Servant, then by her more nervous, but sensual dance in partnership with the second son. Like the manner of the Patriarch's movements, some of the qualities and detail of these characters' dance work illustratively to advance the process of fleshing out their personae. In each of the Sons' solos as well as in the children's quartet¹⁴³ the dancers' timing, their swift changes of direction and syncopated pauses or suspensions in certain positions, suggest the contradictory feelings that their situation and the Patriarch inspire. The impression of all the children's relative weakness, timorousness and vulnerability is constructed from a series of specific actions as well as the dynamic of their dance material: the married son, for example, repeats the motif of bowing head and

¹⁴³ performed in unison and repeated a number of times, and in a number of variations, throughout Part 1 and again, in more fragmented form, in Part 2

shoulders, as if cringing, away from his father¹⁴⁴; the daughter's arms, raised straight above her head, fold at elbow and wrist and drop in quick succession, as though her aspirations have been disappointed and deflated. Yet there is also an "overflow" of movement material that, in contrast to the economy of gesture effectively employed elsewhere, appears ornamental in relation to the advancement of the plot and the fleshing out of character. Because of the pressure of the narrative frame containing the work, the spectator may become impatient with such "ornamental" dance passages. Moreover, to the experienced contemporary dance audience, the vocabulary maintains its codified, traditional idiom in such moments: it combines the virtuosic display of classical ballet with the more subdued, internalised focus typical of new dance forms. It may be that this combination thus falls between two viewing frameworks, creating a dilemma for the spectator and hence a certain loss of concentration.

Such a loss is felt, for example, in the subsection devoted to the character of the Daughter. In terms of narrative development, the section establishes the Young Wife's presence as a barrier to the normal intercourse between father and daughter through a trio involving the relevant characters; the three-point relationship is explored by the viewer who reads the careful plotting of the characters' interactions as representative of their emotional relation. A contrast in movement styles is also invoked to enforce vivid distinctions between characters. Spurned by the Patriarch whose actions are directed almost exclusively towards her new step-mother, the Daughter vainly attempts to retain his attention with elegantly fragile arabesques, leaps and turns. Her classicism seems appropriately naïve and ineffectual in comparison with the sensual and provocative partner-work of the Young Wife and Patriarch. In a suggestive tango-like sequence, they glide across the stage with deft footwork and swaying hips, punctuating their duet with the Young Wife's sudden, ostentatious falls backwards into the Patriarch's arms, her leg extending straight, directly upwards. Twice during and again at the end of the trio, the Patriarch swings his daughter down into a similar lunge backwards, as if in parody of the sexualised contact with his wife. The second time, the Daughter responds by pulling herself back up and twisting to resume an arabesque position, with gaze characteristically lowered and her weight counterbalanced by the Patriarch. Holding her hand, he turns her through 180° before pulling his hand away and allowing her to collapse to the floor while he accompanies his wife off-stage. But the Daughter's solo which follows, even while it repeats some of the motifs used previously, loses this expressive force. The spectator becomes conscious of the technicalities of its

¹⁴⁴ The Daughter too makes this gesture at one moment during her solo.

execution rather than reading through the movement content and its qualities. The dancer (Fuschia Peters) elaborates a slow adage of balances, extensions and *arabesques*, embellished with *fouettés* and classical *ports de bras*. The forward momentum of the musical score is briefly diffused as its rhythm fragments and its melody grows more emphatically dissonant. As a result the pace of the narrative is interrupted, tension and attention dispersed, until the scenario moves to focus on a different group of characters.

Although the scene outline in the programme notes does not attribute a section of Part 1 to the characterisation of the servants as murder suspects, they come to the fore in the interstices between scenes: first, with the sexual harassment of the Maid at the end of the opening section; then again with the hint of the Young Wife's sexual attraction to the Butler. Their duets, alone together on stage after the departure of the other characters, indicate an evolving romantic relationship: the Maid is initially reluctant to take notice of the Butler's attentions; her off-centre *arabesques*, leaning towards the Patriarch's chair, show her either troubled by or yearning for her employer's attentions. Towards the end of Part 1, the character of their relationship alters. A gentle, lilting piano melody momentarily resolves the musical tensions dominant up to this point as the Butler attempts to distract the pensive Maid with a sequence of light footwork, small jumps, swift changes of direction and turns. He hands her up to partner him in a quickstep duet about the stage; their formal ballroom hold and quick, light skips about the stage inviting comparison with the sexually-charged tango sequence between Patriarch and Young Wife earlier in the act. The duet between the servants here appears as an artless parody or ironic commentary on that of the other couple. They seem to interact innocently and simply, in marked contrast with the dark complexity of the family relationships and with the rude interruption of the drunken Patriarch whose intrusion spoils the scene.

This leads directly into an incomplete account of the act of murder itself, which shows the sequence of events immediately prior to the killing, but not the crime itself. Drunk, the Patriarch attempts to force his attentions on the Maid but is led to his chair by the Butler. Illuminated by a spotlight on the raised podium, the Patriarch lights a cigarette, removes cufflinks and jacket, which he hands to the servant before sitting down heavily. Dismissed with a contemptuous and resigned wave of the hand, the Butler leaves. The lights darken on the Patriarch sitting alone in his chair, his head bowed and his torso slumped forward as, illuminated by a spotlight, he continues to smoke. When the scene lightens again, it shows the corpse draped down the steps,

and the Maid standing, arms raised in horror, downstage left. Against a siren-effect on the soundtrack, children and Butler gather round the corpse as the action of the work's opening is reprised. The effect is to encourage the spectator to revisit the bare facts of the narrative, but with additional knowledge of character and motivation acquired through preceding scenes. But it also, by not revealing the truth of "whodunit", keeps the audience in suspense through a twenty-minute interval, and sets the scene for the complex unravelling that follows in Part 2.

The second act begins with a funeral scene, the characters initially gathered upstage centre, around the Patriarch's grave: the venetian blinds have lifted to reveal the landscape painted on the backdrop and a tree has appeared stage right, indicating that the scene has shifted from the closed interior of Part 1 to an outside environment. The new character of the Priest is also introduced here, breaking the closed circle of the household and murder suspects. He provides a focus for much of the action in this scene, as he engages in a series of duets and trios with members of the Patriarch's family. The dance here reinforces the impression that the Young Wife is widely suspected of her husband's murder, as each child confesses her/his feelings and forebodings to the Priest. The process culminates in a chase sequence where the vengeful chorus of the Patriarch's children pursues the Young Wife off the stage. The scene also develops a sub-plot in the evolving relationship of Butler and Young Wife. She goads him to approach her by tantalisingly casting her fur coat to the ground, willing him to pick it up, until they embrace and sink to the ground, the Butler lying on top as they grasp at one another's bodies in a display of frantic passion¹⁴⁵. They are watched throughout by the Maid. As well as foregrounding the Maid as observer of the stage action, focusing on her as the character with whom the audience should identify, the scenario shifts sympathy away from the manservant and the Young Wife. Thus, any sympathy evoked for the latter on account of her victimisation by the other characters is, at least temporarily, dispelled.

The murder mystery finally unravels as the Maid and Butler confront one another. He angrily chases her across the performance space, his characteristically light-footed dance from Part 1 transformed and exaggerated into an explosive sequence of

¹⁴⁵ Despite the nominal seriousness of this scene in the context of the drama, this moment adds a comic touch. The Butler draws back from contact with the Young Wife, momentarily suggesting that he has realised the moral implications his actions and decided against it. The sequence summarily deflates this interpretation by revealing that he has only held back for the much more mundane reason of removing his jacket. Like other distancing devices within the text of the dance, this moment makes an ironic response available to the viewer and compromises the earnestness of the narrative's injunction to take the text seriously.

dynamically charged high leaps and jumps. The chase climaxes in a fleeting moment of stillness with the Butler, his back to the audience, seemingly about to strangle the Maid who is hidden from view by his towering presence. Instead, he crumples and sinks, clasping her knees. Their “conversation” continues with the Maid charging her fellow servant to admit the “truth” promised in the programme notes. The Butler’s demonstrative gesture towards the now illuminated Patriarch, sitting in the chair upstage right, acts as an introductory framing device to point up the ensuing action as a narrative (told by the servant) within the broader story. The Patriarch’s dismissive wave of the hand is reprised from the “Act” scene in Part 1, but then a new sequence of action charts the event of the killing itself. The Butler steps forward of the chair, calmly draws a gun from his breast pocket, hides it under the Patriarch’s jacket and approaches his employer from behind; feeling the Butler’s hand on his shoulder, the Patriarch angrily tries to throw off the hand as he rises, but the Butler pulls his victim closer and a shot is heard as he thrusts the hand with the gun towards the Patriarch’s belly. The body sinks to the ground, the Butler drops the jacket on top and walks out of the illuminated space.

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Once the Butler has told his story, and admitted his guilt, the duet with the Maid is revisited, but with the balance of power now reversed. The Maid angrily, and righteously, pursues her companion to the point where both collapse exhausted to the ground. Again, a highly codified dance vocabulary is used in the duet, but which, in comparison with the dance style of the children in Part 1, allows a greater variation of the classical line, destabilising the verticals by falls, lunges and increased use of the torso over an upright lower body. The dynamic of the servants’ duets is also more overtly expressive of violent emotion, while suspense builds through the momentum of the musical score. The scene functions to propel the spectator forward, to involve her/him in the action and the servants’ perspective, building towards the crucial character transformation and narrative twist.

This occurs as, after a brief pause during which the pace of the music calms, the Maid lifts her head, curiously, and raises herself to all fours; she looks towards the Butler, then stands, pragmatically brushing down her skirt and straightening her head-dress. Turning to her companion, she walks to him as he looks up. Although he initially cringes from her, she beckons him to approach and, as he stands, straightens also his jacket. Taking his chin in her hand, she forces his head up to face the audience, also looking out into the auditorium herself. This is the only moment in the work where the audience is explicitly acknowledged by the characters on stage. The dramatic impact of

the low-key¹⁴⁶ lighting and the looming shadows it casts, as well as the dissonance of the score, lends the moment a disturbing forcefulness. This is spite of the fact that it is still unclear exactly what the Maid has decided to do, although the verbal indication in the programme notes, that “the Lie” follows “the Truth” provides a clue. This is the most cinematic sequence of *Crime Fictions*, the lighting emphasising the connection between the work and its source films. Again, it functions as a self-conscious quotation from the source genre. At the key dramatic moment of *Crime Fictions*, the viewer is thus presented with a range of conflicting positions: the work here encourages at once implication in the action, through identification or a sudden disorienting shift of sympathy, as well as a heightened consciousness of the work’s deliberate artifice and the fictional status of the narrative.

The final *dénouement* is contexted by the increasingly ominous¹⁴⁷ pursuit of the Young Wife by children and Priest. The encounter between the latter and the Maid, with the children gathered on stage, shows the Priest taking the Maid’s hand, encouraging her to tell the truth she seems to know. Again, the framing device of a slow sweep of the arm in a demonstrative gesture introduces the Maid’s story, or narrative misrepresentation of the event of the crime. This time, the Butler does leave the Patriarch when dismissed and the Young Wife approaches her husband. She eludes his attempts to embrace her, steps forward of the chair and removes from her pocket the gun which she covers with the jacket left by the Butler on the chair arm. Feeling her hand on his shoulder, the Patriarch turns and makes to embrace her, but again has the gun thrust into his belly as a shot is heard. The body sinks to the ground as the Young Wife exits, running. The economy of the functional, gestural movement is disrupted only by the embellishment in this third (and false) version, where the Young Wife interrupts her approach towards her husband to execute a heartlessly nonchalant double *rond de jambe*, tracing two circles with her foot on the ground. Deluding the group of other characters into thinking that the Young Wife is indeed the culprit (and, moreover, has murdered in cold blood), the Maid succeeds in intensifying the retributive pursuit. She prevents the manservant from helping his lover, and joins the vengeful group of the family, which finally carries the Young Wife offstage.

A brief duet with the Priest, in which he lifts her chin to look into her face, suggests that he doubts the veracity of her story, but nothing is shown to indicate that this has an

¹⁴⁶ A typical film *noir* device, low-key lighting presents “areas of hard (and for human faces, unflattering) light and shadow” and creates an effect at once “deglamorizing and mystifying, for it constructs areas of significant darkness that often seem threatening” (Palmer 1994:38).

impact on the Young Wife's fate. Rather the work ends with a final duet between Maid and Butler. Paralysed in conscience-stricken inertia, the Butler's wilful control over his action is usurped. The Maid attempts to stir him into life, using similar tactics to those with which he distracted her in Part 1: she lifts his hands, urges him to partner her in another dance and performs a sequence of deft footwork in invitational display. But the Butler barely cooperates, lethargically turning towards the Maid, lifting and lowering her, before moving away to perform a slow turn and slide to the ground. He comes to rest sitting with legs in the fourth position of Graham technique, head bowed, only to be picked up again in another attempt by the Maid to make him dance. As he stops and sinks into to chair positioned by the tree, the Maid places a hand on his shoulder as the lights and music fade. The further shift of sympathies that these final scenes effect jar in typical noir fashion. The Maid, whose perspective has been dominant through many passages of the work, betrays the viewer's trust as well as the truth. The *femme fatale* is revealed as an innocent victim, only implicated in the crime because of her sexual entanglement with the Butler. The latter, whose betrayal of the Maid's fidelity reinforced our sympathy for her, is ultimately also cast in the role of a victim of her machinations. The Maid also, finally, assumes the position of power abused by the Patriarch: but the spectator, too, is implicated in the guilty characters' perspective because of her/his own dislike for the murder victim. The boundaries between innocence and guilt are blurred in the complex of responsibilities, loyalties and betrayals: the narrative's responsibility to provide closure and a clear-cut "moral of the story" for its audience remains deliberately unfulfilled.

¹⁴⁷ especially so, since we now know that she is not the true culprit

4.3 Solving the Dance Riddle: Suspending Preconceptions and Disbelief

The programme notes posit *Crime Fictions* as a murder mystery that involves the spectator with a “passion for riddle-solving”. The work is structured, at least initially, like a “whodunit”, but the figure of the detective investigating the crime is markedly absent from the work. This absence creates a space in which the audience itself is precipitated into this role, encouraged to perceive the evidence the narrative yields, weigh and judge between competing claims, and deliver a verdict in ultimately understanding the secret at the heart of the mystery. The movement must be deciphered like a chain of evidence to resolve the puzzle set out for the audience. The programme notes themselves purport to assist in this process by offering a verbal outline of the characters and scenario. This verbal text invokes the conventional understanding that the notes will accurately summarise the action, off-setting the potentially disruptive essential ambiguity of the dance. But the fact that they do not list as significant precisely those scenes in Part 1 that implicate the servants in the murder, by elaborating their motives, points up the status of the notes as a less than reliable guide to the maze of the work’s plot. If the spectator succumbs to the temptation to accord greater authority to the words in the programme than to the stage action, s/he will be duped by the verbal text and frustrated in her/his attempt to solve the crime¹⁴⁸.

If the narrative of *Crime Fictions* seeks to conform to its source genre conventions and to surprise the audience through the series of plot twists, it is, of course, essential that the spectator be partially misled in particular ways. An audience that enters the fictional world of the work willingly accepts deception as part of the play of this kind of fiction. The audience is encouraged to follow leads and “red herrings” deviating from the path towards the truth of the crime. The work thus offers two modes of engagement with the narrative, corresponding to the guessing and second-guessing processes of the reader of classic detective fiction. This decoding process is further complicated by the dance material that does not fit the pattern of gestural or dynamically-expressive movement designed to flesh out the characters and advance the plot. The more opaque and ornamental passages of choreography require a further shift in the viewer’s approach to the work, whereby s/he engages on an abstract level with the

¹⁴⁸ The spectator familiar with detective fiction may also be duped by the expectations of the genre. Todorov (1995:48-49) cites Van Dine’s 20 rules for the crime fiction author, including the criterion which states that “[t]he culprit must “have a certain importance: (a) in life: not be a butler or a chambermaid; (b) in the book: must be one of the main characters”. The programme notes’ failure to accord a scene to the servants suggests, duplicitously, that we regard them as minor characters. The casting of Kenneth Tharp as the Butler, meanwhile, gives the lie to this principle, since a high-profile performer is unlikely to be given a minor role.

non-representational intricacies and technicalities of the dance. The interpretation above (pp.163-172) suggests that, in my own reading, such moments prove problematic: the dance material is not sufficiently interesting in itself to maintain involvement, but rather diffuses the suspense and momentum that elsewhere is effectively sustained¹⁴⁹.

The tension between the different kinds of response that the work's semiotic fabric invokes is also reflected in the published criticism of *Crime Fictions*. Assessments of the Sadler's Wells performance show a striking lack of consensus about the work's success in setting forth its scenario. Brandstrup himself (1997) attributes this divergence of views (characteristic of the critical response to Arc's work) to the extent of the critic's willingness to enter into the "spirit" of the work: "I think it's a question of whether you get inside it [...] whether you read it as something that's conveying something or whether you just sit and watch dance movement until something is explained". The most positive critical account, revealing the full involvement to which Brandstrup aspires, is that of Brown (1996): she declares scenes to be "so crystal-clear that you can read the dialogue", employing the metaphor of verbal language to suggest the meaningful resonance of the choreography. Crisp (1996), too, affirms that "[t]he reasons for the murder are plain" and "the internal conflicts which might make each member of the cast guilty are no less clear in choreography". Mackrell (1996) agrees, noting how Brandstrup's "dramatically honed choreography amplifies each character's motive". Gilbert (1996) perceives the choreographic difficulty of "identifying the characters early enough so that important detail doesn't pass unheeded", but declares that this problem has been largely overcome by the interval. But Levene writes of her confusion in response to Part 1, advising readers that "if [they] have trouble penetrating the densely populated first act, [they] won't be alone" (cited in Benedict 1996). Meisner (1996), meanwhile, claims to have failed even to distinguish between the dancers' character roles: the presentation of each member of the household, "few of whom you could identify from the stage action", is "so muddled that a Raymond Chandler plot becomes a model of simplicity by comparison".

Meisner's (1996) review points up the inextricability of the viewer's frame of reference and expectations from her/his positioning and reading of the work. Her article also discusses David Bintley's *Far From the Madding Crowd* (for the Birmingham Royal

¹⁴⁹ In interview (1997), Brandstrup expresses his own dissatisfaction with Part I of *Crime Fictions*, claiming that he would restructure if reworking the piece. He remarks in particular on

Ballet), and adopts the central theme of certain types of content being impossible to convey in dance. Recalling Balanchine's statement that "there are no mothers-in-law in ballet", she claims to have been discouraged, even before *Crime Fictions* began, by the programme notes: "one glance at the programme, with its complex list of relationships, reveals that Brandstrup suffers from not knowing the Balanchine dictum" (1996) ¹⁵⁰. Having defined in advance what is and what is not possible in dance, she seems to conclude even before the curtain rises that *Crime Fictions*' ambitions will outweigh the narrative means at its disposal. Similarly, Dromgoole (1996), while he concedes that the dénouement holds audience interest, declares that "all the best moments have remarkably little to do with dance". His review elaborates a fixed distinction between the theatrical and the choreographic, declaring the work's gestural mode to be tantamount to "dumb show, the kind of mime that any competent actor can manage". The timing, spatial groupings and dynamics of the movement are, in his view, neglected and the "actual range of dance movement" proves "limited, repetitive and sadly lacking in invention".

On the one hand, these responses pick up on the tensions discerned in my own reading, created partly by the combination of classical and contemporary styles and partly by the juxtaposition of passages of denotative movement and more "ornamental" sequences where the pace of the story slackens. On the other hand, both Meisner and Dromgoole go further by damning *Crime Fictions* as a whole in the light of such instances. Their reviews articulate an outright refusal to play the kind of game that the work invites its audience to join. This is confirmed by Meisner's summary dismissal of *Crime Fictions* as unsuccessful because it fails to recognise both the limitations of its narrative medium and the inappropriateness of its chosen themes. She concedes that the work "could have been fun as a spoof of the country-house murder genre, with a cast of characters straight out of a Cluedo game" (1996). Had it proposed a blatantly comic exposition of the whodunit genre, the Brandstrup's work would have remained "fun" for the viewer. Dromgoole (1996), meanwhile, is reluctant to engage with a work

the "episodic" framework of both music and choreography through the lengthy solos of the dancers playing members of the Patriarch's family.

¹⁵⁰ Balanchine's remark is made in the context of a glossary entry on the uses of "Pantomime" in ballet: "[m]ime is limited. There are some things it is foolish to try to indicate in a ballet: you cannot indicate your mother-in-law and be readily understood. But within the limits of pantomime, much can be expressed" (Balanchine & Mason 1978:801). *Crime Fictions* pays scant regard to Balanchine's sensibilities, by including both a stepmother and a daughter-in-law in its scenario: even if the programme notes clarify these roles, the viewer still has to deduce which dancers play them from the stage action. The distinction between gesture and dance is, to a certain extent, upheld in Brandstrup's work, although my own reading (unlike those of

that does not adopt his own preconceived idea of what dance is and what it can do, and the world of *Crime Fictions* thus remains similarly closed to him as a spectator.

The more favourable critics, meanwhile, demonstrate in a variety of ways their willing absorption by the work's universe. Crisp (1996) considers that the choreography's deliberate and self-conscious stylisation is in perfect accordance with its orientation as a homage to *noir* cinema, itself characterised by "an almost Noh-like formality". For Brown (1996), too, the choreography's stylisation is appropriate to the atmosphere the work seeks to evoke with, for example, the Young Wife's "discreet, flirtatious foot movement conjur[ing] up an entire era of cocktail parties". Levene (cited in Benedict 1996) is less convinced that the work evokes the *noir* world of 1940s and 1950s cinema, but still recognises that this is what *Crime Fictions* attempts to do. Her review suggests that Brandstrup's mixing of the genres of detective and *noir* fiction may have functioned to dispel any evocation of the violent, disturbing mood of the latter: the more comfortable world of the Agatha Christie and her fellow writers seems more in keeping with her assessment of *Crime Fictions* as "stylish but dull", lacking "the edge and violence of the genre it attempts to celebrate" (cited in Benedict 1996). For Mackrell (1996a) also, the choreography's fluency initially "slides into blandness", destroying the work's sense of suspense. Mackrell is pulled out of her tedium, however, by the final *dénouement*, which disrupts the smooth surface to provide a "powerful and emotional conclusion". For Crisp (1996) too the final moments of the work are "profoundly moving", shattering the self-conscious artifice through the "raw emotion" of the choreography and Kenneth Tharp's performance. This, for him, is the moment of truth within the work: his expectations of Tharp's performing virtuosity and emotive power are satisfied as "[f]or a shocking moment, we face truth not play-acting fiction". Tharp's performance and its power takes precedence over the narrative play and the work's reflexive questioning of the "truth" of dance performance.

It is notable that *Crime Fictions* (unlike much work on the contemporary dance scene) attracts such attention in the press. This is partly a function of its dual status in combining features of the ballet tradition with the dynamic force of contemporary dance, and also of the middle- to large-scale status of Arc Dance Company (see Sadler's Wells 1996; Arc Dance Company 1996; and above, p.156). Thus, even critics and newspapers that would normally review only classical dance are attracted to Brandstrup's work because it promises, at least partly, to fulfil these expectations. The

Meisner 1996 and Dromgoole 1996) recognises the manipulation of both as aspects of the choreographic process in contemporary dance.

scale of the work, the integration of classical with codified contemporary techniques, and (perhaps above all) the narrative mode are assumed to render the work accessible to a wide public. As the analysis above reveals, however, this supposedly accessible instance of contemporary dance work engages, shifts or disengages the spectator's attention in a complex play signifying functions and interpretative paradigms. For all the complexity of the work's own semiotic fabric, interpretation is frequently dominated by prior conceptions of dance, its capabilities as an art form and the prescriptions of genres appropriated from other cultural forms.

CHAPTER 5:
Russell Maliphant: *Unspoken*

5.1 Verbally Framing what Cannot be Spoken

Performed at London's The Place Theatre in March 1996, Russell Maliphant's *Unspoken* was one production in a "Spring Loaded" season which itself marked a departure from previous years. Forty companies were invited to participate in the annual showcase of work from the British independent dance scene where only twenty-five had appeared in 1995. John Ashford, The Place Theatre's Director, notes in his preface to the season's publicity brochure that "few of [these companies are] familiar names from previous seasons"; claiming that the new generation of choreographers and companies emergent during the 1980s had by now matured and moved on to work in a different institutional context, he declares the need to make room for "the younger growth" within the theatre's programme. Selected to show a 20-minute extract from *Unspoken* in "Spring Collection" (4th February 1996), Maliphant had already been singled out as an emerging but distinctive choreographic voice within the independent contemporary scene¹⁵¹. In 1996, he was included for the first time under his own banner in the Spring Loaded programme¹⁵², with the two-performance run of the full-version (50 minutes) of *Unspoken*.

Although not well established as a choreographer, Maliphant was one of the more experienced dance professionals participating in the season. This is reflected in the Arts Council subsidy his project attracted: ACE rarely elects to subsidise choreographers who have received little support previously from other public bodies¹⁵³; that *Unspoken* was funded as an independent dance project by the Council is testament to the fact that Maliphant's previous work had sufficiently secured his reputation¹⁵⁴. As well as the choreographing for the repertory company, Ricochet, he had performed his own solo work, *Paradigm*, at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in the international Dance Umbrella festivals of 1994 and 1995; but his reputation also rested on his work as a performer with other choreographers and companies. A

¹⁵¹ A weekend of short performances, presented by The Place Theatre in partnership with the South Bank Centre, *Spring Collection* aimed to introduce the "best of British contemporary choreography" to promoters and the general public (South Bank Centre 1996). It also functioned as the UK platform for the Bagnolet Competition, the *Rencontres Chorégraphiques Internationales de Seine Saint Denis*.

¹⁵² Ricochet Dance Company had performed works by Maliphant in previous Spring Loaded seasons: *Relative Shift* (1993), *Corpus Antagonus* (1994) and *Re-Coil* (1995).

¹⁵³ Independent artists in London are usually expected to have attracted subsidy from London Arts Board before being considered seriously for an Arts Council grant.

¹⁵⁴ That he received project funding also for the following year shows that *Unspoken* further established him as choreographer. Maliphant (1997) recognises the greater pressure to produce successful work that results from the success of *Unspoken*: prior to the latter's performance, "there wasn't so much interest in me and what I would do next".

member of Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet for seven years, Maliphan broke with his classical background to dance with DV8 Physical Theatre in Lloyd Newson's (1989) *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (see Parry 1992/3 and Constanti 1996a). Following this, he collaborated with performer / choreographer Laurie Booth on experimental projects involving substantial use of improvisation in rehearsal and performance, in which Maliphan's individual presence, skill and movement quality drew critical attention (see, for example, Hunt 1991:14, de Marigny 1991, Burnside 1992:33 and Hughes 1992).

The publicity and programme notes for *Unspoken* give no account of Maliphan's background as an artist. Published profiles of him and his work, however, do stress his history as a classical performer, even as they accentuate the radicalism of his subsequent break with conventional techniques: Parry's interview (1992/3) begins by describing his solo performance work, declaring that it carries "no overt sign that his formative training was in classical ballet"; Constanti (1996a) includes Maliphan in a profile of three ex-classical artists who have chosen to work independently and experimentally, claiming that he has "reinvented" himself as a dancer more definitively than the other two; Nugent's (1996) review of *Unspoken* also mentions his background in classical performance before embarking on a description of the piece. By invoking Maliphan's past involvement in classical work, these commentaries do not simply frame his movement style as experimental; they also single out his own performance (and its degree of contrast with classical virtuosity) as a significant aspect of *Unspoken* to which the audience should attend. His talent as a performer is similarly the focus of the *Time Out* listing: "[w]atching Russell Maliphan perform is always a treat. He is a great mover and a charismatic personality to boot" (13th-29th March 1996, No.1334).

Maliphan's concerns as a choreographer, evident in the work with Ricochet as well as the solo *Paradigm* and *Unspoken*, are grounded in experimentalism consonant with his rejection of the classical tradition. In interview with Parry (1992/93), he explains his reasons for not continuing work with DV8, declaring himself less interested in using dance as a theatrical or narrative medium than in developing dance form as such: "I wanted to expand what dance could do, not reduce it by becoming a performance artist or an actor" (14). In pursuing this ambition, he has engaged in a process of personal movement research in which the attempt to "make his body a neutral instrument" involved an effort to "unlearn" conventional contemporary as well as classical techniques (*ibid.*). To create a movement language distinct from the existing codified aesthetics, Maliphan, like several other independent choreographers in the new dance

tradition¹⁵⁵, has looked to yoga and martial art forms (especially Tai Chi and Capoeira) as well as movement therapies (especially Rolfing)¹⁵⁶ and the alternative dance-based approaches, release technique and contact improvisation. In constructing the idiolect of *Unspoken* in particular, he uses improvisation in rehearsal and composition, as the publicity information emphasises: “[t]he movement language [...] is created through the use of compositional structures which allow the fluidity of improvisational moments to co-exist with choreographed material” (The Place Theatre 1996a:6).

While they assume Maliphan’s involvement in the performance as well as the choreographic process, publicity and programme notes are equally emphatic concerning the collaborative nature of *Unspoken*. They suggest that the partnership between Michael Hulls (lighting designer), Andy Cowton (composer) and James De Maria (performer) allows each practitioner’s contribution relative autonomy within the work: this too aligns the work with other post-modern, and in particular post-Cunningham, contemporary dance forms. The importance of the lighting design is accentuated by reference in the publicity to other experimental practitioners, Jennifer Tipton and Dana Reitz¹⁵⁷, working in a similar area and who have informed the approach Maliphan and his colleagues take. The verbal frame positions *Unspoken* as one aspect of an on-going exploratory choreographic venture¹⁵⁸; it is the product of an extensive “period of research and development” into “the choreography of light and motion” (The Place Theatre, 1996a:6). This suggests the organic and continuing development of Maliphan’s creative process, rather than *Unspoken*’s status as a self-contained, finished artistic product.

In keeping with the work’s experimental orientation, the programme notes also mention the involvement of Maliphan and his collaborators with the first “Choreodrome” at The Place during the summer of 1995. This project, which like Spring Loaded is under the aegis of The Place Theatre’s John Ashford, was a new development in 1995, funded as one aspect of the centre’s activities as a National

¹⁵⁵ such as Laurie Booth and Paul Douglas

¹⁵⁶ Parry (1992/3) writes of Maliphan’s interest in Pilates-based body work. Maliphan (1997) claims that his involvement with “rolfing” has affected his movement style, because it is concerned with “looking at bodies moving, where energy’s flowing or not, or structurally where something seems restricted”. See also below, p.195.

¹⁵⁷ Both American and associated with the post-modern avant-garde, Tipton’s reputation as a lighting designer was established by her work for Trisha Brown, while Reitz works as a solo performer and choreographer. Michael Hulls has worked with Tipton and Maliphan participated in a workshop she conducted (Maliphan 1997); he had also performed as a soloist alongside Reitz at the ICA in the 1995 Dance Umbrella programme.

Dance Agency (see Tait 1995/6). It aimed to provide a context for choreographic research and development, opening the resources of the London Contemporary Dance School and of The Place Theatre to selected choreographers without “the pressure of a performance schedule to follow”¹⁵⁹. Claiming independence in its approach and selection procedures from the influence of public funding structures, the Choreodrome continues to provide also a forum for informal presentation and discussion with other professionals and a “safe” environment for choreographic experiment. In Maliphan’s case, the Choreodrome also made available the theatre facilities which enabled experimentation with lighting and sound as well as movement: the aesthetic choice to involve substantial original contributions from lighting designer and composer was thus facilitated: despite the ACE grant, the budget for the creation of *Unspoken* remained relatively small¹⁶⁰; without the Choreodrome, the cost of hiring appropriate space for a sufficiently long period might otherwise have proved prohibitive. The programme notes also acknowledge support for the work from Sadler’s Wells Theatre (The Place Theatre 1996b).

In that *Unspoken* emerges from this institutional context, the work may be aligned with an experimental tradition in contemporary dance which has developed from the New Dance movement of the 1970s. Certainly, *Unspoken*’s verbal frame positions its dance technical innovations in the avant-garde tradition: the work is a collaboration between equal partners; it uses improvisational methods in its composition; it represents the latest evidence of a continuing project of movement research by Maliphan, who seeks to develop a stylistic alternative to codified contemporary and classical techniques. In suggesting the work’s typicality in relation to such a tradition, the verbal frame in turn sets parameters for the experienced dance viewer’s approach to *Unspoken*. The work invites a largely abstract and formal reading, which takes account of visual impact and technical execution: this invitation is summarised in the very brief programme notes, which, having drawn attention to *Unspoken*’s collaborative character, describe it as a “a vivid and intensely visual duet” (The Place Theatre 1996b). Although they do not outline a thematic for the choreography beyond these broadly inclusive indications, they do also raise expectations concerning the work’s impact on the audience. The spectator waits to be drawn into the “vivid intensity”

¹⁵⁸ This is implied in the description of *Unspoken* as “this latest work”; Maliphan himself also explains his creative process in such terms (1997).

¹⁵⁹ The Place Dance Services (1995, 1996); Tait (1995/6).

¹⁶⁰ Maliphan received a grant of £12,950 in 1995/96 (the mean independent dance project grant for that year was £19,714); a further grant of £17,000 was awarded the following year to cover the costs of touring *Unspoken* as well as creating the 1997 new work, *Decoy Landscape*.

of the experience and to test her/his own response against this positive evaluation of the work's impact.

The title, meanwhile, explicitly refuses to name the work's concerns. Maliphan himself also claims that no particular thematic preoccupation guided the creation of *Unspoken* although he may have hoped it would develop into "a moving piece of movement without being specific" (Maliphan 1997). Commenting on the title, he justifies its selection on the grounds of the word signifying "that nature of being moved by something that's not words, and you couldn't say it in words, I don't think, but it is the body speaking nevertheless" (*ibid.*). Interestingly, while he declares that the work does have expressive significance that cannot literally be spoken, Maliphan still resorts to the metaphorical notion of the body "speaking": juxtaposed with the assertion that dance can transcend the linguistic paradigm of interpretation is the paradoxical reassertion of that paradigm's force in its capacity to explain dance's significative process. Equally, the connotative potential of the title transcends its own referential meaning through ominous implications that also contribute to pre-structuring the spectator's response. On the surface, the title suggests that the world of the work exists beyond that of spoken language, that the significance of *Unspoken* circumvents or undoes the verbal, affirming sense perception over linguistically-informed understanding as a valid approach. But the morphological structure of the word "unspoken" also connotes its more menacing cognate, "unspeakable": this raises the spectre of a world of struggle, pain and despair, all the more sinister because this predicament cannot be articulated.

5.2 Viewing *Unspoken*¹⁶¹

The work opens with a pale blue shaft of light filtering gradually into the initial darkness of stage and auditorium to pick out, upstage left, a tall, shaven-headed male dancer of muscular and sinuous build (James De Maria¹⁶²). Rather than rendering him clearly visible, the quality of light remains hazy, which both dematerialises the visual image and seems to increase its distance from the audience¹⁶³. The spectator becomes unusually conscious of the process of looking at the stage action as s/he struggles to bring the performer into sharper focus; the light draws attention to the way in which it dictates the degree and nature of visibility, rendering the spectator sensitive to the texture of the illuminated space. The surrounding pervasive darkness also assumes a substantial quality that emphasises its viscous presence. The lighting effects thus create a peculiar environment or abnormal world, in which the performer is suspended in a state of indeterminacy. De Maria's movements too emphasise his suspension: although he repeatedly sinks and collapses from a standing position, buckling in reaction to a series of seemingly external impulses, he retains sufficient control not to give way entirely to the pull of gravity; he drops close to the ground but suspends just above it, balancing and supporting his weight between hands and feet, twisting into awkward spirals and recovering slowly but steadily from each fall.

The palpable tension in the mood of this opening section is embodied also in the single sustained synthesised notes that pierce the silence. Like the play of light, the sound also helps to create the environment into which the performer is cast. Both light and sound assume an autonomy and a controlling influence over the human protagonist's action and the way in which it is perceived, suggesting that they will become significant actants within the work's scenario. And the latter already emerges as more troubling and pregnant with ominous significance than the verbal frame had given cause to expect in its foregrounding of formal abstraction. De Maria's movements carry an expressive force as images emerge from his flow of action, moments of stillness allowing time for their connotations to register with the viewer. His contortions evoke sculptural and pictorial representations of suffering and constraint: chest

¹⁶¹ at The Place Theatre, 13th March 1996.

¹⁶² This is a duet, and Russell Maliphant is well-known as a performer. To the spectator with some prior knowledge of the independent dance scene, it is therefore clear from the outset who the performers are.

¹⁶³ This effect, apparent in live performance, is less clear in the recording of the work where the camera rapidly zooms in to focus in close-up on the performer's movements. As suggested in the Introduction, p.22-23 above, the video recording is used as a complement to the memory of

exposed as his back arches and head angles back and up, the performer appears vulnerable and tormented. The play of shadow and light combines with the torsion of such gestures, sharply defining the dancer's musculature and spiralling lines of tension that carve the mass of his body into distinct shapes¹⁶⁴. The effect is to convey a sense of the exertion necessary to maintain an upright posture, even momentarily, when the pull of external forces is great. Moreover, his actions carry associations that accrue also to the verbal signifiers which denote them: the notion of falling evokes a plethora of references – ideas of failure, destruction and mortality – which form a backdrop to visual impressions of De Maria.

If the dynamic governing De Maria's movement is uneven, there is a gradual increase in pace over several minutes, as the succession of the impulses that initiate each process of fall and recovery quickens. The sequence culminates in his wholesale shift out of the blue spotlight and into the wider darkness. The shaft of light fades as De Maria travels through this wider arena: barely visible at first, his movements are picked out by growing dispersed white light against the background of a bluish wash which floods first the upstage, then the downstage half of the space. Propelling himself through a series of cartwheels, slow handstands, leaps, rolls and shunts, De Maria's progress is interrupted occasionally by moments of suspension in a more precarious state: arms outstretched and head thrown back, his body vulnerable, he suffers further impulses to ripple and disturb the smooth functionality of his movements through the space. The soundtrack's continuing repetition of the single, sustained note maintains the atmosphere of tension to which De Maria's more expansive movement also contributes: as he travels through the space, changing level and dynamic, the ideas of struggle and forced exertion still pervade his action.

That tension remains following Maliphan's entry, despite the initially calming effect of the moments of unison that ensue. Maliphan also has a shaven-head and is built and dressed like De Maria, each wearing loose trousers and a sleeveless vest in muted grey-green or grey blue; their similarity in appearance and the character of hairstyle and dress is vaguely evocative of a military environment, and reinforces the uniformity of the image created when they dance in unison. The lighting, however, begins to

the live performance, and the notes taken immediately after it . This account of the work draws on all three sources.

¹⁶⁴ Maliphan (1997) mentions several times the notion of sculptural form: he speaks of the influence of sculpture (particularly that of Michelangelo) upon his movement style and his interest in modelling shapes through variations in light: with lighting "you can sculpt the body, in a much finer, qualitative way than you can in the studio, with movement on its own."

distinguish their different movement qualities. The wash of blue covering the front half of the stage demarcates two different regions within the performance arena: downstage, De Maria is still immersed in a pale blue sea, while Maliphan is picked out from the upstage gloom by rich golden side lighting: the vivid contrast between the colour and quality of light in the two regions forces adjustment of the viewer's gaze. Each region also has a different ambience and emotional charge that infuses also the quality of the performers' movements. Although separated in the space, both are oriented towards stage right. Following a brief moment of stasis, they trace a wide circle with one arm, torso twisting as it lowers behind, and step back through second position *plié*, before the unison fragments. De Maria's incessant shifts between levels, falls and recoveries, contrast with the slower, more composed, smooth gestures of Maliphan who remains upright, upstage: if De Maria struggles to maintain control in the grip of external impulse, Maliphan's self-control is more centred and complete. Further moments of temporarily sustained unison evolve: they come together, as each extends one arm horizontally, bending his body in a long arc at the extreme of equilibrium, and remains still for an instant, head inclined backwards and upwards; again, such gestures are evocative of pictorial images, here of representations of the crucifixion, as the line of the horizontally extended arms pulls at right angles to the arc of the torso and legs. Their arms again circle calmly before they exchange territories, Maliphan walking forward and De Maria backwards to each extend one leg behind and incline the torso forward into a low arabesque. In the soundscore, a dull throbbing grows louder as the wash of light covering one half of the stage dissolves to darkness and both performers move towards centre stage. They circle one another, moving into close physical relation, without either focusing his gaze directly on his partner.

An increasingly charged atmosphere, then, dominates perceptions of the performers' encounter in the centre of the space. They are surrounded by a circle of blue light, reminiscent of the spotlight which picked out De Maria in the opening minutes of the work, but wider in scope and different in effect: rather than dematerialising the dancers, the lighting now draws attention to their physical presence. Physical contact between the dancers here also emphasises their materiality. De Maria rolls across a kneeling Maliphan's back and is lifted lightly off the ground. A succession of similarly low, gentle lifts of one dancer by the other is interspersed with more dramatic and precarious balances and suspensions: De Maria leans to the side across Maliphan's shoulders and is tilted upside down on the diagonal; Maliphan launches himself through a spiralling movement into a horizontal position in the air, resting on one of De Maria's shoulders. The balances struck, in

which the performers pause, are often awkward and, as a result, despite the smooth transitions through which they move and exchange weight, the pull of gravity still threatens the seamless evolution of the interaction. The performers temporarily attain positions of balance and thus accede momentarily to a state of harmony and control; but this is lost once more as they fall off-centre and plunge back into the troubled confusion from which the instant emerged.

The suspense of the scene builds as the dull throbbing eclipses the sustained repeated note on the soundtrack, growing to a steady roar of noise as De Maria leaves the stage. Maliphan's movement quality in the solo that follows contrasts his persona with that of De Maria in the opening scene, despite their superficial similarity in appearance¹⁶⁵. He begins slowly, kneeling with his torso inclining close to ground. His gestures explore twists through different parts of the body in sequence, briefly isolating successive anatomical segments to create a bizarrely fragmentary effect: a twist isolated in the neck is followed by a spiral of the wrist which ripples through the arm but then shifts to a swirl of the leg, causing the whole body to turn. He supports his weight on his knees, feet or hands, moving between levels and increasing the pace of the solo with the suddenness of turns and twists. The intensity of the roar of noise also grows. The lights fade to virtual darkness before a diffuse red spotlight illuminates the performer's violent flurries of activity. The latter are interrupted by occasional moments of sustained concentration in a slow, carefully controlled *developpé*. Both the lighting and the movement quality contrast with the cooler mood of the work's opening. Maliphan's explosive, twisting and lurching, energetic movement phrase is accompanied by an ever more oppressive crescendo of sound. The volume here is so intense that it forces increased physical involvement on the part of the spectator and the sense of urgency consequently also escalates. Maliphan's dynamic also grows faster and faster, building to a tempestuous climax. The final image of this first section shows Maliphan swiftly turning, again and again, arms flailing as he flounders in increasingly impenetrable darkness: the growing difficulty of discerning Maliphan's movement through this obscurity lends added weight to the shadows that threaten to engulf him. The affective charge and physical intensity of the scene for the spectator (like Maliphan, besieged by the encroaching darkness and the roar of sound) is sharply curtailed as the scene cuts to full black and silence.

¹⁶⁵ Each has a shaven head and a similarly muscular physique. Their costumes are similar in style and colour.

The following scene, in contrast, opens on an image of undisturbed tranquillity: two parallel rectangles of white light emerge, clearly defined, from a source above the stage, against the surrounding darkness. Not apparent initially, the performers step forward after a few seconds, close enough to the top end of each rectangle for the light (its source overhead) to pick them out. Into these pools, each dancer extends an arm, raises it slowly to vertical, then lowers it, palm facing up, and circles it behind as the other arm too reaches forward into the light. The latter falls on the upper surface of their bodies. They are partially silhouetted, with their actions casting distinct shadows, dark reflections in the rectangular pools of bright white by which they are framed or strange shapes disembodied and distorted in comparison with the organic wholeness of the actual physical presence of the performers. Calm pervades the quality of movement, light and sound, with each performer sinuously shrugging, stretching, reaching through and exploring the space of his rectangle of light against a backdrop of gently pulsating synthesised chords. They move forward and back through the defined areas of light, smoothly changing levels by alternately kneeling and standing. Moments of stillness fix the dancers in arcing postures, reminiscent of the moments of unison within their first duet, although the emotive and thematic force of their gestures, and the visual images in which they crystallised, is diffused by the general calm. Now, as they move, the performers bask in the light to which their relation was previously troubled. As the rectangles fade and the volume of the chords in the soundscape increases, the dancers are bathed in blue emanating from the wings. Surrounded otherwise by darkness, they come to a standstill, Maliphaunt upstage right, facing out, De Maria downstage left, facing back.

The dancers lean slowly in unison: they are the sole visible points in the performance space and, when leaning in the same direction, their action has the apparent effect of tipping the whole black box on the vertical axis. Reaching the limit of equilibrium, each performer buckles, still calmly, and moves through a series of twists to recover to standing, then joining the other in leaning again to one side. As previously, each occupies one half of the space and remains within that region, his lateral trajectory in parallel with that of his partner. This division subsists throughout the section, although the perception of a geometrical parallel between the two areas dims as the performers break the pattern of leaning and recovery to embark on contrasting movement phrases. De Maria sinks and keeps close to the ground, as he travels steadily across the space. Maliphaunt suddenly bursts into a sequence of small, furtive shrugs and shifts, subject to a barrage of nervous impulses whereby he recommences his struggle with the surrounding environment: his discomfort has a discomfiting impact

on the spectator, disrupting the calm mood sustained up to this point. Moving in line, one behind the other, then sinking slowly from their standing positions, the dancers lie on their backs, parallel with one another and the lateral axis of the space as the chords of the soundtrack fade to silence.

As the performers are settling to the ground, shafts of light are cast sharply across first Maliphan, then De Maria. Elongated rectangles now illuminate the space around the performers' bodies, but in contrasting orientation to those at the beginning of the section and no longer symmetrically positioned but offset in relation to the centre of the stage space; also, each rectangle has one blurred edge which disrupts the otherwise clearly delineated shape. In silence, the performers begin to twitch or raise their heads, legs, or arms slightly off the floor in uncomfortable contractions, like Maliphan in his passage of movement preceding this sequence, disturbed by nervous impulses that distort and fragment the body's organic movement. At one point they contract simultaneously to raise both legs and torso, maintaining this position while rocking back and forth. The single sustained notes from the opening section of the soundtrack are repeated as the dancers sit up, then stand: brief series of convulsive, isolated movements, initiated in the upper body, are broken by pauses in awkward, hunched stances as the shafts of light switch on and off, plunging into darkness now one, now the other performer. The suddenness of the light cutting in and out finds a counterpart in the twitching motion of the dancers as well as noises of clicking and jerking interfering on the soundtrack. This is also disrupted by a female voice repeating at irregular intervals one phrase, "Dr Kravitz, Dr Kravitz - you have a visitor in the main lobby". This verbal intrusion further disturbs the aesthetic harmony with which the section began. It bears little thematic relation to the ongoing action, unless the nervous twitching of the performers suggests them as psychically and physically disturbed patients of the "Doctor". But this impression is overwhelmed by the surrealism of the sound's aleatory intrusion: it constitutes a fragment of concrete existence in a mundane world, reinforcing the sense of the performers' dispossession from the everyday environment; the words intrude on the more abstract landscape or metaphysical dilemma in which the performers are involved in the fictional world of the work. This disjunctive effect is heightened by the staccato effect of the shafts of light switching on and off, at increasing speed, by the short, sharp noises, and by the spasmodic bursts of movement which distort the dancers' bodies.

From the agitated end of this second section, the mood darkens again during the opening minutes of the third: darkness once more fills the space, to be only gradually

disturbed by very dim light. The performers can just be discerned moving towards one another with swift and expansive gestures, contrasting with the smaller, sudden twitching of the previous scene. De Maria arrives centre stage and pauses, crouching, then sways, shifting his weight forward onto his hands and back. Maliphan focuses on his partner as he approaches and stops alongside him, swaying in time until De Maria makes contact by lifting his legs onto Maliphan's back. His hands walk forward slowly, away from his partner, his body extending before his legs spring off, and both shift across the floor to kneel, facing downstage left. De Maria then leans his torso forward to rest on Maliphan's back and he is carried forward as Maliphan crawls across centre stage. Once the two performers have risen, they continue to support and lift one another gently, even tenderly. The duet's slow dynamic develops unevenly: the dancers' deliberate exchanges of weight are interspersed with more rapid low swings of one by the other. They tend here to move through positions, each allowing himself to be manipulated by the other performer. The style of their contact work thus contrasts with that of the first section, where each would find a precarious balance and contrive his own equilibrium on the basis of the other's support, without explicitly recognising his human presence; here, the two protagonists cooperate and collaborate, joining forces and depending on one another as they traverse the menacing environment of encroaching darkness.

The opening of this duet foreshadows the performers' more forceful and directed activity as the soundtrack, for the first time in the work, breaks into a strong, sustained rhythm. The powerful drive this lends the action contributes to the changing movement quality and its intimation that struggle now transpires between the two protagonists themselves. The manipulations of one by the other becomes more forceful and violent: a performer will thrust his partner's head down or back, and restrain him by locking the arms in a coercive hold. Clicks and jerks, like those in the "Dr Kravitz" section above, punctuate the soundtrack, accentuating the dancers' fleeting stillnesses. The lighting glows increasingly red, to recall the ominous, oppressive ambience dominating Maliphan's solo at the end of the first section. Yet certain movements remain suggestive of tender concern, with one dancer supporting the whole burden of his partner's weight in a lift from which he lowers him slowly. The performer being manipulated also accepts relatively passively his fate and moments of concerted action still emerge: both dancers lower themselves from a handstand (still supporting their whole body weight on their hands as they do so, in a demonstration of extraordinary muscular control); they sink to lie face down, then pause before rolling together towards stage left, where they stand up and walk forward in unison. But instances of

this kind are succeeded by emphatic thrusts by one dancer of his arm over the other's shoulder, arm or upper body; their entangled limbs force them into awkward and unlikely positions, trapping and lifting the other dancer without his volition.

As the duet progresses, distant voices, this time from indistinct and confused radio transmissions, and a metallic clashing noise intrude on the soundscape. A pause in the movement sequence emphasises the startling image of De Maria, bending far back and his legs hanging vertically down, carried at arms-length through the air by Maliphaunt, who walks backwards towards downstage. The degree of sheer muscular strength necessary to maintain the position draws the viewer's attention to the exertion involved, in such a way as to call into doubt for the viewer the virtuosic ease dominating much of the movement vocabulary's performance. As De Maria is lowered from this position, the pace slows again, and a simple musical phrase of repeated chords accompanies a series of exchanges of weight, as performers alternate between balancing and supporting the other's equilibrium. A pause in rhythm and melody allows the metallic clashes to dominate as De Maria collapses repeatedly to the ground. He is pulled back up each time by Maliphaunt who grasps his hand, before forcing his head and torso forwards. Both dancers suddenly spring into a high turning leap as the rhythm begins again, this time at a faster tempo, with a simple melody again heard in the background. The dancers continue through such passages of sustained action, interrupted by sudden pauses, as their dynamic becomes more urgent, their lifts and leaps higher and their manipulations of the other's movements more violently forceful. As before, however, emphasis on moments in which one performer carries the other's "dead" weight across the stage or supports him tenderly in a lift, renders their relationship ambivalent so that they alternate between striving together and struggling against one another within the apparently hostile landscape of light and sound.

This impression of hostility, still a vague sense of foreboding which is difficult to locate until this point, crystallises in the 1950s' recording of Dylan Thomas' (1978:207-208) poem *Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night*, laid over the rhythm and melody already audible within the soundtrack. The imagery of the Thomas poem gives thematic shape to the visual images of struggle and despair emerging from previous sections of the work, impressions of the dancers flailing against the encroaching darkness, or "raging against the dying of the light". Each stanza is intoned in its entirety, by a male voice, and the words emerge more clearly than the fragments of speech heard in the second section. Again, however, the interference of extraneous noise suggests a distant radio transmission, barely reaching the world on stage.

Particular words stand out against the fainter, less distinct background of the poem as a whole, evoking notions of struggle and despair; the emotive force of “burn and rave”, “rage”, “crying”, “dying”, “grieved”, “blinding”, dominates the weaker (ironic) assurance that the night is “good”. Enjoining the protagonists to strive against the shadows threatening to overwhelm them, the voice provides *Unspoken*’s audience with a verbal interpretation or concretisation of their general impressions of the performers’ activity; the poem organises the diffuse emotional charge of the formal effects and contributes a further layer of meaning.

As the poem begins, the dancers pause, looking out towards downstage right as they also become conscious of their predicament and their subsequent movements slow. The recitation of the poem is also distanced from the simultaneous action by the paralinguistic features of accent and tone, as well as by the interference of other noise. Despite the force of the poem’s imagery and its injunction, this paralinguistic dimension ironises its semantic implications, steering the effect away from melodrama while still pointing the listener to an interpretation of the work’s general significance. Although the words make linguistic sense out of visual impressions accumulating through the work, their literal relevance to the action here is displaced. The light grows brighter rather than “dying”, flooding the stage and illuminating the action clearly and starkly before it dims again to a blue haze. The voice pauses briefly between stanzas 4 and 5, as De Maria crawls the length of the diagonal between downstage left and upstage right, Maliphan draped across his back. As the final stanza of the poem is recited, the performers, having sunk to the ground, separate, rolling away from one another along the same diagonal. A blue wash of light focuses on the front half of the space and once more divides the performance arena into two regions.

Each dancer now occupies one of these regions, although this time De Maria performs a swift and violent sequence of movements in the background, while Maliphan remains close to the ground, twisting slowly around the forearm which supports his weight. The poem finished and the rhythm no longer audible, a series of sustained chords composes an unresolved melody: the poignancy of the latter is reinforced by the performers’ gestures; they move to the same positions they occupied when the stage first divided, and their actions regain something of the sustained and deliberate quality of that first duet. But, following the climax reached in the intonation of the poem and the dynamism of the performers’ contact-based duet, the calm is now tenuous, a lull after the protagonists have emerged exhausted from a monumental struggle. Initially moving independently of one another, the performers are again

brought together in moments of temporary unison, circling their arms or bending the torso in a long arc to the side. The wash of light fades from the front half of the space to illuminate upstage, with De Maria moving back to join Maliphan in this region. The lighting appears to distance the performers from the audience, to push them back into the depths from which they initially emerged. Both dancers bend, sink, reach and sweep with the arms in a gentle and continuous flow as the lights and music fade very gradually to black-out and silence.

5.3 Reading the Dancing Body's Effort

As suggested above (p.182), the verbal frame of *Unspoken* invites an essentially abstract and formalist reading, in which the spectator's interest clusters around the visual and sensuous impact of the work's orchestration of movement, light and sound. Maliphan himself (1997) argues that no particular thematic governs the work's composition, although he notes that some audience members emphasised its emotional force in performance. The reading above (pp.184-193) suggests a strong sense of an emergent narrative or theme which gains momentum as the work proceeds, transcending both the reading proposed in the surrounding verbal discourses and Maliphan's own understanding of what the work is about¹⁶⁶. My own interpretation is constructed through the accumulation of diverse impressions to which the work's strands give rise. Both light and sound take on a density and an autonomy as actants within a scenario where the human protagonists appear in conflict with their environment. The shape and balance of tensions characterising particular gestures are reminiscent of sculptural, pictorial and everyday images of struggle. The movement quality in many passages has a rawness that emphasises the physical exertion required to carry an action to its completion, while the light accentuating the definition of the dancers' musculature contributes substantially to this consciousness of the physical demands of what they do: in the dramatic world of the work, this heightens the sense of the dancers' physical fallibility, even as they far exceed the limits of what is possible for the everyday body in movement. Such impressions crystallise when the words of the Thomas poem become audible on the soundtrack, positing the action of *Unspoken* as a desperate, and ultimately hopeless, rage against forces of death and darkness beyond the protagonists' control.

The work's choreographic logic is not, however, dominated by this emergent thematic. Rather, *Unspoken* develops patterns of action by exploring a wide range of movement possibilities within the compass of particular dynamics suggested by the shifting ambient mood. The quality of these movements in performance may evoke feeling-states and multiple possible references, but the choreographic material remains abstract in the sense of not representing a specific content. The movement also provides a series of variations on pre-existing dance idioms and other body-based

¹⁶⁶ While Maliphan (1997) denies seeking to explore any particular theme through the work, he does cite Michelangelo's slave sculptures as an influence on the developing movement vocabulary. He also draws attention to the referential charge of certain passages in claiming to have been reminded by the duet work created in improvisation of war-film images where bodies fall, carry, are carried or blown.

practices, encouraging the spectator with background knowledge of such techniques to construct another kind of sense from the performance's semiotic fabric¹⁶⁷. Thus, the performers' partnering work recalls in form and quality the technique and aesthetic of contact improvisation. The dancers exchange weight, share responsibility for controlling their combined momentum and base their interaction on trust in each other's support. The points of contact between them and with the floor are varied and constantly shifting: they support their own weight on feet, hands and forearms, and that of the other dancer across the back, shoulders or legs. The movement tends towards freedom of flow and continuity in both interaction and travel through the space¹⁶⁸.

This relaxed dynamic is not confined to the dancers' partnering work. Their independent movement sequences often retain a fluidity that Malipant himself (1997) associates with the martial art form capoeira and the consciousness of energy flow developed through involvement with Rolfing (see above, pp.180-181). The fluid style of *Unspoken* also recalls that of release technique¹⁶⁹, although Malipant himself (*ibid.*) declares his own distance from both release and contact improvisation methods: he associates the latter with an unfinished, improvised texture of movement in performance which contrasts with his own concern with carefully controlling its sculptural finish. And certainly, the continuous dynamic sustained through several of the work's most physically demanding passages, conveys the impression of extraordinary control rather than improvisatory freedom. Unlike either release or contact improvisation modes, the dancers often seem to transcend, rather than acknowledging, the pull of gravity and human physical limitations: the control exercised by each performer in supporting and transferring the entire weight of his own or his partner's body renders his virtuosity conspicuous. Where he does give in to the pull of gravitational force or physical limitations, this is not because he is in organic symbiosis with the external environment. Rather, such moments (in the reading above, pp.184-193) are sublimated to the level of the dramatic world, and signal a struggle against the

¹⁶⁷ Since the arrival of John Ashford as Director, The Place Theatre has essentially confined its year-round programme to contemporary dance performance. As the only London theatre to do so, it attracts a very dance-knowledgeable audience (see Devlin 1989:86).

¹⁶⁸ See Novack (1990: 118-124) for a movement analysis of the typical features of contact improvisation as a style.

¹⁶⁹ Broadly speaking, release technique encourages the dancer to discover economical and relaxed ways of moving by maintaining consciousness of the body's anatomical structure and of the pathways along which it "naturally" directs momentum; underlying release technique is the premise that the body, if allowed a certain freedom from engrained movement habits and intellectual control, will achieve an organic quality of movement that is more natural than codified contemporary techniques (Richterich 1998).

surroundings. The actual physical strain of the performer's endeavour becomes a feature of *Unspoken's* fictional scenario.

The published reviews of *Unspoken* vary in their readings of this phenomenon, which impacts significantly on their interpretations and evaluations. Mackrell's article (1996b) begins by outlining the technical distinction of the work: she compares the traditional classically-based understanding of virtuosity, which sees "multiple fouettés" or "a flying jeté" as the "great gravity-defying thrills of dance", with the "extraordinary paradox" encountered by the viewer of *Unspoken*, who perceives "movement that ripples with delicacy through powerful male limbs, that lifts big men's bodies as lightly as breeze billowing through silk". The "impressive, shapely control of the two dancers", in combination with the lighting, creates a startling and "exquisite vocabulary". She concludes, however, by voicing reservations concerning the dancers' partner-work, composed of what she considers to be "routine contact manoeuvres" and which she understands to be improvised in performance. This produces an effect of "almost fumbled togetherness" contrasting with the "tautness of the work's highest aspirations". In her reading, then, a raw, improvised and unfinished movement texture disturbs the dancers' graceful control and her appreciation thereof. The change in quality is judged a mistake, which breaks her suspension of disbelief, although it is unclear whether she interprets this as a failure of choreographic intention in including improvised material in the first place, or as simply a lapse in the dancers' control in performance.

Maliphan's own account of his creative process (1997) declares that virtually all of the material constituting *Unspoken* was in fact pre-set by the time of the performance. He suggests that none of the passages should appear improvised to the viewer, explaining that the unfinished texture that improvised movement retains in performance is not the effect that he wishes to achieve. And yet the publicity does invite a reading on the same basis as Mackrell's (1996b), in claiming the existence and "fluidity of improvisational moments" within the choreographic structure. This raises expectations which affect perceptions of the dance material, and certainly seem to have done so in Mackrell's case. But it is also significant that the emerging emotive power and thematic intensity (that my own reading pinpoints) is entirely occluded in her account by technical considerations and the conventional dance critical focus on performance issues.

Nugent's (1996) review, like Mackrell's, also focuses on performance but acknowledges no disruption to the seamless smoothness of its action and movement

dynamic. Her account makes no reference to the movement's possible basis in improvisation, choosing rather to emphasise Maliphan's own performance capability, extraordinary in its apparent transcendence of normal physical conditions: "[w]here other dancers acknowledge physical limitations, [Maliphan] seems to melt through the air, unhampered by bones and joints, achieving a rippling softness that is both unstoppable and unflaggable" (20). Maliphan's lift of De Maria at arms' length becomes "a moment of perfection" in the formal juxtaposition of "curve against linear support", as well as a tangible image of "the support and trust between two human beings" (*ibid.*). Neither the ideal, apparently effortless control the dancers exhibit, nor the harmony of their relationship as protagonists, is disturbed. In this reading, the surroundings too are in organic symbiosis with the dancers' action: the light forms "diaphanous patterns that turn the environment into a forest (of nature and of metaphor)", and the dance "appears to be happening in some haven of the natural world" (*ibid.*). Although the easy control of the dancers may transcend the natural in its defiance of "physical limitations", this creates an idyllic effect of organic harmony.

Mackrell (1996b) makes no mention of any thematic or expressive significance beyond her account of *Unspoken's* formal qualities. Nugent's article speaks of the work's appeal to "both mind and senses" (18) and suggests organic metaphors¹⁷⁰ to evoke the quality of the visual and auditory images. But she does not recognise the more ominous dimension of the work's significance, highlighted in my own reading and also in Constanti's (1996b) review. Constanti too perceives the menace of lighting and sound environments dominating the action, describing the world of the work variously as "eerie", "subterranean", a "*terra incognita*", a "godforsaken place" and a "black chasm". She refers not to the dancers' extraordinary technical capabilities, but describes them as the victims of forces beyond their control: they are "men doing battle with internal demons", "caught up in [the movement's] ineluctable momentum". Her reading provides no summary interpretation of its meaning and, like the other critics, she makes no mention of the poem, but does suggest that, in the dramatic world of this "charged and enigmatic work", hostility and struggle characterise the protagonists' relation to their surroundings.

Mackrell and Nugent, then, consider the performers' embodiment of easy control as the goal or the effect of the choreography and foreground this aspect of the work as its primary significance. The emotional charge of the changing light and soundscape

¹⁷⁰ Not only is the environment a "forest", but the dancers "skim through the air with a lambent grace" and "crease and fold like creatures under the sea" (Nugent 1996:20).

(including the poem), the referential images emerging from the movement flux and the thematic texture created by these formal manipulations assume a subsidiary role to the logic of movement exploration controlling the development of the action. It is as if attention to the performers' virtuosity, their easy transcendence of usual physical limits, precludes focus on the darker implications in the dramatic world¹⁷¹. The verbal frame and, in some respects, the institutional context of the work invite the viewer to adopt a formalist and technical focus on the performance; but the approaches of Mackrell and Nugent also seem based implicitly on an aesthetic ideal which sees the dancers exerting uninterrupted, effortless control over their material. Their focus in this regard can be related back to an awareness of Maliphan's history as an ex-classical performer; but it also has broader implications in pointing up the problems of a critical paradigm, based on a consciousness of dance history and technique, which permits certain features of the work, such as the poem, to be ignored, and prevents the performers' struggle to retain control being seen as itself significant within the context of the drama¹⁷². *Unspoken* is interesting because it makes available an alternative reading whereby the work, notwithstanding Maliphan's intentions and the poverty of the verbal discourse in the programme notes and publicity, simultaneously functions on a visual, sensuous level, and as an allegory of human struggle against encompassing forces.

¹⁷¹ Elizabeth Old's (1996) review of a shorter version of the work pinpoint a similar tension between appreciating the dancers' technical virtuosity and the work's thematic: she describes *Unspoken* as "a mesmeric display of total body-control", but complains that it lacks structure and that the "enraptured applause" was "more in appreciation for the skill of the performers than for the crafting of the piece itself".

¹⁷² Writing in a national newspaper and a supplement to a specialist dance magazine respectively, Mackrell and Nugent are not necessarily wholly responsible, as individuals, for the views articulated in the published texts: these are also edited and adjusted to the particular context of the publication. The claims about how these reviews articulate conventional dance critical paradigms are still relevant, since other instances of dance writing operates under similar conditions, defined, in part, by the institutional environment which shapes the way editors (or critics writing within a particular genre with its own convention) may adjust the image of dance presented.

CHAPTER 6:
Daniel Larri  u / CCN de Tours: *Mobile ou le Miroir du Ch  teau*

6.1 "Un créateur très particulier [...] et en même temps très typique"¹⁷³

As the programme notes to *Mobile ou le Miroir du Château* are keen to stress, Daniel Larrieu is generally recognised as a key figure in the generation of French contemporary choreographers gaining prominence during the 1980s: "[p]endant les années 80, il en a partagé l'aventure, les combats, les espoirs, parfois les difficultés et les misères" (Louppe 1996)¹⁷⁴. Initially producing work of a light, humorous, somewhat eccentric character, Larrieu built an early reputation as a playful, ironic, even "dandyish" persona and player on the scene of "la jeune danse française", whose choreography tapped into a fashion for humorously provocative dance performance (Lambert 1983, Michel 1985). The many retrospective views of his *oeuvre* that have appeared in both national and specialist press suggest that, since the early years, Larrieu's artistic project has developed the depth and maturity expected of a reputable serious choreographer, highlighting certain core preoccupations that distinguish him from his contemporaries (Bossati 1987, Lascault et al. 1989, Frétard 1992, De Nussac 1992).

In particular, he has developed a reputation for a singular poetry of the body that plays on the physical sensations both felt and imagined by his dancers, and transmitted more or less circuitously to the audience¹⁷⁵. Much of his work takes as its theme human corporeality - as an experience or mode of being: its exploration is designed to enable momentary transcendence of the everyday, highly-mediatised modern world, returning the spectator to a universe of sensation, sensuous exploration and pleasure. Lascault (in Lascault et al. 1989: 14) remarks on "l'intérêt de Daniel Larrieu pour les jeux de surfaces, pour le sens tactile, pour les caresses, pour l'oeil qui se désire main", and Larrieu himself comments on his fascination with sensory surfaces and with a dance "liée au regard et à une activité [...] à un exercice de pratique sensorielle [où l']oeil est l'organe de la conversion" (Viva Magazine 1996). The subtle nuances of sensation take precedence in Larrieu's practice over the spectacular

¹⁷³ In Rugieri (1995), Larrieu is introduced as "un créateur très particulier dans cette génération et en même temps très typique de ce foisonnement et de cette imagination". There is a certain tension in discourses surrounding contemporary dance in France between an emphasis on the individuality of a particular figure in choreography, and the tracing of broad traits held in common by the different practitioners of "la jeune danse française". This creates a paradox, evident also in discourse about contemporary dance in Britain, in positing the diversity of choreographic identities as the unifying principle that constitutes an artistic movement (Guy 1991:18-20).

¹⁷⁴ Lambert (1983), Bossati (1987) and Lascault et al. (1989) characterise Larrieu's role in new French dance in a similar way.

and overtly expressive possibilities of the choreographed body, engendering a slowness and serenity in the movement dynamic. This, according to Lascault (in Lascault et al. 1989) comes to set Larrieu's dance language apart from the more fast and furious trend in contemporary work (its typical "agitation perpetuelle" and "activisme qui veut éblouir le spectateur", 14-15).

Although not overtly narrative or expressive in character, Larrieu's choreography is noted for its poetic suggestiveness. The sensorial focus opens on a metaphorical and metonymic dimension by manipulating the variety of elements of choreographic performance (lighting, costuming, set and music), as well as the qualities of movement material. The thematic resonance of Larrieu's refinement of materials is highlighted, for example in Bossati's (1987) account of the 1985 work, *Romance en Stuc*. Describing the sculpted wigs, marble-white make-up and costumes of floating silk that give dancers a statuesque aura, she claims that these elements "n'évoquaient pas seulement le ballet classique, ils disaient son ressort secret: le thème de l'amour impossible et son rapport symbolique à une idéologie de la désincarnation" (83). This thematic richness is the product of hints, partly obscure references and subtle shifts in the atmosphere of Larrieu's work, rather than the "discursive" explication of a content as such. The programme notes to *Mobile* cite this as a feature of the choreographer's practice. According to Louppe (1996), "rien n'est désigné, mais tout fait signe": the audience is offered a variety of significative elements around which its interpretative play can cluster, but never an unambiguous discursive thread or clearly delineated, logically coherent reading through the material of performance¹⁷⁶.

The emphasis on visual and aural elements in combination with movement material points up a further enduring preoccupation in Larrieu's choreography and discourse: the relation between dance and other arts. Already, the play of surfaces that interests him suggests a fine art sensibility in which the exploration of forms, textures and qualities assumes more importance than manipulation of their overtly expressive or narrative potential. In an early interview (Lambert 1983), Larrieu himself comments "[l]e dessein, l'image, la peinture [...] sont des choses tout à fait intégrés à ma vie. Le

¹⁷⁵ Larrieu comments in Viva Magazine (1996) that "l'expérience du corps du danseur revient au corps du spectateur. C'est un voyage troublant".

¹⁷⁶ The texts overlaid on the soundtrack in a work such as *Romance en stuc* (1985) or spoken by an on-stage actor in *Gravures* (1991) do tend to concretise the narrative significance of the choreographic material, although, in the former case, spoken text was only employed in parts of a much larger work. Even in these works, however, the verbal interventions furnish a further layer of poetic suggestion rather than delimiting a purely linear narrative which contains the dance within a specific meaning paradigm.

vêtement, la couture, le graphisme font partie de la danse et la danse se mélange à toutes ces formes de création". In the interview with Tazi (Lascault et al. 1989), he notes that music "influence le mouvement, dans la chair et dans l'émotion, même si, comme au cinéma, elle ne lui est pas directement liée" (92). And, in a televised interview (part of Rugieri 1995), he recognises how his formative influences helped open his work onto "des idées plus larges que la danse: c'était les arts plastique, c'était la peinture, la parole, c'était des choses qui étaient d'une capacité de relier l'être humain à son potentiel artistique". The production of *Mobile* embodies Larrieu's fascination with other arts and their relation to choreography by bringing together a contemporary composer (Thom Willems), designer (Jocelyn Cottencin) and photographer (Corinne Mercadier), as well as a costume designer (Christine Volland) and a lighting designer who is a seasoned Larrieu-collaborator (Françoise Michel).

Larrieu's preoccupation with the fine arts, together with his reputation as a "poet" of the body, contribute to his public image as a peculiarly refined choreographer. This image figures prominently in many of the previews and reviews (as well as the programme notes) of *Mobile*, pre-structuring response to the work itself (see below, p.217). Larrieu's reputation is also discussed in these terms in the documentation for the Ministry of Culture's press conference announcing policy developments in 1994 (Ministère de la Culture 1994). Appointed as artistic director of the Centre Chorégraphique National de Tours (CCNT) in December 1993, Larrieu's new institutional status is formalised and explained by the Ministry's comment on his projected strategy: under Larrieu, the CCN has undertaken to develop new works as well as preserving the Larrieu repertoire, to invite visiting choreographers and integrate fine arts practice with the dance centre's activities, to organise the "Festival Chorégraphique"¹⁷⁷ and pursue a series of audience development projects in the Tours region, notably in schools and universities. The document cites the opening of the work to new audiences as the "clé de voûte de cette entreprise artistique raffinée et spirituelle" (2).

The Ministry thus posits Larrieu's appointment as an opportunity to introduce new regional audiences to the *finesse* of his choreographic portfolio. It also obliquely draws a parallel between his artistic practice and the region of implantation. The Touraine is famous for its art and architecture, notably the Loire *châteaux* and the historical link

¹⁷⁷ The festival was established under the initiative of Larrieu's predecessor, Jean-Christophe Maillot, as a way of introducing modern dance forms to the regional public. Larrieu's

with the royal courts of the Renaissance that they embody; the *châteaux* stereotypically symbolise a world of refinement and sophistication, a harmonious integration between the different arts and between art and life. Larrieu's "entreprise artistique raffinée et spirituelle" matches the cultural and historical associations of the region; the gentleness and serenity of his works parallel the "douceur" stereotypically characteristic of the area's climate and *mode de vie*. Unlike his predecessor in Tours¹⁷⁸, but like many of the other CCN directors, Larrieu has no particular biographical or concrete artistic link with the region of implantation. Ministry discourse here makes an oblique connection as a way of justifying and emphasising the appropriateness of the appointment. And this is a theme taken up by dance critics in the national and specialist press, either on the occasion of interviews with Larrieu (Denis 1994) or with reference to particular works (Frétard 1995b, Peigne-Guily 1995, Louppe 1996¹⁷⁹). Insofar as Larrieu as an artist with a new regional role has to carve out a place for the CCN's work, the parallel between his practice and the area of implantation demonstrates one way in which this task is negotiated. But resting as it does on stereotypical notions of both the region and his choreographic practice, the national critics' and Ministry's discursive strategy suggest a problematic expectation that state-subsidised art will reflect an image, widely recognisable and even saleable, of the region in which it is produced, rather than embodying the experiences or preoccupations of the area's population¹⁸⁰.

As the title of this section of the Ministry document (1994) suggests, Larrieu's nomination is also part of a significant development in French contemporary dance history, namely the accession of a second wave of new dance choreographers to positions of institutional responsibility. Whereas the 1980s saw the *grands* of the dance scene (Maguy Marin, Jean-Claude Gallotta, Dominique Bagouet & Régine Chopinot) recognised as such through their appointment as heads of the new CCN structures, the early 1990s point up that "un certain nombre de chorégraphes, travaillant jusqu'alors dans le cadre de compagnies indépendantes, par la qualité de leur démarche artistique et leur capacité à rencontrer un large public, ont confirmé leurs aptitudes à assumer la direction d'outils plus importants". Larrieu's appointment is not simply testament to the

hyphenation of the festival's title again implies his perception of intimate links between, and shared preoccupations across, choreography and graphic arts.

¹⁷⁸ The former CCNT director, Jean-Christophe Maillot, grew up in Tours and (having performed and choreographed also elsewhere in Europe) ran a company that contributed to its theatre's general programme from 1983, prior to his appointment in 1987.

¹⁷⁹ See below, pp.205-206 and p.217 for further elaboration and discussion of this issue.

¹⁸⁰ C.f. the discussion in Chapter 3 above, pp.128-129 and p.134, regarding culture as an expression or reflection of national and regional identity.

maturing of his choreographic project. It also evidences a shift in favour of new dance within a decentralised cultural environment. The CCNT was originally established in 1987, under the leadership of Jean-Christophe Maillot, as a result of negotiations and a partnership funding agreement between local government and the Ministry of Culture. Maillot's appointment inspired hostile comment in the specialist contemporary dance press (see Bozzini 1987), critical of his work's neoclassicism and his institutional upstaging of the vital new contemporary dance scene. Bozzini (1987) notes the political and aesthetic conservatism of the Mayor of Tours, recognising that a municipality's willingness to enter into partnership with the central State is the motor behind the formation of such structures, rather than a drive to promote new dance nationwide. She complains that provocative new work will, in the current climate, always tend to be sidelined by local governments that cannot comprehend or appreciate its aesthetic and political values.

That Larrieu has, by 1993, acceded to the CCN directorship is indicative at once of the evolution of his work to focus on preoccupations acceptable in the regional context, and, perhaps, an increased willingness on the part of the local government structures to subsidise avant-garde dance, in spite of a limited existing audience. Maillot's six-year spell at Tours is recognised by Larrieu as important in initiating audience development projects, particularly in the company's work in relation to school children (Verrièle 1995). In the same interview, however, he notes the absence of specifically contemporary dance activity in the region and the lack of interest that the local population shows in even well-known contemporary choreographers, such as Philippe Découflé¹⁸¹. He recognises that "[i]l faut donc ouvrir un peu dans cette direction" even as he is keen to stress that "on peut rien imposer". Similarly, the interview with Denis (1994) shows Larrieu keenly aware of the ethical tensions (discussed in Chapter 3) between the cultural interests of regional populations, and artists' desire for the freedom and resources to develop in line with their own aesthetic preoccupations, while initiating new populations into the intricacies of their practice.

In this context, then, the decision to focus on the Château de Langeais as the organising principle of *Mobile ou le miroir du château* is institutionally as well as artistically significant. *Mobile* is Larrieu's first full-length new work since his company's

¹⁸¹ "Mais le public de Tours n'est pas habitué à la danse contemporaine. On n'a pas rempli la salle avec Découflé; je pense que c'est pourtant quelqu'un qui draine du monde sur son nom" (Verrièle 1995). As the orchestrator of the opening ceremony of the Albertville Winter Olympics (1992) and the author of a number of dance films, Découflé's career has been relatively highly mediated.

implantation as the CCN de Tours¹⁸². The Château de Langeais, situated 22km west of the City's centre on the Loire, is a landmark of the region. Both the booklet accompanying the production¹⁸³ and the programme notes to the Paris performance describe Larrieu and his composer-collaborator Thom Willems, while touring the region, being particularly struck by the aspect of Langeais, "une construction royale restée fidèle à l'image du château fort flanqué de tours qui symbolise fortement le pouvoir" (Barré 1995:9). Although not one of the better-known châteaux, the choice of such a landmark as the theme for a contemporary dance work embodies an endeavour to inflect with local colour (and provide a "hook" for a local audience in relation to) Larrieu's creative practice. But it also, precisely by not centring on one of the more obvious great houses of the area (such as Blois, Chambord or Chenonceau), hints at the refined idiosyncrasy of Larrieu's whole artistic project¹⁸⁴. Rather than choose a château better known amongst the population of Tours and the large numbers of tourists from outside of the region, he avoids the obvious clichés by selecting Langeais.

The focus on Langeais in *Mobile* brings the connection between the fine arts and contemporary dance to the fore. Louppe's (1996) programme notes maintain that both Larrieu and the composer, Willems, "s'y sont reconnus", their enthusiasm for architecture being reawakened by the style and invention of the château. Not only do these comments already propose a reading of *Mobile* as a set of variations on architectural themes, they also imply a relation between contemporary present and historical past in artistic practice typical of the way the French cultural policy environment negotiates the heritage / avant-garde opposition¹⁸⁵. Thus the cultural heritage, here embodied in the château de Langeais, furnishes a living site that provides inspiration for, rather than subsuming, current practice, while allowing contemporary artists to legitimate their work with reference to an established canon of

¹⁸² His previous company, Astrakan, was disbanded in 1993, after which he choreographed for other groups including the Jeune Ballet de France and the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris (Denis 1994).

¹⁸³ released to the press and intended as part of the general initiative towards the "sensibilisation du public" (Larrieu 1999)

¹⁸⁴ Larrieu himself (in Rugiéri 1995) rationalises his decision in purely artistic terms, commenting on the exterior aspect of the structure as "une vraie forteresse" balanced by the aesthetic delicacy and finesse of the interior decor. His claims imply a link with the play around fundamental structure, elaboration and ornamentation within and between the different scenic and choreographic elements of *Mobile*.

¹⁸⁵ Refurbishment of France's "patrimoine" is often governed by a principle of re-appropriating the past in the modern context rather than simply preserving the heritage in a hypertrophied state: this is evident in the efforts to integrate new architecture with, or adjoin it to, existing structures, as in the courtyard of the Louvre (Paris), for example, or the Abbaye Royale de Fontevraud. Such an approach aligns with the emphasis on avant-garde creation alongside the

past cultural achievement. Louppe (1996) certainly tends to rationalise *Mobile* in this way, with frequent references to the historical legacy Larrieu and his collaborators are posited as inheriting: thus, for example, Willems' music for *Mobile* "réactive des instances issues de la polyphonie d'un Guillaume Dufay, autre architecture, sonore celle-ci, contemporaine, ou peu s'en faut, de la construction de Langeais"¹⁸⁶; *Mobile* as a whole has parallels with the work of sculptor, Jochen Gerz, and the architect, Tschumi¹⁸⁷. Such references contribute to a vision of Larrieu as an artist of canonical importance.

The fine art dimension of Larrieu's work, and of *Mobile* in particular, is also significant with respect to his audience development mission in the Tours area. Vernay's (1995) review of studio performances cites Larrieu's claim that his project must be to "redonner une identité culturelle à la ville en adoptant la technique du remembrement": Tours, he declares is "très riche culturellement mais tout est dispersé, clôturé" and in need of a point of focus. In drawing together a diversity of art forms, *Mobile* may also draw in the area's existing arts audiences, despite their lack of familiarity with contemporary dance. Similarly, the decision to première *Mobile* in the gardens of the Musée des Beaux Arts in Tours¹⁸⁸ claims proximity between the fine arts and dance in terms of creative practice and audience interest, as well as seeking to anchor the CCN's practice in the regional environment through site-specific performance. And yet the work must not remain so site-specific as to preclude national and international touring, since CCN companies are also expected to maintain a high profile on the national circuit (see Verrière 1994). Again, this gives rise to certain tensions within such a company's artistic practice, the implications of which are explored further below (pp.216-218).

The programming of *Mobile* as part of the Théâtre de la Ville 1995-6 season demonstrates that, while they have a new regional role, Larrieu and company are still

national heritage which has been a characteristic of French state cultural policy since the 1950s (see Chapter 3 above, pp.117-118).

¹⁸⁶ According to the press booklet, Willems' score is partly based on research in relation to three "father figures" of Renaissance polyphony: Dufay (1400-1474), Jean Ockeghem (1420-1495) and Josquin des Prés (1440-1521), although the *Figaro* review notes that "il est bien difficile de deviner les influences des trois grands maîtres de la polyphonie" in the music accompanying the dance in performance (Sirvin 1995).

¹⁸⁷ It is noted also that Willems is William Forsythe's composer-collaborator of choice, encouraging us to view Larrieu's artistic status as equivalent to Forsythe's.

¹⁸⁸ Larrieu notes (in Denis 1994) that he is following the lead of Maillot in this respect, who "pour des questions de financement" used the gardens as a performance platform.

recognised as actors on the national scene¹⁸⁹. The theatre was influential, particularly in the 1980s, in providing a stable performance platform (in the form of a year-long dance / drama season) for *la nouvelle danse française*. The auditorium is the largest of its kind in Paris consistently to programme contemporary dance works, and inclusion in one its seasons is considered a mark of status (Frétard & Schmitt 1995). Louppe's (1996) programme notes to the Théâtre de la Ville performance are still, however, keen to stress the link between the Tours region and Larrieu's practice as it has materialised in the CCNT: in her view, the latter is a structure "dont Larrieu a fait bein autre chose qu'une institution: un lieu de travail, de réflexion, de rencontre, d'accueil, tant pout le public que pour la vie de la danse". Her utopian vision of a regional population and professional dance company exploring together imaginative and contemplative dimension of the body in movement preludes the exposure of *Mobile* to the Parisian audiences.

¹⁸⁹ *Mobile* was also shown in other venues in France including the Théâtre de Chartres (April 1995) and Les Gémeaux de Sceaux (one of the Scènes Nationales) (January 1996). These venues and the Théâtre de la Ville are listed as partners in the coproduction of *Mobile*, with the CCN de Tours.

6.2 Watching *Mobile*¹⁹⁰

As suggested above (p.200, 205-206), the programme notes to the Théâtre de la Ville performance (Louppe 1996) locate Larrieu's work historically (as integral to the flourishing of dance in the 1980s) and canonically (emphasising the fine art dimension by focusing on the collaborations with composer, painter and designer as well as on the work's references to the artistic and architectural heritage). In so doing, Louppe proposes a series of interpretative principles through which to view the performance. Firstly, the theme of architecture looms large and architectural metaphors are employed to characterise both the musical and choreographic composition: while the "forme du château s'absente" from the dance as it appears here, the play of angles, planes and other spatial elements recreate the architectural structure in the performance arena. Louppe emphasises the poetic character of Larrieu's approach, the essential ambiguity of his vocabulary, playing on the paradoxical notion that he is here devising an "alphabet corporel d'un récit indicible". The spectator is implicitly advised not to attempt to decipher clear narrative or thematic sense from the work, but to enjoy the constant circulation of possible meanings of which the movement allows only fleeting glimpses.

Despite the "advice" embedded in the programme notes, the notes themselves assume a prescriptive role in relation to audience interpretation, by virtue of the sheer quantity and detail of the information they convey. We are told how to think of Larrieu historically and institutionally; how the work was conceived; what the thematic focus of the creative process and the title is (Langeais, the château of which this work presents itself as the mirror); what influences and structural principles the music employs; how the various stage elements (painting, sculpture, lighting) combine to form a complete and harmonious work of art; what kinds of spatial and gestural devices the choreography will use in creating its own architecture of the body. The spectator who has read the notes before the performance responds to the work from under the weight of what is, in effect, an essay on *Mobile* and its significance. Such a lengthy description overloads the spectator (or, on re-reading, her/his memory of *Mobile*) by furnishing what seems to be an exhaustive account – even as Louppe's words decry the possibility of this – of what the work is about.

¹⁹⁰ at the Théâtre de la Ville performance, Paris, on 8th May 1996, one of a series of four performances here (8th to 11th May), 11 months after the première in Tours. The tour of the work continued, following the Paris performances, into 1997. On the French contemporary scene it is normal for works from high profile companies to receive exposure over a longer period than in Britain.

The title, meanwhile, is more subtly suggestive of thematic resonance that will echo as *Mobile* proceeds. As in English, the French word "mobile" can be used as an adjective to mean the potential to move or be moved (of a person, object or army, and also in French of a event), or as a noun to refer to a decorative structure where elements are suspended and able to move freely on the impulse of air currents. The French word also has more obscure meanings: in mechanics, "tout corps qui se meut ou est mû, considéré dans son mouvement", and the general sense, now obsolete, of "ce qui fournit une impulsion, un mouvement" or the motivation which determines an agent to act (Robert 1993). In French, the etymological link between the adjective "mobile" and the noun "mobilier" (= furniture, the collection of moveable objects in a human environment) is also evident and significant here because the "mobilier pour la danse" designed by Jocelyn Cottencin will play a prominent role in the work as a whole.

Each of these meanings or associations comes into play as the work unfolds. As the stage lights are brought up, the first image to emerge - a rectangle suspended in the air above the stage floor (created by localised lighting reflecting off an obliquely angled plane of one piece of "stage furniture") - immediately suggests itself as one of the suspended elements of a mobile. This association hovers as the two female performers just in front of the object are revealed, the movements of one (which play on the suspension of weight from different points in the body) apparently motivated by the gestures of the other, who circles her partner intent on the effects produced. In the first few seconds of the work, then, it becomes clear that dancers and objects will cohabit this stage space as movable elements within a fixed structure (emphasised by the division of the stage floor into equal squares), as the embellishments enlivening the regularity of the frames the surrounding structure provides. The dancer motivating the actions of her partner also embodies the notion of a guiding intelligence, orchestrating these elements in a coherent whole – the current of air that wafts the elements of the mobile or the puppeteer-choreographer who controls and structures the dancers' movement (as the dancer's hands seem to be pulling imaginary strings).

The duet also hints at an imaginative dimension by stirring childhood memories of mobiles and, even, of fairy-tales. The controlling dancer's actions concretise in a movement motif that reappears frequently throughout the work, namely a performer clicking her/his fingers to "wake" another dancer or stir her/his colleagues into action. The motif is suggestive of the sleeping beauty story in which a princess is awoken from

a long sleep at the heart of an enchanted forest. This is, in fact, described in the review by Sirvin (1995) as an image furnished by dancers in rehearsal to generate movement material, and knowing this enables the associative link to be made. Whether it would be made on the basis of the semiotic fabric of the movement material, title and programme notes alone is unsure. There are other moments in the work where a gesture, movement or position implies something beyond its formal configuration or spatial structural significance: a dancer standing on bent legs with torso angled over, arms bent also but one arm raised, with the head looking out from under the raised forearm, leaves an impression of a character emerging from a secret place, or again, perhaps, from the undergrowth of an enchanted forest. If, as seems likely, the spectator's image of medieval / renaissance castle is informed on a subliminal level by the pictures in children's books, the work (as long as it makes clear the thematic focus on Langeais) enables a process of association which may open on a fairy-tale world. Whether this interpretative possibility is taken up will depend partly on the extent to which the spectator is charmed by general ambience of this opening section into stepping over this imaginative threshold¹⁹¹.

The focus on the duet is disrupted first by the entry of other dancers, then by the duo itself breaking up and the succession of a more dispersed configuration of performers, who form and dissolve groups and movement phrases in a continuous flow of action. Throughout, but certainly in this first section, changes in both the music and stage lighting are crucial to the shifts in the work's atmosphere. As the lights change, moreover, a variety of colours emanate from the photograph (of a series of concrete blocks, softened by the shades of paint blurring their contours), sometimes filling the stage space with golden, reddish hues, at other moments with dusky purples and mauves, or harsher greys and black. The music, also, moves between strange brightness (the sharp, resonant notes at various pitches which accompany certain of the dancers' gestures, like, for example, the clicking of fingers), more sombre, threatening rumbling and snatches of melody or "medieval" drum-based rhythm. This, too, then contributes to the character of the environment inhabited by the performers, which appears as constantly in flux. The play of the movement in the space also affects the general ambience, through changes in the dynamic as well as alternating between expansiveness and minute detail. This happens, for example, with the shift from the intense focus on the gestures of the opening duet to a more dispersed sequence

¹⁹¹ On this issue, see also below, p.216-217.

where arms are swung, dancers suspend with their whole bodies before tipping off balance, and run or jump across the stage.

A notable recurring pattern in the flux is a “classicist” sequence using balletic shapes and steps in an evolving geometry of regular forms. While drawing from the classical vocabulary, the dance in such moments also transforms it with baroque flourishes and unexpected, idiosyncratic embellishments: a *tendu en avant* unfolds with flick of the leg forward as it rotates in the hip socket from a turned-in to a turned-out orientation; the straight extension of the arms at 45° to the sides of the body is disrupted when the elbows bend sharply. Whilst reminiscent of the classical vocabulary, such movement also refers to baroque and renaissance dance forms, their simple regularity and dependence on an upright, stable, even “civil” body. A reference to architecture in general is evident here (the dance constructs itself and its moments of abandon around a strong structural base), as well as to the Château de Langeais in particular: the movement patterns combine the strength and simplicity associated with the building’s fortress-like aspect with moments of finesse, refinement and playfulness that temper the severity of the façade. Similarly, both the dancers’ general attitude to the movement material, performed in a controlled, confident yet understated manner, introduce a dimension of irony amidst the strictures of the choreographic patterns. As the work proceeds, these ironic, “human” touches proliferate, softening the geometry of forms: suddenly, in the midst of a complex sequence of pseudo-classical steps, the dancers will shrug their shoulders and run to another part of the stage space; flexed feet appear where one would expect the line of a straight leg to extend through the arch of the foot; the classical line of the arms in fifth position will be broken by a sharp angle at the wrist, allowing the hand to flop down; a dancer will face another, in apparent seriousness, until she raises her hands above her partner’s head and flutters them frenetically.

The dancers’ relation to one another and the stage furniture is also playful. Approximately seven minutes into the work, five dancers meet at centre stage in a dance of small jumps and dodges, moving backwards and forwards as if goading each other on in a game of tag. The image consolidates a general impression of playfulness and gentle irony that counters the severity of some of the work’s structures and forms. But it also suggests mutual participation in a common action. While there is physical contact between performers as the piece progresses, its texture suggests cooperation and collaboration rather than domination or manipulation. The individual dancers apparently lend themselves willingly to the architectural orchestration of elements; they

participate in action with its own dynamic transcending the performers' subjectivities¹⁹². The relation between dancers and the objects, littered at various points around the stage, also combines respectfulness, playfulness and symbiosis. Although they may be dragged to other parts of the stage, adapted (by being angled or positioned) to a functional purpose (they become seats, chairs or perches), they are not manhandled or abused, contributing to the sense that there is a balance and harmony between human beings, objects and their common environment.

If this description has, after the account of the opening duet, centred on general impressions of *Mobile*, rather than tracing a linear thread through the work as it evolves, this is because it is difficult to discern within the flux, certainly to hold in memory, moments or stages in the performance which might constitute events in an unfolding narrative or discourse. There is no obvious thread of development around which to construct a narrative reading, even if the expectation that this might emerge weighs heavy on the spectator viewing *Mobile*¹⁹³. A clear tripartite division between sections of 20 minutes duration is evident and, initially, it seems that this embodies a sunset-dusk-darkness pattern: in section one, a lone dancer is left to perform a solo in a rectangle of red light which draws from the photography on the backdrop a correspondingly intense glow, evocative of sunset; but this reading is also influenced by the knowledge that the work was originally performed in the open air, in the evening, so that the shifting atmosphere of the dance was framed by that of the wider, natural environment. The ambience of the dancer's solo is quickly dispersed as the lights brighten again, other dancers enter and the flux of movement resumes its more high-spirited dynamic. The expectation that dusk and night will follow is therefore not fulfilled, or at least the pattern is disrupted so as to render this interpretative paradigm problematic, even if the second section does indeed begin in a more sombre atmosphere where the darkness of the stage is pierced by a shaft of (moon?)light emanating from upstage right.

Another memorable action sequence of the first section (approximately 7 minutes into the piece) also proposes a theme that seems initially capable of focusing the work. This involves the dancers' importation of an empty square frame (approximately 75 x 75 cm) that is manipulated, being passed from individual to individual, to highlight different parts of the body. In this seamless flow of action, visually arresting images of

¹⁹² The sense of group is reinforced by the homogeneity of the costumes - even when some dancers change, donning tops or dresses of different styles and colours, a basic simplicity and functionality overrides the differences.

the fabric of movement construction (body parts in a variety of positions) provide momentary points of focus for the spectator's attention. Thus the head and shoulders, torso or pelvis of one performer will be highlighted in portrait; or, in a typically playful human touch, a backside is presented in the enclosed picture space that the frame creates. The irony of moments like the latter engenders, through the movement, a reflection on portraiture by subverting traditional conceptions of its "proper" content. Certainly, overall, the sequence brings the fine art theme to the fore, exploring the conventions and limits of the framing device by rendering it mobile. On account of its faculty of revealing the body parts out of which the dance is constructed, the frame also carries the association of a draughtsman's tool, used to focus attention on particular features or the spatial relations of the whole architectural design.

The framing theme is continued on a broader level in the second section of the work. The defined black box of the stage space, in which all the action of the first twenty minutes was confined, is broken by the shaft of white light coming from offstage, upstage right, which casts long shadows downstage left of the furniture littered on the floor. This is the first time that the audience is given a sense of a world outside of the designated performance arena. As the shaft of illumination picks out the lighting rig on the left hand side of the stage, the spectator becomes conscious of the theatre and its mechanics as framing devices¹⁹⁴. A few minutes later, the cyclorama is illuminated sufficiently to reveal that the photograph on the backdrop is also surrounded by a black frame, in the shape of a proscenium arch, again drawing attention to the contiguity between visual art and performance in their capacity to focus perception on a clearly delineated and located space, replete with content. This thematic strand of the work, once noted, encourages a reassessment of other elements: the stage floor's division into square segments also creates a series of frames for the floor patterns the dancers' movement follows; the variously coloured rectangles of light, which appear at different moments in the work, frame performance spaces within the wider arena of the stage. By self-referentially pointing up the shifting perimeters of the movement material, the work reflects on art and its boundaries, on the artistic possibility of creating an enclosed world, and also on the perceptual impact of that enclosure being breached. The framing images can also be related back to the thematic focus on the Château de

¹⁹³ see also below, pp.219-220

¹⁹⁴ Similarly, in Section 3, there is a moment in the "bal de cour" where the lights around, as well as those focused on, the performance space are bright enough to reveal the three walls surrounding the stage and suddenly point up the fact that the performers are just that, dancers on a stage, rather than agents in the fictional world of the work.

Langeais, of which the walls delimit a complex network of inside spaces - rooms and corridors – and also, outside, two sides of a square courtyard and garden.

The theme of framing is not, however, foregrounded throughout and is not so persistently evident as to unify the work under this single (albeit multiply resonant) idea. It is disrupted and overridden, as the work proceeds, by other concerns and the general flux and dispersal. Section 2, as suggested above, does begin in more sombre mood and, as the pieces of stage furniture (moved into view by the dancers) accumulate on stage, there is a sense of the objects encroaching on the spatial freedom and mobility of the performers. And yet this shift in atmosphere is not sustained for long enough to dominate the second section and contrast markedly with the first. While more frenetic in its moments of abandon, the movement material retains a similar dynamic to that of the opening twenty minutes. And, although there are echoes of section 1 in the vocabulary and structural organisation of section two (the momentary highlighting of particular groups and solo dancers amidst the multiple displacements of the ten performers), it remains difficult to trace a logical progression through the work.

This changes with the third section (briefly foreshadowed about 34 minutes into the work), which opens on a courtly dance by all ten performers, arranged in parallel diagonal lines from upstage right to downstage left, accompanied by a regular rhythm establishing itself in the score for the first time. The regularity of the musical composition correlates with the emphatic shift to formality and regularity in the dance. The two lines of performers cross, interweave, form in pairs that elaborate a couple dance in unison and then return to the group set. This seamless flow of action transfers the geometry of some individual movement sequences in section 1 to the group as a whole and the clear floor patterns it traces, again in reference to baroque or renaissance dance forms associated with the historical period and world of the châteaux¹⁹⁵. The spatial and thematic “sense” these group dance patterns make comes as a relief after the fragmentation of the preceding sections, in the same way as the sustained rhythm of the musical composition provides relief from the earlier dissonance and apparent lack of structure in the score. In this section, the wild embellishments and

¹⁹⁵ There is also here a subtle manipulation and subversion of a recent trend in French dance and contemporary performance: the fashion for reconstructing and recreating baroque opera and dance. Larrieu’s historicist foray, however, is pure and simple in form, focusing on the lines of the body and the manipulation of space through movement rather than the “peripheral” opulence of costume, music and stage environment that accompanies the reconstructions by many of his contemporaries.

dispersed qualities of movement and music (although recalled towards the end) have been controlled by the enduring strength of a now plainly evident architectural structure.

There is also an edge of irony in this transformation (underlined by the mock seriousness of the dancers' facial expressions), as movement in its simplest, most everyday form takes pride of place over the elaborate complexity of dance vocabulary. The courtly set dance evolves into series of walks, in unison, where the dancers form lines (between five and ten dancers long) and fan across the stage space. The lines alter in number, orientation and length; dancers along the length of the line take increasingly small steps to give the impression of the formation sweeping the space, or to allow it to turn around a particular point; but the performers do not change the tempo of the walk, despite dancers breaking off to run around the stage, recall snatches of movement vocabulary of the previous sections, and step into the path of the advancing line. The walks and their patterns are embellished (about 50 minutes into the piece) by a *port de bras* reminiscent of the classicist movement of section 1, and then dissolve as each dancer takes up a position on stage to perform a sequence on the spot, in unison with his/her colleagues. For a time, small steps maintain the rhythm of the section as the arms extend and sweep and the torso angles over. Suddenly, there is chaos again as the unison is broken, duets and solos form and various movement motifs of the work are reiterated in a frenzy of action. But after a brief stillness (again broken by one dancer clicking her fingers) and a sudden dispersal to the two sides of the stage (lined throughout section 3 by the furniture banished from the centre of the stage space), the courtly dance and patterned walks resume. The lines continue to march through the space as the music falls away and the lights fade.

6.3 Threshold to “un univers tout de douceur abstraite” or to “l’ennui d’une histoire qui s’éternise”?¹⁹⁶

Despite the absorbing and hypnotic effect of the final section of *Mobile*, it remains difficult to engage fully with, or articulate a coherent impression of, the work overall. Throughout, one waits for some “story” or consistent thematic thread to weave itself into the work’s fabric; one expects to be charmed by and involved in an imaginative universe with its own peculiar atmosphere. But, despite the dramatic impact of certain images and sequences, the spectator remains generally detached, self-conscious and dissatisfied with a lasting impression of flux and fragmentation. This is not to claim that all dance should allow the spectator to enter wholly into a world transcending everyday experience. But *Mobile* seems to promise this opportunity and then not deliver it, leaving one bemused as to how to characterise and articulate a response.

Given that the première of *Mobile* (in its complete form) took place in the open air, in the well maintained and manicured formal garden of the *Musée des Beaux Arts* in Tours, it may be in the work’s transplantation from this setting to the more neutral space of the theatre that its atmosphere and magic become diffused. Certainly, Peigne-Guily’s evocative description of the première (1995) suggests that the garden environment and the gradual encroachment of darkness is key to what she characterises as the strong impact of *Mobile*: as “[l]a nuit se fait plus noire et le froid plus vif, les accents grinçants d’un violoncelle engourdissent l’esprit”; the dancers “appellent la nuit [et] créent un univers tout de douceur abstraite”. Performers’ bodies and the design elements harmonise into “un même ballet sous les étoiles” in a strangely peaceful ambience that permeates the spectator’s state of mind as well as the dancers’ relation to their materials. Similarly, Pailley’s (1995) review remarks that, unlike some dance work that has difficulty moving into the open air, this piece is “en parfaite adéquation avec la nature environnante”. In this view, the spectator is, first and foremost, charmed by the beauty of the garden space and the backdrop of nightfall. Both Peigne-Guily (1995) and Pailley (1995) reflect a latent power of the work, in this particular setting, to transport the spectator into its own self-contained and magical imaginative world.

Not all critics commenting on the première are charmed, however. Frétard (1995b) notes that the opening of the work, in particular its movement vocabulary, allows the audience to enter an imaginative and self-reflective space, as if stepping over the

¹⁹⁶ C.f. the reviews of *Mobile* by Peigne-Guily (1995), Frétard (1995b) and Gicquel (1995),

threshold of Langeais itself: “[é]lan de jambe pris à l’arrière, torsion, et jeté tendu en avant portent les marches, qui progressivement nous ferons [sic] franchir le miroir, pénétrer à l’intérieur du château, donc de nous-mêmes”. But then that illusion is broken as tedium, gratuity in the movement vocabulary and a failure to emphasise, or build in, moments of focus for the spectator contribute to her/his discomfort. In Frétard’s reading, Willems’ composition at once disperses the coherence and musicality of the dancing bodies, and flattens their dynamics, while the photography and the costumes appear incidental to the work’s action and focus¹⁹⁷. Frétard’s review indicates that her disappointment is compounded by the high expectations she, and many other seasoned dance spectators, have of Larrieu’s work. She begins by enumerating his successes and suggesting that at last, in Tours, he has found a working environment congenial to his choreographic style (“une region qui s’accorde à la sérénité qu’il aspire à vehicular dans sa danse”). With Frétard, the expectation builds for her readers that that this new work, product of the new, conducive working environment, will consolidate and develop further the refinement and poetry for which Larrieu has become famous. While Peigne-Guily (1995) sees this happen in *Mobile*, Frétard does not, as the work fails to engage the sensibilities she expects to exercise when watching dance à la Larrieu.

Pailley, Peigne-Guily and Frétard all write in a national critical forum (the former for a specialist dance magazine, the latter two for national newspapers), an institution in which choreographic history and convention play a role in setting the parameters for reception. Conventional expectations are disappointed in Frétard’s case, as the charm of the work’s atmosphere fails to take hold, whereas both Pailley and Peigne-Guily declare that *Mobile* does furnish an engaging, sensuous play of surfaces, textures, qualities and atmosphere, with the ambient environment going some way towards charming the spectator into a corresponding state of appreciation. Another writer in a different specialist dance magazine also offers a positive evaluation, but bases this on a reading articulated around the more conceptual concerns that Larrieu’s fine art sensibilities throw up. For Martin C (1995), like parts of the reading proposed above (pp.208-215), the work is a self-referential “réflexion rêveuse sur certains problèmes parcourant l’histoire de l’art”, including the relation between group / mass and the

discussed below.

¹⁹⁷ Interestingly, Frétard does not comment on the “mobilier pour la danse”, even though this interferes more directly with the dance than either the backdrop photograph or the minimal costumes. This links perhaps to the fact that her interpretation centres on the dance as evocation of the Langeais interior: the object / sculptures blend unnoticed into the background, are literally part of the furniture of that interior space.

individual, between structure and ornamentation, as well as the notions of framing, space and volume. He unifies the work under this interpretative principle, exploring its various elements in relation to this core thematic, even if, at one point, he implies that the work tends to disrupt this paradigm: turning to the final section, he notes that its significance is “moins évidente” with respect to the reading he has proposed.

The responses of these writers, however varied, demonstrate that they all have resources to deal with semiotic dispersal of the work: the charm of its atmosphere and its harmonisation with the movement material are bound to be more in evidence if one expects *Mobile* to reproduce the sophisticated qualitative subtlety characteristic of Larrieu's creative practice in general. Similarly, knowledge of his fine art preoccupations and, even, core issues in formalist art, predispose the spectator and critic towards a reading of the work as self-referential. The lengthy programme notes are presumably designed to provide the spectator with a series of possible reference points and sufficient background knowledge to allow an interpretation to take shape. And yet, as suggested above (p.208), the weight of detail included in the notes may function to overload, rather than inspiring the spectator, in stripping the search for meaning of its autonomy.

Criticism from the regional press, meanwhile, which does not draw on the same resources as its national counterpart, remains more negative in its appraisal. Gicquel (1995), for example, judges *Mobile* on the basis of conventional aesthetic criteria, resistant to contemporary experiment and manipulation. For Gicquel, the movement material is disordered, the choreography affectedly assuming the unstructured character and raw edges of a rough draft and drawing on too great a diversity of styles. He associates this feature of *Mobile* with contemporary mode of Larrieu's artistry, which, like the piercing dissonance of Willems' score, jars with the work's purported historical reference point: “[l]e château de Langeais qui, paraît-il, inspire cette création, ne possède pas la modernité du chorégraphe et les grosse murailles ne répercuteront jamais l'écho lancinant de la musique de Tom [sic] Willems”. Gicquel's assessment, though aesthetically reactionary in its obvious distaste for *Mobile*, does draw attention to problematic character of the score: being both uncompromising in its contemporaneity and difficult to ignore, the music, one suspects, is likely to interfere with the appreciation of a number of spectators, even if the gentler approach of the choreography does not.

As Gicquel's account proceeds, however, it becomes clear that the key stumbling block is not the contemporary "feel" of the work so much as its apparent lack of narrative, thematic or emotional development (the dancers are "des acteurs d'une histoire trop abstraite pour figurer dans quelques registres très émotionnels") and general tedium: ("cette histoire s'éternise"). While he would like to recall two or three moments standing in relief from the "composition monotone", the general impression of disorder and lack of structure overrides and erases their memory (c.f. above, p.212-214). Other reviews in the regional press also highlight the problems that the work's lack of overall focus creates. *Paris Normandie* (1995) centres on the work's minimalism which, it is implied, already leaves the spectator bereft of the usual reference points: the work begins "au degree zero du spectaculaire" and proceeds "dans la pureté dépouillée de cet univers minimum". This is compounded, however, by the expectation of development which is never fulfilled: "[o]n pressent qu'il va se passer quelque chose. Mais il ne se passé finalement rien". The experience of viewing instills a sense of serenity and relaxation, but also disappointment and "l'arrière-goût, légèrement amer, d'avoir passé tout à côté de quelque chose de grand". The disappointment here stems from not from prior expectations of Larrieu so much as the promise of coherent and focused evolution that the fabric of the work embodies and then breaks. The journalist in *Le Populaire du Centre* (1997) proposes an alternative interpretation of the work which sees the relation between dancers, their environment and the surrounding objects as one of struggle in an atmosphere of ruin and abandon; but, like his colleagues in other publications, notes the difficulty of sustaining this kind of interpretative engagement when Larrieu "réinvente à chaque fois son spectacle". These constant shifts in dynamic and focus become tiresome, the movement material taking too long and being too "axé [...] sur l'esthétisme" to make significant points effectively. And again, a sensation of disappointment results.

The positive reviews of *Mobile* are such by virtue of inscribing identification and engagement of the spectator with the atmosphere of the work. Where this has occurred, it seems, the spectator/interpreter is content to allow attention to wander over the diverse collection of moments and themes that the work incorporates (Peigne-Guily 1995 and Pailley 1995), or to organise (however tenuously) impressions around a theme which catches the spectator's interest (Martin C 1995). In the more critical articles (Frétard 1995b, Gicquel 1995 and his colleagues in *Paris Normandie* 1995 and *Le Populaire du Centre* 1997), the spectator has decidedly not been swept away by the work's "magic", or intrigued by its thematic content. They suggest that even if the work (like Larrieu's practice in general) is more interested in the play of surfaces, textures,

shifts in atmosphere and dynamics than in developing a coherent scenario through movement, music, light and visuals, it is difficult to sustain audience interest through this route. In *Mobile*, the constant shifts in dynamic and focus paradoxically engender a sense of dynamic monotony, unrelieved by a clear chain of thematic association or narrative significance however non-literal.

In Denis (1994), Larrieu comments on the way he himself likes to watch dance: “[q]uand j’assiste à un spectacle, je m’y promène, mon regard s’y balade [...] La plupart des spectacles de danse sont conçus pour que l’on regarde ce qu’il est nécessaire de voir. Moi, je regarde ailleurs car j’ai besoin de désobéissance, de liberté” (25). This description of his own practice as a spectator parallels his vision of his own choreographic practice: the spectator should develop a wandering yet attentive perceptual engagement, which in his view does not require a specific narrative or thematic focus to furnish an interesting or arresting experience. Yet, the critical, discursive frames and conceptual paradigms associated with them, including those governing my own reading, have difficulty handling the embodiment of this vision in *Mobile*. This work is conceived differently to choreographic practice that clearly defines what it is necessary to watch, and yet it disappoints precisely by not highlighting a thematic core out of which the significance of its diverse aspects might emanate. It is as if some of Larrieu’s spectators (here exemplified in the reviews examined) also demand the freedom he himself requires when watching dance, but for us, the situation is reversed: he wants the opportunity to look around, to look elsewhere, to explore peripheries; we want to return to a central point that controls and makes sense of the dispersal and fragmentation.

CHAPTER 7:
Hervé Robbe / Le Marietta Secret: *Id.*

7.1 “L’un des parcours les plus étonnants de ce groupe des émancipés”¹⁹⁸

Published by the specialist dance magazine, *Les Saisons de la Danse*, the final part in Verrièle’s retrospective panorama of French new dance focuses on what he terms “la plus jeune garde” of the form (Verrièle 1996). This third generation of French contemporary choreographers are, he claims, more difficult to characterise than their predecessors: their universe is more complex and differentiated, and they work from such a diverse set of influences that it is difficult to trace broad lines of development, historically and artistically, across their various practices. Many, Verrièle states, have worked as performers with major companies and contemporary dance institutions, but have struck out in the previous few years to evolve their own choreographic languages and worlds: either because circumstances have jeopardised the continuity of their performing careers¹⁹⁹ or because their artistic interests were difficult to contain within the dancer’s role. Amongst the latter group, the choreographer Hervé Robbe is singled out as worthy of special comment. Interrupting architectural school to pursue his dance interests, Robbe trained in modern and classical techniques at Mudra (Maurice Béjart’s school in Belgium), then performed with the Ballet du Nord, Karine Saporta and Philippe Decouflé, before founding his own company, Le Marietta Secret, in 1988. While his institutional and media profile have been high since that date, the nature of Robbe’s choreographic practice explains, according to Verrièle, the exceptional character of his professional pathway: “sa danse est déjà très mûre, ambitieuse et sans complexe, offrant une exigence de fini, de propreté et de sérieux qui rompt avec les démarches initiales des aînés de la generation Bagouet” (1996: 50). Eschewing the expressionist and humoristic affectations of his predecessors, Robbe is, in this view, preoccupied with the complexity of the dancing body, with the intricacies of developing highly polished movement material and stage performances around serious artistic concerns.

Verrièle’s characterisation of Robbe’s career as a “parcours étonnant” is justified by the institutional interest his work has aroused since the late 1980s. While one might expect several of the first and second generations of French contemporary choreographers to rise relatively quickly to positions of institutional importance, newly-created in the dance scene of the 1980s, far fewer of this third wave have been able to

¹⁹⁸ See Verrièle (1996), p.50.

¹⁹⁹ A number of the young generation of artists cited are ex-members of the Bagouet company: Dominique Bagouet, a key figure in the first wave of new French dance, died of AIDS in the early 1990s, leaving a large number of dancers, with whom he worked closely, to sustain his repertoire (through the *Carnets Bagouet*) and develop their own choreographic pathways.

trace similar routes with comparable speed²⁰⁰. Yet, within two years of establishing his company, Robbe had received commissions for new work from two prominent organisations, the *Centre National de Danse Contemporaine* and the *Festival Danse à Aix*, as well as a request to create and perform a solo alongside more celebrated choreographers for the centenary of Nijinski's birth (see Bossati 1989a, Hersin 1989). This was in spite of the mixed critical reaction his early work inspired. The specialist dance press (see Arvers 1989a and 1989b; Bossati 1989b and 1990) demonstrated an essentially supportive, interested approach, which recognised faults while also commenting that "[l]a maîtrise des formes et du mouvement est indéniablement un des points forts d'Hervé Robbe" (Arvers 1989b). Positive appraisal of his Nijinski solo was also forthcoming, although Hersin's (1989) review focuses more on Robbe's performance presence than the solo's construction. But national newspaper critic De Nussac's (1989b) damning review of *Ignude Ignudi*, the first work with *Le Marietta Secret*, awards Robbe shared honours for "l'oscar de la nullité chorégraphique"²⁰¹, against a background discussion of the disappointment, bewilderment and frustration of the prospective contemporary dance spectator faced with current pickings from Parisian theatres.

Robbe himself (in Krohn 1995:76-77) comments on the criticism his work has attracted, attributing its negativity to a resistance to abstraction and formalism, endemic in the dance scene of the 1980s (see also Bossati 1990)²⁰². Charged by French critics with creating dance that is incomprehensible and cold, he objects that "[i]t's [labelled] cold, just because you don't have a kind of orgasm on stage or a kind of interpretation" (Krohn 1995:77). But, he argues, "[t]he body is not abstract, it's meat it's sensuality. When I dance, even if I don't tell a story, I have so much feeling, so much sensation,

²⁰⁰ See the discussion in Chapter 3 above, p.149, regarding the difficulties of the French dance scene in the early 1990s: with the new institutional positions and opportunities filled or taken up, a younger generation often complains that the "turnover" of artists is too slow to enable career progression for younger creators. This creates a structural problem within the French dance institution where new work by the large number of relative unknowns encounters problems of distribution: without work being widely seen and commented upon, there is little likelihood of young artists' institutional position improving in the future.

²⁰¹ This indictment is palliated by De Nussac's subsequent review of *Antichambre* (1989c) in which she recognises that "on avait été severe avec *Ignude Ignudi* [...] un peu trop peut-être pour une première oeuvre". *Antichambre*, she claims, is "[n]ettement meilleure, et moins prétentieuse".

²⁰² Krohn overstates the negativity of this reaction and Robbe's relation to an "atmosphere in France where he struggles for acceptance of his work" (1995:77). The reviews examined above (and also below, see pp. 239-241) are more often complimentary than critical of *Le Marietta Secret*. Besides, whatever the resistance to abstraction amongst French critics, this has not put a break on the rapidity of Robbe's institutional promotion. His subsequent appointment, in 1998, as director of the *Centre National Choreographique du Havre / Haute Normandie* confirms his high status on the contemporary dance scene (see Ministère de la Culture 1998).

and it's not abstract. It's so real to touch wood, to breathe and to feel another body" (*ibid.*). This concern with the nature of corporeal experience translates into sustained reflection, through choreography, on movement as such, out of kilter with the expressionist trend in French dance theatre of the 1980s. In Bossati (1990), he declares himself "frappé par le manqué d'intérêt que manifeste les chorégraphes pour le mouvement" (68), noting that this blind-spot has been engendered by the wholesale rejection by *la nouvelle danse française* of American post-modernism. His own approach seeks to counter what he perceives as a dissociation between movement form and its expressive content, to develop an exploration of the moving body in its psychological and conceptual as well as a material dimension. Robbe partly attributes his interest in movement as such to his personal history as a performer, but comments also that the dancer's role always already integrates conceptual with physical engagement: "[g]érer un espace, évoluer à l'intérieur, c'est déjà être dans le domaine des idées" (Bossati 1990: 68). He claims that his choreography avoids excessive aestheticism by virtue of its appreciation for performing virtuosity, which he stages and manipulates in his creative practice: "[j]'aime profiter de la maîtrise corporelle que je demande aux interprètes" (*ibid.*), with whom he collaborates closely in developing dance work.

While these concerns are embedded in Robbe's early choreographic practice, they assume even greater prominence in the 1993 piece, *Factory*, recognised as a landmark work in his career path (Ministère de la Culture 1995). Uniting interest in movement, performance and the plastic arts, this collaboration with the sculptor Richard Deacon plays on the interaction between the dancers and larger-than-human wooden forms, which are displaced, rolled, rocked and danced upon in an evolving synergy of animate organisms and inanimate matter (Frétard 1993; Krohn 1995). *Factory* also incorporates a reflection upon, and subversion of, conventional paradigms of dance spectatorship, by inviting the audience to walk around the space of performance, itself interacting with the sculptures as well as partly determining the trajectory, orientation and timing of the dancers' movement. This "formule qui rompt avec cette passivité de la consommation qui gagne le spectacle vivant" (Frétard 1993) aims to enhance the audience's conceptual and sensuous curiosity by allowing far greater physical intimacy between the moving bodies of performers and spectators than traditional performance contexts would permit. Although this goal in itself is not original (embodied, as Krohn 1995 claims, in much American early post-modern practice), Robbe claims that French new dance needs to explore such issues itself in its search for a choreographic identity (Krohn 1995: 74).

The Ministry of Culture document announcing policy developments for 1995 suggests that *Factory* has been instrumental in Robbe gaining institutional recognition as a choreographer. He is one of the four artists who will benefit from a new scheme, that of “Compagnies chorégraphiques associés”, in which a company and its director remain in residence at a theatre or cultural complex for two to three years (Ministère de la Culture 1995:15-16)²⁰³. The document cites *Factory* in particular as the work that marks Robbe out as an appropriate candidate for the scheme: the work was created during a residency at the *Scène Nationale*, La Ferme du Buisson, and, with its reconstruction at the Centre Georges Pompidou (Paris), “continue de susciter, auprès du public, un large echo” (17). A direct link is thus made between the perception of a positive audience response to a work (no concrete evidence of this claim is supplied) and the institutional promotion of its choreographer. The scheme is designed to provide alternative structures for the implantation of dance companies, lighter than the increasingly problematic *Centres Chorégraphiques Nationaux*²⁰⁴, and Robbe’s inclusion is significant because it moves his company out of its categorisation as a simple “compagnie indépendante” and into the vanguard of dance decentralisation policy.

Association with the cultural centre, Le Quartz de Brest (in Bretagne), significantly increases the financial resources of *Le Marietta Secret* by augmenting its subsidy direct from the State, alongside the additional funding the company receives from the cultural centre²⁰⁵. This higher level of resources is key to the production of the work *Id.* (1995). The publicity leaflet for the work’s première (CNDC/L’Esquisse & Nouveau Théâtre d’Angers 1995), lists a total of nine co-producing partners, including Le Quartz de Brest alongside four other cultural organisations that hosted a short-term creative residency by the company: the CNDC (Angers), the TNDI (Châteauvallon), La Ferme du Buisson (Marne-la-Vallée), and the CAC (Marne-la-Vallée). While the number of these institutional partners implies a potential problem for the company in the temporally

²⁰³ The scheme was conceived (although not given this name) in 1994, when five contemporary dance artists (Stéphanie Aubin, Thierry Malandain, Andy Degroat, François Verret and Jean Gaudin) were installed in theatres around the country (see Ministère de la Culture 1994, Annexe *L’Aménagement du Territoire*, pp.1-3). In 1995, alongside Robbe, Michel Kelemenis, Hervé Diasnas and Philippe Decouflé are nominated as *chorégraphes associés*, each to a different organisation / region.

²⁰⁴ See Chapter 3 above, pp.144-145

²⁰⁵ In addition to its continuing subsidy as a *Compagnie Chorégraphique Indépendante* (380,000 FF in 1994) *Le Marietta Secret* will receive 600,000 FF direct from the State and 500,000 FF from the Quartz de Brest. The latter is also granted 1 MF to continue its “actions en faveur de la danse” (Ministère de la Culture 1995).

sporadic and geographically dispersed periods of research and development for *Id.*, it also indicates the range of resources at Robbe's disposal. Whatever support, financial or in kind (provision of rehearsal and performance spaces, assumption of production costs, etc.), that these organisations supply, Le Marietta Secret simultaneously receives subsidy from the State, the Nord / Pas de Calais region and, for this production, the private Fondation Paribas. The high level of financial backing materialises in Robbe's extensive use, in *Id.*, of video (made in collaboration with film director Valérie Urréa), sound montage (composed by Cécile Le Prado), elaborate lighting effects (designed by Yves Godin) and other design elements (including Dominique Fabrègue's costumes), with the publicity leaflet also acknowledging support from the commercial company Philips in the provision of technological materials²⁰⁶.

Id., then, develops out of a growing institutional and financial support network for Robbe's choreography, in which the State's recognition of his success, with *Factory* in particular, is instrumental. The artistic and aesthetic thematic of *Id.* is also partly based on the precedent of the 1993 work. Having furnished a potted biography of Robbe and his company, the publicity leaflet turns to an elucidation of *Id.*'s choreographic concerns, stating at the outset that the work is "tout d'abord un clin d'oeil à *Factory*" (CNDC/L'Esquisse & Nouveau Théâtre d'Angers 1995). The text here thus provides readers with contextual information through which to construct meaning in relation to *Id.*, encouraging us to view the piece in the continuity of Robbe's practice and its core preoccupations. Whereas *Factory* centred on the "rencontre entre la matérialité des objets et celle des corps", *Id.* will reflect on the "multiples utilisations de l'image dans son immatérialité" (*ibid.*). Robbe here pushes further his interest in the nature of embodiment by exploring its obverse: disembodied images of corporeal presence. In addition, the new work once again foregrounds the issue of spectatorship, developing choreographic discourse around the theme of perception, taking the myth of Narcissus as a starting point. Doomed as soon as he perceives and falls in love with his own image in a pool, Narcissus rejects the external world and relations with the Other (symbolised in the unrequited love of the nymph Echo); he loses himself in contemplation of himself alone (CNDC/L'Esquisse & Nouveau Théâtre d'Angers 1995;

²⁰⁶ This is a peculiar and interesting feature of the production, in that, as suggested in Chapter 3 contemporary dance has often had difficulty attracting commercial sponsors. The French State has also been less proactive than its counterpart in Britain in promoting sponsorship as an alternative or supplementary source of income for arts organisations. With respect to the exploration of media technologies that this piece initiates, note the basis of Robbe's subsequent appointment to the head of the CCN du Havre / Haute Normandie: "[c]'est autour des interrogations communes entre les arts visuels, les arts plastiques et les nouvelles technologies qu'Hervé Robbe axe sa démarche de création" (Ministère de la Culture 1998).

see also Ovid 1955). The publicity leaflet draws a parallel between contemporary society's obsession with mediated images of human forms and Narcissus' fascination with his own reflection. It raises the question, around which elements of *Id.* cluster, of the extent to which the human self and human identity are embodied in the image.

The audience-performance relation is also, according to the publicity leaflet, interrogated through the manipulations of time and narrative, effected in the conjunction of dance and film within the stage performance. And, in a further reference back to *Factory*, the audience is encouraged to develop critical consciousness of the conventions of dance spectatorship by disruptions of the theatrical frame. *Id.* will begin in the theatre foyer, and only subsequently move back to the confines of the proscenium arch, while the positioning of mirrors and screens will compromise the clarity and transparency of action within the black box of the stage: "jeux de miroirs et effets de mise en abîme déconstruisent l'ordre établi" (CNDC /L'Esquisse & Nouveau Théâtre d'Angers 1995). Robbe (1998) articulates in more detail the ways in which the work, for him, probes the spectator's relation to the dancing body. He describes in interview his perception that dance has become stifled by the obsessive interiority of the performer's focus, that the dancer often tends to lose him/herself in quasi-narcissistic contemplation of the subjective experience of movement. Robbe declares that his aim with *Id.* was to break this mould; he sought to return to a notion of dance as performance for the other, in which dancer and choreographer unashamedly develop an expansive, virtuosic vocabulary, with a powerful dramatic impact over and above however it may feel to perform (Robbe 1998).

Arguably, this aim is already implied in Robbe's early practice and discourse. As suggested above (p.223-224), he claims in interview with Bossati (1990) to retain a key interest in performing virtuosity, born out of his own work as a dancer. While noting the conceptual dimension of the performer's role, Robbe also declares that "[j]e n'ai pas peur de lever la jambe sous prétexte que l'esthétique actuelle ne le demande pas" (68). However, Robbe (1998) also takes a critical perspective on his own work of the early 1980s, suggesting that his movement-based research in collaboration with some of his long-standing dancers may have succumbed to the excessive interiorisation of focus with which he seeks to break in *Id.*. In the latter, he claims to have introduced new dancers from a different background (Israeli modern dance) and with a different *modus operandi*, partly to challenge the complacency and habitual performance demeanour of his French company. The new members were less diffident about developing a vocabulary that was more overtly spectacular (although still not obviously

theatrically expressive). But, on the basis of informal discussions one of Robbe's more usual dancer-collaborators (Ouramdane 1995), an alternative interpretation emerges of the shift that *Id.* effects. More concentrated on the accomplishments of codified technique and under the new pressures of a complex technological environment, Robbe's choreography has, in this view, lost its particularity and something of the qualitative depth characterising the movement exploration of previous work. The extent to which such issues inflect the audience response to *Id.* is further explored in the description and analysis below.

On entering the theatre foyer, the spectator is immediately struck by the presence of blocks of transparent Perspex in which mirrors are embedded (either sticking out at right-angles to the block or encased within it), and by the television screens positioned at the edges of the space. White-clad dancers emerge, apparently unconcerned by the audience cluttering the foyer, adopt seated positions upon or lean against the Perspex forms, before elaborating slow, carefully considered movement patterns in solos or duets. If the spectator has experienced *Factory* (or read the publicity leaflet where the parallel is made explicit), s/he is reminded of Robbe's dancers' interaction with Deacon's organic wooden forms. The materials in the foyer here contrast markedly with *Factory's* sculptures, in shape (rectangles with sharp, straight edges, rather than gently curving surfaces) and substance (transparent Perspex, giving an illusion of mutability and viscosity, frozen in momentary stasis, rather than the solid opacity of wood). And the dancers' movement language too has been transformed from generosity, openness and symbiosis with the moving audience (characteristic of the 1993 work), to a cooler, impassive self-containment, even self-absorption, which precludes the warmth of human interaction. Immediately, owing to the presence of the mirrors and the pool-like blocks of Perspex, the work's reference to Narcissus is made explicit. One male dancer is still, as if searching for his image in the depths of a block's transparency. Others move towards and around the mirrors, always conscious of their own reflections. The proximity between dancers and spectators cannot help but emphasise the living, corporeal presence of both, but the spectator's perceptions are displaced by the play of reflections and the relay of the action, via video cameras, to the television screens. In mediating access to the moving bodies, these disrupt the sensuous immediacy of close contact.

As in *Factory*, however, the dancers' spatial displacements do provoke a physical response from the audience, who, as a group acting under a common impulse, shift their location to make room for the dance to continue. By virtue of this kind of unspoken communication between dancers and spectators, through which the space is collectively organised, the audience is ushered into the theatre auditorium. The action in the foyer serves to enlarge and intensify the sense of an "event" rather than a simple performance, but also to render the spectator conscious of the theatrical frame

²⁰⁷ at one of the performances at the Nouveau Théâtre d'Angers, 7th April 1995. The work had been presented in "avant-premier" at the TNDI in Châteauvallon, in première at La Ferme du Buisson, Marne-la-Vallée, and subsequently toured nationally and internationally.

governing the remainder of the action. Taking seats in the theatre, the audience is forced to adjust the character of its perception: we shift from a three dimensional awareness of space and action on the periphery of the gaze, as well as directly in its line, to a clear frontal focus on the area defined by the theatre's proscenium arch. But when house lights dim, the stage space itself (and the action the spectator expects it to contain) is not illuminated. Instead, we are faced with a projected image, filling the black box of the stage, of the magnified legs of a male dancer against a background of variegated grey hues. Accompanied by a soundscore of confused industrial rumblings, the legs very gradually bend until one knee reaches the floor. In its almost painful slowness, the movement becomes textured by the minute adjustments in muscles and joints by which the dancer retains his balance. By revealing the complex of tiny changes of position and the effort involved in an apparently simple action, the moving image conveys a sense of desperate struggle, given added weight by harsh, ominous quality of the accompanying sound.

Silence only ensues once the projection has faded to black, succeeded by lights casting a dispersed blue haze over the stage. Its atmosphere has a viscous quality, in which the air takes on a quasi-opaque density through which it is possible to discern white-clad human figures. Initially, there appear to be three dancers on stage: one seated stage right, another standing upstage left and a third sitting just off stage centre but far back in the depths of the space. As the eye adjusts to the atmosphere, however, the latter figure reveals itself as the reflection of the shaven headed male dancer sitting stage right. A large, rectangular mirror is placed upstage spanning much of the black box's width and screening from view the extension of space into the distance. A strange accordion melody begins as the female dancer standing upstage left raises her left hand. It leads a movement of the arm down the side of the body, then is relayed by a *rond de jambe* of the right leg, a shift of weight, a roll of the arms as the hands meet, and the left arm sweeping the space in front to extend horizontally to the side as the torso pulls upright. This arm lowers, both are pulled upwards, bending at the elbows and entailing a rotation in the shoulder sockets as the hips shift slightly off centre, legs bend and the arms pause, partially extended, but with elbows bent, to the sides. The body's position in this moment of stillness creates a two-dimensional image on a frontal plane, as if the dancer is a character in a frieze or hieroglyph. As the solo continues, the dancer's gaze switches between looking out to the auditorium and absorption in her own actions, watched throughout by the seated man to her left.

The movement vocabulary of the female dancer (Cathérine Legrand²⁰⁸) is clearly defined and carefully performed, but also strangely inscrutable. While its deliberate quality suggests the movement to be pregnant with (almost ritual) significance for the performer herself, its meanings remain publicly obscure. This inscrutability is heightened by the strangeness of the electric blue ambient environment and the high-pitched wail of the accordion, as well as through the doubling of the action by the reflections in the mirror. This duplication of dancing bodies continues throughout and is prefigured in the work's title: "*id.*" is the standard French abbreviation of the Latin word *idem* (= the same), used like "ditto" in English to signal multiple instances of the same noun or clause; but "id" also constitutes the first syllable of "identité", highlighting the notion associated with this word as an issue to be explored, and as relevant to a discourse around the myth of Narcissus²⁰⁹. The semiotic fabric of the title and the choreography in this opening section raises questions that will dominate the spectator's conceptual and imaginative engagement with the performance: where is self and its identity located? in "real" corporeal presence or in the "illusory" image of the body's reflection? and what is the relation between self, identity, body and image? As attention turns to the male dancer (Christian Rizzo²¹⁰), his interest has been distracted from Legrand by the small hand-held mirror he manipulates and into which he gazes (the small circle of light it reflects flitting around the space). As the duet proceeds, Rizzo picks up a second small, circular mirror, moves behind a now seated Legrand, and places the two objects briefly in her hands. Rather than contemplate herself in their surface, she looks out towards the audience, until the mirrors are removed and placed on the ground, and Rizzo sinks to lie beside them. With Legrand's head turning to

²⁰⁸ a former Bagouet company dancer, with a distinctive performance identity and presence. Spectators with prior experience of French new dance are likely to recognise both, and also the new influence on Robbe's choreography that Legrand introduces through her performing style. Already, then, there is a sense of Robbe's practice opening out into types of movement material that break with his habitual *gestuelle*, which dominated works preceding this production (*Factory* 1993, but also *Flowing Along* 1994 and *Flip Flac* 1994).

²⁰⁹ For the English speaker, the word "id" also, like the notion of narcissism (in English and French), opens on a psychoanalytic dimension. The id is constituted by the unorganised parts of the psychic apparatus: it is the primitive chaos of instinctual energies and needs, the inaccessible counterpart to the civilised, organising, knowable ego (Rycroft 1972). Narcissism, meanwhile, is described by Freud (1995) as a psychic state in which the subject has withdrawn from the objects of the external world to organise erotic impulse internally, around its own body. As such, narcissism crucially depends on the ego and ego-libido rather than the id as such. Nonetheless, the strange otherworldliness of this work's atmosphere does at times seem to plunge the spectator into the darker parts of the psyche: this interpretation is conditioned by, and forges coherent sense from, the link between the word of the title and its psychoanalytic significance in English.

²¹⁰ Rizzo frequently, in the early 1990s, figures in Robbe's work, and will thus be recognised by those familiar with his choreography. The decision to include the dancers' names in this description is also a function of my own knowledge (personal or by reputation) of many of the

observe him before the lights cut to black, a narrative of their relationship (and on a more general level, of the relation between self and Other) clusters around the play of gazes and movement constituting their duet.

The silence and darkness are broken by a rush of industrial noise (a clashing of metal and rumbling of machines) and a film projection (again filling the whole of the black box) of two different performers, partners in a fast-moving duet: the movement develops, with a much swifter dynamic, Legrand's vocabulary of straight lines and extensions of the legs and arms, the swing of which initiates turns and ricochet action in other parts of the body. Their individual actions also initiate physical contact between them, the functionality of which contributes to the shift away from the ritualistic atmosphere of the previous section. Initially, the film shows only the two dancers' upper bodies, and they move in and out of the film's virtual space until the camera zooms out to frame their whole bodies, still moving. Even when not visible in their entirety, the dancers' physiques and facial characteristics are distinctive. The male partner (Rachid Ouramdane) has a solid, well-built physique and dark-skinned complexion, softened by very long, black curly hair. The woman-performer (Hanna Waisman) is lighter in build, fair-skinned and shaven headed. Their physical appearances are startling, in their disruption of stereotypical gender identities, but also in the play of contrast between their ethnic identities. The spectator remains a voyeur as long as the performers ignore the presence of the camera, until both momentarily look directly out to the auditorium, challenging the audience's gaze. The spectator's attention was, in any case, divided between the moving image on screen, the stage floor illuminated from behind the gauze that renders it transparent, and the inverted duplication of the film action falling on the space behind the screen. As the latter gradually lifts but the projection runs on, this inverted "shadow" action replaces the screen image until cut off by blackout and silence. Only as the projection screen lifts, does the spectator become fully aware that, until now, it formed a gauze barrier between auditorium and stage. By dispersing the light and blurring the contours of the action on stage, the screen contributed significantly to the sense of unreality and viscosity in the blue atmosphere of Legrand's and Rizzo's duet. In terms of the work's thematic, this sudden realisation that perception is, or has been, mediated rather than direct, spurs a reflection on the hidden complexity and duplicity of visual information.

company members, and awareness, during viewing, of the distinctive performance personae of *Id.*'s cast.

After approximately 15 seconds of blackout and silence, a warmer light infuses the space (the stage floor still an intense blue) and the synthesised score evokes the soundscape of a swamp or jungle. A third male dancer (Nicholas Hérítier) is revealed dancing in solo: the bound flow of his movement conveys a sense of concentrated energy and power as he shifts between levels, between floor-work, the body standing upright and small jumps. His gestures are more expansive than those of Legrand, and travel further across the space than Ouramdane and Waisman in the film. The warmer light and the dancer's movement quality characterise him under a more human aspect; his vocabulary at moments suggests a struggle against the environment, especially as it refuses the consistent aestheticization of codified technique. The humanity and vulnerability of Hérítier is also compounded by the presence of strange forms, like reflective rocks, lining the two sides of the stage: as they move slowly, even begin to encroach on the space of the dance, the light bounces off the jagged edges of their surfaces²¹¹. Moments of stillness evolve out of Hérítier's dance, which echo images from the duet between Legrand and Rizzo: he pauses, hands raised in front, as if looking into imaginary hand-held mirrors; or assumes a position, like that of Legrand, on a frontal plane, the line of extended arms broken at the elbows. His focus shifts between absorption in his own action, looking out to the auditorium and gazing upstage towards his reflection in the mirror. Gradually dancers emerge from the strange forms at the fringes of the stage, as Hérítier walks slowly back towards the mirror. As he turns to see his own reflection, this is doubled by another illuminated figure (that of Rizzo), located behind the glass. The latter, then, also functions as a transparent screen, if lighting falls at a particular angle on the action behind. The effect is eerie: Hérítier's reflection is shadowed by another, disembodied image of someone who does not exist in the "real" world of the stage.

Other dancers now join Hérítier on stage, led by a small, slight male dancer (Schlomi Tuizer). All except Hérítier sport sunglasses with small, round dark lenses. These add a humorous touch, with respect to the thematic of identity (the spectacles covering or concealing the "windows to the soul"), but also contribute to the dehumanised feel of the environment. The movement material now also loses the sense of vulnerability characterising Hérítier's solo, subsumed by a faster paced, more spectacular vocabulary full of leaps, high leg extensions, handstands and falls. Two

²¹¹ Again, the spectator who has seen *Factory* perceives a parallel between its large wooden sculpted forms and the jagged, reflective mounds that appear here. Again, they contrast markedly by virtue of their gleaming surfaces and rough, anorganic texture. The softer, humanised or human-conductive material world of *Factory* is replaced here by the harsh, eerie ambience of science-fiction.

duets develop, between a tall, long-limbed Asiatic woman (Emanuelle Huynh) and Hérítier, and Ouramdane and Waisman, reprising the physical material of the film, but playing more with variations in dynamic. The dancers perform with confidence in their virtuosity and also in their colleagues' ability to shift position and avoid collision, or support them when they fall. Despite these cooperative relationships, in which the self is complemented by and dependent on the Other, there is little sense of a human narrative evolving through these patterns. At one point, the group action loses its frenzy as Legrand appears downstage left, facing back, one arm extended at 90° to the torso, pulling it off-centre. Her slow, faltering walk cuts a diagonal pathway across the stage. Rizzo has now moved around in front of the mirror/screen and turns towards it to observe his own reflection. The calmer dynamic operates only for the brief duration of Legrand's traversal of the space, but in such moments of stillness, the dancers' consciousness of their own reflections, problematises also the transparency of the audience's visual contact with the performers. The couples stand back to back: one expects to see in the glass the reflected back of the individual facing the auditorium; but instead the image of the other dancer stares out from the mirror. When the dancers turn away from the audience and towards their own reflections, our access to their embodied presence is closed off, but a different, mediated kind of access opened by the mirror. This engenders an odd sensation of mutual apperception between dancers and spectators, while direct, frontal contact is simultaneously displaced.

The group dance evolves through a series of solos, duets and trios, to a point where six dancers dotted around the space stand upright facing the mirror. Meanwhile, Waisman's small, quick steps, on the balls of her feet, trace a pathway parallel to the stage edges in a series of rectangles, gradually decreasing in size. A sound of water dripping accompanies the slow contortions of the six, which give them the appearance of strange creatures who gradually pull themselves upright, as Waisman too comes to a standstill. Legrand is the only exception here: her shoulder's remain hunched over, her torso off-centre with arms hanging loosely down. Suddenly, a change in lighting infuses the whole space with pale blue, revealing the mirror as composed of six panels. A long fluorescent tube lines its lower edge, casting an ethereal, technological gleam over the fast-paced action which leaves Waisman and Legrand in an moderately-paced, flowing duet, joined by Hérítier then Ouramdane. There is another moment of stillness in which Waisman balances in a headstand, alongside Legrand crouching, and Ouramdane and Hérítier standing upright; the motif of a dancer's body upside down (repeated also elsewhere in the work), plays on the notion of the inverted image (refracted through a lens or projected onto the stage floor), which the living body

imitates. This reverses more usual conceptions of the representational relation, in which the image is characterised as imitative of reality.

We move through blackout (in which the single, ethereal figure of Waisman is still just visible) to another film projection, this time directly onto the stage space so that the projection is inverted until the gauze screen folds down. Again, Waisman and Ouramdane are the focus of the camera which now closes in on their faces and, in particular, their eyes: each will look out, then withdraw her/his gaze or turn the head and focus sharply to the side. Again, the spectator is struck by the unconventional physical appearance of the performers, and also by a sensation of discomfort at being so directly confronted with the magnified image of another's face. Thus thrust into intimacy with the dancers' filmed images, one has the impression of invading the identity and privacy of the Other. This is heightened by the cold, wary facial expressions of the two performers, which challenge the voyeuristic spectator keen to read through their physiognomies to the selves they "represent". The direct visual contact with the filmed faces is also disrupted, once again, by the possibility of seeing through the screen to the stage space behind and silhouettes of other dancers moving into and away from the light. The experience spurs reflection on what the dance spectator in general watches and sees: bodies, movement, faces, performers' own personalities, personae in a fictional world, transitory visual images, or a combination of all six? The work raises these conceptual questions without offering clear resolutions or answers, rather emphasising the complexity of the spectator's experience in contemporary performance. Insofar as the dance can be seen to represent and heighten the experience of perception in the everyday social world, these troubling issues also extend their relevance beyond the frame of the performance arena to interrogate the character of our contact with social reality.

A fade to black is followed by the illumination, once more, of a line of fluorescent tubing, which infuses the stage with a pale blue haze. This time, though, the tubing appears further up in the space, as if the mirror has been shifted upwards and backwards into the previously inaccessible depths of the space. Initially, it is difficult to make sense, visually and conceptually of this transformation, until it emerges that, in fact, the tubing now lines the top rather than the lower edge of the mirror. Through the blue haze, partly generated by the mediation of the screen, the figures of Legrand and Rizzo are dimly perceived, the atmosphere encouraging the spectator to associate this scene with their previous duet, in the evolving narrative of their relationship. The movements of both are awkward and heavy, Legrand in particular staggering off-

centre, foundering in or stultified by the surrealism of the ambience, of her own dancing body's image in performance. She begins a faltering walk, one arm extending horizontally as she gazes out to the auditorium, towards centre stage, where she is met by Rizzo. He gently takes her hand, dips underneath her arm and manipulates its position to cause Legrand to turn on her axis. The texture of Rizzo's touch, and the skin-to-skin contact it engenders, endows their relation with a vulnerable, human quality, as if there is a real attempt here, at least on the part of Rizzo, to develop a communicative connection between the partners. The accordion melody, also staggering slightly by sustaining certain notes longer than expected, lends added poignancy to the duet as it moves through a faster sequence, in which Legrand still seems to lack the will or self-control to respond positively. When Rizzo leans towards her, arm extended over her shoulder, and transfers his weight to make his balance dependent on his partner, Legrand extracts and removes herself. Gradually, she turns and leaves the stage, in a trance-like state, and Rizzo moves to pick up the two handheld mirrors lying on the floor. As the space darkens, flashes of light confirm that he has picked them up: rejected or ignored by Legrand, he returns to contemplate his reflection.

As the light is kindled again, Rizzo is visible, elaborating a dance around his manipulation of the mirrors. This continues through the film projections on screen, more complex in their organisation and timing at this point: Ouramdane and Waisman still dominate the virtual space, but the size of the projection frame has diminished and divided into three distinct areas, foregrounded or receding as this section develops. On the upper left hand side of the stage, a rolling projection of grey then coloured shapes (and at one point a disturbingly pallid face, or death-mask) accompanies the movement; the soundscore is dominated by everyday noises of people talking, shopping and, then, the music of a fairground organ. The play of body shapes, sizes and textures intensifies: Waisman's move into Ouramdane's virtual space reveals her to be dancing, on screen, in front of a mirror, and we realise that Ouramdane's image was also a reflection rather than his real body followed by the camera; the small figures still visible on the stage itself contrast with the looming presence of the filmed bodies, as does their orientation with the static inversion of other dancers present in the film. This play of perceptions continues as the screen folds upwards and, finally, even the rolling projection fades. Dancers move very slowly into view, with partners seated on their shoulders exploring the limits of balance through a series of shifts of position and dynamic. As they descend, a reprise of the swift, virtuosic movement sequences of earlier in the work is followed by further duets and then the journey of a homogenous

group from downstage right to centre. The women depart, leaving three male dancers, now bare-chested, arranged in a diagonal line across the stage and crouched, looking at their raised hands. As they rise and walk towards the mirror, the figures of their female partners are visible behind the screen, and follow their movements, play-acting reflected images. This moment of symbiosis between self and Other, moving in unison despite the glass barrier between them, is broken by the male dancers turning and walking away, as the female figures fade from view.

Another sequence of film projections, developing very similar effects to the last such section, ends as Rizzo enters and places his hand-held mirrors on the stage floor, upstage right. He remains doubled over as the film calms to show just a still Waisman's shoulders and face, gazing out at the audience. Once this has faded, there is a sudden change in atmosphere. A bright note sounds on the accordion, evolves into a melody with a marked change in key signalling new hope. Rizzo's developing solo also has a new texture: controlled, rhythmical, even humoristic (in its playful jumps and undulating hips), his movement contrasts with both the faltering steps of his latest duet with Legrand and the spectacular but essentially cold technical vocabulary of other parts of the work. Moreover, the lights now carve out an orange rectangle over, above and beyond the mirror shutting off the back of the stage space. This suggests a world outside of the closed narcissistic environment of the work hitherto, an unexplored expanse removed from the self-obsessive constraints of both stage world and virtual space. Legrand's emergence from upstage left, and commencement of a slow walk, parallel to the stage edges, leads the spectator to expect a resolution of their relationship: an expectation infused with the sense of hopefulness induced by movement, music and light. But Legrand remains unaware of Rizzo's invitation as she traces a path downstage right. When she turns at the downstage right corner, the spectator becomes aware of a circle of blue, cast by a spotlight following her movement, then anticipating her passage across the front edge of the space: this pool of light harks back to the abyssal atmosphere of the diffuse blue haze in which their previous duets have foundered. Sure enough, when she reaches the upstage left corner and Rizzo approaches, arms outstretched in the expectation that she will turn to face him, she simply continues her trance-like walk without recognising his presence. His body droops as he turns to face the auditorium and the lighting resumes its blue viscous texture, casting him back into the abyss of self-absorption. As he sinks to the floor, the haze overwhelms the action to the sound of a high-pitched, sustained, plaintive note on the accordion. The image of Rizzo, alone but for his reflection in the mirror, gazing down at the floor, is the work's final tableau before blackout.

7.3 Performance Prerogatives and Critical Response

In the above description (pp.229-237), a sense of the strange, sometimes sinister world of *Id.* emerges, alongside an awareness of an evolving narrative or thematic development of the Narcissus theme. The performers enact the drama of self-obsession which reflects back on the spectator to interrogate our expectations of the dancing body: the dance audience may hope that the choreography will enable identification with the performers, through the medium of their corporeal presence, and establish a communicative relation of transparency, openness and symbiosis; but that expectation is subverted and problematised by the work's more dystopian vision. For all the different levels of their visibility, the dancers' identities remain inscrutable: surface appearance repels attempts to probe the reality it is thought to mask. At key moments, the confusion between reality and virtuality takes on a nightmarish quality, both within the fictional world of the work centred on the isolation of its actors, and in the spectator's loss of clear reference points to distinguish qualitatively between different modes of visual perception. In this sense, then, the work succeeds in the exploration promised by the publicity leaflet.

The description above is a reconstruction of the experience of work based on its reviewing on video. In the moment of live performance, the emergence of the thematic dimension of the work remained more problematic, as did my own engagement as a spectator. The live performance was (approximately 20 minutes) longer than the version on video²¹², incorporating more repetition of film and dance sequences: in that first viewing, these did not spur the conceptual or imaginative associations that might have justified their inclusion. The weight of the technological environment seemed to dominate and subsume choreographic nuance. Initial response to the work, then, was tinged with a bitter irony: this variation on the theme of narcissism had itself succumbed to a certain self-absorption, an obsession with its own materials, without sufficient regard for the spectator's involvement. Moreover, the coldness of the movement vocabulary, its largely exteriorised focus, dominated by concerns of technical virtuosity rather than evolving internal sensation, left an enduring impression of emptiness, even frustration. This impression crystallised in discussion with Ouramdane (1995) as he expressed his concern at the choreographic direction the work had taken: according to Ouramdane, Robbe's habitual carefulness and intelligence in exploring the limits and

²¹² a film of a performance of the work on tour

expressive potential of movement forms had largely been lost in the development and rehearsal of *Id.*; instead, there was emphasis on perfecting a more standardised vocabulary and the external image of the performing body.

The contrasts between the first and subsequent response to *Id.* raise significant issues: with regard to how knowledge of the choreographer's practice builds more or less reasonable expectations of new works, which then narrow the range of possible responses; and in respect of the means by which the work's semiotic fabric makes itself available for interpretation. My viewing of the live performance (alongside Ouramdane's experience as a dancer in the work) was dominated by a prior notion of the character of Robbe's movement research. This anticipated an extension of such explorations, along similar lines, in *Id.*. This prior notion closed off the possibility of seeing the work's movement material as deliberately topicalising the notion of performing virtuosity. The interview with Robbe (1998) was instrumental in raising awareness of this interpretative option, and is explored, to an extent, in the contrasting response to the work on video. But the shortening and focusing of *Id.* may also have functioned to enhance the possibility of imaginative engagement with each of the various aspects of the work, and a consistency of interpretation across their diversity.

The interpretation constructed through the second viewing is by no means shared, however, by reviewers from the French national and specialist press. Vernay (1995) offers a very different reading of the movement material, seen as transcending technical and technological orientation of the work's general ambience. She notes the contrast between the dance in *Factory* and that of *Id.*, but claims that the movement's status here as a virtual "corps-matière de l'image" paradoxically reinforces its corporeal reality: it confers "un côté charnel à la danse apparemment désincarnée"; the evolving tenderness of the movement, she implies, is unusual in the context of Robbe's general practice²¹³. In this view, the situation my own first reading observed is reversed. The account above (pp.229-237) does recognise moments in the evolving narrative of *Id.* where a warmer, sometimes poignant humanism disrupts the virtuosic and aestheticised sheen of the movement; but neither of my two readings develop an impression, like Vernay, of the work as "[u]n travail sur la fragmentation, sur la mise en abîme qui, curieusement, révèle la fluidité du mouvement" (my italics). Her review characterises the work as less sinister and more comforting: this impression of fluidity,

²¹³ "Désarticulée dans ses evidences pour mieux s'articuler dans une sorte de langue étrangère aux accents mélancoliques, dans la blancheur ou les couleurs indiennes des costumes dignes de ce nom de Dominique Fabrègue, la danse d'Hervé Robbe s'attendrit" (Vernay 1995).

tenderness and the warmth of corporeal sensation overrides the disturbing interrogation of visual reality.

Vernay's (1995) review ends with a comment on the individuality of each performer, suggesting that the company appears well-balanced precisely because its composite elements are so distinct. Again, this offers a comforting take on the theme of identity problematised by the work's multiplication and mediated distortion of moving bodies and performance personae. My reading suggests that the potential for identifying with the performers is disrupted in this work: even if we see the distinctiveness of their visual identities, the dancers' demeanour, and the various ways in which their presence becomes screened, breaks direct contact between performer and spectator. Like Vernay, however, other critics do not appear troubled by such concerns. Frétard's (1995c) review frames the performance within the continuity of Robbe's choreographic career: she mentions his status as *artiste associé* and his choreographic success, since 1988, as a prelude to congratulating him on "une démonstration impeccable sur le narcissisme". Particularly impressed by the masterly control with which Robbe manipulates the performance elements, she recognises both a ritualistic quality in the work and the psychological anxiety it explores and generates. For her, the juxtaposition between the everyday triviality of parts of the soundscore and the ethereal dance and screen images show "la peur que dissimule ce désir paranoïaque de paraître dont, par ailleurs, elle entretient le vertige inquiétant". Interestingly, though, this comment attaches to the music rather than the dance performance element. It is Le Prado's soundscore that breaks the aestheticised "jeu de ces silhouettes insaisissables et glissantes", that introduces the sinister note whereby the sheen of the dance is disrupted. Frétard's interpretation gives no sense of the movement material itself interrogating its surface image and identity. Rather she is content to end with a very positive evaluation of the dancers' contribution: "[i]ls sont magnifiques", particularly Huynh, Rizzo and Ouramdane, "des habitués de chez Robbe".

In Frétard's reading, performing virtuosity is appreciated and admired but not, as suggested by Robbe (1998) and my own reading, considered as part of the thematic cluster around issues of representation and identity of the dancing body. The theme of the work is recognised and discussed on an abstract level, but not in respect of its embodiment in the very core of the movement material. A similar pattern is evident in Goater's (1995) review. Having discussed the design elements of mirror (likened to the mirror in the dance classroom), film, lighting and blue dance floor as the means by which the work's thematic is elaborated, she turns to comment on the movement: "[l]a

danse elle-même est austère, construite, presque froide, pour une compagnie excellente et multiple”. She passes, thus, from a brief qualitative characterisation of the material to a simple evaluation of the dancers’ performance. Here, Legrand is singled out for special comment. She seems a stranger to the group and “un petit éclair de soleil” in the vast technological environment which constitutes the world of the work: “[s]a danse est simple, claire, merveilleuse, évidente”. Again, the critical text makes a division between the work’s theme and the embodied presence of the performer, viewed in her capacity as virtuosic dancer rather than as an integral expressive element of the piece.

The emphasis of each of these reviews suggests that French dance criticism is still biased towards evaluating the performance element of some dance work: the emphasis is on the degree of virtuosity and control of the movement material, rather than an in-depth exploration of choreographic concerns and their meaningful resonance. With respect to *Id.*, this is manifest in the critics stopping short of an interpretation of movement as itself offering a conceptual reflection on the work’s core thematic. Rather, they make sense of the physical material by drawing on knowledge and assumptions about dance performance and its conventions, resources supplied by a context that transcends the world of the piece. Similarly, in my own first reading, a pre-formed expectation that the movement would develop according to the parameters of Robbe’s typical mode, closed the possibility of an integrated interpretation and full engagement in *Id.*. These responses are, however, instructive to the extent they typify a reaction to contemporary dance performance that struggles to reconcile form and content, to build conceptual consistency from diverse semiotic elements. One route out of this dilemma is to attend to performance as if the dancing were somehow divorced from the imaginative play of meanings, absolving the spectator of the task of interpretation. Although some dance work may, intentionally or not, itself effect such a divorce, *Id.* does offer at least the possibility of a more integrated vision. But the harmony between form and content here is not comforting because it reaches to the very core of the dancing body’s forms of self-representation.

8. CONCLUSION

As the Introduction made clear, this study as a whole seeks to explore the extent and character of public arts funding's impact on the production and reception of British and French contemporary dance. Chapter 3 argued that the state has played a key role in defining the parameters of the danceworld institution, having gradually absorbed contemporary dance into the evolving system of cultural subsidy and policy formulation. That system has helped to define where and how financial and administrative resources and energies are expended within the dance sphere, and thus to determine the conditions of contemporary dance production. The system as a whole, as an extension of state influence into the cultural sphere, is itself beset with political and ethical tensions, produced by different constituencies' competing definitions of culture, of public funding's proposed beneficiaries and of the character of the wider public's investment in the subsidised repertoire. The process of integrating contemporary dance into this environment has also itself produced a set of difficulties peculiar to this cultural form. Chapter 3 concluded by outlining this series of enduring problems within the contemporary dance world of the 1990s that reflect the structural and historical tensions of the dance funding system.

They include the concentration of institutional power in the hands of a few agents, which, as a structural condition, contributes to maintaining the existing danceworld's status quo. A related issue, of particular significance for the dance works examined in Chapters 4 to 7, is the hierarchical organisation of subsidy distribution which produces a corresponding hierarchy of companies and choreographers: the level of funding received, linked to relative security of income, inflects not just the capacity to create but also the level of performance opportunity and visibility on the circuit and, hence, the depth to which the company concerned is enrooted in the system. This has negative as well as positive implications for the higher profile companies, of which the growing institutionalisation engenders a heavier load of responsibilities and a greater weight of expectation on the part of the danceworld and the broader public. Moreover, the increasing dominance of economic considerations within the publicly subsidised cultural sphere brings the pressure of continually proving financial viability to bear on companies and venues in receipt of public funding. Quantitative and commercial indicators of success (such as box office returns and audience numbers) are privileged above qualitative assessment of artistic endeavour or audience engagement. And the agents of artistic production and distribution are compelled to respond to such institutional and bureaucratic imperatives rather than encouraged to develop more symbiotic relationships with audiences and potential publics. Where audience numbers

for contemporary dance productions are seen to fall, the justifiability of public expenditure on dance is called into question, on a macro- as well as micro-level²¹⁴.

Chapter 3 links this systemic bias to a broader set of socio-economic and historical contingencies. The democratisation of culture is a core imperative for the emergent framework of state support for the arts within the advanced capitalist societies of Britain and France. Despite early conceptions of public arts funding as a way of protecting the high cultural domain from market forces, government concerns as to the economic stability and sustainability of national economies have increasingly shaped the character of state action in this as well as other spheres. Within such a climate, efforts to enhance the arts' accessibility translate into an emphasis on the cultural sphere providing a steady stream of saleable and consumable artistic products, physically accessible to those with the ability to pay to see them, who indicate their interest through attendance alone. In the effort to encourage that attendance, marketing seeks to stimulate demand by hyping the impact such works are likely to have, fixing on relatively static conceptions of the artistic identities emerging through artworks and stressing their interpretative availability. The complexities and difficulties of engaging with contemporary dance work are glossed over, as the system predisposes both artists and audiences to focus on the sheer surface of dance works, the sheen of their production values. Such standards of "excellence" include, in particular, the level of performing virtuosity, defined in relation to received ideas about the dancing body that have been shaped by the historically determined canons of professional dance achievement.

Chapters 4 to 7 sought to explore how such institutional factors are inflected on a variety of localised sites, namely in the production and reception of particular dance works produced in the mid-1990s. The philosophical and methodological perspectives employed are grounded in a conception of the aesthetic dimension of these dance works as mutually implicated with their institutional status and conditions. There are a number of questions that arise out of this form of analysis and that will be addressed below. If audience response is broadly predisposed in the ways outlined above, to what extent can and do individual works and interpretations have the capacity to challenge the parameters of that institutional framework? Are there general implications for the contemporary dance sphere that can be distilled from the examination of four particular

²¹⁴ See, for example, Devlin's (1989) account of "The Contemporary Dance Dilemma" as well as the discussion in Chapter 3 above, p.142.

dance works? To what extent are the outlined modes of response to dance typical and/or socio-historically contingent?

Institutionally, *Crime Fictions* is positioned as part of a dance “mainstream” operating at middle- to large-scale, and as such, inviting the participation of a wide audience comprising diverse groups of spectators with a variety of interests, cultural preferences and backgrounds. Expectations as to the work’s interpretative accessibility are further reinforced by its aesthetic mode as a narrative piece which sets out to tell a story about a set of characters and their actions through a form of modern dance theatre that straddles the contemporary / classical divide. Thus *Crime Fictions* puts in play a language of gesture in which the texture of denotative movement signs is manipulated to convey, with considerable economy, key elements of the evolving scenario; alongside this, passages of more significantly opaque movement material provide extended variations on those elements, as well as offering spectators the opportunity to enjoy, with less concern for its denoted content, the formal character of choreography in a traditional dance idiom and the virtuosity of the performers’ interpretation. A further interpretative layer is added by the work’s reference to non-dance cultural forms and their associated modes of feeling, playing with the possibility of embodying the latter in movement and inviting appreciation (or at least awareness) of *Crime Fictions*’ own artifice and also of the film noir and detective fiction genres it celebrates. This further layer contributes to the central thematic whereby the premises and procedures of narrative itself, as well as specifically dance narrative, are interrogated.

As the analysis of different readings suggest, the extent to which any or all of these features of interpretative interest are reflected in spectator response depends her/his willingness to enter the game of the work, and on how far expectations about the character and capacities of the dance medium are allowed to colour the spectator’s approach. The negative critical assessments of *Crime Fictions* make explicit their preconceptions concerning dance, based on assumptions about its significant potential which suggest that the medium is limited in its capacity to explore a narrative and thematic content. Where the very capacity of dance work to tell a story is challenged, resistance to the interrogation of narrative that the work’s semiotic structure invites is also evident. Without an initial suspension of preconceptions about the medium as well as of “disbelief” in the moment of engagement with the work, the channel to that broader interest in thematic and conceptual concerns is blocked.

A similar set of issues is raised in the analysis of Maliphan's *Unspoken*, although the different aesthetic mode and institutional context of the work shapes their inflection in a particular way. *Unspoken* is, institutionally, a smaller-scale production than *Crime Fictions*, of which the British premiere takes place in a theatre noted for the specialist, contemporary dance-literate audience it attracts. In-keeping with this institutional context, the work embodies Maliphan's concern to develop a highly individual movement vocabulary, through an experimental process that takes in also extensive, exploratory collaboration with the other dancer and lighting / sound designers. The verbal frame of the work directs response towards the visual and formal dimension of the choreography, although the semiotic structure of the work (at least as it is highlighted in my own reading) also strongly suggests an evolving thematic which, if actualised in the process of looking, contributes significantly to *Unspoken's* emotive impact. Interestingly, however, two of the critical reviews examined ignore the more troubling aspects of this emergent non-literal narrative, focusing on either the extent to which the performers' virtuosity compares with and transcends traditional concepts of technical skill or maintains aesthetic ideals of grace, harmony and organic flow, thus on features of the work's aesthetic surface. Even in an institutional context that purports to value experimentation and improvisation around the staples of contemporary dance practice, then, departure from recognised production values appears problematic. This is the case also in Maliphan's own subsequent assessment of his work, as he suggests his concern that (for all the improvisational methods used in the choreographic process) the final product display a highly polished finish.

In both of these British cases, the classical / contemporary divide remains an issue, even as the works themselves challenge that dichotomy in various ways. Implicitly or explicitly, the critical reviews invoke prior conceptions of dance and its signifying capacities informed by an awareness of the relation between either the aesthetic mode of the work (in the case of Arc) or the choreographer's own biography (in the case of Maliphan) and the classical tradition. As well as shaping the extent of the critic's willingness to enter into the world of the work concerned, such preconceptions impact on how far s/he is prepared to throw into question received notions of the dancing body. In some cases (and my own readings also fit this pattern), an historical consciousness of contemporary dance evolution also informs response, with the extent of gestural innovation and its adaptation to the work's thematic also functioning as a criterion of evaluation. Concerns internal to the professional dance world play a major role in defining the parameters of response: they are centred on preoccupation with the

formal character of the choreography and its performance, even if they proceed from this base to move outwards to an exploration of a narrative and thematic dimension.

The articulated responses to the two French works examined show a similar concern with both performance issues and prior conceptions of the signifying potential of dance works, and of these two choreographers' practices in particular. The comparison between British and French danceworld contexts points up the greater level of bureaucratic organisation and more extensive funding of the French institution. Both Larrieu and Robbe have shown themselves able to exploit the latter's opportunities, but their relatively secure positions also engender a high level of expectation partly based on the clear conceptions of their choreographic identities that the institution upholds. This is particularly evident in the case of Larrieu's *Mobile*. The verbal frame (including ministry discourse as well as programme notes) articulates relatively fixed ideas as to the type of dance he will offer and the way it will (or "should") engage the spectator, linked to the justification for his accession to the directorship of a CCN. But the more negative assessments of *Mobile*'s success reveals the problematic character of such expectations when they remain unfulfilled in a variety of ways. The search for a thematic or narrative "hook", which would enable the respondent to organise the work's manifold elements, comes to dominate many of the critical responses, despite indications that the choreographer does not consider himself bound by this requirement.

One might be tempted to consider this concern with theme as something that differentiates the French critical and audience constituencies from their British counterparts, but this idea is problematised when one turns to Robbe's *Id*. Along with *Crime Fictions*, this work deliberately topicalises the issue of spectatorship and a second reading, informed by conversation with Robbe plus reflection on the interest and value of the performance, increases appreciation of the complexity of this theme. The work's semiotic fabric offers to interrogate the character and identity of the dancing body by spurring a deepening reflection on what we see and our process of response to dance. While this is nominally recognised in all of the articulated responses examined (in line with the interpretative framework that the verbal frame establishes), there is also a reluctance to pursue this interpretative strand, evident in the disengagement characteristic of my own first reading and the retreat into assessment of the performance as such that the published reviews effect. Again, the issue is raised of whether response remains on the level of a "surface" appreciation where performing virtuosity is treated as a given (displayed or not by the works), or whether the particular

manifestations of these dancing bodies are themselves seen as reflexively questioning such assumptions. In respect of *Id.*, further exposure to the work allows a second chance to accept the latter challenge where a single reading has produced a less reflexive response.

Amongst the general issues that repeatedly arise through these four analyses, then, the concern with theme or narrative consistency (albeit in attenuated form) appears in tension with a mode of response that focuses on the aesthetic surface of the work, according to criteria and expectations that have been shaped by the dance tradition and its institutional context. Each of the works offers the possibility of a thematic reading, although the extent to which this is taken up in particular interpretations varies. In this regard, and perhaps partly as a result of the enduring literary bias of my own approach here, this thesis tends in each case to seek a narrative or thematic core out of which the diverse strands of the work can be said to emanate; the thick descriptions from my own spectatorial perspective invariably engage in the activity that literary theorist Iser (1979) terms “consistency building” and treat as problematic aspects of the works that do not appear unified under a thematic umbrella. The question then arises of how far this prejudice in favour of elucidating a particular form of dance meaning is typical of a broader audience constituency, given that the negotiation of critical responses shows a more purely aesthetic mode of appreciation to be characteristic of many reviews. What is the balance of the tension between the dance spectator’s concern with the question “Yes, but what does it mean?” on the one hand, and, on the other, the desire to enjoy the sheer surface of movement and virtuosic performance precisely because it does not have to mean anything?

This question cannot, reasonably, be answered in general terms, at least on the basis of the research conducted here. However, in line with the philosophical reflection (presented in Chapters 1 and 2) on how human consciousness is prestructured by the form and character of verbal expression, the hermeneutic perspective suggests that a concern with the “said” of contemporary dance is necessarily an element of the dance audience’s experience. Against this, one might cite one conclusion of Guy’s (1991) survey-based empirical study of French dance publics, that it is precisely this “idéologie de l’exploration [thématique]” that intimidates and repels prospective audience members of contemporary dance. The perspective developed here does, however, in turn enable an initial reflection on how far that negative predisposition is itself shaped

by the structures, principles and parameters of the dance (and more broadly the arts) institution in contemporary Western society.

This study argues that, at least in its current state, the cultural institution places considerable emphasis on the easy consumability, spontaneous appeal and aesthetic surface of dance practice, ignoring the problematics of meaning-construction in dance with which this research is itself concerned. Further research (with a wider empirical sweep that extends beyond examining published critical response towards other audience constituencies) would be necessary to determine how this problematic is recognised and inflected in the experience of a broader number of social agents. But the reflection on the ontological, ontic and historical constitution of the human cultural experience remains a way of grounding securely such a broader investigation: it helps to ensure reflexive recognition of the way in which conceptual models, theoretical assumptions and the articulation of aesthetic response through language shape the empirical material under investigation. Conversely, an extended examination of such material would serve to relativise the philosophical perspective on interpretation developed in Chapters 1 and 2, and thus to deepen awareness of how far what is here posited as an ontological structure of human being is not absolute but historically and socially contingent. Cross-cultural and trans-historical extensions of the critical hermeneutic approach employed here could further reflection on this theme.

An initial impetus behind this study was a certain sense of frustration that contemporary dance is not “speaking” as clearly or as widely or as interestingly as it could about human experience. The intention was to explore the link between this impression and the fact of the restricted character of the dance audience, as well as often negative preconceptions and perceptions of contemporary forms and works elucidated in dialogue with potential audience members. The over-riding concern was that issues and problems embedded in the activity of dance spectatorship were not being effectively addressed by either dance practitioners, the public funding system or the institutions of dance criticism and scholarship, all dominated by preoccupations internal to the dance profession rather than those emanating from outside of its sphere. That perspective on dance practice has shifted in the course of the analysis to recognise that individual practices do offer to engage the spectator in a variety of interesting ways, even if that potentiality is often neutralised by conventional expectations, unexamined aesthetic standards and the institutional hierarchies that the danceworld and its public funding system contribute to maintaining. Without channels for a broader range of inputs, including those from a variety of audience perspectives,

to enter into its processes of decision-making, the danceworld risks continuing to place spectators in the position of passively responding to, rather than actively engaging with, dance artefacts and the moving body as significant forms. Academic research (both theoretical and empirical) provides one channel through which the forms of culture's institutionalisation can be subjected to critique: this study is written in the hope that it contributes to that process.

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