

DANCING POETRY

Jonathan Burrows's reconfiguration of choreography

by
Daniela Perazzo Domm

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Dance and Theatre Studies
Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences
University of Surrey

December 2007

© Daniela Perazzo Domm 2007

The starting point for this interpretive study of Jonathan Burrows's (b 1960) choreography is the limited and fragmentary existing literature on his work. Critical essays and performance reviews hint, tentatively, at the idiosyncratic, eccentric and enigmatic qualities of the movement language of this British contemporary choreographer. In this thesis I interrogate the distinctiveness of his performances, arguing that they challenge conventions of co-existing dance genres and techniques, by employing a variety of disciplinary, cultural and theoretical contexts. These frameworks both surround and construct the work, just as they do my interpretations of it: British experimental dance, American early postmodern choreography, recent European performance, ballet and English folk dance; postmodernist and modernist stances.

Critical and literary theory provides the methodological framework for the research, which draws on intertextual and hermeneutical perspectives to construct interpretations that take into account the discursive and multilayered nature of the work. Detailed analyses of six pieces created between 1988 and 2006 (*Hymns*, *Stoics*, *The Stop Quartet*, *Both Sitting Duet*, *The Quiet Dance* and *Speaking Dance*) address structural, thematic and conceptual aspects that I have identified as central to Burrows's dance: the composite character of his movement vocabulary, the cultural specificity of his art, his contentious relationship with minimalism and abstraction, his collaborations across arts, and the presence of underlying compositional strategies and intimate motives throughout his work.

In moving towards a poetic reading of Burrows's dance, I argue that the specific type of language constructed in his pieces and the distinctive modes of signification they embody, between form and content, rule and transgression, non-referentiality and empathic recognition, suggest an interpretation of his choreography as a form of both poetic language and poetics, that is, as both creative and theoretical practice.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vi
Preface: If on a late summer's day a researcher: or the many possible threads of the interpretive narrative of this research	1
PART 1: SETTING THE SCENE	6
Chapter 1: Burrows's choreography in context: journeys, perspectives and intersections	7
1.1 Investigating the 'enigma'	7
1.2 A career across boundaries	9
1.3 Contexts and traces from ballet to postmodern performance via folk dance	15
1.4 Mapping the study	20
Notes	27
Chapter 2: Burrows's dance as multilayered and dialogic text: methodological frameworks and theoretical underpinnings	28
2.1 Researching Burrows's choreography: sources, analytical techniques and interpretive strategies	28
2.2 The research process: an open dialogue	35
2.3 Interpretation and 'fusion of horizons': an hermeneutical perspective	43
Notes	47
Chapter 3: The multiple paths of interpretation: from semiotics to poetics	48
3.1 Constructing ambivalence: between form and content	48
3.2 The dialectics of subjectivity: poetry as a site of contradictions	51
3.3 The text and the outside world: the speculative dimension of poetry	54
3.4 Reading the dance 'as it wants to be read': researching the work through selected foci	58
Notes	64

PART 2:	BURROWS'S CHOREOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE	65
Chapter 4:	Weaving gestures: the multilingualism of the dance (<i>Hymns</i>)	66
4.1	The oddity of the familiar	66
4.2	A pragmatic theatre	69
4.3	Everyday gestural language	75
4.4	Between the gestures and the lyrics	77
4.5	Ordinary and specialised movement vocabularies	82
4.6	Heterogeneity, rhythm and the displacement of meaning	85
	<i>Notes</i>	87
Chapter 5:	Dancing irony: English character and parody (<i>Stoics</i>)	89
5.1	A 'very English' choreographer: problematising national categorisations	89
5.2	Fragmentation, subversion and invention: where the irony lies	96
5.3	Humour as an attribute of Englishness: parody and major conventions	103
5.4	Stoicism and resilience: the elements of a quiet rebellion	112
5.5	Burrows's 'minor' dance	115
	<i>Notes</i>	116
Chapter 6:	The layers of the dance: reinterpreting abstraction and minimalism (<i>The Stop Quartet</i>)	117
6.1	A critical divide	117
6.2	Generating complexity from simplicity	122
6.3	Painting the dance: adding, subtracting and layering	127
6.4	Distillation, dialogue and deconstruction: strategies of reinterpretation	134
6.5	Dancing at the crossroads	140
	<i>Notes</i>	144
Chapter 7:	Burrows and Fargion: a discursive choreomusical collaboration (<i>Both Sitting Duet</i>)	146
7.1	An unconventional partnership	146
7.2	Intertwining musical gestures	149
7.3	Pattern and change	154
7.4	At the intersection between two worlds	159
7.5	Generating modes of signification	162
7.6	Reverberations of self-reflection	169
	<i>Notes</i>	170

PART 3:	INSCRIBED CONTINUITIES	172
Chapter 8:	Traces of dance: following the threads of repetitions and citations (<i>The Quiet Dance</i> and <i>Speaking Dance</i>)	173
8.1	Compounding signs, suggestions and stories	173
8.2	A fascination with old-fashioned ideas	176
8.3	The quiescent images that lie beneath	183
8.4	Material loaded with history: a controlled implosion	187
8.5	Rethinking ways of communicating meaning: a new form of storytelling	194
	<i>Notes</i>	199
Chapter 9:	Jonathan Burrows's poetic(s) (of) dance: dancing poetry and practising theory	201
	A final note	218
	<i>Notes</i>	222
 APPENDICES		
A.	ChoreoChronicle	223
1.	Early works	224
2.	Main works	225
3.	Other projects	229
4.	Awards and residencies	230
B.	Interviews	231
1.	Burrows on <i>Hymns</i>	232
2.	Burrows on <i>Stoics</i>	250
3.	Burrows on <i>The Stop Quartet</i>	258
4.	Burrows on <i>Weak Dance Strong Questions</i> and <i>Both Sitting Duet</i>	273
5.	Fargion on <i>Both Sitting Duet</i> and <i>The Quiet Dance</i>	283
6.	Burrows on <i>The Quiet Dance</i> (1)	292
7.	Burrows on <i>The Quiet Dance</i> (2)	306
8.	Burrows on <i>Speaking Dance</i>	314
C.	Consent letters	328
1.	Jonathan Burrows's consent letter	329
2.	Matteo Fargion's consent letter	330
BIBLIOGRAPHY		331

Acknowledgments

My sincere thanks go to all those who have assisted me through this research, helping me to make it one of the most enjoyable and rewarding experiences of my life. My full-time doctoral degree has been supported by the University of Surrey with a generous scholarship, for which I am extremely grateful.

I am indebted to Jonathan Burrows for the inspirational work he has produced in over two decades of creative and intellectual enquiry, but also for the time, effort and research material he has readily put at my disposal through the numerous interviews and requests for information I have subjected him to for over three years. Thank you to Matteo Fargion for his willingness to share with me insights into his and Jonathan's work on so many occasions. I am grateful to both for granting me permission to use unpublished interview material in this thesis. Thank you also to Adam Roberts for his generosity in providing me with video material and for his stimulating email exchanges on his film works.

I am grateful to Chris Jones for assisting me in the early stages of the research, allowing me access to archival material held at the National Resource Centre for Dance, where she was then archivist, and for sharing with me her own expert knowledge of British contemporary dance. Thank you to many colleagues at the University of Surrey, both staff and research students, for their readiness to engage in discussions and their genuine interest in my research. My warmest thanks go to my supervisor, Professor Janet Lansdale, for her invaluable help and unfailing support. Her experience, knowledge and generous involvement in guiding me through the research have helped me to grow through the process, both academically and personally. I am immensely grateful to her for the opportunities she has offered me and for her constant encouragement.

More private thanks go to my family and friends, who have never ceased to believe in my project. From far away, my parents and my sister have supported me and given me confidence in many telephone conversations. Next to me, my husband Lance has been through every stage of the journey, participating in my (many) ups and (a few) downs. I thank him from the heart for his love, his patience and his critical reading of more than one draft of the text.

PREFACE

If on a late summer's day a researcher

Or the many possible threads of the interpretive narrative of this research

Italo Calvino's *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* is a series of lectures written in 1985 on literary legacies for the twenty-first century. They are devoted to 'lightness', 'quickness', 'exactitude', 'visibility' and 'multiplicity': only five literary values, since Calvino died before he could finish them, or indeed present them. The note to the text (1996) mentions the title of the sixth, unwritten lecture, 'consistency', and the discovery of annotations for an eighth lecture, 'on the beginning and the ending' of novels. Calvino deals with each subject by justifying his interest in the theme and exploring its attributes in relation to those of its converse, through references to a wealth of literary texts from different traditions. However, as Calvino states, 'each value or virtue I chose as the subject for my lecture does not exclude its opposite' (1996, p. 45). The discussion of each theme is based on a personal preference, as is clearly outlined at the beginning of the book: 'I will devote my first lecture to the opposition between lightness and weight, and will uphold the values of lightness. This does not mean that I consider the virtues of weight any less compelling, but simply that I have more to say about lightness' (p. 3). However, through the treatment of each quality it also emerges clearly that each value cannot be perceived without its opposite, which in fact represents the condition for both the existence and the appreciation of the chosen virtue. In the lecture on exactitude, for instance, Calvino discusses the appeal of literary and poetic qualities such as indefiniteness and indistinctiveness alongside those of rigour and meticulousness, and comments: 'the poet of vagueness can only be the poet of exactitude, who is able to grasp the subtlest sensations with eyes and ears and quick, unerring hands' (p. 60).

In coincidentally coming across this book at the end of my research, I identified similarities between the modes of my interpretive examination of Jonathan Burrows's dance and Calvino's discussion of literary examples. The place that my own subjective choices have played in the articulation of the analysis, selecting, linking and evaluating specific themes and pieces, resembles the personal treatment of topics and ideas in Calvino's text. Moreover, the literary values explored in this book, and

the ways in which they are examined, strike me for their consonance with the qualities of the choreographer's work. The traits that Calvino discusses could arguably be identified as well amongst the attributes that Burrows looks for and works towards in his choreography, with a similar awareness of their inextricability from their opposite characteristics. They reveal a similar attitude to composition, a concern for formal aspects and strategies as inseparable from thematic interests, and as an integral part of artistic research. These themes have often emerged as the subject of discussion in a number of interviews I conducted with Burrows (see Appendix B) and are also topics of exchange and debate between the choreographer and his collaborators – especially Matteo Fargion, who often counterbalances Burrows's views on issues of rhythm and composition such as quickness/slowness, variation/repetition, consistency/change (see, for instance, Burrows, 2005b and Fargion, 2005). Similarly, the vastness of Calvino's knowledge, which so clearly emerges from this series of lectures, in which he draws on a wide variety of literary genres, forms and traditions – prose and poetry, Italian and foreign literatures, contemporary and historical examples, literary and scientific texts, high art and popular culture – could be seen to be mirrored in Burrows's eclectic dance background and in the diversity of his interests and contexts of reference. It is an approach that resonates strongly with the modes of analysis I adopt in this thesis, through which I aspire to examine and understand the multiple traces inscribed in the choreographer's work through a composite interpretive framework.

I am intrigued by the idea of how several passages of Calvino's book could be placed in relation to Burrows's work, as they echo readings formulated in this research. Moreover, the literary observations appear analogous to the qualities, nuances and atmospheres created by the choreographic pieces. The light mood of so many of Burrows's dances aligns itself with Calvino's declaration that his 'working method has more often than not involved the subtraction of weight' (Calvino, 1996, p. 3); the inextricability of humour and seriousness in the choreographer's approach to work could be read in the writer's claim: 'above all I hope to have shown that there is such a thing as lightness of thoughtfulness, just as we all know that there is a lightness of frivolity. In fact, thoughtful lightness can make frivolity seem dull and heavy' (p. 10); and in a further comment: 'lightness for me goes with precision and determination, not with vagueness and the haphazard' (p. 16).

Burrows's fascination with the meticulousness of form and performance of English folk dance is mirrored in Calvino's 'attract[ion to] folktales and fairytales ... because of [his] interest in style and structure, in the economy, rhythm, and hard logic with which they are told' (p. 35). The concise form of Burrows's dances, never longer than fifty minutes (and even as short as five, as in the case of the camera piece *Hands*), matches Calvino's preference for brevity, expressed by the statement: 'by temperament I feel more at ease in short pieces: much of my work consists of short stories' (p. 49). A similar sensitivity to Burrows's passion for rhythmical structures and his calculated use of variations of pace can be found in Calvino's quotation of 'the old Latin tag, *Festina lente*' (p. 48), hasten slowly, and in the principle that 'a writer's work has to take account of many rhythms' (p. 54). Burrows's long-standing interest in patterns and schemes – from the simple recurrence of phrases of his early works, to the use of floor grids in *The Stop Quartet*; from his attempts to construct movement sequences from telephone numbers, to his fascination with compositional principles based on serial combinations of repetitions and variations – finds a parallel in Calvino's 'fondness for geometrical forms, for symmetries, for numerical series, for all that is combinatory, for numerical proportions' (p. 68); the choreographer's reliance on constraints to achieve freedom can be read in the writer's 'fidelity to the idea of limits, of measure' which produces an endless chain of 'possible variants and alternatives' and a 'vertigo ... of the detail of the detail' (p. 68).

Burrows's experimentations with different kinds of creative processes, either based on gestural material which eventually may generate images in the viewer's perception of it (as, for instance, in *Both Sitting Duet*) or based on images as starting points upon which to devise the movement (as in *The Quiet Dance*) are summarised in Calvino's identification of 'two types of imaginative process: the one that starts with the word and arrives at the visual image, and the one that starts with the visual image and arrives at its verbal expression' (p. 83). The multiplicity of references, grammars and forms that Burrows draws on evokes Calvino's ideal of literature as 'capable of weaving together the various branches of knowledge, the various "codes", into a manifold and multifaceted vision of the world' (p. 112). Lastly, the intellectual and physical coherence of Burrows's body of work and his attention to structural aspects, especially in the painstaking work he devotes to the composition of the opening and

final sequences of his pieces, might correspond to Calvino's (unwritten) discussions of consistency and of how to begin and end a text.

The openness and complexity discussed in these lectures are also exemplified in another work by Calvino, his 'hyper-novel' (1996, p. 120) *If On a Winter's Night a Traveller* (written in 1979), in which ten narratives originate from a common centre and take the reader through different developments which are all, for various reasons, interrupted and left unfinished; concurrently, other chapters alternate between the ten stories and revolve around the situation of the reader of the book itself, his gestures and rituals in preparation for the act of reading and the unexpected events that occur to him through his reading. Thus the novel is both narrative and metanarrative: it tells a story which is constituted through both its writing and its reading, whilst also concerning the art itself of writing/reading. This interdependence is central also to my research, through which, in writing about dances, I also reflect on modes of reading them. Furthermore, the coexistence of artistic and analytic qualities, and ultimately of practice and theory, is a significant characteristic of Burrows's work, whose pieces, it is argued in this thesis, are both narrative and self-referential, dance and metadance, poetic choreography and a poetics of choreography (Chapter 9).

The conceptual framework of Calvino's series of lectures could also be taken to cast a light on the methodological perspective adopted in my interpretive discourse on Burrows's dance: that is, on the choice to focus on specific pieces, selected as paradigmatic of fundamental qualities of the choreographer's work, as well as of the researcher's interests. In the same way that Calvino's discussion of the chosen value is constructed in interrelation with that of the opposite quality and through references to a variety of texts of different kinds, the interpretation of aspects of the dances analysed in this thesis is based on the recognition of their multilayered, intertextual and contradictory nature. But, in its being a form of writing, 'in which outwardness and innerness, the world and I, experience and fantasy, appear composed of the same verbal material' (Calvino, 1996, p. 99), this research can also be read as a narrative in its own right.

It started on a late summer's day, when I drove to Linate, one of Milan's airports, to meet Burrows, who had been invited to perform at the dance festival that I was working for. In the drive from the airport to the venue, a dialogue began, about

writing and reading – his dances and my texts, other dances and other texts. From the directions and turns of that first car journey (Calvino says that ‘the novella is a horse’ [1996, p. 39], but in this ‘next’ millennium that is the twenty-first century we have to make do with a car!) the dialogue has taken new directions and turns. This thesis is the story of the thread that has been followed since the opening of that dialogue – and it is only one of the possible threads that could have been followed.

PART 1

SETTING THE SCENE

CHAPTER 1

Burrows's choreography in context

Journeys, perspectives and intersections

1.1 Investigating the 'enigma'

Jonathan Burrows's artistic research has contributed significantly to the reformulation of Western-European contemporary choreography and has made a challenge to conventions of genres, languages and techniques. His dance embodies a delicate balance between rigour and lightness, seriousness and wit, detachment and intimacy. Despite their deadpan inscrutability, his performances have conceptual depth whilst also inviting human empathy. They can touch on profound human feelings and conditions without referring to them directly, awakening the spectators' sensitivity without exposing their processes and intentions. On the basis of this hypothesis, I analyse how the complex interplay of references and qualities in his work generate an original form of communication with audiences who are perceptive to this subtle exchange, at once intellectually intriguing and discreetly emotional.

Since the late 1980s critics in Britain, Europe and, more recently, the United States have acknowledged and praised Burrows's talent for inventive and creative work, his 'original use of movement' (Percival, 1992b, p. 32), his fresh approach to composition (Mackrell, 1987), his 'controlled, understated' (Percival, 1988a, n.p.) and 'uncompromising' (Crisp, 1996, p. 15) performances and the humour and 'obliqueness' (Dunning, 2004, n.p.) of his unconventional, challenging and charmingly enigmatic pieces. Yet the scholarship to date shows a lack of detailed analysis of the themes and qualities underlying his dances and of his choreographic method. Various expressive modes, stylistic formulations and conceptual positions can be identified in Burrows's choreography, which are the result of the diversity of his interests and of the openness of his approach to choreographic composition. His linguistic and structural references are drawn from disparate fields – ranging from different genres of dance and other art forms, to pedestrian movement and ordinary situations – and are reworked in his choreography in a casual and non-straightforward

manner, through the use of compositional devices such as fragmentation, quotation, translation, repetition and geometrical patterning.

The role that Burrows has played in questioning accepted formats of Western-European contemporary dance and the international acclaim he has received for his experimental work since the 1980s appear in contrast with the meagre and fragmentary investigations of his dance in past and current scholarship. This justifies a detailed study, constructing an outline, analysis and interpretation of his body of work, with particular attention to the strategies of signification adopted in his dances and the reconfiguration of choreography they imply. In this thesis I argue that, in order to understand the complexity of languages and modes of Burrows's choreography and performance, it is necessary to appreciate the variety of dance environments and artistic experiences he has embraced throughout his career. Hence the need for a biographic outline that traces the contexts of development of his art and interrogates their relationships with his choreographic work.

The sources for a reconstruction of Burrows's career are relatively scarce. The biographical and bibliographical notes compiled by Chris Jones (1998a) in the *International Dictionary of Modern Dance* and by Rachel Chamberlain Duerden (1999) in Martha Bremser's guide to contemporary choreography are the only two attempts to produce a coherent chronological and critical summary of his work. Although they have the merit of collating information on Burrows's early years that is not easily available otherwise, and of outlining the main stages of his training and career, they are by nature concise accounts and are no longer up-to-date. Another useful overview of the work, including a brief list of references, a biographical note and company information, is Duerden's 2001 article in *The Dancing Times*, which nevertheless does not review any of the late 1990s pieces. A more detailed chronology, a bibliography and list of works up to 1993 was also compiled by Sarah Harris in her MA dissertation (1993). The archives of the National Resource Centre for Dance hold a topic file on Burrows, but this has not been systematically updated since the late 1990s.

Whilst other fragmentary details can be gathered from the critical literature, a major source of information has been found in the choreographer himself. Considerable parts of the following reconstruction are largely based on personal conversations with

Burrows (2004, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2006b, 2006c and 2006d). Necessarily, they reflect the choreographer's subjective perspective, his selective memory of the past and his interpretation of events and situations. Equally, interviews have been shaped and framed according to my own choices and interests; hence this account of Burrows's career is, to some extent, constructed around my own perception and understanding of the work. However, this information is also considered in relation to the history of British contemporary dance and to the framework of the latest developments of European choreography, in order to verify details, contextualise or challenge personal interpretations and balance the individual nature of certain perspectives with more widely shared accounts.

1.2 A career across boundaries

Born in 1960 in County Durham, Jonathan Burrows began his career in dance as a ballet dancer. His mother was his first teacher until 1970, when he joined the Royal Ballet School. At White Lodge, where he trained for nine years, besides ballet he also studied composition and English Morris dancing. Speaking about the introduction of folk dance classes in the school for the purpose of fostering a national style of ballet, the choreographer recounts: 'it was Ninette de Valois's idea that, since the Russian ballet schools all learned Russian folk dance, the English ballet school should learn English folk dance' (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.). In 1979 he also became a teacher of folk dances at the Royal Ballet School. As for his choreographic training, Burrows stresses the strong impact that Kate Flatt's Saturday morning composition course at the Royal Ballet Upper School had on his creative development. Flatt, a strategic figure of British New Dance, involved with the work of the X6 Dance Space (Jordan, 1992a), as well as research assistant to Léonide Massine, introduced Burrows to the analytical investigations of contemporary dance and showed him the potential of dance beyond ballet (Burrows, 2005c).

In 1979, he was invited by Royal Ballet director Norman Morrice to join the company in Covent Garden, with the unusual role of 'apprentice choreographer' (Burrows, 2005c).¹ As early as 1978, in fact, he had started to choreograph for Royal Ballet School performances (*Kaleidoscope*, *Songs of Travel*, *Nemeton*) and his potential had already been acknowledged by the Ursula Moreton Award granted in 1978 for his

student piece *Three Solos*. In the early 1980s, he began to create works both for classical dance companies, such as Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (*Catch*, 1980 and *The Winter Play*, 1983), and for modern dance groups, such as Extemporary Dance Company (*Listen*, 1980) and Spiral Dance Company (*Cloister*, 1982). These first experiments, and the solos he created for himself (e.g. *With a Gaping Wide-mouthed Waddling Frog*, 1980), received good critical reviews, which praised his creative gift and unconventional compositional choices (Clarke, 1981 and 1983; Dromgoole, 1983; Goodwin, 1981 and 1983a; Jordan and Friend, 1982; Macaulay, 1985; Percival, 1978, 1980 and 1983; Smith and Agis, 1982). In particular, *Cloister*, a contemporary work presented at Dance Umbrella 1982, is described by Stephanie Jordan and Howard Friend as a suggestive and dynamic dance, in which the 'entanglements and upward striving movements' of the dancers in the group scenes, together with the energetic solo sequences that intersperse them, evoke a 'desire for escape from confinements of place and people' (1982, p. 192). In *The Winter Play*, critics applauded the way in which Burrows brilliantly orchestrated different kinds of movement materials, blending together the various dance forms of his background to create an original ballet:

the means he uses are so diverse that the unity of the piece is remarkable; so is the excitement he distils from a mixture of old myth, the tradition of the mummers' plays, English folk and popular dances and straight ballet. ... It is gratifying to see Burrows, whose inventiveness and originality were never in doubt, find a strong and theatrical use for his gifts.

Percival, 1983, p. 9.

In 1986, Burrows was promoted to soloist, having built his reputation mainly on his choreographic potential and on his talent for character roles. He is remembered especially for bringing 'the shy sister poignantly to life' in *Cinderella* (Levene, 1996, p. 23) and for 'the bossy Widow Simone in *La Fille Mal Gardée*' (Levene, 1991, p. 22), both performed in 1986. Burrows often belittles his performances as a ballet dancer and ascribes his relative success in the Royal Ballet to favourable circumstances:

at the Royal Ballet, I mainly ran around in drag or as some comic character with a large beard. It wasn't the same as being in a pair of white tights dancing Balanchine. And I only got a job at the Royal Ballet because it was the time

when they were interested in new choreographers. ... I didn't get given the job because they loved my dancing.

Burrows, 2005a, n.p.

Nevertheless, the critical literature demonstrates that he also created interesting and captivating roles. In 1991, for example, John Percival welcomed his debut as Drosselmeyer in a *Nutcracker* performed by the Royal Ballet at Covent Garden, with the following comment: 'his is a particularly well-conceived interpretation, wry and sharp at once, with a sad, twisted smile' (1991a, n.p.). And Burrows himself admits: 'I did eventually end up doing much more dancing because the choreographer Kenneth MacMillan kind of liked me. So I ended up doing quite technical things' (2005a, n.p.).

In the mid-1980s, Burrows also started to work as a dancer for the Rosemary Butcher Dance Company. He was invited to take part in Butcher's 1986 ten-year retrospective (including *Landings*, *Space Between* and *Traces*), and he also danced in *Flying Lines* (1985), *Touch the Earth* (1987), *After the Last Sky* (1995) and *Scan* (1999) (Butcher and Melrose, 2005; Burrows, 2005a; Harris, 1993). On Burrows's commitment to Butcher's work, Percival observed that the choreographer

used to take time off from the Royal Ballet to dance for her, and has appeared with her recently even since starting his own company. His explanation of her achievement is: 'it's a matter of her perseverance – she really has gone on following her clear vision in a very courageous way.'

Percival, 1997, p. 6.

In 1988, whilst still performing for the Royal Ballet and, on a project basis, for Butcher, he founded his own dance company, the Jonathan Burrows Group. In 1992, after four years of juggling his ballet commitments and the creation, rehearsals and touring of his own pieces, he left the Royal Ballet to become an independent choreographer. This move was also helped by the choreographic awards he had recently been granted (Frederick Ashton Choreographic Award, 1991; Digital Dance Award, 1991). Thus, like other choreographers of his generation, from Matthew Hawkins to Russell Maliphant, from Michael Clark to Matthew Bourne, Burrows left a world towards which he held mixed feelings (Burrows, 2005a), following his desire to experiment with movement beyond the codes of ballet:

I wanted to keep my horizons as open as possible. I've always thought of myself as a choreographer simply of dance, not as a choreographer with a particular attachment. What is important to me is the ability to look at all the possibilities and explore them.

Burrows cited in Meisner, 1996c, p. 19.

Since his debut as a contemporary choreographer, Burrows and his group have been invited to perform in the main UK dance venues, events and platforms for contemporary experimental dance, with the Dance Umbrella festival playing a key role. There he premiered the first version of *Hymns* (1986), an extract from *Stoics* (1990), followed by the complete piece (1991), and *Very* (1992) (Rowell, 2000a). In the early 1990s, he started to tour internationally and his work enjoyed wider success, both in Britain and abroad. During this period, he also established closer contacts with the contemporary European dance scene, and with Belgium in particular, where he became associate artist at the Kunstencentrum Vooruit, Gent, between 1992 and 2002 and started his involvement as guest teacher and mentor at PARTS, the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios directed by Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker. He also lived in Brussels full-time between 2000 and 2003.

Around the early to mid-1990s, when British New Dance was reaching a turn in its life cycle, opening up to the multiple paths of its postmodern descendants, dance critics and scholars in the United Kingdom sought to produce accounts of the last thirty years of choreographic experiments, analysing their historical development, stylistic aspects and main figures (Jordan, 1992a; Mackrell, 1991a and 1992a; Parry, 1996b). These reconstructions and examinations identify the main points of reference for British contemporary choreographers from the mid-1960s in the past and recent achievements of American modern and contemporary dance, and especially in those of the generation of the Judson Dance Theater.

Within these studies, the extent of Burrows's contribution to British contemporary dance is only partially acknowledged: Jann Parry, in an article on British 'dance at the cutting edge', places him in the variously assorted category of the 'English eccentrics', citing him within an umbrella group of British choreographers that she generically describes as 'different', 'distinctive' and 'original' (1996b, p. 73); other accounts of the development of contemporary dance in the United Kingdom up to the early 1990s only mention him briefly, and mainly for his collaborations as a dancer

with Butcher (Jordan, 1992a; Mackrell, 1991a), or leave him out completely (Mackrell 1992a). Furthermore, Burrows's choreographic voice has often been portrayed as idiosyncratic, if not enigmatic, 'owing nothing to any other choreographer' (Thorpe, 1991, p. 12), and 'defy[ing] summing up' (Jones, 1998a, p. 84).

In response to the vagueness and suspension of judgement on Burrows's unconventional style found in previous scholarship, I propose a detailed examination of specific traits and qualities of his choreography and argue that its originality should be perceived in relation to the specific contexts in which he trained and developed his art. Thus, Burrows's distinctiveness in dealing with compositional issues and in challenging conventional paradigms is here discussed in the light of previous and concurrent works by other American and British choreographers, as well as of contemporary European dance practices. Moreover, a contextual analysis, which draws upon a variety of theoretical perspectives, allows the construction of an interpretive framework that accounts for the multiplicity of layers and texts intersecting in Burrows's work.

Despite the recognition Burrows has continued to receive from British institutions (*Time Out* Award, 1994; Prudential Award for Dance, 1995; Choreographer in Residence at the South Bank Centre, 1998-1999; Arts Council of England Dance Fellowship Award, 2000-2002, nomination for a 2003 South Bank Show Award), his move to continental Europe in the late 1990s has affected his relationship with the British dance scene, where his already idiosyncratic position has been interpreted at times as a sign of distance and isolation. On the other hand, it has widened his popularity abroad, both in Europe and overseas, where he has been touring extensively and has received considerable support (New York's Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts Award, 2002; Bessie Award for Choreography, 2004).

This shift in Burrows's fortune has started to attract the attention of British critics. Ismene Brown, for instance, wrote an article titled 'The Vanishing Man of British Dance', whose subtitle reads: 'European audiences love Jonathan Burrows's latest piece, a duet performed in silence. So why isn't he a big noise in his home country?' (2003a, p. 19). Here she compares the increasing success in the UK of European-

based choreographers such as William Forsythe with Burrows's progressive disappearance from British stages. Since she considers Burrows to be 'probably Britain's cleverest, most stimulating choreographer', she calls herself 'baffle[d] and trouble[d]' by the fact that he 'is so little seen' in his home country (2003, p. 19). Brown reports Burrows's strong views in this respect, with regard both to his choice to move to the Continent and to the reasons behind Britain's limited interest in his work:

he has been based in Belgium for three years, which he believes gives him a better view of the waves of innovation that constantly break in European dance and art. London, with its 'island mentality', is 'resolutely isolated.' Britain, he says forcefully, is addicted to hype, which is intensely discouraging for choreographers not keen to replay old familiarities.

Brown, 2003a, p. 19.

In recent years, Burrows has disbanded the Jonathan Burrows Group and has created his last four pieces in close collaboration with other artists from different disciplines. German and Belgian producers (Joint Adventures, Munich; Kaaithheater, Brussels) have funded his most recent works, alongside long-time British sponsors and supporters (Dance Umbrella, Dance4, British Council, Arts Council of England).

Apart from his early experiments and later less well-known collaborations, to date he has created sixteen pieces:

1. *Hymns*, 1985-1988
2. *Dull Morning*, 1989
3. *Stoics*, 1991
4. *Very*, 1992 (and film, 1993)
5. *Our*, 1994 (and film)
6. *Hands*, 1995 (film)
7. *Blue Yellow*, 1995 (film, for Sylvie Guillem)
8. *The Stop Quartet*, 1996
9. *Walking/music*, 1997 (for Ballett Frankfurt)
10. *Quintet*, 1997
11. *Things I Don't Know* (including the trio *Altogether*), 1998
12. *Singing*, 1999 (revived in 2003)
13. *Weak Dance Strong Questions*, 2001 (collaboration with Jan Ritsema)
14. *Both Sitting Duet*, 2002 (collaboration with Matteo Fargion)
15. *The Quiet Dance*, 2005 (collaboration with Matteo Fargion)
16. *Speaking Dance*, 2006 (collaboration with Matteo Fargion)

1.3 Contexts and traces from ballet to postmodern performance via folk dance

Outlining the framework of Burrows's career is a first step towards the problematisation of the widely held, yet simplistic and scarcely supported opinion of his work as unique and enigmatic, allowing for an analytical investigation of the traits and qualities of his dances. Whilst sharing the view expressed by previous literature on the originality of the choreographer's contribution, it is possible to substantiate this opinion with a critical examination of his distinctiveness in relation to its frames of reference. It can be argued that it is in the way that Burrows blends and reworks the traces filtered through his training and background that his individual creativity emerges. As can be inferred from the stages of Burrows's training and career outlined above, the main contexts of reference for his movement language and choreographic principles can be identified mainly in ballet, English Morris dancing, Rosemary Butcher, London's experimental dance venues and programmes and, from the late 1990s, the contemporary European dance scene.

Although Burrows's style and movement vocabulary have progressively moved further and further away from classical dance, ballet has always been present as a source for his dances, in that it is on this technique – as well as in reaction to it – that he has shaped his dancer's body and has built his understanding of movement and of its physical, structural and aesthetic rules. Although Burrows often claims that he was 'a terrible ballet dancer', that he 'spent quite a number of years standing around carrying spears', and he has talked about the difficulties he had when choreographing for ballet companies (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.), and the 'feeling that [he] didn't belong' in that world (2005a, n.p.), he has also acknowledged the impact that ballet has had on various aspects of his work. The humour of some of his dances bears the influence of the numerous character roles (the 'small funny people', as Burrows calls them) he played in the Royal Ballet (2005c, n.p.). The methodical accuracy of his movement language reflects his fascination for the precision and rigour of classical dance technique:

the principles of ballet make extraordinary physical sense and are extraordinarily complex. There are very few physical systems in the world that are as complex as that, to do with coordination of mind, eyes, arms, legs, head, gravity and anti-gravity.

Burrows, 2005a, n.p.

But there is one aspect of this ballet legacy that Burrows finds annoying and difficult to eradicate, which has to do with the attitude to performance: 'as much as I like to be cool, at the end of the day there is something that comes from ballet, which is about mugging it up' (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.). At times, this played-up approach resurfaces even in his most restrained dances, despite Burrows's efforts to resist any form of amplification, in favour of a more matter-of-fact manner.

I'm a ballet man still, really, under the skin, that's where I came from. And I have within me still that kind of visceral experience of performing all those ballets which are giving, giving, giving to the audience in a marvellous way. And of course I also react against that, not least because I did it for thirteen years, so I earned the right to find other ways.

Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 6.

Another dance form that appears to have had an impact on Burrows's style is Morris dancing. In this respect, Burrows has stated: 'a physical influence that has constantly been as strong as ballet for me has been English folk dance' (2005a, n.p.). Its traces can be seen mainly in the physicality and cadenced patterns of some of his works, where rhythmic jumping and lilting arm moves and steps feature among the essential elements of the vocabulary of his pieces, often lending them a cheerful and light tone. The folk dance classes Burrows attended at the Royal Ballet School were taught by Ron Smedley and Bob Parker, about whom he talks with great affection (Burrows, 2005a and 2005c). He also often quotes Smedley's description of the fundamental principle of Morris dancing: 'it's a jump that doesn't go up, it goes down' (2005c, n.p.). Burrows is fascinated by this distinctive physicality, as well as by the element of ritual that this and other forms of folk dance entail, by the rigour and precision they require, and by the attitude of the performance, which is not about showing off one's individual virtuosity but rather about achieving an overall effect: 'it's very fast, very skilled. It's extraordinary, you are part of a machine in which you lose sense of self completely, and that's something that I still love about it' (2005c, n.p.). Although a relationship with English Morris dance is mostly evident in his early pieces, and especially in *Hymns*, as is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, traces of the physicality and repetitive structure of folk dance, based on the concatenation of segments, can be found throughout Burrows's work. Louise Levene has quoted the choreographer as saying:

people look at what's on the outside, but what I'm talking about is the actual technique of it. It's a wonderful technique to do with dropping into the ground and bouncing off it. It's something that appears to have evolved over a long period of time and it makes great physical sense. It's unlike any other way of dancing. It's not evident when you look at what I'm doing from the outside but from the *inside*, dancing it, the connection is there.

Burrows cited in Levene, 1991, p. 22.

In Burrows's latest pieces, traces of this peculiar dance form may also assume the form of 'quotations'. In *Both Sitting Duet*, for instance, the movement sequence contains a section that in the choreographer's own notes of the performance is called 'Bampton', which includes an arm pattern drawn from Morris dancing (Chapter 7). The name comes from Bampton-in-the-Bush, a village near Oxford, where Burrows goes every year on Whit Monday to see the traditional all-day session of folk dances (Burrows, 2005a). In *The Quiet Dance*, an arm pattern consisting in bouncing one's fists on the knees and then lifting them up to one's ears is also a citation of a folk dance element (Chapter 8).

Butcher's 'minimalist simplicity' and 'reduced movement' (Jordan, 1992a, pp. 160, 161) can be seen to have left traces in Burrows's own physical vocabulary, limited to a small range of movements and gestures; in his rigorous attention to detail and in his use of repetition; in his fragmented, non-climactic and open-ended treatment of the dance material; in the importance he attributes to structural elements such as time and space and to their relationship with the other components of the performance; in his concern with structural devices; and in his interest in collaborations with other artists. But above all, Butcher's constant research into the possibilities of dance and movement seems to have inspired Burrows's working method, and especially his relentless questioning of the direction and principles of the work. This approach was instilled during the Friday evening classes that Butcher taught at the Riverside Studios, which Burrows began to attend in 1985:

we did a lot of contact work, but we did many other things as well. We were, in some ways, researching with Rosemary whatever she was researching. And then, once I did start to work with Rosemary, we went on doing a lot of different kinds of that research.

Burrows, 2005c, n.p.

Moreover, Burrows recognises her legacy in the way he perceives the job of the choreographer, that is, an activity that is given little scope for choice and that is bound by a sort of responsibility towards the work that is being created:

this was something that Rosemary Butcher taught me a long time ago. You may find one way or another to make [a piece], but basically that's the piece that you have in you and the job that you have is to uncover that, or discover it.

Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 3.

In the early 1980s, the Dance Umbrella festival played a key part in making British experimental choreographers (and their audience) aware of the new territories and ideas being explored on an international level. As Bonnie Rowell (2000a) clearly illustrates in her account of the first two decades of the festival and of the contexts of its development, post-Cunningham choreographers who had been involved in the Judson Church movement in the 1960s, as well as those who had subsequently developed the dance language of contact improvisation, were invited to perform at several editions of the festival right from its opening in 1978 – thus contributing to shaping the choreographic language and style of many British New Dance choreographers. In this respect, besides the connection with Butcher's aesthetic choices, Burrows's use of pedestrian movement, of simple gestures and actions belonging to the everyday and defying conventional classifications of genres and styles can be linked also to the work of American postmodern choreographers such as Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs, whom he saw perform at the Riverside Studios in the 1980s, often as part of the Dance Umbrella programmes (Burrows, 2005c).

Affinities between American early postmodern choreography and Burrows's movement language can be identified in aspects such as the incorporation in the dance of pedestrian activities and of different styles and qualities of movement, the inclusion of stillness, the non-hierarchical involvement of every part of the body, the use of everyday clothes, a reduced stage décor and a close spatial proximity with the audience. Furthermore, similarities can be found also in more specific traits of contact improvisation techniques, such as the exchange of weight and the orientation of the dancer's focus inwards or on the other dancer(s), in a non-expressive fashion. Burrows himself has often acknowledged the impact that the Judson Church choreographers had on his artistic development (Thorpe, 1991; Duerden, 1996). He

has referred in particular to Paxton as an important source of inspiration for his challenging investigations of movement and the body. Besides seeing his performances, he also attended one of his contact improvisation workshops in the early 1980s (Burrows, 2005c). Paxton's work has never ceased to interest him and he acknowledges the useful insights into the mechanisms of bodily memory he obtained through a recent month-long practical seminar (Burrows, 2005c).

In recent years, however, Burrows has also shared contexts of exposure and lines of investigation with a particular trend of European choreography whose stance has been described by the Brazilian-born, American-based dance theoretician André Lepecki as 'a necessary rethinking of certain formal and ontological parameters set by modern dance' (2004, p. 170). Within this movement, whose directions of research can vary considerably between its different exponents, the 'conceptual' experiments of Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy are the ones that he has felt the strongest affinity with (Burrows, 2004). Despite significant differences in training, background and products, Burrows recognises a 'mutual curiosity' (2004, n.p.), which he identifies mainly in a questioning attitude towards the boundaries of dance, in the enquiry into its codes and structures and in the clarity and coherence of the principles governing a piece.

This outline of the development of Burrows's career reveals the links that connect him with a multiplicity of contexts, from ballet to British New Dance, from folk dance to postmodern choreography, from American to European performance. Whilst these areas have been extensively investigated in the literature, Burrows himself has received relatively little attention from critics and scholars. It can be argued that it is the cohabitation of such a complex variety of forms and qualities – from the classical to the experimental, from the vernacular to the conceptual – that makes his art so elusive, almost indefinable. Other figures in British dance have also been described as 'solitary' and 'idiosyncratic' and have defied critics' categorisations. Butcher, for instance, is one of them (Jordan, 1992a, p. 160; Sayers, 1999, p. 52). Yet scholars have produced analyses of the main traits and developments of her choreographic work, identifying constant themes and qualities.² Burrows's work, on the contrary, still remains largely unstudied, his aesthetic and thematic concerns deemed obscure and mysterious. Hence, it is my aim to delve into this unexplored territory, analyse the

materials and layers of which it is composed and expose the distinctive traces concealed behind its apparent intangibility.

1.4 Mapping the study

I first saw Burrows's work in September 2003, in Milan, where the cutting-edge performing arts festival Uovo invited him to perform his two then most recent choreographies, *Weak Dance Strong Questions*, with the theatre director Jan Ritsema, and *Both Sitting Duet*, with the composer Matteo Fargion. I subsequently saw *Both Sitting Duet* on various other occasions, including the performance given at The Place in October 2003, when the piece was shown for the first time to a London audience. Later, these two works became the object of an analytical essay (Perazzo, 2004).³

It became evident that the context in which Burrows was viewed differed between Milan and Britain. The Italian festival clearly showed a link between Burrows and a larger contemporary European dance scene, where innovative works verging towards performance art, which challenge the boundaries between genres and styles, are informed by a strong conceptual dimension. In contrast, the British perspective highlighted his early experiences in ballet and his connection with British and American postmodern dance. On the one hand, these biographical details are at the core of Burrows's artistic profile as it is perceived by dance students in the United Kingdom. On the other hand, his links and collaborations with choreographers and artists of other disciplines from mainland Europe in more recent years are less well known in Britain, whilst they are seen as defining traits of his work by European audiences and producers.

It can be argued that both these perspectives are evident in Burrows's work: the attention to the formal and structural details of the dance and the variety of dance genres and styles his choreography draws on attest to his British training and background, whereas the close proximity to performance art and the fascination with conceptual stances link him to recent European choreography. As a consequence, an investigation of Burrows's work should take both contexts into account and assess to what extent they are reflected in the compositional, performative and thematic aspects of his choreography. Furthermore, locating his production between formalist

traditions and recent performance practices, between Britain and continental Europe raises questions concerning the separateness of these perspectives, and leads to the identification of areas of overlap and interrelation. This may enable an understanding of his contribution to the field of contemporary dance in a wider, more composite framework.

Recent scholarship on current trends in Western-European dance since the 1990s includes Burrows in a core group of choreographers whose traits and tendencies have been recognised by Lepecki as defining an 'artistic movement' in its own right (2004, p. 171). In the work of artists such as Bel (France) and Le Roy (France/Germany), Thomas Lehmen and Sasha Waltz (Germany), Vera Mantero (Portugal), La Ribot (Spain), Meg Stuart (Belgium/USA) and Jonathan Burrows – to name only a few – Lepecki identifies common formal, aesthetic and conceptual qualities, including the reduction of 'theatrics', that is, of props and scenic elements (1999, p. 129); the critique of the 'isomorphism between dance and movement', whereby dancing does not necessarily mean moving (2004, p. 170); a close relationship with performance art and its focus on the issue of presence; a distrust of the possibilities of representation; the construction of dance pieces according to an inscribed procedure of internal rules; the disregard for formal dance techniques and virtuosity as an end in itself; the critique of the conventional idea of spectatorship and the subversion of audiences' expectations; and an interdisciplinary approach, in dialogue with other arts as well as with performance theory.⁴ Besides highlighting the impact of 1960s and 1970s experiments in performance art on recent choreography, Lepecki also recognises a parallel with 'the propositions put forth in the visual arts by minimalism and conceptual art' (2004, p. 171). Furthermore, he acknowledges the specific legacies of Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater*, especially for the subtle line it draws between representation and presentation of self, and of the pedestrian and anti-virtuosic dance of the Judson Church choreographers (2004).

This critical account of current European trends provides a further analytical framework, besides British dance scholarship, within which to view Burrows's work, suggesting a possible convergence of concerns and approaches with European experimental choreography and performance of the last two decades. Drawing on this perspective, conceptual, performative and theatrical aspects of his work may be highlighted alongside the formal, compositional traits observed by British dance

critics. However, since Burrows's art is not the object of detailed inspection in Lepecki's analysis, the extent of the choreographer's dialogue with these European experiments is still to be examined.

Although Burrows's work shares with these artists an inquisitive stance towards the place, modes and functions of dance, it also shows a different approach to issues relating to the dancer's presence and the exposure of the body on stage. From Lepecki's observations, one of the main common traits linking these examples of contemporary Western-European choreography is the development of 'a problematic of presence' (1999, p. 130) which manifests itself through a specific emphasis on the corporeal dimension of the dancer, often through the use of nakedness. Drawing on Bausch's focus on the presence and individuality of the dancer, they display the body in its crude materiality, calling attention to its physical coordinates as a means for an explicit commentary on its culturally produced connotations with regard to sex, desire and appearance (Lepecki, 1999 and 2004). The result is a dance which is 'nonreproductive', in the sense that Peggy Phelan attributes to the ontological nature of performance, meaning that it 'implicates the real through the presence of living bodies' and referring to its 'independence from the referent outside of itself' (1993, pp. 148, 149). This non-referential quality of performance is at the basis of what Phelan describes as a shift between the dimension of the 'as if' to the indicative 'is', which, by 'replot[ting] the relation between perceiver and object, between self and other'(p. 165), generates a dialectical exchange between art and society and gives performance a political value.

The dimension of non-referentiality finds development also in Burrows's works, especially through an analytical attention to the forms and modes of choreography. However, the explicitness in the presentation of the body, which strongly informs many works produced within the conceptual and aesthetic rationale of recent European dance, does not feature in his pieces – and the choreographer himself has stated that this is an aspect of performance that has never interested him (Burrows, 2004). Thus, this divergence draws attention to Burrows's distinctive position within the larger experimental European context, a singularity which can once again be assessed in relation to his British training and background. However, this is not to say that Burrows's choreography is unrelated to issues pertaining to the corporeality of the dancer's body. On the contrary, it can be argued that a reconfiguration of the

physical parameters of movement is one of Burrows's main concerns, with significant consequences for how a dance may signify and communicate. Yet, his interest is perhaps of a different kind from that of other European examples, in that his questioning of the language and codes of dance does not explicitly convey the same social critique embodied in the physicality of other choreography. Critical positioning assumes in Burrows the form of a rethinking of the codes of choreography, which suggests an innovative conception of how dance may foreground conceptual stances.

The treatment of the body in dance is at the centre of attention of other examples of current scholarship in Europe. Gerald Siegmund (2003), for instance, argues that since the late 1990s contemporary Western-European choreography has developed bodily 'strategies' to escape the models and symbolic signs imposed on the body by a society based on appearance and consumerism – from constantly reshaping the body to exposing it in its nakedness, to negating its attributes.

In a similar vein, Helmut Ploebst argues that, through a purposeful exploration and reconfiguration of the human body and its language, contemporary European choreographers show the 'critical relations between dance and its society' (2001, p. 12), questioning the adherence of dance to the models of the body imposed by the cultural conditionings of the 'society of the spectacle'. He suggests that, through a use of the body that challenges preconceived ideas of physicality and corporeal identity, choreography affirms its own voice in the current political debate. The figures examined by Ploebst are, by and large, the same ones that Lepecki identifies as a group (Stuart, Mantero, Le Roy, Bel are amongst the nine artists whose work he illustrates),⁵ but unlike Lepecki, Ploebst does not consider these choreographers as forming an 'artistic network' fostering specific trends (p. 12); rather he analyses their work in the form of individual portraits, constructed through a dialogue with the artists themselves. Although Burrows is not represented here, the issue of the critical and political value of choreography that questions codified principles can be pursued also in relation to his work.

The format of a dialogue with the artists is adopted also by Silvia Fanti (2003) in her collection of essays, interviews and reflections on contemporary Western-European choreography from the late 1990s, focusing on the work of Bel, Le Roy, Miriam Gourfink (France), Kinkaleri and MK (Italy). Here the emphasis is again on the body

as a product of cultural models, and on its reconfiguration through the abandonment of virtuosity and the subversion of conventional codes of representation, with reference to Guy Debord's critique of the society of the spectacle. Apart from a critical text by Jean-Marc Adolphe, who reflects on the 'in[ter]disciplinarity' of these artistic procedures circulating material belonging to dance, visual arts, music and theatre, on the reassessment of the conventions of spectatorship (how to make the spectators uncomfortable and critically disposed towards the work, as opposed to seducing them), and on the political value of this 'critical body' that challenges the conventions of production and reception of the dance work (pp. 14-15), this miscellaneous book is an anthology of interviews with the artists presented and of texts by the choreographers and their collaborators. Although precious for the rich corpus of artists' writings it offers, this collection lacks a critical review of the works portrayed, apart from the Debordian perspective that frames the general reading of the works, which nevertheless had already been adopted by Ploebst.

Whether Burrows's marginal status in, or exclusion from, these studies of contemporary forms of European choreography, both in the case of general outlines and of detailed analyses, is related to his non-aligned position with regard to the notion and treatment of the body constitutes another topic of research. In any case, the existing scholarship appears inadequate in providing a comprehensive account of a multifaceted situation, to which Burrows's work can be seen as offering a significantly distinctive contribution.

Overall, these critical studies provide two potential frameworks in relation to which to construct an examination and interpretation of Burrows's work. In this respect, both the examples of British scholarship and the more recent contributions on European dance suggest two main analytical issues. Firstly, by looking at Burrows's choreography either from a 1990s British perspective or from a new millennium European perspective, there appears to be a division in his body of work, between the early pieces, revealing the heritage of his ballet background and his experience within the British contemporary dance scene, and the most recent ones, created within a broader European context. Nevertheless, the nature of this tension between the early and the more recent years of Burrows's career needs to be problematised and investigated more closely. The study discusses how this variety of contacts and intersections with different contexts may be reflected in the choreographer's work and

explores both changes of direction and continuities of issues and interests in his artistic research. By examining Burrows's choreographic language and thematic concerns throughout his career, the research investigates how their qualities and approaches may relate to the backgrounds of his artistic practice and to what extent these contexts of reference may have offered new frameworks to interests and questions underpinning all his work.

Secondly, neither of the two lines of research, British and European, has provided a detailed analysis of Burrows's work, offering only a partial contextualisation of his choreography, which is either generically described as distinctive and unique, or is related to that of others without investigating where the similarities lie. The fact that in both contexts Burrows appears to be portrayed as an idiosyncratic figure, never entirely fitting into a defined category, suggests the need for a specific investigation of his work engaging critically with its qualities, modalities and frameworks. Hence, by questioning unsupported definitions and categorisations of Burrows's choreography, this study aims to identify traces and texts that contribute to the original synthesis realised by his work, through an examination of the artistic and cultural references that can be read in his dances. The distinctiveness of his production within contemporary experimental choreography is thus interrogated through an analysis of both its confluences with and its divergences from other artistic practices and positions.

The interrelation of different forms and references from a variety of temporal and stylistic contexts is a widely recognised trait of postmodern artworks and is at the centre of philosophical and critical interpretations of postmodernism's relation to history (see, for instance, Hutcheon, 1988). Theories of postmodernity offer divergent views of the relationship between the contemporary world and the past. They range from positions defining the postmodern 'as an experience of the "end of history"', in the sense of its rejection of the modernist idea of development, and therefore 'as a dissolution of the category of the new', since this would imply the acceptance of the very evolutionary logic that is being questioned (Vattimo, 1988, p. 4), to perspectives claiming the 'return to history' of postmodernism from the 'ahistoric formalism and aestheticism' of modern theoretical and critical stances (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 88). However, despite the apparent incompatibility of such theories, philosophical positions questioning the idea of progress unfolding from an identifiable 'origin' do

not necessarily contradict critical conceptualisations recognising the historical dialogism of contemporary artistic products, where the past intersects with the present in the form of textual and contextual discourses, rather than as a linear sequence of causally connected events.

In relation to the complexity of the situation highlighted by these two seemingly incongruous, yet complementary, interpretations of the relationship of the present with the past, Burrows's choreographic language raises questions regarding his aesthetic and theoretical positioning. The frequent references to disparate dance types and artistic practices identifiable in his pieces suggest that the issue of the relationship to history is of central relevance to the choreographer's work. In this respect, interrogating the forms that his view of the past assumes in his dance is also crucial to an interpretation of the complexity of his artistic and conceptual relationship to postmodern positions.

Interdisciplinarity and critical awareness of cultural specificities provide me with a multiplicity of perspectives, enabling the identification of links and intersections between the choreographer's stance and its artistic contexts, and between his distinctiveness and more largely shared themes and concerns. This entails dissolving the dichotomy created by the British and European perspectives, seeking to identify continuities and discontinuities and, ultimately, composing a critical profile of the choreographer's work.

Despite the limited attention paid to Burrows's work in dance scholarship, reviews and critical articles on specific pieces have pointed to several qualities and themes of his dances, often offering insightful readings of his choreography. Thus, this research draws on this literature as a preliminary stage in identifying the key aspects of his artistic contribution, looking at the multiplicity of layers composing his work and seeking to map more comprehensively its contexts and themes. Through detailed analyses of specific works, notions of 'originality' and 'sources' are problematised in the light of a more composite understanding of the production of artworks. Burrows's idiosyncratic voice is thus interpreted in relation to the complex web of references and traces of the dance forms and practices that his choreography draws on and of the cultural and artistic contexts he inhabits. Finally, drawing on different levels of investigation – an outline of Burrows's work and a description and interpretive

analysis of his dances – an argument is developed on the reconfiguration of choreography produced by his pieces, which appear to challenge conventional codes and paradigms.

Notes

- ¹ Morrice played an important role in the development of modern dance in Britain, especially through his choreographic and directorial roles at Ballet Rambert (see, for instance, Craine and Mackrell, 2004). In interviews, Burrows himself (2005a, 2005c) has highlighted this aspect of Morrice's career and interests. In this respect, it is significant that it was Morrice who recognised Burrows's choreographic talent, possibly for its innovative potential within the context of the Royal Ballet.
- ² See especially: Jordan, 1992a and Butcher and Melrose, 2005.
- ³ This was also made possible by the fact that I had since kept in contact with him and was able to arrange to meet him and interview him about the work.
- ⁴ Amongst other choreographers mentioned are: Boris Charmatz, Felix Ruckert, Tom Plischke, João Fiadeiro, Miguel Pereira and Christine De Smedt (Lepecki, 2004, p. 171).
- ⁵ The other five portraits are: Benoît Lachambre, Raimund Hoghe, Emio Greco, João Fiadeiro and Boris Charmatz.

CHAPTER 2

Burrows's dance as multilayered and dialogic text

Methodological frameworks and theoretical underpinnings

2.1 Researching Burrows's choreography: sources, analytical techniques and interpretive strategies

In this chapter the research procedures and methodologies that are employed in the construction of an analysis and interpretation of Burrows's work are discussed and interrogated. Researching his choreography involves dealing with a living artist, who is both creator and performer of his own pieces. Since no exhaustive study on his work has been compiled and published to date, the reconstruction of his dance career and choreographic production has entailed identifying, finding and assessing the appropriate sources.

The materials this research is based upon include video-recordings of works, programme notes, published interviews, personal meetings and correspondence with the artist, my own notes of live performances, rehearsals and public talks, reviews, journal articles, dance dictionaries' entries, other students' analyses and university coursework from the early 1990s, video-documentaries, film versions of his pieces and general histories and critical literature on contemporary dance. Sources have been located mainly in the archives of the National Resource Centre for Dance, in the British Library's general and newspaper archives, in online databases of British and American newspaper articles, in Burrows's personal archives, and in Janet Lansdale's and Chris Jones's personal files.¹

Documents other than performance reviews and general introductions to Burrows's work and career are scarce, and most critical analyses of his choreography are incomplete and often fail to contextualise his practice through an identification of the variety of its references. Whilst these records have provided useful information and suggestions for the reconstruction, analysis and interpretation of his work, in some cases they have also raised methodological issues concerning the accessibility and reliability of the sources and the validity of the analytical parameters and critical frameworks implied in their proposed interpretations. Especially for the most recent

years of Burrows's production, the coverage of the British press has not been as thorough as it was up until the beginning of the 1990s. Increasingly, substantial critical literature has been produced abroad, raising consequent issues of physical and linguistic accessibility. As for the reliability of the sources, for instance, the audio-visual material documenting Burrows's work is not comprehensive and is often in the form either of documentaries featuring only selected sections of the dance pieces, or of dance films, where the camerawork reflects the creative vision of the film-maker and therefore adds an extra layer to the artistic product. Thus, these documents may present different dances from the original stage pieces. As for the validity of the critical literature in making sense of the dances, some reviews of Burrows's performances seem to analyse his pieces using parameters similar to those applied when interpreting more conventional dance works, looking for narrative consequentiality and for direct representations of an external reality; on the contrary, it can be argued that, especially in the case of Burrows's most recent work, the anti-climactic structure of the pieces and their non-figurative, almost self-referential nature challenge the validity of such a critical framework.

These incongruities found in the critical literature have shown the need to identify an appropriate methodology of dance analysis which could allow the examination of, on the one hand, the movement and compositional structure of the pieces and, on the other hand, their relationship with previous and contextual dance practices and other artistic forms, as well as their underlying themes and wider cultural contexts. Tracing the contours of the framework of suggestions and connections that have informed the choreographer's work has constituted the preliminary phase of the investigation. Particular reference has been made to his ballet training, his fascination with American post-Cunningham choreography, his interest in English folk dance and his intersections with the British and European experimental dance scenes (Chapter 1).

Further exploration addresses to what extent his choreography has absorbed and re-elaborated these traces and how far it has distanced itself and affirmed its individuality. Repeated viewings of video recordings of Burrows's works and attendance at live performances, rehearsals and workshops have been the basis for the identification of the key features and distinctive qualities of his dance language, which have been observed in relation to established styles and techniques as well as to their embodied cultural references. Detailed movement analyses, a critical study of

the existing literature on specific works and the identification of references and suggestions in the pieces have enabled an understanding of the dances in terms of the structural and compositional codes they appear to challenge and of the wider cultural discourses they give rise to and participate in. The dialogue between this specific and contextual knowledge and the researcher's critical and subjective engagement with the aesthetic and cultural dimensions of the work has led to the ascription of meanings to Burrows's choreographies articulated in this thesis.

The idea that a convincing reading of a dance cannot be arrived at without a detailed observation of the movement material and of its relationship with the other elements of the performance is at the basis of this endeavour. Thus, identifying the type of movement description that would provide the most useful basis for an interpretation of the dances represents a fundamental methodological stage. Since around the middle of the twentieth century, different analytical systems have been developed for the recording of dance, from symbol-based systems, such as Labanotation, to the four-stage method (describing the components, discerning the form, interpreting and evaluating the dance) set out by Janet Adshead (1988). At the core of these different methods is the shared argument of the importance of a 'deep and informed response to *the dance itself*' (Adshead, 1988, p. 6), which, in other words, states that

the heart of dance is the movement. Dance research that ignores the dancing ... ignores a major component that has potential for revealing a great deal about those who create and use dance.

Bartenieff et al., 1984, p. 3.

Yet, whereas symbol-based recording systems appear to be concerned merely with movement, a descriptive method allows for a more comprehensive analysis of the dance, which takes into account elements such as style and quality, the attitude of the performers, the interaction with other components of the choreography, as well as external references, from subject matters to suggestions or direct quotations from previous works (by the same choreographer or by others), to cultural traits. Arguing for the need of a 'detailed and systematic description' of dance texts (1988, p. 16), Adshead points out that 'the problematic nature of the relationship between the study of *movement* and the understanding and appreciation of *dances* has been largely overlooked' by existing notation models, such as the Benesh, Eshkol and Laban systems (1988, pp. 17-18). Furthermore, as Lesley Main remarks in her article on the

legacy of Doris Humphrey on modern dance, 'crucial aspects of movement quality and style, which are integral aspects of interpreting a work, are not in evidence' in symbol-based notation scores (2005, p. 106). Thus, whereas Labanotation can be a precious instrument for the reconstruction of dance works (Van Zile, 1985), it can be argued that dance analysis finds a more appropriate aid in the wider scope of an interpretive method such as Adshead's. Whilst the description of the physical elements and features of the dance is a necessary stage in the understanding of a work, interpretation is a more complex activity; it requires 'the recognition of *character* and *qualities*' of a piece (Adshead, 1988, p. 61) as well as the 'agency' of the spectator (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 4) in constructing the dance text, through the selection of particular aspects of the dance, the choice of a specific perspective and by means of his/her relevant knowledge and intuitive engagement with the work.

Choreography such as Burrows's, drawing on different genres and styles of dance and blending pedestrian elements with the dance material with no hierarchical distinction, requires an analytical method that allows the researcher to consider all movement on equal terms, independently of codified principles and formal conventions. This has been the fundamental consideration behind the choice of an appropriate language for the movement analysis. Consequently, the examination of Burrows's pieces has been carried out through detailed descriptions of all bodily movements, with reference to relevant indications of time, internal subdivisions in units (whether clearly marked, i.e., parts, or intuitively deduced, i.e., sections, sequences and phrases), qualities of movement and relationship with the musical elements. To account for the variety of styles and the matter-of-fact attitude to performance that characterises Burrows's works, the everyday language used describes movements in general terms, as trajectories of the body in space, without adopting a codified dance vocabulary. However, specialised terminology is employed when a particular figure is perceived as a clear reference to a particular dance form, whether as a metalinguistic comment or as a direct quotation. Moreover, pedestrian movements resembling specific actions and gestures are placed in relation to the everyday contexts they are perceived to be associated with.

The choice of a general language rather than a specialised vocabulary has raised issues concerning both its comprehensiveness and applicability to the dance product and its efficacy in relation to the object described as well as to an audience of

spectators/readers. Whereas a specialised vocabulary has the advantage of describing a specific object (that is, an example of a particular style or form of dance) concisely and effectively within a community of experts, the use of a more general terminology can result in lengthier and more elusive descriptions. Equally, however, a more fluid language has the merit of providing an account of the movement material without imposing tight stylistic interpretations or aesthetic categorisations on a dance that cannot be described in unequivocal terms. A less specialised vocabulary allows the research to overcome barriers between different fields of scholarship, an advantage that appears of particular value in relation to a form of dance that strives to break down boundaries between genres and styles and that feeds on collaborations with other artistic disciplines.

Nevertheless, any attempt at an analysis of an artistic product is far from being 'objective'. The description of a dance, even when the terminology adopted does not confine it within a specific genre, always carries an element of interpretation – of its aesthetic qualities, stylistic references and compositional traits. Although, as Adshead observes, interpretation 'remains outside the scope of a notation system' (1988, p. 18), a subjective perspective is nevertheless intrinsic to any account of a dance. Especially in the case of postmodern or experimental choreography, with its fragmentary and open form, multiple references and manifold meanings, the simple notation of structural units and patterns and the acknowledgement of qualitative attributes and stylistic aspects are the result of a choice, being but one of the many possible readings of the work. Quoting Adshead, 'notation is not totally unambiguous ..., in the sense that any system used to notate a dance already encapsulates a description and analysis of the movement as found in a specific context' (1988, p. 17).

Since an interpretive study of a dance encompasses more than an examination of the movement, the other stages of analysis identified by Adshead (1988) are equally important: investigating the relationships between the components of the dance within the overall structure, highlighting the links with its wider cultural and aesthetic contexts and assessing the qualities and character of the dance in order to make sense of it and evaluate it. In this respect, Adshead-Lansdale's further development of an intertextual methodology of analysis (1999) provides the theoretical grounding for a study of the multiple 'texts' resonating in a dance work, and thus for a reading of its multiple connotations. Drawing on literary theory and semiotics, and especially on

the poststructuralist notions of discourse, death of the author and dispersal of meanings, Adshead-Lansdale discusses the open-ended nature of the choreographic artefact, its being both body and text, form and concept, subject and object, process and product, whose relationship and perpetual dialogue with its contexts, sources and receivers are at the basis of its fluidity and intrinsic ambiguity. This perspective appears the most viable to make sense of the multiple meanings embodied by Burrows's dances, which blend different styles and types of movement, are composed of multiple layers, play with a variety of references and interact with other arts.

The manifold nature of choreographic language locates the dance in a historical dimension, constructed around the dialectics of past and present. In the domain of literature, this interplay is at the core of Julia Kristeva's notion of intertextuality, that is, her formulation, following Mikhail Bakhtin, of 'the "literary word" as an *intersection of textual surfaces* ..., as a dialogue among several writings' (1980, p. 65). As Kristeva explains,

Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them. Diachrony is transformed into synchrony, and in light of this transformation, *linear* history appears as abstraction. The only way a writer can participate in history is by transgressing this abstraction through a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure.

Kristeva, 1980, p. 65.

The permeable, historical, transpositional nature of artistic production (Kristeva, 1984), which implies a dialogue between different signifying systems, is made evident in Burrows's dances by the textual strategies through which the choreographer acknowledges the dynamics of 'cross-fertilisation' at play in the process of creation (Worton and Still, 1990, p. 1). Compositional devices such as imitation, translation and quotation both disclose and disguise the formal, conceptual and thematic links with a variety of textual references. In their discussion of intertextuality, Michael Worton and Judith Still examine the discursive value of these textual strategies, all of which appear to establish an ambivalent relation with an 'original' text, 'supplement[ing]' it, 'fragment[ing] and displac[ing]' it (pp. 7, 11). Overall, these devices signal an ambiguous attitude towards their sources or references, which may be described as both 'of recognition and transgression' (p. 9).

To quote is not merely to write glosses on previous writers; it is to interrogate the chronicity of literature and philosophy, to challenge history as determining gradation and to question conventional notions of originality and difference. Consequently, to read an explicitly (or even tacitly) quoting text is not to engage in a simple play with and of sources but to recognise and establish criteria of significance.

Worton and Still, 1990, p. 12.

An intertextual methodology requires an interdisciplinary approach to interpretation. Hence this research draws on a composite theoretical framework to identify the appropriate instruments to understand the dance: dance analysis and history, critical theory, sociocultural studies, poststructuralist theory, performance and visual arts theories, semiotics and studies of language, gesture, and music.

Moreover, an interpretation of the dances also requires the imaginative engagement of the researcher in the construction of a reading of the choreographer's work. In her discussion of how interpretations of dance texts might be formulated, Adshead-Lansdale (1999) refers to Umberto Eco's notion of the role of the reader (1979), a function that she describes as 'a paradoxical semiotic position': although the reader/spectator contributes to the production of the text/dance, (s)he is also "defined" by the text' itself, since 'the text presupposes, or foresees' its own readings (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999, p. 4). As Eco puts it, whilst 'no text is read independently of the reader's experience of other texts' (1979, p. 21), a 'text, however "open" it be, cannot afford whatever interpretation' (p. 9). The contexts and suggestions that contribute to the complexity of the dance are made explicit by the researcher by means of his/her competence, perceptiveness and intuitive and empathic involvement with the work examined. While this allows for a multiplicity of interpretations and a fluidity of meanings, the text itself also suggests 'all the paths of its "good" reading' (p. 10). The 'lexical and syntactical organisation' of a text defines the reader, and its 'discursive structures', such as codes, contexts and frames, guide the reader in his/her understanding of it (pp. 10, 17). However, rhetorical, stylistic or thematic codes may suggest to the researcher intertextual frames within which a text might be read, which allow the reader to understand it in relation to its wider cultural and aesthetic contexts.

Both Eco's semiotic model of textual reading and intertextual interpretive positions provide the theoretical underpinning for the choice of the forms and methods of analysis adopted in this thesis. Each individual work has raised specific issues and

suggested specific questions; hence interpretations have been constructed through methodologies that arise from each theoretical stance, and from each work. However, Eco's argument that a text can only be read as it wants to be read, as well as his idea of a 'model reader', that is, of a reader who is 'supposedly able to deal interpretatively with the expressions in the same way as the author deals generatively with them' (1979, p. 7), suggest that, besides a critical analysis of the text, an hermeneutical investigation of the relationship between reader and text may also produce further understanding of the dialogic process of meaning formation.

2.2 The research process: an open dialogue

Researching Burrows's choreography has entailed dealing with a multiplicity of sources and voices, which, when juxtaposed, highlight the intertextual nature of cultural artefacts and of their critical accounts and historical narratives (Hammergren, 2004). The fact that the literature on Burrows's artistic production to date is fragmentary and limited means that important resources for this research have been found in the choreographer himself and, occasionally, in his long-time collaborator, and co-creator of the three latest works, the composer Fargion (Chapter 1).

Besides the interviews found in the existing literature (Thorpe, 1991; Marigny, 1994; Boxberger, 1996; Burrows, 2002; Hutera, 2003; Polzer, 2004), personal contacts with the choreographer have enabled me to establish a dialogue with him, which has proved a precious research instrument and has often informed the directions and focuses of the study. First-hand interviews with Burrows and Fargion have been conducted over the course of three years (Burrows, 2004; 2005a; 2005b; 2005c; 2006a; 2006c; 2006d; Fargion, 2005; Perazzo, 2005b; 2005c)² and have been complemented by informal meetings and attendance at sessions within workshops, seminars and talks led by the two artists or by Burrows alone, as well as by occasionally sitting in rehearsals, thus generating a continuous exchange between artist(s) and researcher.³ The dynamics of this open dialogue have demanded critical awareness of methodological issues regarding the use of interviews as a research tool, the nature of the choreographer's engagement in the interaction and the negotiation of my own research focus and direction. These three aspects seem inextricable and have clearly informed one another throughout the development of the research.

The dialogic nature of this analytical process has also drawn attention to the role of the researcher's interpretive voice, which is informed by both the existing literature and first-hand sources, by his/her knowledge of the field and by his/her reading of the dance material. The development of the interaction with Burrows has highlighted the emergence of converging ideas and views of the work between artist and researcher, which has led me to query the process through which understanding and interpretations are formed. The following sections of this chapter recapitulate the stages of this interpretive process and suggest perspectives from which they might be viewed.

Within the human sciences, the use of interviews as a tool of enquiry is a central methodological aspect of research in ethnography and oral history. For the ethnographer, the interviewee has the role of informant, whose accounts and explanations constitute an invaluable source for the researcher (see, for instance, Buckland, 1999). For the historian, the oral testimony of a witness represents a form of knowledge which is considered 'unofficial' in relation to conventional history, that is, knowledge in which 'memory and myth intermingle, and the imaginary rubs shoulder with the real' (Samuel, 1994, p. 6). However, oral tradition and popular memory are precious instruments for historical investigation that challenges 'hierarchical view[s] of the construction of knowledge' (p. 5). In both these fields, the use of interviews in the research process has led to the development of specific methods and theories addressing issues related to the treatment of first-hand oral sources, such as Michael H. Agar's discussion of approaches and techniques concerning observation and enquiry in ethnographic fieldwork (1996) and Raphael Samuel's ideologically driven theorisation of history as 'a social form of knowledge; the work ... of a thousand different hands' (1994, p. 8).

In the case of research on a living artist, both these strands of literature are of relevance in the formulation of investigative approaches involving the use of interviews. On the one hand, they raise issues concerning the nature of the encounter between two entities, the researcher and the researched, highlighting the ambiguity of such distinctions, and on the other hand, they draw attention to the multiplicity of elements and traces that come into play in the construction of cultural and historical narratives. The interviews conducted with Burrows have questioned dichotomous views of the research process implying a clear division of roles and functions

(subject/object, researching as active/being researched as passive). Moreover, the dynamics of this dialogue have challenged the preconception that analysis is the exclusive domain of the observer, from which the observed is excluded, implying that the observed does not articulate his/her own analytical process. They have also shown that research that aims at an understanding of Burrows's artistic work should not be confined to 'official', 'academic' sources but should follow the threads generated by its diverse contexts and references in order to appreciate the fertile substratum of 'unofficial' elements which contribute to the richness of the work – reflections, memories, anecdotes and episodes of personal relevance, alongside intersections with other artistic and intellectual practices through interpersonal encounters and informal exchanges of ideas and opinions.

The interplay of roles and the relevance of informal exchanges are evident, for instance, in Burrows's accounts of the creative processes that have led to the creation of his dances. In an interview about *The Stop Quartet*, for example, Burrows identifies the different stages of the making of the piece, relates them in minute detail and explains his choreographic choices in relation to a range of other artistic practices, from Merce Cunningham and John Cage's use of a gamut of movements or sounds, to movement patterns coming from yoga positions (because he and the dancer Henry Montes were practising yoga at that time), to compositional ideas that arose from a dialogue with the composer Kevin Volans (Burrows, 2006c). In this respect, it can be argued that Burrows's choreography is an example of artistic production that overcomes the distinction between theory and practice, research and delivery, and challenges both traditional categorisations of the forms and modes in which artistic creation may be carried out and canonical premises of theoretical activity. Whilst his choreographic practice may also be seen as a form of theorising on the discipline itself, on its boundaries, principles and coordinates, both the dancing and the thinking are carried out in unorthodox ways.

In working on the recent *Speaking Dance* (2006), Burrows and Fargion were struggling with compositional aspects of the piece and had doubts about its result in a performance setting, as they had always been rehearsing the work in Fargion's kitchen. Hence they sought an external opinion: 'we asked our friend Gerard Bell, who is an actor, "will you come into Matteo's kitchen and help us with this transition from the kitchen to the theatre?"' (Burrows, 2006d, n.p.). Anecdotes of this kind shed

a light on Burrows's creative method, which reveal an unconventional approach to choreographic practice and openness to collaborative experiences that appear to question elitist conceptions of the role of the artist and traditional formats of creation.

Recent contributions to dance history have also addressed the issue of recording and retelling stories of moving bodies, which are always bodies of the past, reflecting on the fragmented nature of their traces and on the ephemeral, intangible quality of their past presence. Susan Foster theorises the task of writing histories of bodies which, through their own actions, gestures and movements are in themselves writers of (hi)stories (1995). Equally, writing about these bodies requires a corporeal understanding of their (hi)stories, of the physical, embodied nature of their existence and motion: 'writing the historical text, rather than an act of verbal explanation, must become a process of interpretation, translation, and rewriting of bodily texts' (p. 9). Hence, the task of the researcher becomes that of finding a way of recording through the bidimensionality of a printed text the multiple directions, links and connections of moving bodies. Seeing the moving body as a writing body allows dance scholarship to recognise the dancing body's agency in 'participat[ing] in the restructuring of meaning production' (p. 14) and to argue for the potential of dance-making as 'a form of theorizing' (p. 15).

The autobiographical nature of most of the material collected through conversations with Burrows poses the question of the perspective from which 'stories' are told and accounts constructed. As discussed by Thomas Postlewait, autobiographical sources 'cannot be read as straightforward historical documents' because of the narrative, teleological patterns they employ in shaping the material; in this respect, they 'require interpretation', although not in the sense of a classification of their elements 'into true and false categories' (Postlewait, 2000, p. 259). Narrative, 'metahistorical' qualities (White, 1973) can be recognised in Burrows's accounts of his choreographic career and creative processes. For instance, the device of repetition is at play across both first-hand and published interviews and appears to be used by Burrows to establish his positioning within the field of contemporary dance and in relation to his artistic references. In three of the seven interviews I conducted with him (Burrows, 2005b; 2005c; 2006c), as well as in a few instances in the literature (Thorpe, 1991; Boxberger, 1996), Burrows mentions the Judson Church choreographers as a term of reference for his choreographic research; similarly, Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Noces*

is often quoted as a seminal piece of dance that he regularly goes back to for inspiration (Burrows, 2005a; 2005b; Thorpe, 1991; Marigny, 1994). These statements clearly locate his work in relation to practices that have challenged conventional forms and styles of dance, connoting it as experimental, whilst also affirming the variety of its references.

Another narrative thread can be identified in Burrows's depiction of his complex relationship to ballet. In his references to it, ballet is both the foundation of his training, deeply embedded in his bodily structures and attitude to performance (Burrows, 2005b; 2005c; 2006a), and a technique that, according to him, he never fully mastered (2005a; 2005c; 2006a). The role ballet has played in his choreographic development appears also in tension with other practices he has felt closer affinity with, both physically and ideologically, such as English Morris dancing and American early postmodern choreography: the former fascinates him for its simple, repetitive patterns and its dignified and matter-of-fact attitude to performance (Burrows, 2005a; 2005c; 2006a), and the latter, which he came into contact with in the 1980s through performances and workshops and via his work with Butcher, interested him especially for its questioning approach towards the boundaries of dance (2005a; 2005c; 2006a; 2006c; Marigny, 1994; see also Chapter 1). On the other hand, Burrows has at times reinforced his link with ballet when this has assumed particular relevance within the field of dance, as a means to define his position within it. For instance, in the mid-1990s, when questioned by dance critics about the relationship between his ballet training and the choreography of *The Stop Quartet*, which was read as an 'evolution away from a ballet vocabulary', on more than one occasion he replied that in fact his movement language was 'getting closer and closer to it' (Meisner, 1996a, p. 3). In a more recent conversation, however, he explained his position further:

in *The Stop Quartet* ... the primary movement for the arms is mainly based on very simple balletic elements: diagonal arm, curved arm. Which is perhaps why I would respond to those interviewers by saying that my work was getting much closer to ballet. It was a slightly stupid response because *The Stop Quartet* isn't like ballet at all. But I suppose I was a little bit bored of those questions and I was maybe also trying to jump on the bandwagon due to the fact that ballet was very popular at the time, mainly because of Forsythe, so I wanted to align myself still with ballet.

Burrows, 2005a, n.p.

This account, together with other comments of this kind about his ambivalent relationship with his training and other artistic practices, appears to reflect a tension between the artist's desired and actual positions within the larger field of contemporary dance, whilst also demonstrating his close experience and direct knowledge of its dynamics and mechanisms. These statements also testify to his awareness of the wider scene in which he operates and of the multiplicity of threads and directions intersecting his work. In this respect, ethnographic and historical methodologies of analysis allow the researcher to identify the contextual and narrative elements of these autobiographical testimonies; however, these accounts should not be perceived as coherently studied and straightforwardly teleological reconstructions of his work and career, since they are the result of a continuous reflection on and reassessment of his artistic position and creative choices in relation to a field which is all but static and uniformly organised. The roles of ballet, folk dance, contemporary experimental dance and collaborations with artists from different disciplines, such as music (Fargion and Volans), film (Adam Roberts) and theatre (Ritsema),⁴ are commented upon in Burrows's accounts from the perspective of their area of influence (bodily training, attitude to performance, enquiry into the modes and functions of dance) and are constantly reassessed in relation to the shifting dynamics of the dance field. For instance, the emergence of a European scene of new choreography in the 1990s has introduced a further term of relation to Burrows's work, thus widening his set of references beyond the British/American panorama and increasing his potential for dialogue (Chapter 1).

With regard to this variety and fluidity of references and voices, the development of Burrows's artistic work is examined from the perspective of the multi-layered, dialogic, 'heteroglossic' (Bakhtin, 1981) nature of literary and cultural texts and their intrinsic ambiguity, which informs the theoretical framework of contemporary critical theory, and mainly of post-structuralist discourse. In particular, with reference to the use of interviews as a research tool, it can be argued that it is in relation to notions such as the reassessment of the role of the reader in the construction of the meanings of a text (Barthes, 1977; Eco, 1979), and the discursive and intertextual composition of dance texts (Adshead-Lansdale, 1999), that the position of authorial and autobiographical voices in dialogues and conversations between artist and researcher should be interrogated. It is from this perspective that the roles played by the

choreographer's motivations and intentions and by the researcher's own voice are here reflected upon in the interpretations of Burrows's work formulated in this thesis.

Furthermore, *a posteriori* reflections on the research process have also been informed by notions concerning the interpretive nature of understanding. In particular, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics has provided the study with a lens through which to investigate the dialogic formation of knowledge and the centrality of language in this process. Although Gadamer's relation to contemporary critical theory and post-structuralist and deconstructionist discourses is of a complex nature, due to the claim of omni-comprehensiveness implicit in his 'definition of his project as an ontology of the universal experience of understanding' (Dostal, 2002, p. 5), his critique of traditional notions of understanding as a linear and unified process of reconstruction of an author's intellectual stance demonstrates clear affinity with post-structuralist and postmodern positions. Gadamer's theorisation of the dialogic, linguistic dimension of understanding, that is, 'understanding as agreement', which characterises the concept of understanding alongside its cognitive and practical connotations (Grondin, 2002, p. 39), challenges

the notion that to understand is to reconstruct, in a disinterested fashion, the meaning of the text according to its author (*mens auctoris*). ... Gadamer deems it too 'aesthetic' or too 'contemplative' in the sense that it does not do justice to the fact that the interpreter is also very much concerned by the matter at hand.

Grondin, 2002, p. 40.

This focus on the role of the interpreter presents a similarity with post-structuralist accounts of understanding, which place the reader at the centre of the interpretive process. However, post-structuralist positions have often depicted the role of the reader as antagonistic to that of the author, in an attempt to challenge classic criticism's rationalistic notion of the Author as the fulcrum of meaning formation – for instance, Roland Barthes's formulation that 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author' (1977, p. 148). Conversely, Gadamer's notion of the involvement of the interpreter, as well as the 'insight that every interpretation draws on anticipations of understanding' (Grondin, 2002, p. 47), portray the process of interpretation as a dialogue, a conversation – and in fact the parallel between the hermeneutic situation and the exchange occurring in a conversation between two people underlies Gadamer's theory of interpretation as articulated in his main text,

Truth and Method (1989, first published in 1960). Here Gadamer maintains: 'conversation is a process of understanding. ... Everything ... characterizing the situation of two people coming to an understanding has a genuine application to hermeneutics, which is concerned with *understanding texts*' (1989, p. 385). Drawing on Plato's dialectic, he discusses 'the hermeneutic priority of the question', that is, the crucial importance of questioning in the process of understanding (p. 362). As Gadamer states,

the close relationship between questioning and understanding is what gives the hermeneutic experience its true dimension. ... This is the reason why understanding is always more than merely re-creating someone else's meaning. Questioning opens up possibilities of meaning, and thus what is meaningful passes into one's own thinking on the subject.

Gadamer, 1989, pp. 374, 375.

Hermeneutical ideas concerning the process of understanding as a dialogue appear of particular relevance for the appreciation of the dynamics of a research process which involves questioning as a form of direct exchange between the object of study and the interpreter.

Despite the attention he grants to the role of the reader in the production of meaning, Gadamer's acceptance and use of concepts such as 'truth' and 'method' (which nevertheless he adopts in open critique of the meanings that these terms hold in the natural sciences and positivist epistemology [Dostal, 2002]) and his reference to Greek philosophy and its intrinsic idealism and logocentrism clearly set him apart from the postmodernist, deconstructionist problematisation of metaphysical notions, exemplified by Derrida's rejection of the principles of centrality and systematicity (1978). However, this ambivalence in Gadamer's thought may prove theoretically instrumental to an understanding of the tensions and ambiguities that are inherent in Burrows's dance, in the sense that it offers a further context, alternative to postmodernism, within which to read the choreographer's work. In this thesis it is argued that in challenging conventional paradigms by opening up his works to a dialogue with his own dance history and other artistic forms, Burrows's choreography works across boundaries between disciplinary codes as well as conceptual stances. His dances embody at the same time the old and the new, embracing rigour and chaos, seriousness and parody, humanistic values and postmodern ephemerality. Hence the

need for a theoretical approach that shares modernist and postmodernist stances and that attempts to reconcile these sometimes opposing directions.

The coexistence of historical awareness and critical distance from the past, of deference and distortion, respect and revision of traditional elements in Burrows's work may be seen as either a condition of 'in-betweenness', embracing attributes of both modern and postmodern artistic approaches, or as a defining trait of the intrinsically contradictory nature of postmodernism itself. As is argued by the Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo, in this ambivalence lies the critical meaning of the prefix 'post-', which presupposes a questioning attitude towards the modern past, whilst also being unable to reject its premises entirely, as 'any call for an "overcoming" would involve remaining captive to the logic of development inscribed in the tradition of European thought' (1988, p. 2).⁵ Postmodernity appears therefore to be caught *between* the effort to break free from modernity and the impossibility of creating new foundations without replicating modernity's logic of progress and evolution. Without attempting to answer multifaceted and contentious philosophical questions over the nature of postmodernity, it is in this framework that Burrows's creative voice is investigated in this thesis, as an idiosyncratic response to the inherent contradictions of the contemporary artistic condition.

2.3 Interpretation and 'fusion of horizons': an hermeneutical perspective

To address the methodological questions in relation to this research, the approach adopted in the investigation of first-hand sources can be said to have been constructed through the process, that is, in relation to what the process was offering and suggesting. This has entailed close attention to the dynamics of the interactions with the object of study. For instance, Burrows initially expressed resistance to becoming the focus of long-term, detailed academic research. This attitude demanded sensitivity towards his reserved and humble nature; respecting his position and leaving to him the decision of whether to be open to collaboration or not became the key to gaining his trust. This subsequently led to his progressive involvement in the research and his spontaneous offers to share material and ideas. Over time, the nature of the choreographer's engagement in the dialogue appears to have changed, from

initial hesitancy and distance to participation and interest in the development of the research.

However, the main methodological issue regarding the use of interviews as an investigative tool concerns how and to what extent these conversations have informed the research process, particularly in relation to the choice of directions and focus of the thesis. After an initial phase devoted to the identification and collection of written sources, conversations and interviews with Burrows, and occasionally with Fargion, have taken place throughout the research period, each concentrating on the choreographic work that had been chosen as the focus of a particular chapter. Although interviews have often been used also to fill gaps of information about the contexts and modalities of creation of the dance, they were always arranged after substantial preliminary research had been conducted, mainly through detailed analysis of audio-visual material and examination of the existing literature, and once some initial interpretive ideas on the piece had been formulated. Hence my perspectives on the work discussed would frame the conversations. As a consequence, the choreographer's accounts and observations about his own work would serve as one of the voices, but not necessarily *the* voice, to come into play in the understanding and interpretation of the work.

Each choreographic piece has been investigated from a specific perspective, which has been identified as of particular relevance for the chosen work (see Chapter 3.4). Hence, meetings and interviews have always been instigated in order to address specific questions and discuss specific topics. However, the focus and direction of the conversations have often been the result of a process of negotiation between researcher and choreographer, since on more than one occasion Burrows appeared to approach the interview with a specific idea of what aspects of the work it would be important to discuss. Thus, it could be said that both the researcher's and the artist's positions have played a part in the shaping of the research. However, both stances can be seen as limited, in the sense that they are shaped by personal visions and intentions. In Gadamer's terms, these positions represent a 'situation', a finite 'standpoint', 'determined by the prejudices that we bring with us' (1989, pp. 302, 306). Gadamer argues that their determinacy can be overcome through the concept of 'horizon' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 245).⁶ Contrary to the immobility of a 'situation', 'a horizon is not a rigid boundary but something that moves with one and invites one to

advance further' (p. 245). The concept of horizon is of central importance in Gadamer's explanation of the hermeneutic process. In a hermeneutic situation involving a text and an interpreter, as in a conversation between two people, 'the common subject matter is what binds the two partners ... to each other' (p. 388). Between the two parties,

a communication takes place ... that is more than mere accommodation. The text brings a subject matter into language, but that it does so is ultimately the achievement of the interpreter. Both have a share in it.

Gadamer, 1989, p. 88.

Gadamer argues that neither text nor interpreter, as the interlocutors in a conversation, is 'immovably and obstinately fixed' (p. 388). On the contrary, they are both responsive to each other's horizon and both contribute to the creation of understanding and meaning.

This means that the interpreter's own thoughts too have gone into re-awakening the text's meaning. In this the interpreter's own horizon is decisive, yet not as a personal standpoint that he maintains or enforces, but more as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly to make one's own what the text says. I have described this ... as a "fusion of horizons." We can now see that this is what takes place in conversation, in which something is expressed that is not only mine or my author's, but common.

Gadamer, 1989, p. 388.

Gadamer's idea of 'horizon' may provide an insight into the dynamics of the ongoing dialogue with Burrows that this research draws upon. In a historical sense, it may enable a reading of his shifts in perspective on the field of dance, and aspects of it, that can be registered from interview material. A person's horizon changes over time, in accordance with a process of 'historical self-mediation between the present and tradition' (pp. 373-374). Hence, Burrows's fluid relationship with his dance background and other traditions may be seen as the result of a negotiation between his present and past horizons and 'the relative significance of everything within' them (p. 302). This could apply, for instance, to his changing viewpoints on his relationship to ballet technique, as observed earlier in this chapter, or to his treatment of particular movement references, such as his hesitant yet increasingly frequent allusions to the influence of Morris dancing on his physicality and attitude to performance: 'I'm always reluctant to talk about this because it's always misunderstood, but a physical

influence ... for me has been English folk dance. ... But I don't like to talk too much about it because, if I talk about it, that's all that people see.' (Burrows, 2005a, n.p.).

In a hermeneutical sense, the notion of a 'fusion of horizons' may support the interpretation of the research process as a collaborative task in which the distinction between the roles of researcher and researched is blurred. Subsequent stages of the study have shown that Burrows's accounts of his own work has become increasingly detailed and analytical in relation to his wider artistic context. This is evident, for instance, in his subtle observations on how the coexistence in his work of different references acquired through his training and practice may result in a sort of 'tension', and in his recognition that these ambiguities may also be where the fascinating qualities of his choreography lie. As he recounts:

I grew up in the strongest years of the impact of release technique and contact improvisation, the New Dance scene and the influence of Judson Church through the X6 generation and through Dartington College. I could see all these things going on, but I was a ballet dancer But for me this leads to the inherent contradiction and tension within everything I do. ... At times I used to feel that I should have been more courageous and leave the Royal Ballet earlier than I did But I also do have a sense that I would have absorbed myself wholeheartedly in that alternative scene, and perhaps might have lost some of these contradictions which become more fruitful to me the older I get. I now can see where they are interesting and where they are not.

Burrows, 2006c, n.p.

Accounts such as this reveal that researching Burrows's choreography has entailed a reconfiguration of traditional patterns of study and of the conventional division of roles between who analyses and who is analysed, who interprets and who is interpreted. Although the formal acceptance of these roles has ensured that distance was maintained between the researcher and the object of study, this study has drawn on both the imaginative engagement of the interpreter with the subject matter of the research and the artist's progressive involvement in the analytical enquiry. As a consequence, the readings of Burrows's work that are formulated in this thesis can be seen as the result of a continuous dialogue and the occasional 'fusion of horizons' between researcher and artist.

However, it remains a prerogative of the interpreter to develop a critical awareness of the different threads that constitute the weave of this discourse and of their methodological and theoretical implications. This awareness makes the researcher

conscious of the different levels at which narratives work and of the complexity of the overall picture constituted by intersecting perspectives: the relationship between the artist and the researcher, the relationship between the artist and the work and the relationship between the researcher and the work.

Notes

- ¹ At the time of my preliminary research on Burrows's work and career, Chris Jones was archivist at the National Resource Centre for Dance.
- ² Consent has been obtained from both Burrows and Fargion to the use of unpublished interview material in this thesis, both for the partial quotations used in the chapters and for the full transcriptions provided in Appendix B. Copies of the consent letters are included in Appendix C.
- ³ Attendance at workshops and seminars include sessions of Burrows and Fargion's research project at The Place Choreodrome, September 2005, and of Parallel Voices, a series of talks curated by Burrows and held at the Siobhan Davies Studios, London, January-April 2007. I interpreted a post-performance talk on the occasion of the Milan performances of *Both Sitting Duet* and *Weak Dance Strong Questions* in September 2003 in the context of the performing arts festival Uovo.
- ⁴ See specific chapters for more detailed examinations of Burrows's collaborations with Fargion (especially Chapters 7 and 8), Volans (Chapter 6), Roberts (Chapter 6) and Ritsema (briefly discussed in Chapters 1 and 7).
- ⁵ In *The End of Modernity* (1985, translated 1988) Vattimo develops his critical interpretation of postmodernity from Friedrich Nietzsche's nihilistic position and Martin Heidegger's theory of the crisis of humanism.
- ⁶ Gadamer's notion of horizon is a development of Edmund Husserl's discussion of the concept (Gadamer, 1989).

CHAPTER 3

The multiple paths of interpretation

From semiotics to poetics

3.1 Constructing ambivalence: between form and content

In formulating an interpretation of Burrows's work, definitions and categorisations of his choreography suggested or implied in previous scholarship are questioned, in particular those of abstraction and minimalism, which are largely shared in the critical literature. For instance, Duerden (1999) and Jones (1998a) describe his pieces as 'abstract', and David Dougill (1988), Percival (1995; 2003-2004) and Debra Craine (1998b) make reference to his minimalist style. In this thesis I challenge these assumptions on the basis of a close inspection of Burrows's choreographic language, revealing the references on which his dances draw. A hypothesis is therefore formulated, of his artistic work being much closer to life, in its practices, dynamics, themes and images, than has so far been argued by others. The dichotomy between form and content, between readings of works emphasising either structure or subject matter, which often informs dance criticism,¹ is deconstructed in suggesting that content is expressed in Burrows's work through an unconventional use of form.

By questioning abstract and formalist characterisations of Burrows's choreography, I locate his work more closely in dialogue with postmodernism's rejection of modernist stances of closure and purism and with its 'interrogations of humanist certainties' which stem from the notion of a whole, universal, rational subject (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 8). The complex role of subjectivity in Burrows's work can be examined in relation to the ambiguity surrounding the position of the subject in the contemporary world and arts. On the one hand, postmodern theory, in line with poststructuralist critiques of the notion of the autonomy and individuality of the author, affirms the vanishing of the subject in a society overwhelmed by technology, where it loses its distinction from the object and becomes a 'function of the world of objectivity' (Vattimo, 1988, p. 46). On the other hand, postmodern criticism claims the return of subjectivity, as a notion to be 'situate[d]' and problematised in its pluralistic and discontinuous manifestations (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 159).

Entailing a similar paradox to the one pertaining to the issue of the relationship between past and present (Chapter 1), these seemingly opposing positions are ultimately an expression of the same condition, which is not free from contradictions and paradoxes: the crisis of subjectivity argued by the philosophers of postmodernity does not imply the complete disappearance of the subject, but rather the notion of ‘a subject which can no longer be thought of as a strong subject’ (Vattimo, 1988, p. 47). The conceptualisation of the subject as inhabiting a fluid condition of ‘presence-absence’ (p. 47) can thus be seen to marry postmodern criticism’s argument for ‘alternative notions of subjectivity’ (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 159). Drawing on suggestions found in reviews and critical literature, which have recognised in Burrows’s dances an interest in and concern with human behaviour and interpersonal relationships, I argue that a certain degree of intimacy always informs his work.² On the basis of a detailed analysis of selected choreographies and through an interpretive engagement with the themes suggested by his dances, this study interrogates the echoes of/between multiple voices and texts that resonate in Burrows’s works and the ways in which they construct his personal representation of the world.

Indeed, if Burrows’s work deals with subjective and intimate matters, further questions concern the ways in which he treats them and communicates them. How can these themes be read in his work? What strategies of signification are employed? It is argued that an interpretation of Burrows’s choreography should take account of the different layers that compose it – its cultural references, its dialogue with other arts, its movement qualities and the interplay of all its compositional elements. In this respect, the combination of a formal, semiotic examination of the works with dialogical, interpretive perspectives enables readings of Burrows’s dances that take into consideration the cultural, performative and poetic aspects inscribed in their compositional and structural elements and ascribed to them by the spectator. Hence it is suggested that an intertextual analysis enhances the understanding of the multifaceted nature of the choreographic language and allows an interpretation of the dances as embodied forms of (re)presentation both of the choreographer’s subject and of the world. In this respect, this thesis moves away from structuralist semiotic approaches of analysis and draws on references, connections and associations suggested by the works to propose a poetic reading of Burrows’s choreography – a poetics rather than a semiotics, in the sense ascribed to the term by scholars such as

Linda Hutcheon (1988) and Adshead-Lansdale (2007) of a critical, interpretive investigation of the multiplicity of linguistic, aesthetic, cultural, historical, narrative, subjective and philosophical aspects of artistic work, constructed through an analysis that looks at the text's 'production of significance' rather than at its 'philological' dimension (Barthes cited in Adshead-Lansdale, 2007, p. 26).

Interpretations of choreography can be presented as poetics, that is, as theoretical discourse on poetic texts, also in the sense that dance can be understood as poetic language, as opposed to the ordinary language that would constitute everyday movement. The term 'poetic language' is here employed in the sense formulated by Kristeva of a system complementary to ordinary language, in which the 'constraints' of the linguistic code are challenged and subverted (1980, p. 25). In this sense, poetic language encompasses all forms of literary language 'admitting of upheaval, dissolution and transformation', in both prose and poetry (p. 25). With reference to its intertextual, dialogical, historical, ambivalent nature, poetic language is described by Kristeva as 'an infinity of pairings and combinations' which challenge the binary logic of the Saussurean linguistic system based on the 'vertical (hierarchical) division between signifier and signified' (p. 69). By breaking the unity of the sign, the poetic word 'is at least *double*, not in the sense of the signifier/signified dyad, but rather, in terms of *one and other*' (p. 69). A crucial consequence of this doubleness, Kristeva maintains, is the 'inability' of hierarchical, binary systems 'to account for the operation of poetic language' (p. 70), a position which provides an argument for the articulation of intertextual interpretive practices rather than structuralist semiotic analysis.

The following two sections of this chapter draw on linguistic, literary and theoretical discourses on poetic language, identifying such language as an analogous term to choreography, and focus on the specific genre of poetry as a possible framework within which to read Burrows's dance. These perspectives are discussed with particular attention to issues surrounding the ways in which poetry relates to the speaking subject and to the world.

3.2 The dialectics of subjectivity: poetry as a site of contradictions

Linguistic discourses on poetic language share the concern of defining it in opposition to everyday language and prose: ‘in considering poetic uses we are able to explore hidden aspects of language and communication which are vividly highlighted in poetry and only dimly present in ordinary prose’ (Yaguello, 1998, p. 88). Poetic texts are distinguished from other written and verbal texts on account of the formal aspects of their language: rhythmic patterns, structural units, sound correspondences, typographic distribution; that is, metre, verse, rhyme, layout etc. (Lennard, 1996; Hobsbaum, 1996). Similarly, in the context of the various languages of the body, dance could be distinguished from ordinary movement for its musical and rhythmic qualities and for the formal and stylistic conventions it observes.

This binary linguistic view is maintained in Gérard Genette’s structuralist analysis of poetic language, which he identifies with poetry: ‘there is probably no more ancient or more universal category in literature than the opposition between prose and poetry’ (1982, p. 75). However, in recognising the formal changes that occurred in the genre since the late-nineteenth century, Genette proposes a ‘principle’ for its identification which takes into account the ‘collapse’ of the metrical and versification system as the ‘unequivocal criterion’ for its classification: ‘poetic language is defined, in relation to prose, as a *gap* ... in relation to a norm, and therefore ... poetics can be defined as a *stylistics of genre*, studying and measuring the characteristic deviations ... of a *linguistic genre*’ (pp. 76, 78). The liberation of modern poetry from ‘metrical constraints’ raises the question of how to articulate its difference from prose beyond formal aspects (p. 76).

For the modern poet, poetry ‘corrects’, ‘makes use of’, ‘replenishes, eliminates, and exalts’ the ‘shortcomings’ of language through the ‘poetic ambiguity’ generated by the ‘simultaneous presence’ of denotation and connotation in the poetic word and its attempt to overcome the arbitrariness of the sign (Genette, 1982, p. 90). In this respect Genette makes reference to Paul Valéry for ‘compar[ing] the transitivity of prose with that of walking and the intransitivity of poetry with that of dancing’, through an analogy which draws on the opposition of ‘the essentially transitive, prosaic function, in which we see the “form” eliminated in its meaning ... [to] the poetic function, in which the form is united with the meaning’ (p. 92). Hence poetic

language is thought of not as a 'form' but as a '*state*, a degree of presence and intensity', which is measured against the conventions of ordinary language it infringes (p. 96).

Drawing on Genette, Jonathan Culler's (1975) structuralist poetics of the lyric highlights the importance of conventional expectations over formal linguistic properties in defining the specificity of poetry. Paraphrasing Genette, Culler maintains that 'the essence of poetry lies not in verbal artifice itself, though that serves as catalyst, but more simply and profoundly in the type of reading ... which the poem imposes on its readers', that is, in the conventions and expectations of the genre (1975, p. 164).³ He identifies these conventions in the 'distance and impersonality' of the poem, which 'is not related to time in the same way, nor has the same interpersonal status' as other speech acts (pp. 164, 165); in 'the expectation of totality or coherence' that a poem generates, if not already through its structure, in processes of reading and understanding (p. 170); and in the claim of 'significance' that each poem makes by the act itself of its own writing (p. 175). To these general conventions Culler adds further criteria, including the notion that a poem should be characterised by 'resistance' to understanding through 'patterns and forms whose semantic relevance is not immediately obvious' (p. 179).

Although some of the aspects of poetry identified by Genette and Culler bring attention to qualities of poetic texts that go beyond their formal characteristics, their discussion of how these conventions operate in the genre mainly revolves around the stylistic and rhetorical constructs of poetic examples that are seen to respond to these expectations. Thus these theories of poetic texts, which oppose the study of their conventions to that of their formal properties, appear to lead to a circularity of discourse. Furthermore, these readings fail to acknowledge that if qualities such as transgression, impersonality, unity and thematic pregnancy can be identified in poetry, so can their dialectical counterparts of rigour, individuality, fragmentation and lack of referentiality. It would therefore appear that the understanding of the specificity of poetry could be enhanced by the deconstruction of such dichotomies and by the reading of the opacity and intransitivity of poetic language in relation to the type of discourse it creates between the subject and the world. It is in this respect and for the contradictory position it occupies between form and content, detachment and

intimacy, significance and obscurity that poetry may be employed as a metaphoric term of comparison for the ambiguities of Burrows's choreographic language.

Kristeva's definition of poetic language characterises it as a 'heterogeneous process', a 'complex operation' in which 'the dialectics of the subject is inscribed' (1980, pp. 24, 25). In *Desire in Language* (first published in 1977, translated in 1980), she refers to Roland Jakobson's studies of poetic language, and in particular to his analysis of Russian futurist poetry, calling attention to his contribution to the construction of a linguistic discourse that recognises the role of the speaking subject alongside formalist and historical concerns. Implicitly drawing on Jakobson's definition of a poetic function (one of the six basic functions of language that he identifies), as privileging the utterance itself, that is, the signifier, over the contexts and interlocutors of the verbal message (Jakobson, 1960),⁴ Kristeva sees the poetic word 'as ciphering, as rhythm, as a presence that precedes the signification of object or emotion' (1980, p. 31).

In the rhythmic qualities of the poem she reads the subject's rejection of the semantics of ordinary language, the poet's '*eminently parodic* gesture that changes the system': 'the poet ... wants to turn rhythm into a dominant element; ... he wants to make language perceive what it doesn't want to say, provide it with its matter independently of the sign, and free it from denotation' (p. 31). As rhythm, poetic language becomes '*other*' – to the ego of the subject and to its system of reference (p. 27). Besides, its otherness lies also in its relationship to time and history, which Kristeva defines as a form of (non-)existence in the future: 'poetic discourse measures rhythm against the meaning of language structure and is thus always eluded by meaning in the present while continually postponing it to an impossible time-to-come' (p. 33).

Through Kristeva's notion of poetic language as an intertextual, subjective and historical event, the specific form of poetic language that is poetry can be read as a site of contradictions in which opposites meet. For Jakobson this is ultimately the power of poetry, as he expresses clearly and evocatively in a paragraph quoted by Kristeva:

the word is experienced as word and not as a simple substitute for a named object nor as the explosion of emotion; ... beside the immediate consciousness of the identity existing between the object and its sign (A is A), the immediate consciousness of the absence of this identity (A is not A) is necessary; this

antinomy is inevitable, for, without contradiction, there is no interplay of concepts and the sign becomes automatic, the progress of events comes to a halt, and all consciousness of reality dies Poetry protects us from this automatization, from the rust that threatens our formulation of love, hate, revolt and reconciliation, faith and negation.

Jakobson cited in Kristeva, 1980, pp. 31-32.

Whilst Culler reads impersonality and detachment in poetry's relationship to history and the subject, Kristeva sees poetic language as 'the most appropriate *historical* discourse' in which the poem (and with it the poet) is engaged in a 'contest between rhythm and sign system' (1980, pp. 33, 34). By entering a state of challenge, the identity of the subject involved in this operation is itself put at risk: 'this kind of language, through the particularity of its signifying operations, is an unsettling process – when not an outright destruction – of the identity of meaning and speaking subject' (1980, pp. 124-125). Furthermore, whereas structuralist analysis attributes properties of unity and totality to poetry, Kristeva, drawing on Bakhtin, upholds qualities of heterogeneity and carnivalesque protest, arguing that the poetic word 'adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture' (1980, p. 65).

3.3 The text and the outside world: the speculative dimension of poetry

A thesis concerning the correspondence between poetry and other arts is advanced by Jean-Paul Sartre at the beginning of his polemic treatise *What Is Literature?* (1948), in which he distinguishes poetry from prose for being 'on the side of painting, sculpture, and music' in its dealing with 'thing[s]' as opposed to 'signs' (1993, p. 4). Read along these lines, dance too would be perceived as different from ordinary physicality (or, in the case of self-reflective choreography, even from openly narrative and theatrical uses of movement) for its employment of the body's motions as physical shapes rather than as gestures and actions.⁵ Although Sartre appears here to draw on the same argument as Kristeva, that is, on the idea of the poetic word as signifier, he does so in order to discuss the potential of prose for 'commitment' versus the detachment of poetry from worldly concerns. Whilst prose, which Sartre ultimately identifies with Literature, uses words as 'tools' to produce meaning, poetry

treats them as self-contained objects, ‘serv[ing]’ them rather than ‘domesticat[ing]’ them (p. 5).

Even though choreography is not drawn into this parallelism by Sartre, from his discussion of how ‘notes, colours, and forms are not signs’ since ‘they refer to nothing exterior to themselves’ (p. 1), it could be deduced that dance, and especially those types of dance that do not use movement to convey a message, would, like poetry, also be excluded from the ‘empire of signs’ (p. 4), the realm in which prose uses words to produce meaning, thus engaging with the outside world and expressing a ‘commitment’ towards it. On the contrary, the ‘poetic attitude’ considers language as ‘the mirror of the world’, and the word as an ‘*image*’ through which ‘an aspect of the world’ is ‘*represent[ed]*’ rather than a meaning ‘*express[ed]*’ (pp. 5, 6, 7). Whilst the prose writer places words at meaning’s disposal, the poet sees words as objects which are related to the world by ‘magical resemblance’ and which interact with one another through ‘magical associations’ (pp. 7, 8). ‘The poetic word is a microcosm’, in which associations, suggestions and memories reverberate, beyond the poet’s control (p. 8).

Sartre’s notion of poetic language is discussed by Genette as an example of theory of ‘the mimetic relationship between word and thing’, which Sartre appears to arrive at despite the formalist stance implicit in his view of the poetic word as disengaged from external reality (Genette, 1989, p. 206). According to Sartre, ‘since the signifying object is, theoretically, external to the sign’, meaning ‘is by nature intuitive; it is the odor that impregnates a handkerchief, the perfume that vanishes out of an empty, musty bottle’ and is based on a relationship of ‘*participation*’, of metonymy between the poetic word and the object it designates (cited in Genette, 1980, p. 205). In Genette’s reading of Sartre, this interpretation of the poetic mode of signification attests to the imitative character of the relationship between the poetic word and reality in modern poetry: what Sartre identifies as metonymy is in fact more rigorously understood as metaphor, since ‘words have no odor’ (Genette, 1989, p. 206). Genette’s notion of the mimetic quality of poetry questions formalist linguistic analyses and interprets ‘this idea of poetic language as compensation for and challenge to the arbitrariness of the sign’ (p. 212).

The relationship between poetry and mimesis is also investigated by Gadamer, through a discourse that revisits the ancient Greek notion of art as ‘imitation of

nature' in relation to poetic theory (1986, p. 116). Drawing on the Aristotelian 'meaning of the word "mimesis"' as 'letting something be there without trying to do anything more with it' (p. 119), Gadamer refers to the Greek etymology of the word 'poetry', *poiesis*, which designates both 'productive activity' and 'poetic creation', to argue that poetry is 'properly speaking something "made"' : 'poetry is something that is made in such a way that it has no other meaning beyond letting something be there. There is no respect in which a linguistic work of art has to be there *for* anything' (pp. 118, 119). The linguistic dimension of poetry is identified as a privileged condition of artistic making, due to the immaterial quality of its production which guarantees the absence of 'a useful purpose' in its being 'simply there' (p. 118). However, Gadamer ultimately recognises all artistic activity as based on 'mimetic experience', where 'mimesis ... does not imply a reference to an original as something other than itself, but means that something meaningful is there as itself' (p. 122, 121).

Through this concept of the mimetic quality of poetry a link can be traced to Gadamer's notion of the 'speculative' dimension of poetic language: 'the poetic statement is speculative inasmuch as it does not reflect an existent reality ... but represents the new appearance of a new world in the imaginary medium of poetic invention' (Gadamer, 1989, p. 470). Speculation, in Gadamer's term, is 'the realization of meaning, the event ... of coming to an understanding' (p. 469), and although it is an aspect of all language, it is primarily realised in poetry due to the self-enclosed nature of the poetic statement. Language is central to Gadamer's hermeneutics, since 'man's being-in-the-world is primordially linguistic', from which it follows that '*hermeneutical experience is verbal in nature*' (1989, p. 443). For Gadamer, 'poetry is language in a pre-eminent sense' (1986, p. 106) due to its 'ideality' (1989, p. 391).

In drawing on Gadamer's theoretical stances to construct a framework for the understanding of the potential poeticity of Burrows's choreography a clarification is needed, concerning the limits of the application of a theory specifically constructed around the linguistic nature of hermeneutic activity to a non-verbal practice such as dance. It could be argued that a parallel can be drawn between poetic language and choreography insofar as the latter is observed in its linguistic qualities, that is, for the modes of signification it establishes between movement and meaning – which constitutes the main focus of analysis throughout this research. Moreover, if

Gadamer's theory of the hermeneutical dimension of language is here referred to literally in places, his perspective on poetry is also drawn upon for its capacity to suggest a parallel with what I identify as the dialogical and theoretical qualities of Burrows's choreography.

The poetic word is for Gadamer 'a fundamental instance of the hermeneutic experience' (Baker, 2002, p. 145), a role which substantiates his claim that 'poetic language enjoys a particular and unique relationship to truth' (Gadamer, 1986, p. 105). Truth, which Gadamer identifies as a prerogative of poetry, and of art in general, is a contentious concept in contemporary thought, like other ideas explored earlier in this chapter and in Chapter 1 (e.g. subjectivity, history). However, Vattimo's reinterpretation of the concept of truth in 'the epoch of the end of metaphysics' (1997, p. 71) provides a possible framework in which to read Gadamer's thesis of poetry's 'claim to truth' (1986, p. 105). In discussing the idea of the truth of art and poetry, Vattimo draws on the notion of truth formulated by recent hermeneutic stances, including Gadamer's, in terms of 'truth as opening' rather than 'truth as correspondence' (p. 78). Truth is no longer thought of as 'the incontrovertible givenness of an object held in a clear and distinct idea and adequately described in a proposition that faithfully reflects that idea', that is, as the possession of knowledge, the result of scientific evidence or metaphysic belief; rather, it is understood through 'the metaphor of dwelling', 'impl[ying] ... an interpretative belonging which involves both consensus and the possibility of critical activity' (p. 82).

The language of poetry, according to Gadamer, '*stands written*' (1986, p. 108). Like religious and legal texts, a poetic text 'is autonomous in the sense that it is self-fulfilling. The poetic word is thus a statement in that it bears witness to itself and does not admit anything that may verify it' (p. 110). In this sense, poetic language is productive rather than reproductive: instead of depicting a reality that exists outside of itself, the poem has the capacity to construct its own reality, 'to open up before us a possible world' (Baker, 2002, p. 149) – or, rather, multiple worlds. Whilst ordinary language and other forms of linguistic expression presuppose a context within which they are intended and a motive for which they are produced, poetic language 'is not dependent upon given, empirical reality', but realises its own, beyond its correspondence with an existing context and accepted conventions (Baker, 2002, p. 151). 'What makes poetry essential language is its showing forth a whole whose

sense exceeds the grammatical or even semantic sense of its statements' (Baker, 2002, p. 151). Especially in the case of what Gadamer terms 'pure poetry', that is, mainly the French symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé and Valéry amongst others, the 'hermetic character' of the text is the result of the poem's separateness from conventional semantic systems (Gadamer, 1986, p. 136). The poetic text is thus free from subservience to a message, motive or intention which binds its syntax to accepted codes and its meanings to a specific context of reference. Nevertheless, 'however splintered and fragmented poetic language may become, it is always presenting something to us, "always bestowing a certain intimacy with the world of meaning"' (Baker, 2002, pp. 151-152).

These interpretations of how the poetic word breaks from the conventions of its system of reference, and constructs meanings by embodying critical relationships with both the subject and the world, seem to offer stimulating perspectives from which to look at the language of choreography. In particular, they suggest an interpretive framework for the idiosyncratic forms through which Burrows's dances produce signification through an interplay of voices and references and in dialogue with the codes of the discipline.

3.4 Reading the dance 'as it wants to be read': researching the work through selected foci

Within this framework, Burrows's choreography is analysed in the rest of the thesis for the specific form of language it constructs and for the distinctive relationship with the subject and the world this language embodies, between form and content, rule and transgression, representation and presentation, referential and speculative meaning.

Drawing on Eco's notion that textual reading is shaped as much by the interpreter's competence and interests as by the text's structural and thematic arrangement, and adopting his idea that you can only use a text 'as the texts wants you to use it' (1979, p. 9) (see Chapter 2.1), I propose to investigate Burrows's choreography by focusing on selected issues and qualities of his work that appear of particular significance. Thus, this thesis does not set out to construct a systematic study of his entire body of work through a chronological, piece-by-piece account. A preliminary analysis of his

sixteen productions to date has led to the identification of thematic concerns and methodological aspects that characterise his creative work. These have been chosen as the lenses through which to examine the specificity of his choreography. These issues are relevant because they appear to underlie his entire body of work, either as recurring subject matters and compositional approaches, or as significant stages in the development of his practice.

Although these themes and methods have informed his choreography throughout his career, it can be argued that they are realised most evidently in, or are most specific to, certain pieces. It is thus in relation to particular works that this research explores them, without suggesting that they cannot be found in other choreographies or that they are the only possible angle from which to look at a specific piece. Each work is in fact composed of different layers in which formal, aesthetic, methodological, thematic and cultural aspects can be highlighted. Whilst still aiming to construct an exhaustive description and outline of the pieces examined, in this research I propose to interpret them from a particular perspective, which appears especially revealing of the choreographer's artistic stance and method.

The issues around which Chapters 4-8 are constructed are: the composite character of Burrows's movement language, with the insertion of pedestrian gestures alongside other specific dance vocabularies; the cultural specificity of his art, whose interplay of humour, irony and parody has often been described as 'very English'; his contentious relationship with minimalism and abstraction; his collaborations across arts, and especially with the musician-turned-dancer Fargion; and the presence of underlying methodological and thematic strategies throughout his work, such as the use of repetitions and citations. My purpose is to investigate how these thematic and methodological concerns are treated in Burrows's choreography in order to analyse what is particular to his way of devising dances. Maintaining a chronological approach in the general structure of the thesis, six works have been chosen to illustrate these issues in detail: *Hymns* (1985-1988), *Stoics* (1991), *The Stop Quartet* (1996), *Both Sitting Duet* (2002), *The Quiet Dance* (2005) and *Speaking Dance* (2006). However, references are made also to other pieces that appear relevant in relation to particular themes.

Apart from the earlier experiments mentioned in Chapter 1, *Hymns* can be considered Burrows's debut piece as a contemporary choreographer. In this respect, it is particularly significant as an early attempt to construct an original movement language, resulting from the blending of the different elements that have informed his dance training and background.

Burrows's specificity as an English artist is embodied in most of his dances – from *Hymns*, set to a score of Anglican hymn tunes, to the recent *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* – where the humour and wit of the pieces can be seen as culturally distinctive traits. However, *Stoics* has been selected as the example through which to investigate this aspect of Burrows's choreography, since in this piece subtlety and irony are not only recognisable qualities of the dance; together with other cultural attributes and forms of social behaviour that are commonly identified as 'typically English', such as a certain resilience and 'stoicism', they also become subject matter of the piece.

Several reviewers and critics have been quick to classify Burrows's choreography as abstract and minimalist. As one of Burrows's least 'representational' pieces, *The Stop Quartet* could potentially manifest most openly his fascination for these artistic approaches. Nevertheless, because of the complexity of its formal and conceptual structure, which plays on intersections between the different layers of the dance, this piece also provides an argument against easy categorisations of the choreographer's work. Analysis demonstrates that its stripped-down and self-referential quality does not necessarily imply minimalism and abstraction, and that these definitions need to be problematised in relation to the forms they assume throughout the history of art.

Collaborations with artists from different disciplines, especially musicians and, to a lesser extent, lighting designers and theatre practitioners, have played a significant part in Burrows's work. *Both Sitting Duet* is the finest example of his interest in opening dance to a fruitful dialogue with other arts. Whereas previous collaborative pieces maintained a distinction between the different creative roles, this recent choreography, by making the relationship between dance and music the very subject of the work, overcomes that division and transforms the creative but until then still conventional relationship between Burrows and the composer Fargion into an innovative partnership, in which the two artists play an equal role. The prior work

Weak Dance Strong Questions is another example of collaboration across arts, and was devised with the theatre director Ritsema. Since the piece is an investigation of the principles of movement and of the ways in which they manifest in the body, such enquiry by Burrows and Ritsema, that is, by a dance practitioner who has explored and questioned movement throughout his career and a theatre director who has produced highly conceptual work, assumes the form of an interrogation of the body/mind relationship. Although other examples are included in the discussion of the collaborative dimension of the choreographer's work, the analysis in this chapter focuses primarily on *Both Sitting Duet*.

From the point of view of the choreographic method, Burrows's pieces throughout his career present similar compositional techniques and ways of shaping the dance material, from the use of repetition to the combination of patterns and phrases, to the simplification of the movement vocabulary, to the reduction of theatrical elements and to the use of citations from previous and other choreographers' pieces. From this perspective, Burrows's latest works to date, *The Quiet Dance* and *Speaking Dance*, can be seen as a compendium of all his compositional procedures, whilst they also introduce a new approach to the treatment of recurring subject matters. These performances appear therefore as interesting examples through which to explore the methodological aspects of Burrows's choreography and their relationship with more intimate, human themes.

The remaining ten works enter the discussion as further examples, but they are not investigated in full. Some pieces cannot be analysed in detail due to the lack or unavailability of video documentation and the scarcity of reviews and critical material. This is the case, for example, of works such as *Quintet* and of most sections of *Things I Don't Know*, for which the only sources are a limited number of short reviews and the choreographer's own memory. Other choreographies, such as the film piece *Blue Yellow* and the insufficiently documented *Walking/Music*, were created for other dancers (respectively, Sylvie Guillem and Forsythe's Ballett Frankfurt) and, although they present some of Burrows's distinctive traits, they were also conceived for the particular physicality and style of their performers. Works such as *Very* and *Our*, and, to a lesser extent, the earlier *Dull Morning*, are representative of a darker side of Burrows's themes and aesthetics, in which gloomier, tougher and more aggressive traits prevail on his distinctive humour and subtlety.

Although these pieces are not studied in detail in this thesis, these motifs are discussed in relation to other choreographies, especially *Stoics*, where they play a part in the construction of the intertexts composing the dance. It can also be suggested that the overt signs of violence and dark humour that can be found in *Very* and *Our* appear to belong to a particular phase of Burrows's work, since in the other pieces in which these themes can be recognised their treatment shows a lightness and delicacy that are arguably more typical of the choreographer's style. Finally, works such as the cameo piece *Hands* and the later *Singing*, which are examples of Burrows's experiments with the possibilities of interaction between dance and music (and with singing, in the case of the homonymous duet) are not explored in detail but are referred to alongside other works that deal with similar compositional issues.

In this thesis different interpretive methods are applied to each work; each of the pieces examined is analysed in ways and from perspectives that have appeared appropriate to it and capable of engaging with its distinctive traits and underlying themes. Within Part 2, which comprises four analytical chapters, Chapter 4 draws on linguistic studies of gestural language (especially McNeill, 1992) and on Ludwig Wittgenstein's (1969) philosophy of ordinary language to articulate the relationship between pedestrian gestures and specialised dance vocabularies in Burrows's work *Hymns*. Moreover, Michel de Certeau's (1984) interpretation of the productivity of everyday activities and Erving Goffman's analysis of the performative dimension of social interactions provide a further framework in which to read the play of subtle signifying strategies in the dance.

In Chapter 5, contributions from social studies concerning issues of British/English national identity are drawn upon in order to outline and problematise Burrows's categorisation as a 'typically English' choreographer. In particular, the humorous quality of *Stoics* is investigated in its cultural specificity, and its mechanisms are exposed to identify its potential for ironic and parodic discourse (Hutcheon, 1988 and 1994). Finally, the marginality implied by parodic gestures and the 'stoic' rebellion portrayed in the piece suggest a reading of the dance within the framework of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's (1986) notion of the inventive, transgressive potential of 'minor' artistic practices.

In Chapter 6, widely accepted labels of Burrows's work as minimalist and abstract are discussed in relation to artistic and aesthetic theories and with reference to the forms that these approaches have assumed in modern and contemporary examples of artworks, in the visual arts, music and dance. Through an analysis of *The Stop Quartet*, dichotomous conceptions of form and content, referentiality and non-referentiality are challenged, in a reading that identifies the *intra*-textual dimension of the work and its potential for *inter*-textual signification.

In Chapter 7, Burrows and Fargion's *Both Sitting Duet* is examined with particular attention to the innovative opening to meaning that their dialogic collaboration between dance and music generates. The device of repetition, around which the choreography is constructed, is read for the potential for change and difference it embodies. Structuralist formats of analysis are challenged in recognising the role played by difference, in a Derridean sense, in the creation of multiple forms of signification beyond the conventions of each of the two disciplines.

Part 3 draws these analytic threads together in constructing an interpretation of the rethinking of strategies of meaning formation realised by Burrows's choreography. In Chapter 8, the compositional and performative elements of Burrows's two most recent works are examined through a reading that highlights the interconnections they establish across his body of work. The personal resonances of the physical patterns of *The Quiet Dance* are understood in the light of Gadamer's (1986) interpretation of the 'human' form of meaning embodied by gesture. The correspondences between the different modes of communication that *Speaking Dance* is constructed around are seen to mirror the dynamics of the art of storytelling (Benjamin, 1992), especially through the intertextual references they play with and the intimate connection with the spectators they establish.

Finally, in Chapter 9, concepts, themes and perspectives that underlie the analysis constructed in the thesis are revisited. By reflecting on the ways in which history, subjectivity and (re)presentation are articulated in Burrows's dance, a reading is formulated that suggests that the specificity of his choreography lies in the modes of its poetic and theoretical articulation.

Notes

- ¹ See, for instance, Copeland, 1990, where, despite his claim that he does not 'want to resurrect those tired, old dichotomies of form and content', he certainly does so in reading Bausch's theatrical use of bodies, gestures and images versus the 'architectural configurations' and 'abstract movement vocabulary' of, for example, Cunningham's and Balanchine's works (pp. 5, 4).
- ² See, for instance, Duerden's comment on Burrows's 'belief in dance's ability to be relevant to and expressive of the human condition without the trappings of theatre' (1999, p. 48).
- ³ See Genette, 1982, pp. 95-96.
- ⁴ The other five linguistic functions identified by Jakobson are the referential, the emotive, the conative, the phatic and the metalingual, focusing respectively on the context, addresser, addressee, contact and code (1960).
- ⁵ However it could be argued that such a reading of the language of dance would fail to take into account the inextricability of dance vocabularies from pedestrian bodily elements and the capacity for signification of any language rooted in the human body, due to its socially and culturally constructed connotations. A similar objection could be made in relation to Sartre's interpretation of the non-referential nature of music, painting and sculpture, which dismisses the signifying potential of notes, colours and forms used and composed according to cultural and artistic conventions.

PART 2

BURROWS'S CHOREOGRAPHIC LANDSCAPE

CHAPTER 4

Weaving gestures

The multilingualism of the dance (*Hymns*)

4.1 The oddity of the familiar

Burrows's choreographic language is characterised by the diversity of its codes and layers of signification. This multilingualism emerges as a distinctive trait already in *Hymns*, the first piece that Burrows created for his own group in the late 1980s. In engaging with the linguistic strategies adopted in the work and the shifts of semiotic paradigms and audience's expectations they imply, in this chapter I explore the semantic complexity of the dance through an analysis of the resonances inscribed in its vocabulary. In constructing a reading of the interplay of connotations, associations and ambiguities produced by the variety of cultural elements encompassed by the work, formalist conceptions of Burrows's choreography are problematised and challenged. After an introduction contextualising the piece, attention is drawn to the pedestrian aspects of its movement language and attitude to performing, with reference to specific sequences of the performance.

Although preceded from the late 1970s by solo pieces created for himself and other group works choreographed for ballet and contemporary dance companies, *Hymns* is considered Burrows's debut piece (Constanti, 1994a; 1994b). He worked on this choreography at different stages between 1985 and 1988, thus the piece is known in different versions: parts 1 and 2 of the duet (1985, approximately 7 minutes); the duet in three parts (1986, approximately 12 minutes); and the complete version, including a trio, the duet and an epilogue (1988, approximately 45 minutes).¹ The core of the work, which is also the section that appears most closely related to the theme suggested by the title, is the duet, danced by Burrows and Simon Rice to hymn tunes. In the final version, the piece begins with a twenty-minute work for three other male dancers, performed to six bossa nova pieces, and the central duet is lengthened by adding a coda danced to a Bach chorale and a Chopin nocturne (Percival, 1988a).²

Considered both individually and arranged together in the form of a full-length piece, the trio and the duet are constructed around the interrelation of various and diverse

modes of expression – which can be described as corporeal, acoustic, linguistic and visual (and are discussed later in this chapter). Their respective qualities and connotations are brought together in unfamiliar combinations, thus contributing to the creation of an intricate weave of references. In the initial trio, the Royal Ballet dancers Jeremy Sheffield and William Trevitt and the Royal Ballet School student William Tuckett perform a choreography combining ballet-derived leaps and spins with social dancing steps, cha-cha moves and pedestrian gestures. The musical accompaniment is a selection of charismatic songs by the Brazilian Wilson Simonal, and the costumes are sky-blue striped pyjamas. In the following section, Burrows and Rice, who at that time were both soloists with the Royal Ballet, dance to Anglican hymn tunes. In most versions of the duet the dancers wear simple everyday clothes: t-shirts tucked inside classic trousers and black shoes – an outfit that makes them look like ordinary, if not clumsy, youths. The movement vocabulary ranges from dance steps drawn from ballet, contact improvisation, social dancing and English Morris dancing, to everyday gestures and movements with inscribed connotations. These can be located between Christian traditions and schoolboys' social behaviour and can be read, respectively, in the praying postures and gestures interwoven in standing physical sequences and in the dynamic qualities of the interaction between the two dancers which reproduce chasing and wrestling patterns.

What strikes one about the work considered as a full evening of dance is the apparent incongruence of its structure, in which two seemingly unconnected parts and a coda are placed beside each other and under the same title. Significantly, on some occasions, Burrows even had to resort to a visual solution to create a link between the different sections of the piece and had the duo wear brown striped pyjamas to establish a continuity with the preceding trio (Burrows, 2005c). Undoubtedly the disparity of the compositional elements of the different parts of the performance, most evident in the choice of three unrelated and yet strongly distinctive musical accompaniments, reflects the stratified process of creation of the piece.³ Nevertheless, the work is given a sense of unity by a number of elements, to do with three main factors: the movement vocabulary, which draws on similar sources and influences throughout the piece; the recurrence of compositional patterns, involving a well studied alternation between individual, almost introverted movements and partnered work, as well as frequent physical contact (guiding and being guided,

holding and being held, lifting and being lifted); and especially an attitude to performing which is relaxed, understated, matter-of-fact. Burrows describes this attitude as dry and tough, ‘deadpan’ but not of the ‘played-up’ type, as if the dancers’ stance was, ‘we are just going to do this and we are just going to go on doing this’ (2005c, n.p.).

Because of the range of cultural contexts on which it draws, the piece can be examined from a multiplicity of perspectives, as most critics and reviewers have observed (Dougill, 1988; Mackrell, 1988; Percival, 1988a): the treatment of religious themes and the comment on the institution of the Anglican Church, the portrayal of children’s behaviour at school assemblies and the depiction of the dynamics of male personal and social interaction. However, these subjects are not openly addressed in the work, since, in both the first and the second part, the dancers generally perform with expressionless faces, understating emotions and disguising intentions. In a review of the work, Judith Mackrell comments: ‘what makes *Hymns* so seductive as dance is Burrows’s control over the rhythms and implications [*sic*] [of] movement and the dancers’ drily understated performances’ (1988, p. 15). Moreover, the cultural references inscribed in the movement vocabulary are filtered through compositional devices such as fragmentation and linguistic pastiche, which add to the oblique ambiguity of the treatment of the subject matter.

An examination of the structural elements of the piece suggests that, in all these different thematic areas, meanings emerge instead as a result of a dialogue between the cultural specificity of the components of the dance work, expectations connected with genres and styles and the cultural positioning of the spectators. It can be argued that, among all aspects of the choreography, pedestrian elements play an important role in the process of signification, both through the cultural references they embody and through their interactions with the other components of the dance. The choice of ordinary clothes for the dancers’ costumes seems to confirm that these men are presented as ordinary individuals – whether grown-ups or young boys – and that the ‘language they speak’, i.e., the movement they make, is a common one. The main focus of this chapter is therefore on constructing an interpretation of the use of everyday gestures and attitudes in the work, exploring the variety of meanings they produce in relation to the dance movements alongside which they appear and to their semantic use as non-verbal signs.

Burrows's choreographic experiments before *Hymns* included not only ballet pieces, but also contemporary dance commissions. These first attempts were informed by both his classical training and the contemporary dance vocabulary he had been eager to investigate with frequent visits to the Riverside Studios and Dartington (Marigny, 1994; Burrows, 2005c). About his first ballet choreographies in particular (*Catch*, 1980, and *The Winter Play*, 1983), Burrows has observed, 'both were really really difficult experiences for me. I made ballets which were not right for me and were a real struggle. And then I just gave up, I didn't choreograph anything for two years' (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.). These experiences arguably revealed to him the complexity of the choices that were available and called for a personal solution to the classical/contemporary dance dichotomy that characterised his training at that stage of his career. The next piece he created was *Hymns*, which therefore appears to have played a crucial role in Burrows's artistic development. The choreographer himself acknowledges the importance of this work: 'it was a real attempt to define something for myself in relation to all these new experiences of dance, and I was really conscious of that' (2005c, n.p.).⁴ The result is a piece that blends traces from different dance forms, whilst also bringing personal suggestions and associations into the composition.

Thus, Burrows's incorporation of everyday gestures in his work can be seen as sitting in a dialectical relationship with previous and contemporary choreographic investigations, as much as being in tension with his balletic background. It is in relation to this double-fronted dialogue that in this chapter I examine the ways in which pedestrian elements are employed and interwoven in the fabric of the dance.

4.2 A pragmatic theatre

The incorporation of everyday movements, the blending of different dance forms and the fragmentation and repetition of phrases are amongst the distinctive traits of the work of the Judson Dance Theater and of the generation of American choreographers that stemmed from there. Sally Banes (1993) observes how these characteristics challenged audience's preconceptions about the qualities, form and composition conventionally thought to be appropriate for dance pieces. This result was achieved by presenting works which did not conform to the traditional image of dance as

featuring graceful movements, virtuosic technique and clear structure, but, on the contrary, could be connoted as ugly, prosaic and hybrid. Drawing on Cunningham's notion and aesthetics of dance movement as independent of any representative or expressive function, the Judson choreographers widened the spectrum of bodily possibilities with the inclusion of everyday movements – 'less familiar in art but more familiar in life' (Banes, 1993, p. 54).

In an article reflecting on the recent history of American choreography, Foster (2002) gives an account of a few significant examples of dance practices – including pieces by Childs, Brown, Paxton, Meredith Monk and Bill T. Jones – to examine how they constructed different notions of theatricality and performativity through the use of a pedestrian movement activity such as walking. Analysing the modalities through which 'these dances combined site specific explorations of the environment with investigations of non-traditional movement vocabularies' (p. 127), Foster argues that, by bringing everyday elements into the dance, they achieved the goal of 'expos[ing] the disciplining conventions of the theater' (p. 128) and, in some instances, also of affirming new cultural conceptualisations through performance, and thus of performing identities.

Amongst the examples that Foster analyses are specific works by the generation of the Judson Church choreographers, which she interprets as a form of theatricalisation of the everyday: 'they wanted viewers to see them theatrically, to use *theatricality* as a tool with which to see the world differently' (p. 128). Foster argues that this was achieved by means of a questioning attitude towards both the conventional separateness of the theatrical space and the traditional rigidity of the linguistic and structural composition of dance pieces, constructed from specific vocabularies and according to recognised forms.

Yet, exactly because of this questioning approach, the works created by the Judson Church choreographers are commonly described as showing a 'matter-of-fact attitude toward life and art, and movement as one component of both' (Banes, 1993, p. 55) – and elsewhere Foster herself has talked about these dances as 'focusing on the performance of movement as a neutral activity' (1986, p. 181). From this perspective, which can be seen as complementary to Foster's thesis of their theatricalisation of the ordinary, it can be suggested that these pieces also give the theatre a pragmatic,

prosaic quality. Foster points out that these works ‘challeng[ed] tacit assumptions about the boundaries between theater and life’ (2002, p. 129). But, if she sees them as attributing to everyday life the ‘specialness’ of art (p. 128) – a thesis that closely relates to the fact that she is analysing site-specific performances – it can nevertheless be argued that these dances crossed the art/life boundary also in the opposite direction. By widening the range of movements and activities that could constitute material for dance, by opening the work to the participation of untrained dancers and by moving away from emphatic performance styles to a more pragmatic approach to movement, they questioned the role of dance as a virtuosic activity and made it more accessible to a non-specialised audience, thus bringing art closer to life.

Numerous differences can be identified between the pieces examined by Foster and Burrows’s choreographies, the most straightforward of which is his acceptance of theatrical spaces as the place for his performances, although other significant ones involve the quality and mood of the dances (Chapter 5), compositional methods (Chapter 6) and strategies of signification (Chapters 7 and 8).⁵ Nevertheless, *Hymns* also presents similar qualities to those of the work of post-Cunningham choreographers in its vocabulary and approach to performance. These traits can be identified mainly in the insertion of pedestrian movements in the dance and in the relaxed and understated attitude of the dancers in both the trio and the duet.

Of the two parts of the work, the trio is the one in which this matter-of-fact quality seems better accomplished: it is maintained throughout the choreography, resisting the more ballet-derived, and therefore theatrical, elements which prevail in the last section of the duet and in the coda. As the 1988 rehearsal video shows (Burrows, 1988), the trio opens with the dancers entering the space from upstage right and slowly walking diagonally towards downstage, casually, almost lazily, often looking down at their feet. Suddenly they turn around and walk back, towards where they came from. When the music starts, with its cool, captivating rhythm and charismatic songs, they begin a choreography made predominantly of walking patterns: slow strolls around the stage, as if wandering around; rhythmical steps in a winding line, conga-like; advancing in a circle holding hands, as if dragging each other; moving with arms wide open, in a bird-like position; walking by sliding the feet on the floor; turning upstage, walking away from the audience, in the most untheatrical gesture. The movements are generally performed with low energy and a throw-away quality

(almost sleepily, as if literally matching the pyjamas outfits), the steps often look tentative, as if the dancers were experimenting with them, and movement is interspersed by frequent lying down. In more dynamic sections, the steps are bouncy and springy, which prevents them from achieving a clear shape and perfect synchronicity, and the higher energy often results in movements pushed over the point of balance.

Amongst the recurrent patterns are small, almost imperceptible, rhythmical steps, executed without lifting the feet off the floor, and a position held by the three performers standing in a line, facing away from the audience, their torsos leaning to the right, the right arm hanging down the side, lifeless. The dancers often lift each other in the most bizarre fashions, as to defy conventional rules of partnered work: they carry each other's bodies as sacks across their shoulders, they grab one another with arms around the other's waist, they lean against one another and they help each other to stand up from the floor. The others' bodies are often treated as inanimate objects, pushed and pulled and stepped over.

This pragmatic attitude is clearly deliberate, but it is not emphasized. Burrows describes the trio as a dance that, by being stripped of most of its theatrical attributes and of the high energy generally used in performance, became 'virtually invisible' (2005c, n.p.). He also recognises that this understated quality – which he sees as bearing the influence of the Judson Church choreographers as much as of Samuel Beckett and of the atmosphere of the works by Tadeusz Kantor⁶ he saw at the Riverside Studios in the early 1980s – was a very fragile condition (Burrows, 2005c). He observes that, whilst the trio managed to maintain this 'wandering around not doing much' quality and, throughout the performances of the piece (despite there being only few), the three dancers were progressively doing 'less and less', the duet started instead to undergo a transformation and lost its original subtlety (2005c, n.p.). As Burrows says, used as they were to performing in ballets and playing it up for the audience, he and Rice found it difficult to resist responding to the reactions of the audience.

The problem with *Hymns* was that people warmed to it. In a way, because we were part of a ballet company people ... saw it as eccentric and quaint and English and ironic. And because we were ballet dancers, the only experience of performing we had was ballet. As we performed it, we moved towards the thing

that people wanted. And by the time it got filmed for the BBC [in 1992], it had become something a bit cute, and that rather confused me because it didn't feel like it had started out that way.

Burrows, 2005c, n.p.

According to Burrows, the references to the music and the lyrics became more overtly ironic and less 'tangential', and the 'delicate' and 'reserved' relationship 'between two boys', characterising the interaction between Burrows and Rice in the first version of the piece, seemed to fade and was replaced by a more simplistic comradeship (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.). A comparison between a 1986 recording of a rehearsal of the first two parts of the duet (Burrows, 1986a) and the 1988 video of the complete piece (Burrows, 1988) shows that intentions and reactions had become more explicit in the later document: in sequences in which the two dancers appear to wrestle with each other, physical effort and violence are acted more openly; equally, the playfulness of the more dynamic sections is more overt, undermining the subtlety characterising the original duet. Nevertheless, reviewers' comments show that the intimacy of this relationship was still visible in later performances. Observing how even the most manifestly aggressive passages of the duet reveal a certain 'camaraderie' between the dancers, Mackrell describes as 'impressive' 'the delicacy with which Burrows handles this very specific aspect of male experience without resorting either to the clichés of machismo or to the more well-trodden theme of sexual politics' (1988, p. 15).

These observations suggest that the everyday traits and qualities that Burrows brings into the dance are of a different kind from the pedestrian elements found in post-Cunningham works. Banes compares the way in which the Judson Church dancers borrowed from life to the artistic practices of the Dadaists and of the Pop artists, especially with reference to the use of chance methods and to the construct of the readymade. On the one hand, for the American early postmodern choreographers 'chance, collage, automatism, and other methods were ways to free themselves from the tyranny of the self' or to challenge the 'mythic' status of art and its separateness from life (Banes, 1993, p. 63). On the other hand,

like Pop artists, the Judson choreographers were fascinated by the everyday and put mundane objects and activities in their dances A newspaper used as clothing or as something to shred and play in; a radio blaring banally as the background for a romantic pas de deux; references to football and other

athletics, to social dancing, to daily activities – all these elements were a way of making the viewer stop to examine more closely the things one ordinarily takes for granted.

Banes, 1993, p. 105.

These practices reveal a degree of detachment which is partially recognisable in Burrows's work as well, especially in his use of arbitrary methods to select and arrange the choreographic material.⁷ However, in his dances this element of impersonality appears to be challenged by the intimate quality of the numerous personal traces and images underpinning the works. As Edith Boxberger observes, Burrows's creative processes are 'based on very decisive starting points' (1996, p. 46). Although they are often not at all explicit, these references are nevertheless connected with the choreographer's memories and background.⁸ The choice of hymn tunes for the duet, for example, can be connected to the fact that his father was a vicar – 'it was ... music that kind of belonged to me', says Burrows (2005c, n.p.). The level of closeness and familiarity transpiring from the relationship with his dance partner, the easiness with which they play and fight with each other like two schoolmates, can be connected to the fact that Burrows and Rice 'did go to school together, ... did have that relationship' (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.). Despite Burrows's increasing interest in the structural elements of dance, most visible in his mid-1990s pieces, and especially in *The Stop Quartet*, the personal character of his dances is a constant throughout his work. As Duerden argues, it 'represent[s], or manifest[s] in some way, an existentialist approach to dance and art' (1999, p. 50), whereby special attention is given to the most intimate and prosaic details. This quality openly informs the subject matter, for instance, of another early work by Burrows, the 1989 piece *Dull Morning*, which deals with the moods and conditions of old age and was inspired by pages of his grandfather's diary containing melancholic, repetitive comments on the weather (MacGibbon, 1992; Bayston, 1992). In more recent works, references of personal significance have become more subtle, but it can be argued that they continue to be embodied in Burrows's minutely detailed and precisely structured choreographies, such as the duets composed with Fargion (see Chapters 7 and 8).

Despite the differences in the pedestrian elements brought into play, a further parallel with the practice of the Judson choreographers can be drawn: this can be seen in the continuity of the modernist trajectory into the postmodern. If post-Cunningham choreographers reworked strategies and techniques of the first and second avant-garde

to construct an innovative approach to dance-making, Burrows blended personal references and traditional religious music into an unconventional composition which draws on postmodern devices such as fragmentation, multilingualism and parody. This dialogue between institution and innovation, subjective traits and distancing devices is a key ingredient of Burrows's interpretation of the connection between the present and the past, the new and the old, and informs his idiosyncratic response to postmodernism's complex relationship with history (Chapter 1).

4.3 Everyday gestural language

In Foster's article on the choreographic tactics of recent American dance, the main concern of her examination is to consider the difference between the 'whiteness' of the kind of theatricality formulated by the Judson Church generation (2002, p. 129) and the performance of 'a new theorisation of race' enacted by a choreographer such as Bill T. Jones (p. 142). Nevertheless, her analysis is also relevant to a study of the use of everyday elements in performance, especially from the perspective of the theoretical references she draws on.

In conceptualising the implications of the incorporation of the pedestrian into dance, Foster makes reference to de Certeau's study of the procedures of everyday activity. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1974, translated 1984), de Certeau investigates the 'ways of operating' adopted by ordinary men in their everyday acts, to discuss their intrinsic productivity and signifying capacity. In doing so, he overcomes the distinction between mind and bodily practices and identifies in corporeal articulations the same procedures that govern linguistic activities. Thus, in his view, moving, shopping and cooking have the same productive and 'enunciative' capacity as speaking (1984, p. xiii). All these practices generate individual acts within more or less rigid normative codes or models; they determine 'a *present* relative to a time and place'; and they operate in a 'network of places and relations' (p. xiii). These operations 'embod[y] both an analysis of and a response to the normative', they are 'tactics' through which individuals express their agency (Foster, 2002, pp. 129-130).

De Certeau's contribution was conceived as a critique of the ways of operating of Western socio-economical systems, to argue for an active role of the user or consumer

in shaping social dynamics and the mechanisms of production. Although this political agenda is inextricably linked to his theorisations, for the purpose of the present study attention is drawn to his examination of the functions and place of common acts within a larger normative context. Thus, de Certeau's assumption that everyday practices are all manifestations of the human capacity to signify is here adopted and extended to argue that the models constructed to understand one activity may be applied to the examination of others as well. Whilst acknowledging the fundamental differences between activities, and, above all, the specificity of art in relation to the role played by intentions and cultural conditionings in its expressivity and to its intrinsic interplay of imaginative and rational dimensions (Best, 1974 and 1985), the present discussion adopts de Certeau's argument as a starting point in understanding the strategies of signification of an artistic practice that appears to blend different modalities of communication and draws substantially on the everyday.

Among all signifying operations, linguistic procedures are undoubtedly the ones whose principles and structures have been most thoroughly studied. Indeed, de Certeau starts his construction of a 'contemporary science of the ordinary' (1984, p. 14) by analysing the workings of everyday language. Here he refers mainly to Wittgenstein's examination of the logics of common language and to his argument that every other specialised vocabulary or discourse can be observed only in relation to the language of the everyday: 'it is *primarily* the apparatus of our ordinary language ... that we call language; and then other things by analogy or comparability with this' (Wittgenstein, 1968, § 494).

In his discourse on language, de Certeau also briefly mentions Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and his idea of the 'prose of the world' (1984, p. 11). Merleau-Ponty's analysis of language underwent different formulations, including theorisations of the language of the body, of indirect language and of the language of the visible (Silverman, 1981). Reflecting on how language may communicate in a non-direct way, the French phenomenologist states: 'the meaning occurs at the intersection, in the interval between words' (Merleau-Ponty cited in Silverman, 1981, p. 131).

It can be argued that these observations on how verbal language works and signifies can be applied to movement language and provide useful instruments to understand how meanings are produced in dance. In particular, in the analysis of Burrows's

Hymns, this analogy may lead to the following two hypotheses: if in language meanings arise from intersections between words, in dance meanings emerge from the interaction of its different compositional elements; if ordinary language is the model in relation to which we understand specialised languages, the everyday gestures in Burrows's choreography are the term of comparison against which movements drawn from specific dance techniques can be read.

Sequences of the piece may be used to exemplify how pedestrian movements signify. They produce meanings both in relation to the other elements of the performance and through a dialectical juxtaposition with the other, more specialised, movement languages in the dance. The main focus of the following analysis is the second part of the piece, the duet danced by Burrows and Rice, where the choreography appears to establish a dialogue with the musical accompaniment and the cultural references conveyed by the unspoken lyrics, and blends different forms of movement and dance.

4.4 Between the gestures and the lyrics

The *Hymns* duet is divided in three parts, arranged in seven music sections. The first part, the most complex from a compositional point of view, comprises five sections, danced to a selection of four Victorian hymn tunes, one of which is repeated twice. The second and the third part are both performed to one other tune each.⁹ In performance, the music is played live on the harmonium by an organist, 'Methodist-style' (Harris, 1993, p. 18). The two dancers blend pedestrian gestures with dance steps and moves in a choreography that seems to respond to the themes treated in the hymns, by miming or opposing what the lyrics say. Although they are not sung, the lines of the hymns would be familiar to a greater or lesser extent to a British audience. The mimicking attitude contributes to the performers' portrayal as young schoolboys, by conveying the atmosphere of playful and/or confrontational interaction between children when listening to and singing religious hymns during school assemblies.

The first tune is *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, a hymn that calls men to action, inciting them to 'march as to war' in the name of Jesus. The choreography is made of slow, careful movements, uncertain steps which need the guidance of the other and frequent signs of immobility, such as standing still or lying down. This is in stark contrast

with the sense of confidence and strength communicated by the lyrics. At the beginning of the first stanza ('Onward, Christian soldiers, marching as to war, with the cross of Jesus going on before!'), the two dancers stand still, facing the audience for approximately twenty seconds; then they slowly bend forwards, flex their legs to crouched position, sit down and then lie on their back, feet towards the audience, as in a statement of resolute immobility. During the refrain, they lie still, then slowly stand up. With the second stanza, the movements get faster and more rhythmical, but the patterns still show signs of uncertainty and indecision in the changes of direction, in the dependence on the lead of the other and in the contorted turns and lifts. They walk downstage left, Burrows guiding Rice from behind; when they stop, Burrows lifts Rice holding him from the rear, turns to his right and puts his partner down in a different position. This phrase is then repeated in the opposite direction.

In the following sequence, a pattern with a leg lift, the opposite hand reaching for the sole of the shoe, and a turn ends again with a change of direction. Next is a rotation and wavy movement of the right arm, the head bending forwards and underneath the arm, accompanied by a turn and a change of direction. Since this pattern recurs again five more times during the tune, it acquires particular significance, possibly suggesting an idea of compliance with the exhortations of the hymn and of submission to its instructions. This is nevertheless counteracted by the rotatory movements and changes of direction, which seem to indicate reluctance to accept the yoke and a will to escape it. The following phrase, which is also frequently repeated, consists of a side jump with an alternate movement of the arms, one straight up, the other straight out to the side. With its blunt movements and precise lines, this pattern reveals qualities that appear more appropriate to the military tone of the hymn, but once again the alternate directions betray the indecision of these 'soldiers'. Later, when the third stanza praises the unity of the Church, a 'mighty army' that marches on as 'one body', Burrows and Rice couldn't be more apart – they wander around the space in isolation and appear divided: initially Burrows stands still whilst Rice walks in a circle alone, then the roles are swapped and Rice lies down whilst Burrows walks in a circle in the opposite direction.

The next hymn tune is *Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer*. Here the movements become faster and the choreography presents frequent and complex sequences of gestures, often performed in synchronicity, which include reproductions of praying

patterns, with hands joined or arms extended upwards. At the end of the second stanza of the hymn, for example, the dancers execute a quick arm and hand pattern: they half-rotate their forearms inwards, to a joined-hand position, extend their arms down and up, rotate their left forearm, raise their arms again and then lower them again, ending with hands resting frontally on their waistline. These semaphoric patterns seem to refer to the content of the hymn, a prayer offered to the Lord. But the recurrent phrases with arms bent at the elbow and rotations of the forearms can be explained also with a physical condition that occurred to Burrows at the time of working on the piece. As the choreographer recounts, ‘I broke my thumb and my hand was in plaster And, in a way, that’s what determined this strange not very much happening, quite gentle wandering around’ (2005c, n.p.) The influence of this injury is also visible in those sequences of the piece in which both Burrows and Rice walk around with one hand resting on their waist.

The hymn progressively becomes more dynamic, with sequences of jumps and leaps, arms swinging and floating like those of angels. The last stanza of *Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer* ends with a peculiar version of prayer: after an intricate arm pattern with rhythmical jumps, they bend forwards as if bowing, reaching down and to the left with straight arms; they lift their right leg backwards bending their torso forwards, then hop back towards upstage, bend their knees and torso as if to sit on a chair and pause, resting their elbows on their legs.

This sequence is followed by the first stanza of *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*, the harvest hymn. The movement sequence is here lively and fast and contains a repeated arm gesture, with hands joining above the head, in correspondence with terms indicating the security of the home in the inclemency of the winter weather. After running and jumping in a circle, they walk around slowly and meet at centre stage, one in front of the other; in unison, they join their hands as in prayer, then raise their forearms whilst facing the audience, as if surrendering or in a preaching gesture, rotate the forearm of their external arm, raise their hands again and then lower them to their waist. In a pause at the end of the tune, a repetitive rocking movement with hands joined, as in a blessing gesture, is followed by a snap of one hand on the other and a jiggle of the fingers, right at the beginning of *Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer*, here repeated once again. The five seconds of silence make this phrase all the more poignant. Is the ‘offer’ turning into a request, with this quick hand movement that

seems to ask for something? The deadpan performance of the two dancers enhances the ambiguity of such passages, but in a conversation Burrows confirmed that the phrase ironically referred to the Church's ritual of collecting money during services, as if to say 'give us your money!' (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.).¹⁰ A specific gesture with an explicit meaning is thus elaborated into a movement pattern and blended into the choreography. The reference is nevertheless still recognisable and the unexpectedness of the gesture and its occurrence in a pause of the music draw attention to the ironic comment it bears on a well known institutional practice.

In contrast with this childishly naughty joke, the next sequence sees the two dancers hopping around like angels: hands to their ears, they perform a small jump backwards, extending their head and neck backwards and turning around, with arms wide open and looking up; then they hop towards upstage, waving their arms and bending their torso forwards. Moreover, the following hymn, *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*, asks God to 'forgive [their] foolish ways', while they carry one another from behind, arms placed underneath the other's armpits, alternately stopping each other's ears and mouth and closing each other's eyes, as if promising to hear no evil, speak no evil, see no evil (Mackrell, 1987 and 1988).¹¹

The second part of the *Hymns* duet is danced to *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*, celebrating the strength and power of God. Here the movements become tougher and more controlled, revealing a different kind of energy, and thus possibly referring to the theme of the hymn. This can be seen, for instance, in the 'handshake' that Burrows and Rice exchange twice, during the first and the second stanza: a slow yet firm movement executed sideways, with both dancers facing the audience and, in its second occurrence, with Burrows leaning onto Rice, sustained by the handgrip. Towards the end of the tune, these vigorous encounters intensify and the last stanza is a sequence of physical assaults and chases, as in a fight: Rice jumps at Burrows and lands on his partner's back, sliding down to the floor. Burrows frees himself and he and Rice run around in a circle. Rice pushes past Burrows and jumps over and across him, using his partner's shoulder as a springboard. Immediately after, he jumps again at Burrows, who then starts chasing Rice in a small circle. Rice pushes Burrows away pressing a hand against his head, until, on the last notes of the tune, they cross their arms around their chest, as if hugging themselves – and as if to stop themselves from

carrying on with this indecorous behaviour. Then on the Amen, they bend forwards, swing their arms sideways and walk off.

As it may be inferred from this movement analysis, an interplay between pedestrian movements and unspoken lyrics can be read in these sequences, bringing together the references and connotations of both components. In this respect, the gestures seem to conform to the paradigm of the communicative act formulated by David McNeill in his study of spoken language, in which he argues that ‘gestures are an integral part of language as much as are words’, and they relate to both the ‘overarching discourse structure’ and the ‘thought structure’, combining individual, contextual and normative meanings (1992, p. 2). In the same way, it can be argued that in Burrows’s duet both the gestures and the hymns have to be taken into account to interpret the overall sense of the choreography. Within the discourse structure created by the hymn tunes and lyrics, the gestures in *Hymns* reflect the dialectical relationship between that discourse and the more individual and situational aspects of the choreographer’s thought.

McNeill’s contention is that ‘the gesture supplies the idiosyncratic, the personal, and the context-specific aspects of thought, to be combined with the socially regulated aspects that come from the conventions of language’ (1992, p. 2). This relationship between idiosyncratic and normative sides can be identified also in *Hymns*: while the tunes and the lyrics convey the institutional ideas of the Anglican Church, the pedestrian movements of the choreography appear to refer to the contexts in which Burrows personally experienced those ideas (playing and fighting during school assembly, saying prayers, the preaching and blessing witnessed during the Sunday service, the collection box, singing in a choir [Burrows, 2005c]) and to his own reactions to them (from the angelic hopping around, possibly reminiscent of affectionate memories, to the undeterred immobility in response to the Church’s calling to action, to the mocking imitation of ritual gestures and practices). A comment by Mackrell appears to share this argument: ‘the routine of school discipline is imposed by the geometrical pattern and steady rhythms that dominate the piece, while individual gestures reveal its rebellious opposite’ (1988, p. 15). Hence, it can be suggested that the everyday movements of the choreography are employed to convey personal attitudes towards the themes and references of the hymns: from fondness to critique to irony, or ‘a subtle mixture of affection and hostility’ (Dougill, 1988, n.p.)

However, a parallel between language and dance can only go so far, in that the intrinsic multimodality of choreography makes it a much more complex signifying event. Whilst in the spontaneous speech acts that McNeill analyses, gestures appear to ‘reflect the discourse functions of the sentences they co-occur with’ (1992, p. 183), in *Hymns* the relationship between movement and language is purposefully constructed and thus more articulated: on the one hand, the verbal element is not contextually produced and is only present in the memory of some spectators; on the other hand, although the gestures can be said to respond to the absent text, they do it either by accompanying it or by conflicting with it, thus generating ambiguity. For example, the movement sequences at the end of the first three stanzas of *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*, in the second part of the duet, are characterised by unbalanced postures, with Burrows leaning sideways onto Rice, thus mirroring the sense of uncertainty conveyed by the last verse, ‘for those in peril on the sea’. But in other instances the gestures contrast with the words of the hymns, like in the light-hearted hopping accompanying ‘but for strength, that we may ever / live our lives courageously’ in the second occurrence of *Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer*, in the first part of the duet.

The oblique and contradictory nature of the relationship between lyrics and gestures in the piece seems to allow the emergence of the subjective voice of the choreographer, which is articulated through a dialectical tension between system and individuality, deference and rebellion. In Kristeva’s terms (1980), this can be read as a poetic act realising a contradictory and parodic discourse in which the subject engages in a challenge with the contexts and codes of the language of reference (see also Chapter 3.2). Meaning is thus displaced and eluded, in a constant interplay of voices which destabilises the distinction between personal and normative stances, between self and other, and generates multiple, heterogeneous positions and interpretations.

4.5 Ordinary and specialised movement vocabularies

The second hypothesis formulated in this chapter is about the relationship between ordinary language and specialised vocabularies. The following analysis looks at how ordinary gestures combine with specific dance languages in the piece, suggesting that

this synthesis of genres and styles is symptomatic of Burrows's dialectical position within the field of dance. This reading investigates a distinctive trait of his choreography, in which movements and phrases borrowed from different dance styles can be recognised, from English Morris dancing to contact improvisation, to ballet.

Burrows has often talked about being fascinated by the physicality of English Morris dancing (Chapter 1), by its peculiar use of weight and gravity ('you go down to come up'), by its unusual movement quality ('it's heavy, but at the same time it has this kind of strange, ugly grace to it') and by its attitude to performing (pragmatic, matter-of-fact, and yet 'deeply moving'): 'there's hardly a thing I've made that doesn't have that somewhere in the heart of it' (Burrows, 2005a, n.p.). Throughout the choreography of *Hymns*, traces of this form can be seen in social-dance-like partnering and in liling and hopping patterns. One of the most significant of these phrases occurs in the second part of the duet, between the third and the fourth stanza of *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*, when Burrows and Rice execute a repeated hopping step, holding each other's right hand. Here, the five seconds' background silence makes the light stomps of the feet audible, thus highlighting the connection they establish with folk dance.

The references to contact improvisation are more indirect, and in both the trio and the duet they can be identified in postures and phrases in which the dancers lean against each other or carry one another's weight. The most explicit instance occurs in the second part of the duet, at the end of the third stanza of *Eternal Father, Strong to Save*, just before the folk-dance hopping. Here Burrows places his left arm around Rice's shoulders and leans against him, whilst Rice pushes him up and lifts him off the floor.

Ballet-like steps and figures, such as spins and turns, occur throughout the choreography, but they are most frequent in the third part of the duet and in the coda. The last hymn tune to which the duet is danced, *The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended*, brings the piece to a close with an evening prayer, before 'darkness falls'. Here, the lyricism of certain phrases of the tunes creates the ground for balletic spins and turns. These are performed very gracefully, in an exaggerated fashion, with the affectation of a showy ballerina. At the start of the hymn, Burrows and Rice stand upstage in a line, the former in front. Burrows raises his arms to the sides, fluidly and

lyrically, moves forwards running lightly and lowering his arms, then turns and runs back. He repeats similar sequences rushing in different directions and spinning around, whilst Rice stands upstage, raises his arms with equally graceful movements and eventually sits down elegantly, his legs extended to one side, his left arm sustaining his torso. Towards the end of the stanza the roles are inverted and Rice spins around whilst Burrows lies down, and in the following sequence they both move from one end to the other of the stage leaping and spinning. Overall, the choreography of the third part is considerably more balletic than the rest of the piece, with repeated references to classical steps and figures and deliberately overstated posing.

These references to steps and attitudes of classical dancing suggest that, besides responding to Anglican religion, the culture that he had been closely related with through his father's ordination, in *Hymns* Burrows also engages in a dialogue with the institution of ballet, the world that he had been involved in for almost twenty years. Yet, in the same way that his response to the hymns oscillates between the critique of the establishment ideas they are associated with and the fondness for the childhood memories they bring back, his portrayal of ballet is not a mere caricature. The parodic potential of this use of balletic language lies in the contradictions it calls attention to, which reflect the tensions between the contexts it brings into play: everyday movement and specialised dance vocabulary, freedom and discipline, individual idiom and recognised culture. This critical use of the code allows the poetic voice of the subject to emerge through a 'carnavalesque' gesture, in the Bakhtinian sense of the word. This act of positioning, by locating the creative, poetic act in relation to its history and contexts, also identifies unconventionality and marginality as the conditions for its expression. As Kristeva, drawing on Bakhtin, puts it, 'the only way a writer can participate in history is ... through a process of reading-writing; that is, through the practice of a signifying structure in relation or opposition to another structure' (1980, p. 65).

By choosing to overemphasise balletic traits and attitudes of performing, Burrows seems to underline his ambiguous connection with classical dance. The complexity of the cultural significance of this stance may be further explained through Goffman's analysis of social interactions, and especially of the coexistence of 'reality and contrivance' in everyday performances (1990, p. 76). Goffman argues that every

status or position is something that ‘must be realized’ through performance, whether this is conducted with ‘ease or clumsiness, awareness or not’ (p. 81). He quotes an example from Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness* (1943), in which the philosopher describes the gestures of a waiter in a café:

a little too precise, a little too rapid ... a little too solicitous All his behaviour seems to us a game. ... He is playing, he is amusing himself. ... The game is a kind of marking out and investigation. ... The waiter in the café plays with his condition in order to *realize* it.

Sartre cited in Goffman, 1990, pp. 81-82.

By resorting to ballet moves and performing them ‘a little too eagerly’ (p. 81), Burrows is here affirming his association with classical dance and his role as a dancer – which ultimately achieves the goal of legitimising the introduction of pedestrian gestures and the blending of different movement styles in his work. Significantly, the piece was created only few years before Burrows’s departure from the Royal Ballet to become an independent choreographer, thus assuming the function of sanctioning his role and position outside the institution of ballet through reference to his established classical background.

Looking back on the choreography for the third hymn, Burrows admits that it may have been influenced by what he thought were the expectations of audiences and critics. He felt pressure to incorporate some more traditional dance, in contrast with the larger freedom with which he composed the first minutes of the work. ‘It’s like I was thinking, “we’d better do something!” ... We made a finale, because that’s the background we came from’ (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.). Balletic influences are paramount also in the section of the coda danced to a Chopin nocturne, but here the performance regains the relaxed attitude of the first parts of the piece. Arguably, in this last section, it is the choice of a classical musical accompaniment that legitimises the classical steps, without the need of any emphasis on the way in which movements are executed.

4.6 Heterogeneity, rhythm and the displacement of meaning

In *Hymns*, elements from different contexts (religion, education, entertainment and dance) and with different qualities and connotations (parody, lyricism, playfulness

and aggressiveness) are placed beside each other to create an unexpected choreography for the chosen musical score. Liturgical and pious gestures escape from their usual contexts, are displaced from their customary sequences and used as elements for new movement patterns. Performed alongside jokey or confrontational schoolchildren's games, as well as lyrical ballet-like steps and folk-dancey lilt and hopping movements, these gestures produce a new 'ritual', alternative to the one that traditionally accompanies the Anglican hymns, thus generating comic or wrong-footing effects.

Through the blending of conventionally unrelated contexts, codes of behaviour, tones and registers, the piece enacts a series of displacements:¹² what is meant to be a concert dance piece is performed to religious tunes; the hymns inspire ritual gestures that are nevertheless combined with steps from various dance forms and recognisable elements of body language; the ballet and social dance steps are performed by a couple of men, dressed as young boys; these two boys, who are in fact two grown-ups, engage in childish games and fights. The effect produced by the juxtaposition of the dance and its different styles with the music and the (unspoken) lyrics, as well as with the costumes, is one of an atypical amalgam, where meanings are produced through unconventional intersections of cultural associations and expectations.

Through this line of displacements, rhythm is upheld as 'a dominant element', challenging accepted strategies of signification and introducing a poetic alternative to denotative meaning (Kristeva, 1980, p. 31). The musical arrangement of the piece, from the simple, repetitive four-squareness of the hymns (Burrows, 2005c) to the warmer, jazzier rhythm of the bossa nova and the softer classical accompaniment to the coda, forms the structure through which the various movement vocabularies employed in the work confront their systems of reference and challenge their codes. By 'preced[ing] ... signification' (Kristeva, 1980, p. 31), rhythm opens up the meaning of language beyond its conventional uses, thus affirming the choreographer/poet's individual and subversive position.

Overall, heterogeneity characterises the use of choreographic elements in the piece. Whilst the duet ambiguously oscillates between the seriousness of the religious theme and the both light and vehement quality of children's behaviour, the other parts of the piece add to this variety of suggestions by playing with a multiplicity of languages

and attitudes, from the everyday to the balletic. Through these seemingly unconnected ingredients of a composite vocabulary, *Hymns* seems to show us the diversity and richness of dance, and of life. Through the contextual references they embody, these linguistic elements situate the dance in relation to its history, whilst also allowing the choreographer to challenge and rewrite links and connections in a personal and idiosyncratic way.

Notes

- ¹ My reconstruction of the development of the piece differs slightly from the one proposed by Duerden (1999). Whereas she identifies as the first version an *Hymns, Parts 1-3*, dated 1985, to my knowledge, the third part of the duet was not choreographed until 1986. The only documentation of the 1985 version is a rehearsal video shot in a studio of the Royal Ballet in January 1986, and this only comprises two parts (Burrows, 1986a). The complete duet and the final version of the piece had their premiere respectively at the Riverside Studios, London, in October 1986 and at The Place Theatre, London, in June 1988. They are documented by reviews and critical accounts, by a rehearsal video including both the trio and the duet (Burrows, 1988) and by a BBC documentary featuring the *Hymns* duet alongside other works by Burrows (MacGibbon, 1992). About the different phases of creation of the work, see also my unpublished interview with Burrows (2005c). The analysis constructed in this chapter is mainly based on the 1988 rehearsal video, which provides the most complete documentation of the piece.
- ² Apart from the premiere at The Place Theatre in June 1988, the precise dates and places of the following performances are not known to me. However, in a conversation Burrows suggested that the full piece was performed only less than half a dozen times (2005c).
- ³ Burrows recounts that it was in order to present it as a full-length performance that the duet was extended and the trio was added at the beginning (Burrows, 2005c).
- ⁴ On the time preceding the creation of *Hymns*, Parry reports: ‘he became so dissatisfied with his experiments that he stopped choreographing for almost two years. “I waited until I was driven to make something really personal,” he says. “Then I started again, very slowly and meticulously, not moving on until I was satisfied I’d got it right”’ (1991, p. 57).
- ⁵ Other characteristics of the work of the Judson Church choreographers that are only partially shared by Burrows’s dances can be found in the use of improvisation in performance, in the use of impersonal methods to create the dance and in the absence of thematic starting points.
- ⁶ Polish theatre director and visual artist (1915-1990) whose work shared artistic concerns with Constructivism, Dadaism, Surrealism and Art Informel. His ‘Theatre of Death’ was characterised by the use of mannequins, objects and anthropomorphic machines in an almost symbiotic relationship with the actors on stage (see Perazzo, 2005a).
- ⁷ In *Hymns*, this approach is particularly evident, for instance, in the choice of costumes and in the selection of musical accompaniment for the trio (see Burrows, 2005c). This mode of choreographic creation is discussed further in this thesis with specific reference to more recent works (e.g. *The Stop Quartet*, *Both Sitting Duet*, *Speaking Dance*, for which see Chapters 6, 7 and 8).
- ⁸ In this respect, Burrows’s artistic outlook shows a similarity with Kantor’s work for the theatre, which typically draws on personal memories and intimate details. Amongst the pieces by Kantor that Burrows saw at the Riverside Studios was his 1975 masterpiece, *The Dead Class* (Burrows, 2005c), which, significantly, was inspired by his childhood and school memories.
- ⁹ In the 1988 recording of the piece (Burrows, 1988) the hymn tunes are arranged as follows: part 1 is danced to *Onward, Christian Soldiers* (five stanzas and refrains), *Father, Hear the Prayer*

We Offer (four stanzas), *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* (one stanza), *Father, Hear the Prayer We Offer* (one stanza), *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind* (two stanzas); part 2 is danced to *Eternal Father, Strong to Save* (five stanzas), and part 3 is performed to *The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended* (six stanzas). I owe my reconstruction of the hymn tunes arrangement to Sarah Harris's useful analysis of the piece in her MA dissertation (1993), as well to the expert help of Chris Jones, former archivist of the NRCD, and of my supervisor Professor Janet Lansdale.

¹⁰ Burrows comments: 'audiences always got it, they always thought it was funny! But there's also something very nice rhythmically about it' (Burrows, 2005c, n.p.).

¹¹ Mackrell describes this phrase as containing 'corny references to the words – like a po-faced dance' (1988, p. 15).

¹² It should be noted that by the term 'displacement', although alluding to Kristeva's theory of the revolutionary potential for meaning of poetic signifying practices, I do not refer here to the psychoanalytical implications discussed by Kristeva in relation to Sigmund Freud's notion of 'primary processes (displacement and condensation)' (Kristeva, 1984, p. 22). The word is employed in this and other chapters of this thesis in its linguistic sense of a substitutive process involving signifiers and signifieds. As a linguistic procedure, displacement is discussed also by Genette in relation to the 'artifices' of 'poetic expression' (1982, p. 92): 'the most frequent, no doubt the most effective action on the signifier ... is of a semantic order: it consists not in deforming signifiers or inventing new ones: but in *displacing* them, that is to say, in substituting for the literal term another term that one diverts from its use and meaning by giving it a new use and new meaning' (p. 94).

CHAPTER 5

Dancing irony

English character and parody (*Stoics*)

5.1 A ‘very English’ choreographer: problematising national categorisations

Burrows’s work, with its deadpan performance, subtle wit and the use of traditional forms of dance as a source of inspiration for its movement vocabulary, is often identified in the literature and press as typically English. As well as praising the uniqueness and distinctiveness of his talent amongst his contemporaries – ‘the most original creative thinker out of the Royal Ballet for some years’ (Jordan, 1992b, p. 12) – dance scholars have also recognised a strong cultural specificity in his work. Ann Nugent, for instance, has commented: ‘his choreography ... is deft, droll and understated, with a humour arising out of small incidental details that is both highly original at the same time as it seems very English’ (1992, n.p.).

John Ashford, director of The Place, has been quoted as saying: ‘I think ... Burrows is entirely English, if you look at his work you can see clog dancing in it as much as you can see ballet’ (cited in Brown, 1992, p. 58). This remark emerges from a larger discussion on the identity of ‘British dance within an increasingly global culture’ (p. 58). According to Ashford, choreographers from the United Kingdom ‘stand at a crossroads’ (p. 58): between American dance, European dance theatre, intercultural influences resulting from immigration from Asia and Africa (a much stronger and deeper-rooted presence in Britain than in many other European countries), and the tradition of English dance.

The history and specificity of British contemporary dance in relation to its broader socio-cultural context became a prime object of enquiry for dance scholars in the early 1990s, when the widening of the performing arts scene, through international programmes and festivals held both in Britain and abroad,¹ seemed not only to bring attention to the dialogue and points of contact between cultures, resulting in increasingly hybrid forms of dance, but also to highlight the distinctiveness of the contribution of British choreographers. Fiona Burnside (1992), for instance, observing the work of Butcher, Siobhan Davies, Laurie Booth and Richard Alston,

maintains that some traits of their work ‘are distinctive preoccupations of British contemporary dance’ – ‘abstraction, technical exploration rather than innovation, examination of the formal properties of dance in performance, collaborations exploring the relationship between theatrical elements working with a variety of artists’ – and ‘are not in line with the focus of current European or even North American preoccupations’ (p. 31).

Dramatic narrative is not there, emotional expression and sexual relations are barely visible, shock tactics are not in evidence, political ideology is not an issue, raw athletic physicality has no advocate within this group of choreographers and extrinsic modes of visual stylisation are not within the canon [*sic*].

Burnside, 1992, p. 31.

Yet, Burnside’s view seems to reduce British contemporary dance to the outputs of these four artists – ‘some of our most eminent and mature choreographers asserting a very British sensibility’ (p. 42) – who, despite their respective idiosyncrasies, appear to share aesthetic and formal concerns. These are described by Burnside as in stark opposition to the emphasis on emotions and the stylistic excesses of much European dance.

What distinguishes these British artists in an international context is their concern to integrate the different elements of production. This blending is entirely different from the jarring juxtapositions of much European work. The enhanced perception of movement heightened by design, music, lighting, costume or architecture calls for an intellectual rather than an emotional response. ... The determined neutrality of tone and presentation of a smooth surface for inspection does not really have a counterpart in the international dance scene.

Burnside, 1992, p. 42.

Nevertheless, this portrayal of British dance at the beginning of the 1990s does not seem to take into account the multifaceted nature of the arts scene in the United Kingdom, a reflection of cross-cultural fertilisations and of an increasing attention to diversity. The 1991 programme of the Dance Umbrella festival, for example, showcased a variety of styles and dance forms, as well as aesthetic, formal and methodological perspectives, with contributions ranging from the mainstream to the avant-garde, from Britain, the United States, continental Europe, Japan and New Zealand (Rowell, 2000a). Moreover, two of the British participants were ‘overtly concerned with cross-culturalism’: Shobana Jeyasingh and Valli Subbiah (Rowell,

2000a, p. 110). As Alastair Macaulay (1992) points out, this focus on multiculturalism was far from being a new concern of the dance scene in the United Kingdom. On the contrary, it could be described as ‘something obvious about Britain today’ (Macaulay, 1992, p. 320), that is, a typically British trait, which Burnside seems to have taken no notice of in her overview of ‘distinctive preoccupations of British contemporary dance’ (1992, p. 31). As Rowell observes,

multiculturalism has been a feature within the arts in general in this country since the late 1970s. ... During the 1970s there was a proliferation of dance companies featuring non-western forms, due to a new generation of British-born people of African, Afro-Caribbean and Asian descent who needed to proclaim their sense of cultural identity.

Rowell, 2000b, p. 201.

Towards the late 1990s, Parry’s (1996b) overview of British contemporary and experimental dance presents a scene that is hardly as self-contained and impermeable as Burnside depicted it less than half a decade before. In a territory that appears fluid and varied, Parry identifies categories and trends that illustrate the openness of Britain to external forms and styles: for instance, the work of Lloyd Newson, Nigel Charnock, Mark Murphy, Wayne McGregor and Mark Bruce bears the signs of the extreme physicality of the ‘Eurocrash’ of Pina Bausch, Jan Fabre, Wim Vandekeybus and De Keersmaeker; whilst Booth, Maliphant and Paul Douglas blend martial arts and oriental movement techniques in their choreographies (p. 71).

The greater affirmation of postcolonial discourse in the 1990s highlights the importance of diversity and cross-cultural fertilisation, whilst socio-cultural studies of the extent and effects of globalisation urge researchers to look beyond a uniformed surface for more genuine representations of national identity. With reference to these theoretical enquiries, at the dawn of the new millennium, Jordan and Andrée Grau observe that

a key area for current European debate ... is one about difference within ‘the same’ culture as opposed to between cultures, given the patterns of post-war migration challenging the alleged homogeneity of European nation states.

Grau and Jordan, 2000, p. 3.

Grau and Jordan locate their book, *Europe Dancing*, in the framework of theorisations of the historical and cultural aspects of our postmodern, globalised condition, with references to Mike Featherstone’s and Paul Gilroy’s social investigations.

Nevertheless, whilst acknowledging that ‘today’s international economy has signalled the decline of nation states as economic-political units of organization’ (p. 2), they conceive a study that frames manifestations of European dance according to their national provenance. They justify their choice by saying that

numerous dance networks now operate with this European conceptual and institutional framework in mind, including scholarly networks in dance. ... The organization of the book also reflects the fact that the different countries of Europe have their own systems, institutional structures and heritages that play a major role in any consideration of dance culture.

Grau and Jordan, 2000, p. 7.

In her chapter on dance in the United Kingdom in Grau and Jordan’s collection, Rowell argues that ‘the search for identity’ has been ‘the major agenda for dance in the UK in recent decades’ (2000b, p. 200). This has meant negotiating images of identity in relation to both American and European representations of dance, as well as to the country’s own demographic and cultural diversity, giving voice to ethnic minorities, distinctive social groups and local communities. This increasing complexity of Britain’s social composition calls into question the identification of ‘typically English’ traits in the work of British choreographers. Rowell wonders whether these characterisations are still legitimate – ‘what then of the Ashton style, the English style, the understated lyricism of *Second Stride* ... that was said to be so English in the early 1980s?’ – and concludes that ‘perhaps these things are all of the past’ (p. 201). The question is, however, whether these seemingly conflicting aspects may be mutually coexistent and find expression in the tensions and contradictions of contemporary works.

The debate on the characteristics of English identity and on the need to distinguish between Englishness and Britishness in the light of the country’s growing ethnic stratification was still occupying historians and scholars of cultural and literary studies at the turn of the millennium, when the effects of the immigration from former colonies and of globalisation, as well as Britain’s complicated relationship with the European Union, added to the already intricate scenario of the relationship between England and the other identities of Britain (Cohen, 2000). Several researchers set out to investigate the notion of an English identity, its places and conditions of expression (Baucom, 1999), its unconscious modes and mechanisms (Easthope, 1999), its history and actual formation (Shell, 2005). Although some of these contributions have been

criticised for their ‘Anglocentric’ attitude (Watson, 2000, p. 739) and for ‘fail[ing] to incorporate post-colonial theories of national identity’ into their examination of Englishness (Trimm, 1999, p. 130), they are nevertheless indicative of the re-emergence of issues that might be thought to have become neglected in the cultural studies agenda by the recent transformations of modern society.

In the wake of this renewed interest in the traits and qualities of English identity, it is arguable that examining the newly complex position of images of Englishness in British contemporary dance is not necessarily a thing of the past. Representations and manifestations of an English style and character have certainly changed their forms and functions during the last few decades – reflecting and responding to an increasingly heterogeneous social situation – but it would be inaccurate to say that they have disappeared. Like Burrows, other British contemporary choreographers have been described as typically English: further examples can be found in the abovementioned *Second Stride* and in Lea Anderson, whose works, according to Macaulay (1996), reveal ‘an utterly English conception of character: light, defined principally by social behaviour, close to caricature’ (cited in Rowell, 2000b, p. 201). Other strongly connoted images of identity can be recognised in Clark’s work, which can be seen to enact a rebellion against balletic codes and a transgression of social conventions (British ones, in this case, given Clark’s Scottish origins), thus embodying what can be seen as an alternative side of the national character. As Banes points out, ‘the English see it as a protest against Thatcherism and an emblem of post-punk London in the ’80s’ (1994, p. 300).

Hence, the scene is more complex and multifaceted than it appears at a first sight. On the one hand, British contemporary dance cannot be reduced to a few selected examples distinguishing themselves from their European counterparts for their formally coherent and intellectually driven approach to composition. A more comprehensive picture should take into account hybrid forms of dance that bring into play elements from the different traditions and cultures that constitute British contemporary identity. On the other hand, whilst images of Englishness/Britishness can be recognised in some choreographers’ works, they do not create a homogeneous portrayal of a collective character, but they are embodied interpretations of specific cultural traits and thus generate different constructions of identity.

In this chapter Burrows's work is examined from the point of view of the images of Englishness it appears to generate, with particular attention to how they may relate to the broader British and European dance scenes. The discourse focuses on the 1991 piece *Stoics*, selected for this purpose for two main reasons. Firstly, its date: the 1990s witnessed the increasing prominence of postcolonial discourse and of theorisations on the issues and dynamics of global culture. Later, towards the end of the decade, historical, literary and cultural studies investigated the formation and expressions of English and British identities, thus arguing for the relevance of discussing issues related to national identity in an age of globalisation and recognising 'that, in fact, state structures and national cultures are integral parts of global and transnational networks' (Watson, 2000, p. 737). Hence, this appears as a significant social and cultural framework in which to observe a dance work from the perspective of what it reveals about its larger collective identity. Secondly, whilst qualities such as humour, wit, subtlety and understatement, which have often been identified as stereotypically distinctive of the English character, have been recognised in most of Burrows's dances, *Stoics* appears not only to be indirectly informed by these traits, but also to reflect overtly upon them.

As Chris de Marigny puts it, with *Stoics*, as already partially with *Hymns*, Burrows seems to 'make wry comments on the nature of British life' (1994, p. 7). Constanti reports that the choreographer himself 'describes *Stoics* as a particularly English work: "it's all about keeping a stiff upper lip while everything around you is falling apart"' (1991, p. 132). Indeed, in the Arts Council/BBC documentary *The Far End of the Garden*, Burrows talks about the meaning of the title of the piece, referring to the stereotypical English stoicism: 'I called the piece *Stoics* ... because of "stoics" in its very English sense, of being upright' (MacGibbon, 1992). In one of our conversations, although Burrows seemed to challenge the reading of the piece in terms of its portrayal of specific cultural traits, in an attempt to 'resist ... categorisations', he also demonstrated an awareness of how the piece draws on English behavioural patterns in claiming that the intention was also to make fun of them (Burrows, 2006a, n.p.) – which is possibly another 'typically English' attitude, 'the droll humour ... through which Burrows has taught us to enjoy the English poking fun at their insularity' (Nugent, 1994, p. 21).

In reviewing a number of recent publications on issues related to British/English identity, Robin Cohen makes reference to a

persistent yet totally doomed attempt to capture some essential, eternal, national characteristics. The English are ... generous, honest, taciturn, tolerant, eccentric, phlegmatic, brave, just, bad lovers, decent, best when their backs are against a wall, good losers, trustworthy. Or the English have ... a sense of humour, charming manners, a sense of irony, a sense of fair play, or a stiff upper lip.

Cohen, 2000, pp. 578-579.

Although Cohen describes these lists as ‘sociologically illiterate in that they are clearly bound by the specificities of time, place, class, gender and education, among other variables’, he also recognises their value as myths, that is, as constructions that social agents may respond to and that therefore may become real through their acting as points of reference (p. 579). Through a detailed movement analysis of the piece, I examine how Burrows’s work is constructed in dialogue with culturally specific social and behavioural attributes, which are at the same time exposed and commented upon in the dance. Drawing on the poststructuralist idea that the subject and its representations are an ‘effect of discourse’ (see also Chapter 3.1), recent cultural studies positions conceptualise identity not simply as passively received but also as actively constructed by individuals, and argue that collective identity is not universal within the nation but ‘plural and disjunct’ in reflecting specific socio-cultural conditions (Easthope, 1999, pp. 19, 22). Within this framework, Burrows’s personal portrayal of English identity is investigated in this chapter through an examination of the particular traits of collective culture it appears to embrace and perform. Whilst it is not the aim of this research to propose a sociological study of English identity, contributions from social studies are here taken into account in the interrogation of the behavioural and social traits that Burrows’s works, and *Stoics* in particular, appear to draw on and play with in constructing images of Englishness.

The following sections of this chapter provide, as a starting point, an overview of the piece, with reference to its compositional and critical history. In analysing the humorous character of the work, an argument is constructed around the subversive, political ‘edge’ of the comic solutions found in the choreography, which suggests that irony can be read in the fragmentary, composite nature of the piece (Hutcheon, 1994). Furthermore, in discussing the role played by stereotypical characterisations of

English traits in the construction of a reading of the behavioural qualities that *Stoics* portrays and plays with, the notion of parody is explored in relation to its connotation of transgression and marginalisation (Hutcheon, 1988) and through Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minority (1986). Finally, ideas associated with the character of 'stoicism', resistance and rebellion are employed in the formulation of an interpretation of the choreography's stance towards conventions and traditions.

5.2 Fragmentation, subversion and invention: where the irony lies

The formal structure of *Stoics* appears particularly fragmented. This arrangement reflects the composite history of the creation of the piece, which was presented in different configurations with varying structure, length and musical accompaniment. The complete version of the work was performed by Burrows and four other dancers, all members of the Royal Ballet; it lasts approximately forty minutes and is composed of seven parts: two duets, danced by Burrows and Lynne Bristow; a trio performed by Bristow, Deborah Jones and Natalie McCann; a solo danced by Luke Heydon; a third part starting with a solo danced by Burrows, who is subsequently joined by Heydon and Bristow to form, in turn, a duet and a trio; a section danced by Burrows, Bristow and Jones; and a final quartet with Burrows, Heydon, Jones and McCann.

The first part to be choreographed was the initial duet by Burrows and Bristow, which was also performed independently (Burrows, 2006a). Extracts of the work were presented at the Riverside Studios in July 1990, and later that year at Dance Umbrella (Rowell, 2000a). The complete version had its premiere at the Place Theatre in April 1991, in a production presented and supported by the Royal Ballet,² and was performed again in an English tour in the Autumn, at Dance Umbrella in November in a shared programme with Julyen Hamilton (Rowell, 2000a), and in Brussels, Copenhagen and other European venues (Burrows, 2006a). But the piece continued to undergo further changes, especially with regard to its musical arrangement. Moreover, the final quartet also had a life of its own, and was presented in six performances at the Royal Opera House between November and December 1991, in a programme featuring a new piece by Tuckett (a Royal Ballet member and one of the dancers of Burrows's *Hymns* trio) and two of George Balanchine's works, *Agon* and

Symphony in C (Anon, 1991b). In these Covent Garden performances, Burrows's part in the quartet was taken over by Rice (Burrows's partner in the *Hymns* duet).

The setting of the piece (by Craig Givens) is designed in conformity with Burrows's usual simplicity of style. The stage is bare (even for the Royal Opera House performances) with traditional frontal seating, the lighting is basic, and the costumes are designed on classic everyday clothing, with an austere look given by their formal cuts and generally dark shades: anthracite classic trousers, a grey shirt with a black tie and classic shoes for the two men, and dark classic trousers with a coloured sleeveless top (green, blue and red) for the three women. As was already the case in *Hymns* (see Chapter 4), the musical arrangement is the product of the choreographer's eclectic taste, and reveals the diversity of his influences as well as their distinctiveness within the contemporary dance scene: Mendelssohn's *Songs without Words*, two Bach *Chorales*, Curly Putnam's country song *Green Green Grass of Home* (made famous in Britain by Tom Jones), *Piece for 2 Pianos* by Fargion and Strauss's *Blue Danube Waltz*.

Stoics is a very dynamic piece: movement phrases follow each other at great speed and involve fast arm gesturing and footwork and frequent partnered work with audacious lifts and unorthodox acrobatic passages. The movement vocabulary is not as content-specific as in *Hymns*, but draws more generally on everyday gestures as well as on the dance forms of Burrows's background; it 'is a combination peculiar to himself' (Mackrell, 1991b, n.p.), blending ballet, folk dancing and contact improvisation, whose basic principles are employed to construct an unusual choreography made of intricate compilations of curious moves. The result is a fast-paced composition whose every passage, especially in the ensemble sequences, leads to and evolves into the next, like the workings of a well-engineered, albeit bizarre system: 'individuals are lifted and supported in all kinds of impossible positions and combinations like choreographic jigsaws' (Meisner, 1992a, p. 29).

The movement sequences feature patterns with a distinctive Morris dancing influence, already found in *Hymns* and *Dull Morning*: stomping feet and swinging arms, as they are effectively summarised in an interview with Burrows (2006a). Although the performers' ballet background is revealed in the skilled lifts, spins and jumps and in the overt characterisation of roles, the manner of the piece is 'decidedly unclassical'

(Constanti, 1990, p. 24): twists, angled positions, blunt movements, deliberately clumsy-looking steps, awkward poses and deadpan performance can be read as a clear sign of ‘Burrows’s ... quiet, personal revolt against the spectacle of ballet and the amorphousness of much modern dance’ (p. 24).

The freshness and unconventionality of the movement language were noted by most critics: ‘*Stoics* is quiet in presentation, yet stunningly inventive and original’ (Meisner, 1992b, p. 2); ‘gorgeously inventive dance, slyly sending up the routines of performance art’ (Dromgoole, 1990, n.p.); ‘he has certainly invented a strong and extraordinary style with inventive and impossible looking lifts’ (Bayston, 1992, p. 1156); ‘amazing contortions, explosive invention and almost deadpan dancing reveal wild emotions, despair, determination and comic effects all mixed in’ (Percival, 1991c, n.p.); ‘the originality is striking’ (Sacks, 1992, p. 20);

he uses many everyday, naturalistic movements, poses and gestures that are recognisable as common body language, supercharged with a strange assortment of sudden stampings, falls, twists, flurried and angled limbs together with deliberately awkward lifts – humping sacks come to mind – and moments of stasis, very often in a prone position, to create an elaborate dance structure that is continually fascinating to watch even without trying to impose narrative ideas upon it.

Thorpe, 1991, p. 12.

As can be gathered from these comments, the reviews of the various performances of the piece (or of parts of it) between 1990 and 1992 are all extremely positive and salute Burrows as one of Britain’s most gifted choreographers: ‘Jonathan Burrows is the most impressive talent to come out of the Royal Ballet since Kenneth MacMillan’ (Meisner, 1992a, p. 29); ‘this is the best new choreography the Royal Ballet has shown in a long while’ (Percival, 1991c, n.p.). The press also reported very enthusiastic audience responses, including at the Royal Opera House: ‘[Burrows’s] young dancers borrowed from the Royal Ballet toured so successfully that a hilarious extract was transferred triumphantly to Covent Garden’ (Percival, 1991d, n.p.).

Several critics initially wondered how the *Stoics Quartet* would be received at the Royal Opera House, especially in a programme dominated by two major works by Balanchine: ‘it will be fascinating to see what a Covent Garden audience makes of Burrows’s unpredictable choreography: will they sit in baffled silence or break into guffaws of laughter?’ (Parry, 1991, p. 57). Indeed the matching was audacious, as

one critic clearly pointed out: ‘I found it ... provocative to have *Agon* followed by the *Stoics Quartet* from Jonathan Burrows’ (Goodwin, 1992, p. 18). But the warm reaction at Covent Garden dissipated all fears that the piece would not appeal to a ballet audience: ‘when a quartet from that piece was announced for inclusion in Wednesday’s Covent Garden programme, I imagined that it would look out-of-place on this stage; but not so’ (Dougill, 1991, n.p.); ‘I feared the Opera House audience might not take it, but they did’ (Percival, 1992a, p. 22). Some critics went as far as describing the piece ‘the hit of the evening’ (Dougill, 1991, n.p.), ‘the joy of the programme’ (Percival, 1992a, p. 22) or the ‘surprise hit of the last Opera House season’ (Mackrell, 1992b, p. 6). In short, a big success, which was also marked by an official recognition: as Angela Kane (1991) points out, soon after the performance of the piece at The Place Theatre in 1991, Burrows was presented with a Frederick Ashton Choreographic Award.

Of all the traits and qualities of the choreography of *Stoics*, one of the elements to have provoked the most surprising effects is Burrows’s treatment of the musical accompaniment, which critics described as ‘witty and original’ (Levene, 1991, p. 22), ‘imaginative’ (Percival, 1991b, n.p.), ‘irreverent’ (Constanti, 1990, p. 24) and ‘anarchic’ (Crisp, 1990c, p. 17). As in *Hymns*, Burrows subverts the expectations connected with largely popular musical scores by juxtaposing them with choreography of a completely different character and quality, with humorous effects. The most evident example is the use of the lyrical notes of the *Blue Danube Waltz* to accompany the final quartet, where the movements are at their most pedestrian and manic – Burrows ‘cleverly us[ed] some well-worn Johann Strauss music to underpin every point’ (Dromgoole, 1990, n.p.).

However, in *Stoics* this contrapuntal treatment of classical references is never allowed to be taken for granted and thus lose its effect. When the quartet was presented at the Royal Opera House, Burrows decided that the choice of Strauss was ‘much too ironic’ and ‘corny’ (Burrows, 2006a, n.p.) and had the piece performed in silence for the most part, with just a few notes from Mendelssohn’s *Songs without Words* being played towards the end. As a critic recounts:

one section of Burrows’s 1991 *Stoics* ... was first performed to the *Blue Danube Waltz*. The familiar Strauss music aroused expectations of a lyrical style – typical of English dancing – that were wittily contradicted by Burrow’s blunt,

end-stopped, deadpan, everyday movement. But when the traditionalist Royal Ballet took the already offbeat piece into its repertoire, Burrows decided that ‘there are fresher ways of working than taking well-known music and counterpointing yourself against it’ – and insisted much of the work be performed in silence.

Hunt, 1993, p. 52.

Mendelssohn was already used to accompany the first two duets, between Burrows and Bristow, which had originally been choreographed without music; to some critics this matching appeared appropriate in relation to the subject matter of the piece. As Duerden observes,

the choice of some of Mendelssohn’s *Songs without Words* for solo piano is especially interesting, particularly in view of the fact that the dance seems to be dealing with an inability to communicate, with people speaking different languages and not understanding each other.

Duerden, 1999, p. 49.

As is typical of the choreographer, and most evident in his early works, in *Stoics* Burrows draws on his own experience to find inspiration for the construction of the piece; ‘his subject matter is often very private’ (Mackrell, 1991b, n.p.) and ‘the human dimension is very prominent’ (Duerden, 2001, p. 553). In Ross MacGibbon’s (1992) video documentary, Burrows explains that the choreography of the final quartet ‘was inspired by a visit to an aunt in hospital and the handling of patients’ (see also Bayston, 1992, p. 1156). Through the use of movement, rather than facial expression or other stage effects, the piece reproduces the dynamics of interpersonal and social interaction, dwelling on attitudes and conditions such as competitiveness and stubbornness, aggressiveness and passivity, transgression and diligence, isolation and mutual incomprehension, cruelty and humiliation. The dance is therefore at times vehement and tough, and features frequent, often forceful, manipulation of bodies and body parts.

The work is not stagey: there are no starry leaps and glossy leg lifts. Emotions are conveyed not through the face but through the body, which is required to put itself in danger by being walked on or slung over someone’s shoulder like a laundry bag, or even to hang upside down.

Sacks, 1992, p. 20.

However, the fragmentation of the scenes, the posed pauses, the alternation of qualities in the movement patterns and the dancers’ impassive interpretation make the

comic side of this portrayal of human relationships prevail over more serious readings. As Duerden summarises,

audiences have perceived *Stoics* as funny rather than menacing ... and it is easy to see why, because the dynamic shaping of the movement, whether it be aggressive, violent, or threatening, is somehow channelled differently so that it is never focused one person on the other – though dancers may stop to watch or contemplate each other from time to time.

Duerden, 1999, p. 49.

Nevertheless, the result is ambiguous and the element of risk and physical effort generated by the acrobatic passages of the choreography adds another perspective to the predominantly cheerful character of the piece. This tougher side of Burrows's work, which played a part also in the earlier *Hymns*, appears more clearly in the two pieces that followed *Stoics: Very* (1992) and *Our* (1994) reveal a darker side to the choreographer's outlook on social and human interaction. Here the violence, although still not emotionally charged, is not softened by a constant alternation with lighter passages or by the use of an awkward, clumsy, almost comic body language, but is expressed more directly – 'laid bare', as the programme note for *Very* suggests (Nugent, 1992, n.p.). Cruelty, oppression, solitude and incomprehension are given a blunt, impassive representation through the use of matter-of-fact physical aggression and the spatial isolation of the performers. In *Very*, the juxtaposition of signs of intimacy and tenderness with uneasy and violent gestures produces an ambiguous, yet crude portrayal of interpersonal relationships. In *Our*, everyday gestures intersperse the dance creating an interrupted language of human encounters and poignant interplays. According to Marigny, 'with the evolution of *Very* and *Our* [Burrows] has taken his art beyond issues of national identity to the nature of pure dance itself together with an examination of the human condition' (1994, p. 7). Although the concept of 'pure dance' is contentious, it can be argued that with these two choreographies Burrows progressively distances himself from the more overtly narrative, however fragmented, dimension of his earlier works, and through the use of more introspective dance moves towards the non-representational choreography of *The Stop Quartet* (see Chapter 6).

Overall, in *Stoics*, the humour and detachment behind the conception and execution of the dance make the piece intriguing and easily accessible. However, it can be argued that in the piece's references to established music and dance forms and to culturally

recognised behaviour a subtlety and obliqueness can be perceived that require further questioning. The treatment of aspects of human and social conduct, which appears to focus specifically on stereotypically English traits and to adopt a humorous attitude (which in itself can be identified as characteristically English), occupies the ambiguous space between commentary and embodiment, between critical awareness and inherence, between outside and inside. Humour acquires therefore – to borrow Hutcheon’s term – the ‘edge’ of irony, which establishes ‘dynamic and plural relations among the text ... (and its context)’ (Hutcheon, 1994, pp. 11). ‘Happen[ing] in the space *between* (and including) the said and the unsaid’, irony implies specific ‘politics of use’, ‘function[ing] tactically’ in challenging conventional correspondences between signs and meanings (pp. 12, 15, 10). As Hutcheon puts it, ‘irony removes the security that words mean only what they say’ (p. 14). The interplay between conflicting qualities (playfulness vs. aggressiveness), conventions (everyday movement vs. lyrical music) and purposes (detachment vs. intentionality) gives the piece the political force of discourse that can ‘mean different things to the different players’ of the ‘ironic game’ (p. 11) and that from this doubleness and ‘transideological nature’ (p. 27) acquires the power to affirm and negate, accept and reject simultaneously.

In reviewing the piece, one critic alludes to this ambivalent quality of the work:

Stoics ... is a very curious piece. On the one hand you revel in the wealth of nuance that Burrows extracts from so small and unstagey a subject; on the other hand its pleasures are so English, so ironic and reticent that you sometimes have to work hard to root them out.

Mackrell, 1991b, n.p.

The relationship of the dance with these ‘pleasures’ and qualities is explored in the next sections of the chapter, with particular attention to characters and traits portrayed in the piece such as humour and caricature, understatement and subtlety of manners, stoical attitude, competitiveness and determination – elements of a widely recognised image of Englishness through which Burrows constructs his own idiosyncratic representation of national identity.

5.3 Humour as an attribute of Englishness: parody and major conventions

Humour is a central quality of Burrows's choreography. It manifests itself in the forms of subtle wit, comic attitudes and light-hearted tones. It is generally achieved through unfamiliar compositional choices that wrong-foot audience expectations, through caricatured movement language or through the representation of incongruent or absurd social and behavioural patterns. Of all the pieces in Burrows's repertoire, *Stoics* is probably the one that produces the strongest humorous effects; in the two live recordings of the performance of the *Stoics Quartet* and of the complete piece held in the choreographer's personal archives (Burrows, 1991a and 1992), the audience can be frequently heard bursting into raucous laughter.

Humour is one of the behavioural traits conventionally associated with British/English identity. Despite its universality as a form of social conduct – 'humour is one of the few basic social phenomena which occur in all groups throughout the course of human history' (Mulkey, 1988, p. 1) – in its specific national incarnations it appears to be a more defining trait for certain collective identities than for others. The scholar of English and cultural studies Antony Easthope states that the English 'have a reputation for their sense of humour' (1999, p. 160), and the socio-linguist Richard Alexander maintains that British society shows

what appears to be a widespread propensity for irony, which impressionistically, at least, appears to be employed very widely by British people. The general phenomenon is clearly not unique to Britain, even if apparently differentially prominent.

Alexander, 1996, pp. 75-76.

Although having a good sense of humour is considered to be a desirable quality by most contemporary cultures (Chapman and Foot, 1976), British society appears to regard humour as one of the markers of its identity and a sign of distinction from other nations. As Easthope wittily observes, 'English national culture, profoundly secular as it is, seems to treat only two things as genuinely transcendental – cricket and its own sense of humour' (1999, p. 162).

Whilst the sociologist Michael Mulkey bases his study of humour in the United States and Britain on the assumption 'that the social organization of humour is likely to be fundamentally the same in the other industrial nations' (1988, p. 2), according to

Avner Ziv (1988) humour as a social phenomenon is composed of both universal aspects and culturally distinctive ones. Whereas the ‘functions’ and ‘techniques’ of humorous messages are common to all their individual manifestations, their ‘contents’ and ‘situations’ reveal the specificity of the culture by which they are produced (Ziv, 1988, p. ix). Hence British humour can be thought of as a distinctive trait of a specific society.

Scholars have discussed the ‘inherent difficulties’ of ‘mak[ing] serious sense of humour’ (Mulkay, 1988, p. 7) and have voiced commonly shared doubts that people’s sense of humour might be ‘beyond analysis’ (Easthope, 1999, p. 160). Moreover, the literature shows that defining what is particular to a culture’s ways of joking is a complex and contentious task. Focusing mainly on verbal humour, sociologists and linguists have mapped the history, aspects and occurrences of culturally specific forms of wit in various ways. Palmer’s (1988) socio-historical study of British humour maintains that the most common forms of irony in contemporary Great Britain are to be found in sexual, social and intellectual jokes, that is, in stories about gender relationships and sexual acts, in remarks about foreigners and in nonsensical and absurd puns. Easthope attempts to explain English wit by connecting it to England’s empirical tradition, which he sees as informing the three factors that characterise the socio-cultural phenomenon of humour: ‘the use of irony; the exposure of self-deception; a tendency towards fantasy and excess’ (1999, p. 163). Although, as Watson (2000) points out, Easthope’s argument betrays an intrinsic weakness in connecting empiricism uniquely with Englishness, as if one necessarily implied the other, his discussion of typical features of English humour has also the merit of highlighting the peculiarity of the English comic style, straightforward and matter-of-fact, and the relevance of the national tradition of caricature.

It can be argued that, whilst these studies do not exhaustively answer the question of what is distinctive of the English sense of humour, and they seem to perpetuate the confusion between Englishness and Britishness, they provide a framework for this chapter’s case study. Drawing on these suggestions, specific sequences of Burrows’s *Stoics* can be read in terms of the ‘typically English’ humorous effects they appear to produce. The occurrence of laughter in the 1991 live recording of the piece highlights that the strongest reactions are provoked by choreographic passages that appear to match, at least to a certain extent, the traits of English humour detailed above, in

terms of both content and style: they play with the relationship between men and women, they make use of absurdity, fantasy and exaggeration, they display a cartoon-like quality and a matter-of-fact style and they are very direct in their treatment and handling of bodies.

The first two duets between Burrows and Bristow provide numerous examples of humorous treatment of gender power relations. The beginning of the first duet displays a distinctive cut and thrust arrangement, which, whilst it is a reflection of the choreographic process – entailing the creation of discrete sequences which were then performed alternately by the two dancers (Burrows, 2006a)³ – it also suggests the reading of this section as a confrontation between a man and a woman. The pattern is almost that of a contest: whilst the man performs a phrase, the woman stands and watches and vice versa, thus each phrase can be seen as reacting to the previous one and, in turn, provoking the following one. The sequences, danced to Mendelssohn's lyrical notes, are made of fast, energetic, blunt movements – flinging and slicing arms and purposeful steps and jumps – which appear to be making firm statements, as in a showdown between two quarrelling partners. Nevertheless, the deadpan performance gives the 'argument' a matter-of-fact, almost understated quality, which leaves the reading of the scene open to interpretation. When, three and a half minutes into the piece, towards the end of the first duet, Burrows turns upstage and crouches down, and Bristow sits on his back, facing the audience, resting her legs comfortably and elegantly to the left, the spectators respond with distinctive laughter: the woman has won, of course! Burrows gets up and turns around carrying Bristow on his back, whilst she sits properly and upright, looking out with a solemnly unperturbed expression, her hands composedly joined on her lap.

The absence of drama in the scene identifies it with the subtlety of manners and dignified character typical of English culture and strongly distinguishes it from the emotionally overcharged dance of many contemporary choreographers from mainland Europe. An example of a diametrically opposite treatment of gender relations can be found in Bausch's choreography, which, in portraying, and subverting, stereotypical patterns of gender behaviour (for instance, in *Bluebeard*, 1977, or in *Kontakthof*, 1978), relies on strongly expressionistic dance with intense personal and emotional content. On the contrary, the detached and understated performance of Burrows's

piece transforms even a scene showing a woman walking on a man's back into an amusing moment, at which the audience openly laughs.

In the second duet, the power relations between Burrows and Bristow are rendered through frequent partnered work where the woman often lifts the man, pulls him and pushes him, sits on him whilst he is on all fours, arm wrestles with him, grabs him and fights with him, is walked around the space sitting on his back in a lotus position or is carried around lifted by his hands, standing upright and leaning against his body. At the end of the section, Burrows walks from stage right to centre stage and smoothly dives to the floor, lying face down; Bristow follows him and walks straight over him, stepping on his back, then over his head. When she steps onto the floor, the woman pauses and stares at the audience. There is no emphasis on a defiant attitude, but her calm confidence and composure are a clear sign of triumphant unconcern.

Still playing with the theme of gender behaviour, the following section, performed by the three female dancers, produces humorous effects through the juxtaposition of tough movements and unscrupulous manipulation of bodies with fluid, rhythmical patterns. At the beginning of the trio, performed in silence for the most part, the smallest of the women, McCann, is roughly handled by the other two, who grab her, lift her, carry her, pass her to each other and put her on the floor. This display of strength and business-like action, as if the two women were just executing a manual worker's job, is then followed by a cadenced, graciously flowing pattern with swinging arms, performed facing the audience. Rudeness and violence of gesture generate surprise in association with female performers, but the effect is subsequently subverted when they resort to poses and moves of a typically feminine quality, thus provoking laughter. Towards the end of the female trio, another humorous passage plays on this juxtaposition between masculine and feminine gestures. After lifting McCann up horizontally, in a diving position, Bristow and Jones put her back on the floor and swing their arms, pausing in front of the audience with their elbows at shoulder-height, forearms up, as if showing their muscles. Then they start moving diagonally to the right, executing in unison a phrase made of small steps and rhythmical swings of their arms and torso: a macho action is wittily lightened up by a pretty line dance.

The section of the piece in which the humorous effects of seemingly careless and pragmatic manipulation of bodies are exploited to the full is the final quartet. The choreography for this section is based on the close interlocking of unusual acrobatic passages that resolve into each other. Whether danced to the *Blue Danube Waltz*, as in its original version, or mostly in silence, as it was later rearranged, the quartet reaches peaks of ‘overt comedy’ (Meisner, 1992a, p. 30). Since the hilarity was not lost along with the contrapuntal effect of the musical accompaniment – as the frequent laughter from the audience in two available recordings, both danced to no music, testifies (Burrows, 1991a and 1992) – it can be argued that humour is generated through the use of excess, absurdity and caricature of an almost graphic quality. The choreography is made of images so vivid that they resemble those of comic strips. The jerky patterns and angular shapes that bear the trace of the folk dance element at the basis of the movement language can be seen to contribute to the cartoon-like character of the quartet.

Marilyn Hunt describes the choreography as ‘clodhopping, spiky, and end-stopped’ – terms that bring to mind the qualities of Morris dancing, whereas she contentiously judges these qualities as ‘most un-English’ (1992, p. 86). Although Burrows’s composite style and movement vocabulary are certainly distinct from the English lyrical style or the clean form of the British contemporary choreography described by Burnside (1992), *Stoics* suggests the argument that there is not one univocal way in which dance can embody and interpret Englishness. The images of cultural identity constructed by Burrows’s choreography show his interest in national forms of folk dance, which, whilst setting him aside from the more intellectual trends of the American-influenced British New Dance scene, also links him more clearly to an English tradition. The jerky, gawky, ‘antiglamorous’ (Hunt, 1992, p. 86) quality of his dance can therefore be read as an idiosyncratic, unusual sign of the English character of his work.

The distinctive, almost caricatured roles that the dancers perform in *Stoics* are also a legacy of ballet, and of the character parts that Burrows used to play – and was still playing at that time – in the Royal Ballet, reminiscent of the music-hall slapstick comedy of the mid-twentieth century. However, in ballet, the ‘overt humour’ and greater freedom of movement of these roles are only experienced by male dancers (Burrows, 2006a, n.p.). Thus, as Burrows states, ‘with *Stoics*, it was about trying to

find a way that we could all, but especially the women, feel confident to move in a different way' (2006a, n.p.). Moreover, Burrows points to another possible source of the 'English quality' of the dance: it 'is also a little bit boarding school humour. Three of the five of us went to the Royal Ballet boarding school, so there's a certain quality there, a little bit public school' (2006a, n.p.) – a trait that connects the piece to the schoolboy atmosphere of the earlier *Hymns*. As Constanti points out, after the more intimate and meditative *Dull Morning*, in *Stoics* 'Burrows returns to the immaculately constructed vignette style and wry humour of his earlier work, *Hymns*' (1990, p. 24).

Constanti's remark suggests a further possible context of influence for the humour of the piece. This can be found in what Easthope describes as the 'strong English graphic tradition of caricature and cartoon', which he sees as 'fit[ting] in with an empiricist tradition', starting with William Hogarth, James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson, then on to nineteenth-century satirical magazines, and more recently with tabloids' cartoon (1999, p. 169). This genre's use of humour focuses on the depiction of the human body, 'personalised by face, gesture, clothing, accoutrements' through parody and exaggeration (p. 169). Indeed, the treatment of the body is at the centre of the humour of *Stoics*, where similar effects to those of the graphic devices described by Easthope are achieved through a peculiar use of gestural patterns and a well-studied orchestration of the movement dynamics of the choreography.

The main target of physical attention and manipulation in the quartet is once again the smallest of the women, McCann, who is constantly and deliberately manoeuvred by the other three dancers. She is guided, surrounded, slammed, thrust around, lifted in the oddest ways, passed from one to the other and dumped on the floor with apparent indifference. She is carried head-down, or horizontally like a ladder, and pushed up and thrown in the air in a frog-like posture, with an absurdity of behaviour that generates hilarious effects. Her impassivity and composed acceptance of these impositions add to the comedy, as does the unemotional performance of the other three dancers, who execute such unceremonious gestures without expressing the underlying intentions. Both the victim and the tormentors, though, seem aware of their respective conditions, as it is shown for instance in the passage in which Heydon, after sandwiching McCann between the other two dancers in a pile of human bodies, turns around to stare at the audience, as if to gauge their reaction, or when

McCann attempts to escape and rebel against her oppressors. Talking about the unorthodox handling of the dancers' bodies, Mackrell comments: 'these lifts and balances produce some of the work's funniest moments where the contrast between preposterously undignified positions and polite teatime expressions is deliciously absurd' (1991b, n.p.).

Another comic element of the choreography has to do with the pace of the performance, which features very fast movements and patterns following each other at great speed. In addition, especially in the quartet, the dancers often walk hastily, with small steps, with a rhythm and attitude that resemble that of comic characters in old slapstick silent films. Thus, in *Stoics*, the human body is caricatured, ridiculed for its funny and least elegant aspects, and objectified. Nevertheless, Burrows's style of humour avoids the grotesque traits and indecent allusions employed in many forms of comedy. There is a composure in his choreography that is reminiscent of old times. Also, there is none of the sexual explicitness and bodily exposure that can be found in much contemporary European choreography since the late 1980s – especially in the Belgian scene, from Vandekeybus to Fabre – where nakedness has often been employed to convey a critique of social conventions and constrictions. When questioned on this point in a conversation on the subject, Burrows (2004) confirmed that he has never been interested in this kind of exploration of the body, and attributed this to the fact that his first contemporary dance influences were from America, rather than from continental Europe (see also Chapter 1). But, in reference to his later work *Both Sitting Duet*, he also talked about a particular quality that he recognises in the piece:

it has a subtlety, I think, but I don't know whether that might have something more to do with being English I mean, there is a subtlety of manners about English culture which does come out.

Burrows, 2004, n.p.

In *Stoics* the humour in the commentary on socially and culturally constructed situations appears unequivocal, assuming the form of overt parody. This straightforwardness can be read in the light of Hutcheon's interpretation of postmodern parody as a 'mode of ... formal self-reflexivity' which, through the integration of elements with specific connotations, 'often points to these ideological contexts somewhat more obviously, more didactically, than other forms' (1988, p.

35). Nevertheless, it could be argued that the gender and social relations that represent the explicit targets of the piece's parodic intertexts, are only the manifest instruments of a subtler kind of critique. Burrows's challenge is not so much directed at conventional patterns of interpersonal behaviour as at widespread concepts and perceptions of what British contemporary choreography is and can be.

In this sense, the piece's references to established artistic forms through the use of classical scores can also be read as expressions of a parodic attitude towards history and modernity, articulating a challenge to traditional distinctions between high and low cultural practices. According to Hutcheon, 'parodic echoing of the past ... can still be deferential' and reflects a 'paradoxical doubleness of both continuity and change, both authority and transgression' (1988, p. 35). The unconventional reproduction of classic masterpieces through the use of incongruent musical accompaniment and the blending of different styles of dance becomes a way to place art in a critical dialogue with its past and to affirm the political dimension inherent in its formal research.

Beyond the literalness of the jokes and the openness of the humour, a critical attitude can be read in Burrows's choreographic choices which locates the piece in a field of discourse. As Hutcheon argues,

parody seems to offer a perspective on the present and the past which allows an artist to speak *to* a discourse from *within* it, but without being totally recuperated by it. Parody appears to have become, for this reason, the mode of what I have called the 'ex-centric', of those who are marginalized by a dominant ideology.

Hutcheon, 1988, p. 35.

Parody is linked to marginality also in Kristeva's notion of a heterogeneous, poetic language which challenges the conventions of the system of reference and realises its historical and cultural significance through the multiplicity of texts it calls into play in opposition to the fixity and linearity of the main code. The 'polyvalent and multi-determined' dimension of this linguistic practice acquires the potential of 'social and political protest' through a gesture that, whilst acknowledging a relationship with a tradition, also transgresses its rules and boundaries and unveils its intrinsic dialogism (1980, p. 65).

According to Deleuze and Guattari, the notion of marginality, which implies the recognition of mainstream conventions, can only be defined in relation to ‘a more objective concept’, that of a ‘minor practice’ of a ‘major’ code, that is of a ‘deterritorializ[ed]’, ‘political’ use of an established language (1986, pp. 18, 16, 17). It can be argued that the terms of reference of Burrows’s marginality are to be found in British established traditions, manifesting themselves in a variety of culturally and socially recognised practices: classical music and ballet, mainstream contemporary choreography, as well as familiar national habits and norms. These contexts inform the choice of musical accompaniment, type of performers and venues for the performance, as well as the themes of the work. However, although the piece was danced to scores by classical composers, was performed by ballet dancers, on occasion even in high-culture venues such as the Royal Opera House, these ‘major’ codes are placed alongside ‘minor’ traditions such as folk dance, country music, the genre of satire and caricature and references of a personal nature. Moreover, whilst *Stoics* appears to reiterate stereotypical images of Englishness, it also displaces them from their usual discourses thus allowing their critical reappraisal.

In *Stoics* Burrows appears to make use of ‘major’ languages in a ‘minor’ way, thus challenging the conventions implicit in those codes and adopting a ‘revolutionary’ practice (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, p. 18).⁴ The artistic traditions and social rules referred to in the work place the dance in a specific cultural discourse and signal the choice of a recognised language; at the same time however, these conventions are ‘appropriate[d] for strange and minor uses’ (p. 17) and composed with less established forms to create an innovative alternative to their regular function. As observed by Deleuze and Guattari in relation to Kafka’s use of the major language of German, ‘intermixed with Czech and Yiddish’, to construct a *minor literature*, the coexistence of different codes of reference makes the language ‘fluid’, thus allowing the artist ‘the possibility of invention’ (p. 20). This is achieved by challenging ‘figurative sense’ (p. 20) through practices such as fragmentation and repetition, that is, through the ‘deterritorialization’ of language (p. 16), which liberates the possibilities of meaning beyond the forms accepted by the code. By adopting English social and artistic modes in constructing his choreography, Burrows acknowledges his relationship with established practices; however, by playing with their order, form and

logic, he eludes the reproduction of recognised narratives, thus displacing cultural conventions and creating the foundations for a ‘minor’, innovative position.

5.4 Stoicism and resilience: the elements of a quiet rebellion

In a rather Anglocentric pamphlet examining the formation of English identity, Tony Shell compiles a list of selected attributes that would define ‘the English ethnic character’, a categorisation that the author himself describes as ‘somewhat arbitrary’ (2005, p. 25). Despite the questionability of its academic rigour, this study can nevertheless be used as a source to examine widespread images of English identity. Such stereotypes, for their being cultural constructions, are part of a more general cultural discourse, which, as Easthope (1999) argues, is ultimately implicated in the construction of cultural identities.

Among the English qualities listed by Shell is ‘stoicism’, which he maintains is ‘intimately connected to the popular perception of Englishness’, especially in the form of the clichéd “stiff upper lip” response of the archetypal English person to tragedy’ (2005, p. 29). Shell connects this trait of social behaviour to ‘deep indigenous beliefs with regard to the nature of “fate”’, meaning that the English accept misfortune without interpreting it as a form of punishment from God (p. 30). He also refers to the ‘formative effect’ of tragic moments in the nation’s history, which would have been particularly instrumental in the development of the English ‘resilient stoicism’ (p. 30).

Indeed, resilience and stoicism are at the centre of numerous national narratives constructed in popular culture as well as in the media, and Burrows’s piece declaredly plays on this stereotype, mocking it and reiterating it at the same time. In *Stoics*, the repetition of steps and patterns, the stomping feet, the pauses and poses and the deadpan performance typical of his choreography can be read as signs of stubbornness and a will to react to adverse circumstances. As Parry puts it, ‘Burrows has become a master at conveying the inexpressible – the pent-up fury, passion and confusion stoically contained by the English temperament’ (1991, p. 57).

In the two initial sections of the piece, this attitude is clearly expressed by a pose that Harris (1993) terms ‘stoical stance’: hands clasped on the stomach, hips pushed

forward and shoulders leaning back, Burrows and Bristow look at each other or at the audience with a relaxed and detached attitude. This pose is repeated by both dancers at the beginning and at the end of the first duet, framing it, as if to signify that the events that occurred during the dance have left them unmoved. The stance is assumed again by Bristow in the finale of the second duet, after she has walked on Burrows's back, as a clear mark of her victory over the man lying at her feet.

A stoical attitude can be read also in the two male solos. In Heydon's dance to the popular notes of *The Green Green Grass of Home*, the insistent recurrence of vigorous upward jumps, with knees pushed up to the waist or arms lifted towards the ceiling, and the sturdy walk across the stage in diagonal on his knees can be read as a metaphor for resistance and endurance. Burrows's dance to the urgent, staccato notes of Fargion's piano piece seems to symbolise the strength and toughness required to overcome life's complicated events through the use of twisted movements, feet stepping over his joint hands and through his own arms, tortuous trajectories of steps, fast and nervous arm gesturing, tilted stances and stiff and robot-like moves. Contorted patterns in solo and partnered phrases, with entanglement of arms and legs, abound also in the following duet with Heydon, whereas in the subsequent trio with Bristow, the female dancer is lifted and carried in the most unusual positions and handled like a lifeless body – a sign of docility, but also of sturdiness.

A stoical attitude is portrayed also in the quartet, through the humorous representation of McCann's endurance of the tough treatment by the other three. Her resigned acceptance of the apparently purposeless constraints imposed upon her by Burrows, Heydon and Jones becomes a figurative emblem of the English stoicism and tolerance. This endurance is under threat only on rare occasions, signalled by blunt arm gestures with locked fists, revealing contained tension, and is broken only in one instance (briefly mentioned in the previous section of this chapter), when McCann manages to evade her tormentors' control, walks diagonally towards the audience and expresses her frustration in an agitated pattern with a leg kick and a head shake. The insubordination does not last long, and Heydon calmly walks her back to the group and restores the order. These scenes are possibly what brings Mackrell to say:

the prevailing mood in Jonathan Burrows' *Stoics* is of a very English, very resigned masochism. ... Occasionally [the dancers] permit themselves a brief and solitary tantrum or a bout of emotional struggle. But mostly they wear

expressions of enigmatic detachment as if, whether they're bullies or being bullied, they feel it's not good form to admit what's going on.

Mackrell, 1991b, n.p.

The rebellion depicted in Burrows's piece is of a subtle kind. It avoids the noise of the frontal attack and chooses instead a quiet resistance, which can at a first sight be mistaken for passivity. However, at the end of the quartet, the bullied McCann discovers a new sense of freedom: on two consecutive occasions she runs towards the other three performers and dives, to be caught and lifted up horizontally. Subsequently, she leaves the group to walk upstage, whilst the trio move forward towards the audience, turning their heads to the right and to the left, as if looking for her, and crouch down. Unseen, she runs towards them from behind and climbs on their shoulders, to be carried around the stage like a lady on a horse-drawn carriage running at full speed.

Similarities can be drawn between this attitude and the character of Burrows's revolt against the conventions and constrictions of dance: a quiet resistance that achieves creative freedom and originality without the stir of much postmodern dance. Clark's choreography springs to mind for immediate comparison. With a similar technical training to Burrows's, he employs the eclecticism of his background – ballet, Scottish dancing, new dance and punk culture – in a loud rebellion against established codes of dance. He resorts to parody and exaggeration, including the exposure of the naked body and 'outrageous sexual content' to provoke and shock (Banes, 1994, p. 300). Burrows's subtlety versus Clark's excess: this dichotomy summarises antithetic ways of responding to tradition and, ultimately, two diametrically opposed interpretations of the British national character.

Through a dialectical tension between freedom and constraints, Burrows's dance chooses linguistic and semantic ambiguity as the way to challenge reference codes and traditions and produce transformation and change. In this sense, his work acquires the 'revolutionary' potential that Kristeva identifies in signifying practices that endorse 'heterogeneity' and 'contradiction' as the conditions for 'analytical' and 'critical discourse' (1984, p. 191).

5.5 Burrows's 'minor' dance

Stoics offers interesting material for the examination of Burrows's representation of English identity, since it appears to contain both 'conscious' and 'unconscious' images and structures (Easthope, 1999, p. 4). Whilst it presents an explicit commentary of stereotypical patterns of English behaviour, such as humour and stoicism, it can also be read in terms of the unconscious representation of Englishness it constructs through the qualities of its movement language and the treatment of the dance material. Thus, cultural identity is at the same time deliberately represented and inherently presented, that is, both ironically depicted and embodied in the dance itself, in its refined manners, subtle wit, understated performance and pragmatic treatment of the subject matter. It is both produced and producing, result and process.

Expression of a particular sensitivity and social and cultural background, Burrows's interpretation of Englishness is only one of the possible representations of this national identity. Nadine Meisner sums it up as follows:

perhaps it is the combination of Burrows's very English understatement with sudden outbursts of pent-up energy that gives *Stoics* its particular freshness; it also offers a more dazzling construction of movement than his previous work. With each piece Burrows has shown us a different facet of his style. But always he transforms a potentially drab vernacular Englishness into something strange, surprising and fascinating.

Meisner, 1992a, p. 30.

His idiosyncratic perspective is also the result of a dialogue with other artistic voices from inside and outside Britain. Burrows (2006a) identifies them in the formal investigations of British New Dance and its concern with the spatial dimension of choreography; the pedestrian use of bodily movement of American postmodern dance; the overt humour of ballet's character roles and its contrapuntal use of music; the rhythmical patterns of Morris dance; the transgression of the British punk culture in the 1980s; the myth of the silly and irreverent Monty Python comedy. In addition to these contexts, the performing arts scene of continental Europe, with its tradition of expressionistic dance theatre and its open display of emotions, should also be mentioned. In relation to these voices, Burrows has, over the years, negotiated his own, and possibly reassessed his choices and interests. But whilst the representation of English behavioural patterns and the borrowing from English vernacular dance forms are less overt in his more recent works, it can nevertheless be argued that they

have continued to inform his work, alongside the embodied qualities of subtle wit, understated manners and matter-of-fact performance, which have been seen to characterise both *Hymns* and *Stoics*.

In *Stoics*, through the ironic treatment of classical pieces of music and of stereotypical interpersonal situations, the dance establishes a discursive relationship with its artistic and social contexts, which allows it to overcome its ‘self-reflective parodic formalism’ and become ‘intimately connected to the political and the social’ (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 35). By ‘set[ting] up a dialogical relation between identification and distance’ (p. 35), the parodic practice of contamination of diverse choreographic elements plays more than a merely linguistic function, becoming a way through which the choreographer’s critical and political voice is conveyed. Burrows’s references to cultural traditions, both in the parodic portrayal of stereotypical English characteristics and in the use of established artistic codes in the construction of his choreographic language, become a means of questioning dominant choreographic codes and categories and of suggesting their rethinking.

In this respect, the ‘minor’ dance that Burrows constructs in *Stoics* in relation to its ‘major’ codes of reference sets the foundation for further experimentation of the principles of dance which, in later works, leads to the abandonment of explicit forms of signification and ‘designation’ to arrive at a mere ‘distribution of states’, that is, a ‘language torn from sense’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986, pp. 21, 22), dissected and explored down to its minimum units and simplest tools.

Notes

- ¹ For example, in France, the 1986 Lyon Biennale de la Danse was dedicated to German choreography; in Belgium, Kaaithheater has played a key role in establishing international networks since the mid-1980s; and in Germany, 1991 saw the institution of the international festival Tanzwerkstatt Europa (Grau and Jordan, 2000).
- ² As indicated in a Royal Ballet/Royal Opera House press release (19 March 1991) on the premiere of *Stoics*.
- ³ Burrows explains that he created the duet by firstly choreographing some sequences and then showing them to Bristow; subsequently, they each picked the phrases that they liked and Burrows composed them in an alternate order: he dances a sequence, Bristow dances another one and so on (Burrows, 2006a).
- ⁴ I am grateful to Professor Rachel Fensham for bringing to my attention Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of ‘minor literature’ and highlighting its potential as a tool for understanding Burrows’s idiosyncratic position in the field of British contemporary dance.

CHAPTER 6

The layers of the dance

Reinterpreting abstraction and minimalism (*The Stop Quartet*)

6.1 A critical divide

The existing literature on *The Stop Quartet* (1996), one of Burrows's most renowned works, offers strong yet often divergent opinions. Two conflicting comments, by a choreographer and by a dance critic, may be juxtaposed to sketch the contours of the reception of the piece.

Forsythe has spoken of the work as a 'masterpiece' by which he 'was deeply moved and changed' (Brown, 2003a, p. 19). Observing that 'it's when the choreography is indivisible from the dancers that you have something' (p. 19), he appears to have appreciated the level of embodiment that Burrows's ideas on choreography reach in this piece, commenting on the integration of its conceptual foundation with its physical embodiment. Forsythe's interest in Burrows's work also led to a direct collaboration with him, since 'Burrows made a variant of his masterly *The Stop Quartet* for Ballett Frankfurt', resulting in the 1997 piece *Walking/Music* (Brown, 2003, p. 19).¹

At the other end of the spectrum, Mackrell, reviewing *The Stop Quartet*, laments the loss of the broader variety of movement and other choreographic elements that Burrows displayed in earlier works, claiming that 'compared to Burrows's dark and comical *Stoics*, the piece feels meagre in its material, and over-fastidious in its methods' (1996, p. 14). She also criticises the piece for abandoning the narrative dimension through which his previous choreographies had constructed a now humorous, now harsh world, sacrificing subject matter in favour of structure. In her critique, which she repeats in a later article, Mackrell appears to reinstate the form/content opposition on which conventional criticism is based, reaffirming its validity as a canon for contemporary dance:

Burrows has a much wider palette of movement than he lets himself play with in the *Quartet*, and it makes you nostalgic for earlier works like *Stoics*. Here the choreography pursued an uncompromising logic yet it still took a dark and

comic look at the foibles of human behaviour. As a poised, confident and richly satisfying balance between narrative and form, it was an exemplum of what new British dance is doing best.

Mackrell, 1996-97, p. 58.

With this comment, Mackrell establishes a link between Burrows's early choreographies and the use of pedestrian elements with a suggestive and narrative dimension, raising the question of how far this connection is still visible in later works. However, a critical reading of her perspective leads to further interrogation of the extent to which connotation is inscribed in the movement material, or rather is ascribed to the dance through an interpretive act that appreciates the role that form and structure play in the construction of meaning.

Forsythe's and Mackrell's statements exemplify two diametrically opposed viewpoints not only on Burrows's piece, but on contemporary choreography in general. On the one hand there is the idea of an organic combination of method, aesthetics and performance, and on the other hand there is a dichotomous vision of dance in which the physical arrangement is seen as functional to the telling of a story. However, whilst Forsythe's personal remark, by its very nature, does not investigate the aspects and traits to which the uniqueness of the dance should be ascribed, Mackrell's critical account arguably fails to understand the significance of *The Stop Quartet* within the larger picture of the choreographer's artistic discourse and of the development of contemporary dance. Similarly, an analysis of the reviews and articles on the piece shows that, whilst the choreography's qualities have been widely acknowledged, they have not been examined in relation to the role they have played in Burrows's construction of a personal dance vocabulary and syntax.

From the early 1990s, Burrows's work began to gain recognition outside the United Kingdom and the choreographer's links with continental Europe were strengthened as a result of international tours (see Chapter 1.2). In his role as Associate Artist at the Kunstencentrum Vooruit in Ghent, Belgium, a position he held between 1992 and 2002, he premiered *The Stop Quartet*, a choreography that opens as a male duet between Burrows and Montes, and only in its second half turns into a trio and then into a quartet, with two subsequent additions of a female dancer, Fin Walker and Kate Gowar. A score by Volans and Fargion, consisting of piano notes, dissonances, natural sounds and silences, is combined with Michael Hulls's geometrical lighting,

characterised by perpendicular beams creating a glowing grid on the dark floor. This interplay of media adds complexity to an already finely textured dance, where patterns of jerky movements and gangly steps, performed with apparent casualness and randomness, intersect meticulously and with studied precision. The result is a composition constructed around an intricate web of intratextual relationships between movements, sounds and lighting patterns.

The work enjoyed considerable success with audiences and critics, who described it as a ‘revelational work’ (Constanti, 1996d, p. 959), ‘his most daring and most uncompromising piece to date’ (Crisp, 1996, p. 15), a ‘stunning dance piece’ (Brown, 1997b, p. 74), ‘so intriguing, so consummately structured’ (Meisner, 1997, p. 34). A conspicuous number of reviewers were fascinated by the complexity of the choreography, the intricacy of the patterns and the unconventionality of the combinations; Clement Crisp, for instance, described the work as ‘odd. Odder than odd, it is difficult, very far out, and insidiously rewarding’ (1996, p. 15). However, other critics, like Mackrell and Brown, also objected that it was far too elaborate and excessively demanding on the attention even of experienced viewers, resulting in dryness, since ‘its intelligence is formidable but in the end, unloveable’ (Mackrell, 1996, p. 14); ‘it is an awesome achievement, but my admiration was frayed, in the end, by mental exhaustion’ (Brown, 1996a, n.p.).

From an audience’s point of view, the piece could come across as exceedingly difficult and inscrutable. Jennifer Dunning observed that ‘Burrows proceeded to test the outer limits of boredom and exhaustion’ (1997, p. E3) and George Dorris commented that ‘*The Stop Quartet* ... tested the audience’s attention quotient’ (1997-98, p. 47). The piece was deemed so uncompromisingly obscure that it was seen to call into question the need for an audience altogether: as Meisner pointed out, ‘a few spectators criticised the dance for being insular and making the audience feel dispensable’ (1996a, p. 4); and Mackrell went as far as to claim that ‘it’s a work that virtually ignores its audience’ (1996-97, p. 58).

The reason for this response seems to lie in the language of the piece, which appears to dissect the most basic movements that legs, arms, torso and head can execute to explore their possibilities of combination. Its articulation has been described as an in-depth investigation of ‘the mechanics of the human body’ (Brown, 1996a, n.p.) and is

often depicted in very concrete terms, which highlight the materiality of the movement and the intense physicality of the work: ‘its flat-footed, chaining steps, its arms slicing like broken-sailed windmills, its abrupt animal crouches’ (Meisner, 1997, p. 34); ‘the elements are neolithic – stamping, treading, walking, crouching, squatting, bodies bent, arms extended in semaphore line’ (Crisp, 1996, p. 15); ‘it is beauty on a new, instinctive level’ (Brown, 1996c, n.p.).

Whilst the literature emphasises the strong corporeal dimension of the choreography, the complexity of its composition and the strain it inflicted on the concentration of the viewers, interestingly *The Stop Quartet* is also one of the main works in Burrows’s repertoire to have sparked the labels of abstraction and minimalism that critics have given to his art (see Chapter 3.1). Duerden, for instance, describes the piece as the example that best embodies ‘the idea that something may be most effective when most abstracted’ (1999, p. 49), drawing on the artist’s own analogy between choreography and homeopathy, according to which the strength of a dance is not proportional to its density of images, but, on the contrary, is enhanced by the dilution of the ‘solution’ (Burrows cited in Marigny, 1994, p. 9). These comments appear to echo widespread characterisations of Butcher’s aesthetics as minimalist (Jones, 1998b; Jordan, 1992a) and abstract (Sayers, 1999), thus establishing a link between her work and Burrows’s own choreography (see Chapter 1). As Jordan argues, ‘counter[ing] ... [the] noisy, strongly coloured theatre’ of much postmodern dance, Butcher ‘retains strong formal interests’, which locate her work within the modernist agenda, as a demonstration of the minimalist belief that ‘less can still be more’ (1992a, pp. 160, 180, 181).

Yet, ‘abstraction’ is a term that Burrows often questions when talking about his creative practice. In a 1994 interview, he asks, ‘what is abstract in dance? If the performer is completely there, completely present, completely focused upon where they are and what they’re doing – then it’s not abstract’ (cited in Marigny, 1994, p. 9).² More recently, the role and meaning of abstraction in dance and music was the topic of discussion of a public talk between Burrows, Fargion and Davies in the context of *Parallel Voices*, a series of encounters organised by Burrows devoted to the exploration of cogent themes and issues of contemporary performance (Burrows, Fargion and Davies, 2007). Here the concept of abstraction was interrogated through the exploration of complementary and opposite terms (e.g. formalism and narrative,

structure and improvisation) and in relation to its historical and aesthetic links with modernism and its consequent unpopularity in postmodern performance.³

Similarly, Burrows has often challenged the characterisation of his work as ‘minimalist’,⁴ which some reviewers have identified as one of the traits that started to emerge distinctively in his choreographic language from *The Stop Quartet*. References to his compositional method found in the literature point out that his ‘careful, piecemeal approach’ and the resulting ‘spare, intense choreography’ are ‘often dubbed minimalist but Burrows seems uncomfortable with the term. “I don’t think the dance piece is minimalist: it’s just economical”’ (Anon, 1997, n.p.). Thus, Burrows appears to make a distinction between the economy of ingredients and instruments on the one hand and the sophistication of the creative process and the general effect of the work on the other. This is a position that he has expressed again in more recent conversations. In a public talk with Tim Etchells of Forced Entertainment moderated by Adrian Heathfield, the choreographer discussed the idea that the clarity of structure and process of his works is often mistaken for minimalism and he argued that by choosing ‘clear means’ he aims instead at generating ‘the richest possible communication’ (Burrows and Etchells, 2004, n.p.). In one of our interviews, he explained his position further:

I never want to call it minimalism because I always think that, physically, I’m always trying to do something as rich as possible I’ve always wondered if the fact that people feel that what I’m doing is minimal is more to do with how I want to concentrate on the thing itself and not dress it. But at the same time I do love things which you don’t question and which seem to be very effective, but which are made of simpler ingredients. ... When we started to work on *The Stop Quartet* we were using really simple elements, and in a way you couldn’t break movement down more than we broke it down. So in a way that gives it a certain feeling of something stripped back which then arrives at a flight via a different route. But the idea of ‘less is more’ doesn’t really underpin my way of thinking.
Burrows, 2006c, n.p.

The contradiction between the observation of the intense physicality and extremely elaborate structure of *The Stop Quartet* and its classification as an abstract and minimalist piece shows a tension in Burrows’s work that is worth exploring in some depth. What elements of the choreography determine its complexity and often reported inscrutability? What aspects may instead lead the spectator to identify in it traces of a link with abstract and minimalist forms of art? And how can the tension

between these two divergent perspectives be read in relation to his work? These questions also suggest that such conflicting positions may be a reflection of different constructions and understandings of the ideas of abstraction and minimalism, whose multi-layered conceptual underpinnings require careful examination.

Drawing on a detailed analysis of the dance, the next sections of this chapter reflect on the critical literature related to the piece (which is limited to about a dozen newspaper reviews and approximately as many journal articles) as well as on Burrows's own remarks on the work (gathered from both published interviews and personal meetings with the choreographer), and examine these materials in relation to notions of abstraction and minimalism as constructed and employed in the artistic debate in the latter part of the twentieth century. In the analysis, the complexity of such artistic concepts and of their interpretations by artists and critics alike in a variety of significant disciplines and practices are teased out. Ultimately, in this chapter I explore the qualities, structure and resonances of Burrows's piece and investigate its aesthetic, methodological and cultural underpinnings, in order to propose a critical account of its multiple readings.

6.2 Generating complexity from simplicity

The analysis of the choreography of *The Stop Quartet* on which this chapter draws is based on the 1996 film version of the piece, directed by film-maker Roberts, a close collaborator of Burrows. He created films of most of the choreographer's pieces from the 1990s, which in 2004 were assembled in a collection released in DVD format, offering a retrospective of ten years of Burrows's work (Roberts, 2004).⁵ Another available document is a recording of a live performance which took place at Laban, London, in 1996, held by the Laban Library and Archive (Burrows, 1996). While this video is a useful record of the performance, and possibly the only live recording of the piece publicly accessible, Roberts's film has been chosen as the main source for the study of the dance, since its release in DVD format makes it more widely available; thus, in the absence of the live performance, the film comes to stand for the work. It is worth noting that, in his collaborations with Burrows, Roberts's intervention does not aim to produce plain documents of the dance works, as if recorded by an invisible hand; his films 'complement qualities and characteristics of the live choreographies.

interpreting them through the specificity of the filming medium' (Perazzo, 2006, p. 45). Especially in the case of *The Stop Quartet*, with its complex texture of dance, music and lighting, the video editing adds a further layer to the choreographic text. The distinctiveness of the cinematic language arises from a dialogue with the other vocabularies of the choreography and thus appears to be in line with the compositional principles of the piece and with their underlying concept (as discussed below).

It could be said that *The Stop Quartet* is a piece composed by accumulation. The structure of the dance, the movement material and its interrelation with the musical score, the lighting design and the film editing are the product of a working method based on the constant interrogation of the fabric of the dance and on consequent additions of new elements and findings. In a conversation Burrows (2006c) observed that the piece started off as a duet with Montes, focusing on the exploration of simple movements, performed at a given pace and in constant relationship with each other. The process of creation involved using a metronome, working with counterpoint and 'building basic blocks of movements which then, when they are combined, become something completely different from what you would have imagined' (Burrows, 2006c, n.p.). Burrows explained that the choreography began as a continuation of the short film piece *Hands* and as a reaction to the earlier group work *Our: The Stop Quartet* resumed and expanded the investigation of the principles behind patterns of basic hand gestures executed in counterpoint between the right and the left hand at a purposefully set tempo, on which the choreography of *Hands* was based; conversely, it rejected the quest for 'interesting' and 'virtuosic' movements aiming at the 'physical expression' of images and ideas that can be found in *Our* (Burrows, 2006c, n.p.).

The creation of the duet started from breaking down the movement to very simple elements, which were then placed together in complex phrases; the patterns were visualised on paper on two parallel lines, representing the two dancers (Burrows, 2006c). In this respect, Burrows (2006c) recognises the instrumental role of Fargion's advice on how to observe movement in time, based on a form of notation of rhythm and counterpoint employed in African music, and observes that producing a score of the physical sequences seemed to allow him to visualise time and become aware of the intersections between the dancers also on a temporal level.

On a structural level, in devising the movement phrases of *The Stop Quartet*, Burrows deliberately rejected narrative elements. Recounting the process of creation of the duet, he explains that he began to feel the need to step outside and, for a period of time, Gowar replaced him in working with Montes (Burrows, 2006c). This enabled him to look at the choreography from a distance and discern its dynamics more clearly.

We worked for a week and out of that there was one thing which I thought, 'this is very interesting'. The one thing is the very beginning of the piece, which I tried with Kate and Henry: it's the relationship between one person moving half speed and one person moving double speed. ... But then I decided that the one thing I didn't like was it being a man and a woman, because it introduced a narrative which I felt would be lessened if it was either two women or two men. So I decided that I had to come back into it again.

Burrows, 2006c, n.p.

The deliberate elimination of potentially dramatic elements from the choreography, combined with the decision to build the movement sequences from simple ingredients, may justify the link between Burrows's art and abstract and minimalist aesthetics made by critics, through both explicit references (Duerden, 2001; Mackrell, 1996; Mackrell 1996-97; Meisner, 1996a) and implicit allusions by means of comments on the self-reflective quality of the dance and on its reduction to basic ingredients (Boxberger, 1996; Constanti, 1996b). However, the relationship between the work and these artistic positions is a contentious matter, claimed by some critics and questioned by the choreographer. Whilst it does not seem relevant – nor, for that matter, possible in unequivocal terms – to tackle this controversy with the aim of solving it and labelling Burrows's art one way or another, this debate provides a potentially fruitful starting point to explore the tensions inherent in the choreographer's work by viewing it in the broader context of late twentieth-century art. An exploration of the conceptual foundation and philosophical implications of abstract and minimalist practices and stances may cast a new light on *The Stop Quartet's* choreographic principles, movement composition and processes of performance and reception, beyond the sketchy and hasty observations found in the literature on the piece's frugality of means and its analytic attention to dance as an artistic medium.

A tendency to abstraction can be recognised in a variety of artistic currents and schools throughout the twentieth century: whilst Clement Greenberg regards it as the fundamental feature of the ‘search of the absolute’ of the avant-garde, which can be identified in movements from cubism, fauvism and futurism, to Wassily Kandinsky’s *Blaue Reiter*, to geometric abstraction (2003, p. 541), in the second half of the twentieth century this approach became characteristic of artistic currents such as abstract expressionism and action painting. As Harold Osborne observes, whilst the general meaning of the term presupposes an object and an act of separation or withdrawal from it,

in the language of twentieth-century art two different meanings of ‘abstract’ have become firmly established. One of these – when we say, for example, that a picture of a certain object or scene is abstract rather than naturalistic – is on all fours with the use of ‘abstract’ in other contexts. The other – as when we describe a picture as ‘abstract’ because it is not a picture *of* anything at all – has little or nothing in common with the former usage and is, linguistically, far more arbitrary.

Osborne, 1979, p. 25.

The first meaning of the term refers to what Osborne calls ‘semantic abstraction’, whereas the second occurrence applies to those artworks that can be considered as ‘non-figurative’ and ‘non-iconic’: that is, ‘pictures and sculpture within the wide spectrum of twentieth-century art which are not pictures or sculptures *of* anything at all These works are not more “abstract” or less “abstract”’ (p. 26).

This oscillation in the meanings of the word is also reflected in the different forms that abstraction assumed in modernist art, where this practice and its principles can be linked either with subjectivism or with rationalism, and therefore with both expressionist and formalist tendencies. This translates into the equally ambiguous relationship of abstraction with reality, realism and illusionism: whilst, on the one hand, abstract art represents a reaction to the illusionism inherent in naturalistic and impressionistic representations, on the other hand, it can also fall into forms of deception and materiality. Art critic Hal Foster (1996) argues that abstract expressionism’s pictorial rendering of the subject’s voice can be read as a form of subjective realism interpreted through the illusionism of the pictorial space.⁶ Similarly, albeit from different premises and with different results, the formalist use of abstract forms can generate optical illusionism which, in its most stylised examples

– a conceptual betrayal of analytic abstraction’s search for pictorial purity – can produce a sort of reification of abstraction itself (Foster H., 1996).

In dance, a parallel to abstract expressionist painting has been identified in the ‘psychological introspection’ of Martha Graham’s dances from the 1940s, in which she explored the unconscious dimension of human behaviour (Polcari, 1990, p. 3). As Stephen Polcari points out, works such as *Letter to the World* (1940) and *Deaths and Entrances* (1943) were constructed as dynamic and three-dimensional expressions of feelings, dreams and emotions through ‘a metaphoric, allegorical, and poetic montage’ of memories and images, a technique that, in its two-dimensional form, was known to painters such as Mark Rothko and Jackson Pollock (p. 6). On the other hand, abstraction in Osborne’s second meaning of the term, that is, as ‘non-representation’, is a characteristic of a choreographic approach that originated as a reaction to expressive modes of dance such as Graham’s. This can be identified with what Susan Foster (1986) describes as the ‘reflective’ mode of dance, which emerged with Cunningham and later developed through the experiments of early postmodern choreographers. Hence it is clear that definitions of choreographies such as Graham’s and Cunningham’s as ‘abstract’ draw on two diametrically opposed meanings of the word.

As for the term ‘minimalism’, whilst its narrower usage refers more specifically to a movement developed in the 1960s in North American visual art and sculpture, in a wider sense the label has also been employed in relation to other art forms, from music to architecture to dance. Because of the diversity of interpretations that abstract art has known and the variety of applications of minimalist principles, the relationship between these two artistic positions is not unequivocal: on the one hand, a line of continuity can be identified between certain forms of geometric abstraction – for instance, Kazimir Malevich’s suprematism – and minimalism; on the other hand, minimal art can be seen as having developed as a reaction to ‘the deep subjectivity and allusive emotionalism’ of abstract expressionism (Gablik, 1994, p. 245).

Although minimalist movements in other arts, such as music and dance, do not necessarily adhere to the same principles of minimal art, they nevertheless share the same interest in working with limited materials, repetitive and modular patterns and simple conceptions, as well as the rejection of expressivity and emotional display.

From the mid-1960s, American composers such as Philip Glass and Steve Reich created static, repetitive pieces whose reduced scope for variation and ‘deliberate technical limitations’ gave the compositions a calm and serene mood (Brindle, 1987, p. 195). Similarly, a minimalist aesthetic was embraced in dance by Rainer, who in the 1960s became interested in the exploration of the everyday, through the use of pedestrian movements, street clothes and functional objects (Banes, 1987). This genre of performance, inaugurated by Rainer and by her colleagues at the Judson Dance Theater, is commonly known as ‘task dance’ and, in its ‘anti-illusionist’ attitude, it ‘shares a set of recognized aesthetic preoccupations with contemporary fine art. ... That is, it attempts to close the gap between artworks and real things’ (Carroll and Banes, 1982, p. 38).

Whilst similarities between these aesthetic and conceptual approaches and Burrows’s work can be easily spotted at a superficial level, a closer analysis of these practices and of their underlying principles reveals a wider range of shades which suggests the need to interrogate their differences. Thus, in the remainder of this chapter, aspects of the compositional process and of the final choreography of *The Stop Quartet* are examined and discussed alongside corresponding and seemingly analogous abstract and minimalist principles that have informed other art forms in the fifty years preceding Burrows’s work, in order to question their relationship and discuss the extent and nature of their connection.

6.3 Painting the dance: adding, subtracting and layering

The extension of the duet into a quartet, via the intermediate trio section, was the result of a contingent rather than premeditated decision. According to Burrows’s account, when he and Montes concluded that they had exhaustively explored the possibilities of movement and its combinations in the duet, they decided to expand the variables of the piece by adding two more dancers, Walker and Gowar:

I had the idea that if we had a twenty-five-minute duet – and we had already been talking about asking Fin Walker to join us for a trio – it would be great if we had a trio which was shorter than the duet, and finally a quartet which was shorter than the trio. So, just arbitrarily, I thought: if the duet is twenty-five minutes, then use all the fives, so make the trio fifteen minutes and make the

quartet five minutes, and it would make for a really interesting shape: you get this huge activity at the end, but it only lasts a very short time.

Burrows, 2006c, n.p.

The compression of the dance material in the last part of the piece also entailed the addition of new movement elements and therefore the expansion of the range of ‘ingredients’ used – of the “‘gamut’ of movements’, as Burrows calls it, borrowing from Cunningham’s terminology (Burrows, 2006c, n.p.). Changes and alternations in the ways in which the material was condensed and extended were also applied to other components of the choreography, and especially to the arrangements of the music and of the lighting.

The collaboration between choreographer, composers and lighting designer began in the early stages of the creation process and each artist contributed to the structural and conceptual coherence of the piece (Burrows, 2006c). Each of the scores of the three different media – four in the case of the film version of the piece – was composed in constant negotiation with the others and is characterised by an intrinsic tension between affirming its presence and making room for the other elements. Thus the different languages may complement, assist or fight one another. Between the dance and the music, for instance, alternate pauses in the movement or in the sound direct the focus on the other element; coinciding moments of stillness and silence slow down the overall pace of the performance and make it breathe; overlapping sections of high activity intensify the rhythm with effects of increased power or dissonance.

In the first ten minutes of the duet, where the choreography begins its exploration of movement and spatial and temporal dynamics from simple elements and small changes, treated almost individually, the music is made of slow and soft piano notes with frequent pauses and long silences. Through this gentle, subdued opening, the music allows the dance to affirm its voice and make a first connection with the audience. In the second part of the duet, the dance becomes more ‘choreographed’ and single elements are organised together in phrases; the dancers travel more widely through the space and move faster than in the first part. Here the music breaks in with renewed strength, with louder and more vigorous sounds, employing multiple pianos to create a score of staccato notes and blunt breaks and changes.

In the trio, the dance begins with a slower pulse, although the addition of one more performer balances the reduction of the speed by enhancing the complexity of the choreography; in contrast, towards the end of the section, multiple changes of direction and the mechanical and brisk quality of the movements generate a sense of tension. This progression from a more meditative mood to an increasing nervousness is paralleled in the music, which begins with piano lines of quiet, deep notes, frequent silences and sparse sounds and ends with the addition of screeching and metallic noises and birds' chirruping, which turn progressively louder.

This direction is developed further in the quartet, where the dance and the music concur in enhancing the overall feeling of increasing pressure: a faster pulse and the addition of a fourth dancer match the constant intensification of the sound volume and the insistence of the piercing noise continuing from the previous section. However, on a compositional level, choreography and soundscape follow conflicting principles in the final quartet: a new freedom in the organisation of the phrases, in the spatial and temporal relationships between the dancers and in the treatment of unison and counterpoint (Burrows, 2006c) increases the variety of the dance structure and is developed in opposition to the uniformity of the musical score, based on a single sound.

A detailed analysis of the materials of the choreography and of their composition enables an examination of their relationship with the aesthetic and methodological principles of minimalism. At one level, Burrows's choice to work from simple elements shows a link with a key characteristic of minimal art. The visual and sculptural works of artists such as Donald Judd, Dan Flavin, Robert Morris and Frank Stella employed basic elements, often of industrial origin, composed according to rigorous geometrical patterns of extreme simplicity.

The ambition they shared was to create works of maximum immediacy, where the whole is more important than the parts, and where relational composition is suppressed in favour of an arrangement of simple ordering.

Gablik, 1994, p. 246.

However, at another level, the intricate interweaving of elements and parts of *The Stop Quartet* breaks with minimalism's structural immediacy. As Nick Kaye (1994, p. 27) states, 'the "minimalist" objects ... rejected not only representation, reference and symbol, but the very idea that the art-object should be composed of inter-related

parts'. Modular patterning was one of the most frequent organisational principles and the rationality, predictability and 'outstanding ... clarity' of its repetitiveness made the work self-explanatory and, according to Gregory Battcock, totally unambiguous (1968, p. 32). However, as Battcock points out,

minimal style is extremely complex. The artist has to create new notions of scale, space, containment, shape, and object. He must reconstruct the relationship between art as [*sic*] object and between object and man.

Battcock, 1968, p. 26.

Nevertheless, in minimal art these notions were addressed individually, since, as Suzi Gablik observes, 'composition is a less important factor than scale, light, colour, surface or shape, or relation to the environment' (1994, p. 252). Moreover, the relations between these elements were determined rationally, not experientially, seeing that 'the Minimalists shared with Mondrian the belief that a work of art should be completely conceived by the mind before its execution' (p. 245).

In contrast, Burrows's piece is the result of a laborious compositional process, with precise attention to the relationships both amongst the different parts of the choreography and between the dance material and the other artistic media. Hulls's lighting, for instance, 'a carpet of chequered light beams' (Brown, 1996b, p. 20), gives visual consistency to the idea underpinning the organisation of the movement and the overall choreographic arrangement, the geometrical grid of light projected on a blue or black floor being the optical equivalent of the intersecting and layering of the different media. The lighting also appears to create correspondences with the dancers' foot patterns which are often organised in grid-like diagrams (Burrows, 2006c): 'on the floor, bars of light overlap – a startling design by Michael Hulls that exactly complements the dance' (Brown, 1996a, n.p.). In live performances the design was not static and the relationship between the bright lines and the darker background was constantly changing (Burrows, 2006c). The dynamism of the lighting is lost in Roberts's film version, where it is replaced by frequent cuts and blackouts and by the movement of the camera, which 'pans left to right in a similar structure to the choreography' (Burrows, 2006c, n.p.). Blackouts may coincide with pauses in the dance or in the music, but usually these moments give the spectator the chance to concentrate on the soundscape (or they give the sounds the opportunity to

intervene more forcefully) and often the noise of footsteps can still be heard when the scene is blacked out, indicating that the dance is continuing in the dark, unseen.

Meisner (1996a) saw in *The Stop Quartet*'s tripartite structure the sign of a classically inspired balance, but she also recognised that the composition of the piece was informed by principles of stratification and accumulation, which suggest a very different set of methodological and conceptual influences:

if we define classicism in its broad sense of a preoccupation with perfect form, then the architecture of *The Stop Quartet* has a wonderfully severe classicism. In one respect, it unfolds in a systematic linear progression, beginning with a male duet, then continuing with two further sections, each shorter than the previous one, but simultaneously larger, with the addition each time of a female dancer, so that the piece ends as a quartet. In another respect, it is a construct of layers, inspired by the abstract paintings of Gerhard Richter.

Meisner, 1996a, p. 4.

In past and recent interviews (Boxberger, 1996; Burrows, 2006c), Burrows refers in fact to Richter's paintings as a source of inspiration for the compositional method and conceptual rationale behind the piece. In the German artist's abstract works from the 1980s and 1990s, a technique consisting in applying cumulative layers of paint and then scraping off quantities of the pigment reveals the texture and history of the work. Similarly in *The Stop Quartet*, the individual elements of the choreography – dance, music and lighting, with the addition of the film in the case of Roberts's version – expose each other through the gaps of the mesh created by their interlacing, like intersecting and overlapping brushstrokes. As Burrows explains,

it was Kevin Volans' idea to cut holes in the thing through which you can see or hear the work of the others. ... You've got a fabric in which you cut holes. Through the holes in the dance you hear the music, see the lighting. The same thing goes for the music: through its gaps you see the dance and the lighting. And it's just the same with the lighting.

Burrows cited in Boxberger, 1996, p. 49.

Consequently, the composition of the piece revolves around the intersection of the different media and the use of pauses, silences and blackouts in the choreographic, musical and visual sequences, creating a grid through which the other media are exposed. As Burrows describes it,

dance consists of various strata of activities, and over that there's the music which also presents a strata of activity within which there are further smaller

levels, and then there's the lighting, yet another layer of activity that can be subdivided. Dance, music and light inhabit their own space-time continua and dance and music especially meet at the intersections, where the material alters.

Burrows cited in Boxberger, 1996, p. 48.

Correspondences between dynamic, acoustic and visual arrangements can be read throughout the piece. In the first part of the duet, for instance, moments of suspended activity and held poses in the choreography are as frequent as short pauses in the score of gentle piano notes and blackouts in the camera shots. This well-orchestrated alternation between movement and its suspension, sound and silence, vision and its absence generates a finely composed texture conveying an impression of overall balance between the different elements of the choreography.

In the second part, the composition presents stronger accents and the impact of the different media on each other is sharper and produces varied effects: when the sounds suddenly turn higher and discordant and follow a faster rhythm, the dance – the view of which has been until now obstructed by a camera blackout – seems to be propelled by a similar force and incorporates blunt steps, stiff movements and hopping patterns. However, the choreography soon changes into a slower, more fluid and more meditative sequence, in correspondence with a long silence of almost one minute; when the music resumes, with fast, light and high piano notes, the movement of the two dancers moving rhythmically, pausing and browsing around the space with their torsos bent forward, as if looking for something, appears both to accompany and to contrast the modulation of the music. Thus connections are never obvious and the intersections between the shifts in the dynamic modes of the choreographic, musical and filmic sequences often generate indistinct moments in which the relationships between the different media fluctuate between intensification, dissonance and complementariness.

This attention to the correlation between the parts of a composition and their coherence is not typical of minimalist approaches. In minimal music, for instance, strategies such as repetition and patterning, that is, 'the repetitive use of short cells' (Mertens, 1983, p. 15), are not functional to the development of a consistent arrangement, but draw attention to individual notes and the effects that their (repeated) occurrence has on the listener. As the musicologist Wim Mertens (1983) argues, the use of reduced means, which can be read as an influence of ethnic music

from India, Bali and West Africa, is one of the main attributes of minimal music. Here repetition is to be interpreted in opposition to how it is employed in classical music, where it 'is used in a pre-eminently *narrative* and *teleological* frame ... so that a musical perspective emerges that gives the listener a non-ambivalent orientation and that attempts to inform him of *meaningful* musical *contents*' (pp. 16-17). In the context of American minimalist works, which reject traditional principles of linear development, mimesis or expression of emotions, the use of repetitive patterns 'can be described as non-narrative and a-teleological' (p. 17). Repetition presents and reiterates sounds as discrete entities, in a non-dialectical fashion in which 'the concept of *work* has been replaced by the notion of *process*, and ... no one sound has any greater importance than any other' (p. 88).

In minimal music, dramatic substance, when perceived, emerges from pitches and rhythm, which are experienced as the sole event, thus resolving the form/content duality. As a consequence, 'structure is secondary to sound': 'with the removal of logical causality sound becomes autonomous, so that ... no structure exists before sound: *it* is produced at each moment' (Mertens, 1983, p. 89). Within this framework, the listener plays an essential role in the production and experience of the music, and perception becomes 'an integral and creative part of the musical process' (p. 90).

Burrows's *Stop Quartet* is instead held together by the precisely studied relationship between the elements of the choreography, which captures the attention of the spectator through its ordered, yet unpredictable, changes. Dichotomies such as movement and stillness, music and silence, light and dark, are explored and deconstructed, challenging the viewers' perception of interruptions and continuities, chaos and order. This in-betweenness appears to be mirrored in the visual composition of the filmic images as well, where the dancers' figures are often dissected by the camera framing, which leaves parts of the bodies out of sight. This compositional choice implies an awareness of the viewers' role in making sense of the work in its entirety and suggests that the arrangement of the different fragments and the discernment of the mutual effects that one element has on the others and in relation to the whole can only occur in the process of the spectators' reception. Whilst minimal music offers the listener an immediate experience of perception, Burrows's quartet calls the viewers to an analytical reading of the work, in which

their observation of the relationships between the elements of the choreography plays an essential role in their appreciation of the dance.

6.4 Distillation, dialogue and deconstruction: strategies of reinterpretation

The Stop Quartet appears to subvert compositional strategies employed in previous works by Burrows, from the early *Hymns* through to the later *Our*, where movement patterns could be read as content-related, or at least thematically influenced by the general subject matters of the pieces (see Chapters 4 and 5 for a reading of the religious references in *Hymns* and of the comments on culturally generated forms of behaviour in *Stoics*). As Burrows himself explains, ‘in *The Stop Quartet* I made a clear decision not to use any functional movements with a verbatim basis’ (Burrows cited in Boxberger, 1996, p. 48). The smallest moves, from steps, the most widely exploited physical elements,⁷ to arm trajectories, head rotations, simple gestures and yoga positions, were composed together by applying floor grids or constructing sequences based on changes of the level of the body in space, in random or chance-derived order (Burrows, 2006c). Furthermore, whilst the beat was determined by a metronome, the speed at which each dancer moved was often diversified, ‘from single speed to double speed, to sometimes four times faster, to sometimes syncopated speed, and sometimes combinations of those’ (Burrows, 2006c, n.p.).

These devices contributed to the weaving of the dance material, shaping not only its bodily and spatial aspects – which were dissected both horizontally through the grid patterns and vertically through the fluctuation between low, medium and high postures – but also its temporal dimension. As is especially evident in the opening of the duet, the dancers may perform the same sequence of simple steps but individual tempos may fluctuate and one dancer may, for instance, shift almost imperceptibly to moving at double the speed of the other. These relationships can be further complicated by the use of alternation and counterpoint and, on a spatial level, by changes of direction and the application of what could be read as various types of symmetry, from translation to reflection to rotation. However, since the duet is performed at a fast overall pace, these subtle changes and slippery coincidences confound the spectator’s perception of unison performance and blur the distinction

between synchronic and autonomous movement, unity and division, accord and discord, as well as between symmetry and asymmetry.

The self-sufficiency of the piece's arrangement suggests a comparison with Rainer's interest in the use of raw movement material and of non-dramatic structures. Rainer's choreographic principles were explicitly drawn from 'aspects of so-called minimal sculpture' (Rainer, 1974, p. 63). In the same way that minimal art rejected the compositional principles and conceptual underpinnings of traditional and modernist works and redefined the place of art, postmodern dance of minimalist descent exposed the conventions of classical and modern dance and challenged the very idea of what constitutes dance movement. Whilst in Monroe Beardsley's definition, 'dance moving' is identified by the intensification of the qualities of functional movements and by a 'superfluity of expressiveness' (cited in Carroll and Banes, 1982, p. 37), Rainer's work employed movement in a neutral, literal, descriptive way, stripped of dramatic, subjective and representational attributes.

Her strategies involved eliminating textured composition, complex variety, illusionist performance and virtuosity, and substituting them with discrete elements and their repetition, non-expressive performance and the literal execution of simple actions, including 'found' movements and 'tasklike' activity (Rainer, 1974, p. 63). Thus, although her dances were not conceived prior to their execution and independently of the bodily experience of movement (as minimal art would have prescribed), the focus was directed to single materials as opposed to their composition. Talking about her *Trio A*, one of postmodern dance's seminal work, Rainer recounts:

in 1964 I began to play around with simple one- and two-motion phrases that required no skill and little energy and contained few accents. The way in which they were put together was indeterminate, or decided upon in the act of performing, because at that time the idea of a different kind of continuity as embodied in transitions or connections between phrases did not seem to be as important as the material itself.

Rainer, 1974, p. 66.

Although Burrows's working method also presupposes a close involvement with the movement material and an appreciation of its intrinsic logic, its studied organisation and overall shape are of equal, if not greater importance in his choreography. On the contrary, in Rainer's *Trio A* no deliberate variation was applied to the composition, which resulted in a continuous, untextured sequence of individual 'factual'

movements with ‘no pauses’ and no climaxes (Rainer, 1974, pp. 66, 67). As Noël Carroll puts it, ‘*Trio A* is a study in negations, an eschewal of the relevance of many of the central cultural criteria that we typically mobilize in order perceptually to recognize movement as dance’ (2003, p. 95).

A crucial function that minimalism fulfilled in twentieth-century art was to challenge conventional principles of conception and reception in order to expose the circumstances and conditions of the work. Hal Foster, who sees in minimalism the genealogical antecedent of postmodernism, argues that ‘minimalism breaks with the transcendental space of most modernist art’ and places art ‘among objects’, thus redefining its place (1996, pp. 37, 38). According to Hal Foster, interpretations of minimalism that focus on its reductive attitude to materials and on its idealist, conceptual and abstract nature, are ‘misreading[s]’ of its key principles (p. 40). These were aimed at challenging modern art’s dichotomies of abstract and real, subject and object, by drawing attention to the conventional nature of art and of its reception. Minimalism’s self-reflectivity ‘tends toward the epistemological more than the ontological, for it focuses on the perceptual conditions and conventional limits of art more than on its formal essence and categorical being’ (p. 40).

Examining the complex relationship of minimalism with reality and abstraction, Hal Foster observes: ‘not only does minimalism reject the anthropomorphic basis of most traditional sculpture ..., but it also refuses the siteless realm of most abstract sculpture’ (1996, p. 38). What minimalism rejects is the illusionism intrinsic in both traditional and avant-garde art, which can be found in realist tendencies as much as in abstract ones. However, critics of minimalism at the time of its development and affirmation saw in the conceptual shift it promoted a corruption of modernist art’s strive towards the purity, separateness and absoluteness of its formal essence. As reported by both Hal Foster (1996) and Kaye (1994), the American critic Michael Fried attacked minimal art for adopting a ‘*literalist*’ approach and thus showing the conventional nature of art. In his essay ‘Art and Objecthood’, Fried (1968) argued that minimal art exposed the ‘objecthood’ of the artworks, which modernist painters and sculptors had been trying to defeat by creating art that responded solely to its own internal rules. Minimalist works were thus essentially affected by an ‘incurably theatrical’ condition (p. 130), which made the experience of art a temporal event in

which the viewers were lucidly aware of their position, of their relationship to the work and of the work's terms of presence.

Fried's definition of this attitude as 'theatrical' – although not the pejorative sense in which it is used – finds an echo in Susan Foster's (2002) reading of the Judson Church choreographers' moving of dance into non-theatrical contexts as a form of theatricalisation of the everyday, already referred to in Chapter 3. Susan Foster's first example of this form of theatricality is Childs's 1964 *Street Dance*, in which what constitutes dance is determined by the framing, that is, by the identification of an area of a street of lower Manhattan in which movement activity takes place, whilst the audience watches the event from the windows of an overlooking building.

Childs's later work, with its 'close minimalist patterning', has been – debatably – seen as a source of influence for Burrows's *Stop Quartet* (Mackrell, 1996, p. 14). Whilst her dances from the late 1960s and the 1970s are especially characterised by the exploration of repetition and space relations in the creation of movement sequences, overall her body of work presents a line of continuity in a particular concern with the role and position of the viewer (Banes, 1987; Kaye, 1994). Her 1968 *Untitled Trio* was constructed by applying a set of variables to elements of the same phrases – rhythm, speed, relationship between the performers, distances covered – thus blurring the distinction between replica and variation (Livet, 1978) and enhancing the perceptual experience of the spectators (Kaye, 1994). However, whilst a similar effect on the piece's structure and on the audience's perception of it is achieved in *The Stop Quartet*, in Burrows's case this result is not expressly pursued and it is the by-product of the process of distillation he applies to the dance material and of the dialogic exchange between the principles of the choreography and those of the music, lighting and film. Moreover, since Burrows has often professedly located his movement research in the wake of American early postmodern experiments, the work can also be read as a reinterpretation of their concerns and significance through a deconstruction of their underlying codes.

This exploration of Burrows's choreographic method and ideas in relation to features and principles of abstract and minimalist forms of art has drawn attention to possible points of contact and/or divergence. In eliminating narrative elements and movements with inscribed connotations, *The Stop Quartet* shows a non-

representational quality which would align it with what Osborne describes as non-iconic art, that is, abstract in the sense of non-figurative. Moreover, the choice of simple elements as the ingredients with which to create the choreography, and the use of patterning and of non-expressive performance are features that the choreographer appears to share with minimal art and dance. In relation to minimalist and early postmodern dance, Burrows (2005b, 2005c) himself has often acknowledged the role that Childs and Rainer, amongst other Judson Church choreographers, have played in his choreographic development. Similarly, the musical background of his close collaborator Fargion can be traced back to minimalist and post-minimalist composers.⁸

On the other hand, though, Burrows's work diverges substantially from the minimalist canon in its grammar, working method and approach to composition. Firstly, from the point of view of the language of the dance, if simple, basic elements are chosen as a starting point, this is done in order to discover their unexpected possibilities through their complex organisation in space and time. In *The Stop Quartet*, these are even more minute, raw elements than the task-like movements employed in minimalist dance: they are trajectories, shifts and rotations of parts of the body, with no literal reference to everyday and work activities. Secondly, from the perspective of the creation process, the final structure of the work is not determined by an a priori concept but is arrived at through a continuous questioning of the choreographic material and the performers' physical experience of it. Although structure is not a governing principle for his compositions, in the sense that these are devised by addition of subsequent moments choreographed one after the other and not through the editing process of an otherwise disordered mass of creative material, a clear sense of the whole and of the relationships between the parts emerges from his works, conferring on them a sense of balance, coherence and unity. In this respect, Meisner's (1996a) comment on the classical quality of the organisation of the piece is indicative of the role that Burrows's ballet background has continued to play in the construction of his choreographic syntax. Thirdly, the place that composition occupies in his work distances it from the minimalist concept of the self-sufficiency of shapes and volumes, sounds and pedestrian and functional movements in the visual arts, music and dance.

The lack of literalness of the movement vocabulary and the complexity of the relationships between the elements and sections of the choreography found in *The Stop Quartet* represent a shift from Burrows's previous work, the form of which could paradoxically be seen as closer to the minimalist canon, in both vocabulary and outline: in earlier pieces the dance language played with more explicit references to the everyday and the general choreographic structure revolved around sequences or series of sequences that, to a certain extent, constituted discrete parts, often with highly individual qualities and accents. (However, these works presented a more explicit narrative dimension, which would make their characterisation as abstract and minimalist appear inappropriate.) Nevertheless, as already discussed, it is in *The Stop Quartet*, and in general in Burrows's mid-1990s works, that critics have recognised a minimalist attitude, failing to identify their methodological, and therefore conceptual divergence from minimalist principles.

The interpretation of these works as marking a 'transition toward abstraction' given by some critics (Jones, 1998a, p. 84) also prompts further questioning. Whilst it is not made explicit which type of abstraction this and similar comments refer to, it is to be assumed that they imply it is the formalist, as opposed to the expressionist, due to the piece's meticulous attention to structural details. Yet *The Stop Quartet* seems hardly concerned with the idea of the absoluteness and purity of form intrinsic in modernist abstract art. The piece is about relations: between artistic languages and their media, between these and the movement of the performers, and between the performers themselves, both on a spatial and temporal level. It is a study of these interconnections conducted in an empirical, organic way – by trial and error and not by superimposition of abstract principles and ideas.

I argue therefore that Burrows's choreography, as constructed in *The Stop Quartet*, inaugurates what could be read as a post-minimalist and post-abstract mode, which reinterprets the methodological and conceptual foundations of these artistic positions. The dialogic exploration of dance's relationships with other arts enables the work to overcome clear-cut characteristics and conditions of simplicity and complexity, straightforwardness and ambiguity, detachment and inherence, separateness and participation. Although Burrows's choreography is unthinkable without the minimalist and abstract stances of contemporary visual arts and music and of early postmodern dance, his work is situated beyond these positions from the point of view

of both its methods and significance. Whilst, as Hal Foster (1996) proposes, the minimalist rethinking of the artistic gesture addresses epistemological rather than ontological questions about art, Burrows's choreographic research goes back to investigating the nature and relations of dance by both drawing on these enquiries and applying them to a different context. Minimalist and abstract modes are but two of the various approaches that inform his artistic discourse, whose coherence and meanings are to be read in the dialogue it constructs between different aesthetic and conceptual positions and in the creative interstices that can be found between them.

6.5 Dancing at the crossroads

Mackrell has compared *The Stop Quartet* to a 'board game', in which movements are decided by an external hand and the dancers simply apply their competence and precision to their execution:

two, three and finally four players work intently on concentrated bursts of movement, then stop abruptly as if waiting for the next throw of the dice, and the stage is lit to resemble a luminous board. Watching the piece is like watching people play chess, fascinating in that the performers are highly-skilled players and the choreographic rules are intricate and rigorous. Dancers play against each other in a tight counterpoint and so intricate is the interplay of detail that it seems almost computer-generated [*sic*].

Mackrell, 1996, p. 14.

The same analogy has been used by other critics, possibly inspired by the geometrical design of the luminous projections on the floor, or intrigued by the complex dynamics of the choreography (Dunning, 1997; T'Jonck, 2002). Moreover, Burrows (2006c) himself, when talking about the process of creation of *The Stop Quartet*, makes explicit reference to Cunningham and Cage's compositional procedures and their use of chance techniques, through descriptions of the piece that appear to align his choreography with American 'objectivist dance' from the 1950s and 1960s (Foster S. L., 1986).

Indeed, works by American minimalist choreographers, constructed around sets of rules and performed in a neutral manner, can be read in similar terms – and a piece such as Rainer's *Room Service* was in fact 'generated by a game structure' (Banes, 1987, p. 42). Yet, whilst these works were conceived as a way to redefine the codes

and conventions of what constitutes dance, Burrows's choreography both draws on these investigations and takes them in new directions. Whilst the place of dance is no longer at stake, its intratextual links between its parts and its intertextual relationships with other arts offer the choreographer additional areas for research.

The analytic dimension of performance developed by the Judson Church choreographers inspired Butcher's work also. The role that simple principles and 'tactics' played in the composition of the dance can be seen especially in those pieces that were 'built on rules', such as *Suggestion and Action* (1978), in which 'Butcher called out instructions' to the dancers (Jordan, 1992a, p. 166) or *Flying Lynes* (1985), in which 'instructions [were] taken from a kite flying manual' (Jones, 1998b, p. 86). About *Catch 5, Catch 6* (1978), for instance, 'Butcher says that she welcomed viewers' recognition that some kind of game was going on in this piece, and their involvement in it' (Jordan, 1992a, p. 166). Hence, as with Burrows in his *Stop Quartet*, Butcher chooses precise physical tasks and 'reduced movement as a means of reactivating the spectator's attention after a plethora of full-blown technical dance styles' in the 1980s and 1990s postmodern fashion (Jordan, 1992a, p. 161).

However, Butcher's dances of the late 1970s and 1980s – during the time when Burrows trained and worked with her (see Chapter 1) – are characterised by 'the reduction of the personal and of performance presence'; this trait, although 'refreshing after the habitual high emotion and role playing of expressionist contemporary dance', gives the work a certain quality of separateness and remoteness: 'far from emphasizing "empathy" with the audience, Butcher encourages its objective distance' (Jordan, 1992a, p. 161). Butcher's interest in dance's structural devices is often coupled with a particular attention to spatial aspects (Jordan, 1992a), revealing an architectural and sculptural sensitivity which 'aligns [her work] with the visual art rather than the dance world' (Jones, 1998b, p. 86). Hence her choreographies, in 'stress[ing] the following of rules' (Jordan, 1992a, p. 166) and in exploring the spatial arrangements of movement and the qualities of its surroundings – especially in the case of outdoor and site-specific performances such as *Passage North East*, 1976, and *Touch the Earth*, 1987 (Jordan, 1992a) – are often characterised by 'the disappearance of the individual or withdrawal of personality' (p. 173), with instances in which 'human "presence" [is] as far as possible eliminated' (p. 180).⁹ On the contrary, it can be argued that in Burrows's work, despite the effect of estrangement that the

complexity of his compositions may generate, it is the intimacy and human quality of performance that ultimately emerges from the dance.¹⁰

Several reviewers of *The Stop Quartet* have wondered about the existence of mysterious rules, of a secret code behind the dance: ‘the piece seems like an arcane game. If only you knew the rules, you think, everything would fall into place’ (Meisner, 1996b, p. 18); ‘the code in which he has written his extraordinary, brilliant *Stop Quartet* is virtually impenetrable’ (Brown, 1996c, n.p.). But, as Brown and Parry conclude, in the end ‘it doesn’t matter’ (Brown, 1996c, n.p.): ‘surrender to Burrows’s spell and the piece becomes enchanting instead of puzzling’ (Parry, 1996a, p. 13).

The experience of watching *The Stop Quartet* is not about deciphering a code or discovering a secret. The quality of the piece is simple and complex at the same time; the dance does not narrate a story but it presents relationships and dynamics between the performers and with time and space in the most concrete form; its compositional elements are laid bare but the work ultimately preserves its ambiguity. Although it is constructed according to clear physical tasks and a coherent investigation of the principles of movement, *The Stop Quartet* is not a board game in which pawns move according to a predetermined set of rules. Whilst Burrows’s dance is not of the expressive type, the ideas behind the choreography are inseparable from their physical performance. The dancers embody the rules, they do not simply enact them, and form and content are no longer separate, since the one does not exist without the other.

Similarly, in the work *Altogether* from two years later, for instance, Burrows’s choreography for himself and the performers Dana Fouras and Ragnhild Olsen, danced to Fargion’s percussions played on a piano lid, presents the same integration between the principles and the physicality of the movement. In an eight-minute dance which is composed mainly of blunt and flinging arm patterns, playing with angular and vertical shapes, performed by the trio standing in a line facing the spectators, or away from them, the compositional precision of the piece is in dialogue with the corporeality of the performance, bridging the gap between structural and human qualities, between exactitude and indeterminacy:

the movement can know internal changes of pace and dynamics, and phrases can go out of phase. We watch, hypnotised by the shapes and also by the skill with which the dancers move in perfect understanding of each other.

Crisp, 1998, p. 16.

In this sense, the togetherness evoked by the title (and especially by its phonetic equivalence with the phrase 'all together') can be seen to refer both to the idea of unison performance which underlies the dance and to the sensory awareness it requires from the dancers, who translate the notion of identical execution through the physical variety of their bodies. Despite the role of the formal 'structure' in giving the piece a sense of 'balance', 'the power of the work lies in the passion and ingenuity with which it is assembled' (Mackrell, 1998b, p. 12).

Gadamer's reflections on the communicative power of art provide an inspirational framework in which to look at Burrows's quartet. Contemplating the intensity of artworks from the past, in which meaning is accumulated through time and tradition, and observing them in relation to contemporary creations, he states:

the nonobjective art of our time ... can possess a similar density of composition and a similar capacity for addressing us directly. The work of art transforms our fleeting experience into the stable and lasting form of an independent and internally coherent creation. It does so in such a way that we go beyond ourselves by penetrating deeper into the work.

Gadamer, 1986, pp. 52-53.

In the light of these remarks, *The Stop Quartet* can be read as a piece at a crossroads, both in relation to the field of contemporary dance and in terms of Burrows's choreographic development. Whilst drawing on seminal investigations into the conventions of dance and its processes of reception, in this work Burrows also reinterprets the principles on which previous artistic research was founded and widens its scope to address dance's own textual and intertextual nature. In relation to Burrows's previous work and his later directions, *The Stop Quartet* represents a key step in the choreographer's investigation of the dialogical quality of dance. It explores dance's own internal dynamics in relation to those of music, lighting and filming and it represents an initial challenge to the conventional self-containment of the work and allows a closer involvement of the audience in the creation of the coherence of the piece. The spectators are invited, in Gadamer's terms, to penetrate deeper into the work and to recognise and appreciate the threads and weaves of which

the dance is made. It is almost an exercise in concentration, where the performers share a task with the viewers – a task whose content and framework both lie in the dance itself.

It can be argued that *The Stop Quartet* represents an intermediate stage in Burrows's construction of his language and poetics. In this piece the choreographer distils movement and reduces it to its simplest units in order to separate it from its inscribed connotations. This seems to allow him to employ movement as a 'neutral' vocabulary that can be composed according to an utterly idiosyncratic syntax. In his most recent works, from *Both Sitting Duet* to the latest *Speaking Dance*, his choreography develops its fullest communicative intensity by combining the referential quality of his early work with the formal texture of pieces such as *The Stop Quartet*. Deconstructing the one through the principles of the other, Burrows creates pieces whose *intra*-textual links open the dance to *inter*-textual webs of connections, thus arriving at a new, subtler and more intimate form of communication with the spectators, which enables them to make a Pindaric leap and 'go beyond' themselves (Gadamer, 1986, p. 53).

Notes

- ¹ According to Burrows's account (2006c), the choreography for Ballett Frankfurt was actually commissioned by Forsythe after he saw his earlier piece *Very*. Burrows observed that he was not satisfied with the piece he created for Forsythe's ensemble and said that he considers it as 'a pale imitation of *The Stop Quartet*' (2006c, n.p.), in that he tried to work on the same ideas that underpin the 1996 piece but without achieving the same organic interrelation between methodological principles and their practical application.
- ² Such stance recalls Balanchine's reflections on the widespread interpretation of his choreography as abstract: 'I am so often told that my choreographic creations are "abstract". Does abstract mean that there is no story, no literary image, at best a general idea which remains untranslated in terms of reality? Does it mean the presentation of sound and movement, of unrelated conceptions and symbols in a disembodied state? ... No piece of music, no dance can in itself be abstract. You hear a physical sound, humanly organized, performed by people, or you see moving before you dancers of flesh and blood in a living relation to each other. What you hear and see is completely real. But the after-image that remains with the observer may have for him the quality of an abstraction' (1966, p. 98).
- ³ Among other topics discussed in *Parallel Voices* (Siobhan Davies Studios, London, February-March 2007) were the notion of conceptual dance (with Bel, Le Roy and Bojana Cvejić), forms of bodily expression that challenge conventional ideas and attributes of beauty (with Etchells, Heathfield and Kate Macintosh), and the construction of narratives through performance (with Nicholas Hytner, Katie Mitchell and Newson). Archival audio-visual documentations of these

talks, chaired by Burrows, can be found at <http://www.siobhandavies.com/index.php/parent/68/item/462> (accessed 23 August 2007).

4 See, for instance, Burrows, 2005a.

5 For a review of this audio-visual collection see Perazzo, 2006.

6 To avoid confusion, in this chapter Hal Foster and Susan L. Foster are referred to in the text by their full names and in the references by their surnames and initials.

7 ‘The most basic ingredient was a step, and you could in effect call the piece “The Step Quartet”, because ... that’s almost all the material, it’s just a series of steps’ (Burrows, 2006c, n.p.).

8 Fargion studied composition with Volans at the University of Natal, South Africa, and also worked closely with Morton Feldman (Fargion, 2005).

9 See also Burrows, 2006a, for the choreographer’s reflections on the role that time and rhythm play in his dance in opposition to the role of space in Butcher’s.

10 In this respect, Burrows’s fascination with patterns and structural precision has more in common with the compositional rigour of works by the Flemish choreographer De Keersmaeker, who in pieces such as *Rosas danst Rosas* (1983) creates a subjective and intimate world through the use of geometric grids and the deconstruction of traditional theatrical spaces (Briginshaw, 2001).

CHAPTER 7

Burrows and Fargion

A discursive choreomusical collaboration (*Both Sitting Duet*)¹

7.1 An unconventional partnership

Burrows's *Both Sitting Duet* (2002) was created in collaboration with his long-time artistic partner, the Italian composer Fargion. It is a work of forty-five minutes, which they perform together, mostly seated on two chairs, facing the spectators and in close proximity to the first row of the audience. The choreography is made of rhythmic patterns of movements, mainly focused on hands, fingers and arms, and occasionally on legs and head, which replicate and vary gestures and small actions. Only towards the end of the piece do the movements expand, to involve legs, feet and mouths: the two performers stand up, noisily stamp their feet and shout rhythmic vocalisations. The performance space, usually a studio theatre with frontal seating, presents simplified setting and lighting, and the work is performed without music.² The mood of the show is light and humorous and the response of audiences and critics has been reported as extremely warm and positive, with occasional expressions of puzzlement and disagreement.

Throughout his choreographic career, Burrows has explored ordinary gestures, corporeal vestiges of interpersonal conduct, details of movement and small actions originating from individual parts of the body, interruptions of rhythm, variations of speed, devising rules to break the conventions of codified movements and escape the clichés acquired through dance training and socially constructed bodily routines. In the early *Hymns*, the movement vocabulary juxtaposes dance movements drawn from ballet, contact improvisation and folk dancing with pedestrian gestures carrying references to the religious context of the musical accompaniment and to memories of childhood behaviour (Chapter 4). While *Very* investigates the fragmentariness of the human condition between inclusion and isolation through gestures of intimacy and remoteness, affection and violence, *Hands*, a short piece for the camera, consists solely of a few simple hand movements composed into phrases of varying sequences and speed. In *Blue Yellow*, the well-known video choreography for Guillem, the

dance plays with clearly defined spatial, corporeal and visual interruptions and intersections. In *The Stop Quartet*, the different elements composing the piece – movement, music and lighting – are treated as layers that can obstruct or complete, conceal or reveal each other (Chapter 6). *Weak Dance Strong Questions*, devised with Ritsema, challenges the conventions of dance by interrogating the principles and effects of movement.

In this respect, *Both Sitting Duet* demonstrates the most radical rethinking of the traditional components and structure of a dance piece. The simplification of its movement patterns and scenic elements, the refusal of virtuosity in the execution of the dance and the absence of musical accompaniment or sound system are amongst the characteristics of this work that account for a certain degree of nakedness. Lepecki has described this quality as ‘reductionist’, a questioning attitude towards the principles of dance that he recognises as a thread connecting many European choreographic experiments of the last decade (Lepecki, 1999; 2004; see also Chapter 1.4).

A crucial feature of *Both Sitting Duet* is that it presents a radical and innovative approach towards the relationship between dance and music. Since the late 1980s, the composer Fargion has created the musical accompaniment to most of Burrows’s choreographic pieces. This collaboration has been a mutual exchange, in which the two artists’ creativity has been fed by their parallel experiments with issues such as the relationship between movement/sound and stillness/silence, the role and effects of a pause in a choreographic/musical composition, the structure of layers and holes that shapes the correlation between dance and music in a choreographic piece, and the juxtaposition with pedestrian, mundane elements in both movement and sound. In the early *Dull Morning*, Fargion’s slow and sparse score ‘for two violins, double bass, trumpet, saxophone and piano’ (Goodwin, 1989, p. 27) complements the gloomy and contemplative mood of the choreography; the staccato notes of a piece for two pianos accompany the jerky steps and fragmented movements of Burrows’s solo in *Stoics*; the composite scores of *Very* and *Our*, juxtaposing music with text, sounds or silence, explore similar relationships to those between dance, pedestrian gestures and stillness in the choreography; in *Hands*, a composition for string quartet emphasises the contrapuntal dynamics of the movements of the right and of the left hand; in *The Stop Quartet*, a densely layered choreography combining different qualities and tempos of

movement with moments of immobility is intertwined with a score of piano notes, sounds and silences written by Fargion and Volans; in *Singing*, the lyricism of a piece for soprano, tenor and fortepiano enhances the continuity of concentration of the performance by Burrows and Bristow through proxemic and contrapuntal variations.

Within this common spirit of questioning the boundaries of their respective disciplines, *Both Sitting Duet* takes Burrows's collaboration with Fargion to a level where the final piece is no longer a choreography danced to a score written *ad hoc* by the composer, but becomes an 'equal' partnership (Burrows, 2002, p. 28) where both artists take to the stage to perform, side by side, what has been described as a 'musical choreography' (De Kunst, 2003, n.p.) – a movement composition based on a musical score to which the two artists contribute equally, each by employing their own expertise. The dance, created through a dialogue with a pre-existing musical score, plays with the disappearance of the music in an unconventional way, thus raising questions about the possibilities of interaction between these two art forms. The score is converted to movement by transposing each acoustic and rhythmic combination into a particular physical pattern. As a result, music is absent to the sense it normally appeals to, the sense of hearing, but present in sight. The 'disappeared' musical accompaniment – its arrangement, its variations of rhythm, emphasis and colour and the effects of unison and counterpoint produced by the interaction between the two instruments – is recreated in the dance through the exploration of the range of possibilities given by the various combinations of movements of different types, qualities and intensities and by the interplay of simultaneous, alternate and overlapping modes of gestural execution by the two artists.

Because of its non-referential and non-representational approach, the duet can be described as a piece *about* dance and music, with a substantial analytic dimension. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the self-reflective quality of the piece is what generates its potential for signification thus granting the work a degree of openness that allows for the production of new meanings. The relationship between music and dance in *Both Sitting Duet* is constructed around their shared fluid condition of presence and absence, whereby the disappearance of the music makes way for the appearance of the dance, which in turns allows the rhythmic and acoustic qualities of the musical text to return in a different form. In a performative embodiment of the Derridean notion that 'nothing ... is ever simply present or absent' (Derrida, 1981, p.

26), the interplay of the music and the dance can be said to generate a ‘movement of play’ in which the language of choreography becomes the ‘field of infinite substitutions’ (Derrida, 1978, p. 289). The centrality of the one and the subordination of the other are questioned, reversed and reinterpreted in the light of their mutual ‘supplementarity’, where signification arises from the difference between linguistic modes and between signifiers and signifieds.

Drawing on a close observation of the piece’s formal and structural elements, in this chapter I propose an analysis of *Both Sitting Duet* as a highly structured dance piece whose concern with formal elements and apparent decontextualisation from any reference external to it generate a new form of engagement with the outside world, thus producing an alternative mode of expression and communication to the referential one. Firstly, I describe the components of the dance and the patterns underlying the structure of the piece; these are observed in relation to the musical score on whose ‘trace’ the choreography is constructed. I then move on to analyse the place of this duet within Burrows’s production and in the wider framework of the forms of dance that Foster identifies as ‘reflective’ (1986). Finally, drawing on the visual art theoretician Filiberto Menna’s notion of an ‘analytic line’³ within modern art and on Barthes’s theory of semiology, I offer an interpretation of the textural qualities and multi-layered structure of the piece and of the way it subverts conventional processes of meaning formation. In this reading it is also suggested that the work’s metalinguistic approach is symptomatic of a critical engagement with the institution of dance and, ultimately, with the outside world.

7.2 Intertwining musical gestures

With the house lights still on, Burrows and Fargion walk into the performance space and sit down on the two chairs placed in the middle, slightly turned towards each other. On the floor in front of them lie two open notebooks. The two men, both in their forties, wear everyday clothes – jeans, a shirt or t-shirt and boots. After a short pause, just enough to adjust their position on the chairs for better comfort and gather their concentration, they begin the execution of their choreography. Already from the first minute, the performative elements (lights, silence, ordinary clothes, middle-aged performers, seated position, pausing, back-stage-like actions) deny expectations

conventionally associated with a dance duet with regard to scenic elements, age of the dancers, and the kinetic dimension of the piece.

The choreography opens with gestural phrases performed alternately and repeated six or seven times: Fargion rubs the back of his hands on his thighs, from hips to knees, and then bluntly brings his hands to his ears, as if to stop them, but without touching them; Burrows starts with his hands resting on his knees, gestures towards the right, with his hands joining and the middle fingers touching, then reaches down for the floor with his right hand. After approximately twenty seconds, Burrows picks up Fargion's phrase and both performers repeat it four times in unison and five times alternately before Burrows goes back to his first pattern. After just over a minute, a new phrase is introduced, which they repeat successively, Burrows leading: the right hand reaches for the left hand, slides on its palm then up to the forearm and down again to rejoin the left hand and over, ending with only the fingers touching. About thirty seconds later, they synchronise their movements and continue in unison, with a pattern that looks like a smaller version of the previous one, where the movement stops at the hands, without going over the wrists and up to the forearms. They repeat it six times, then pause, then perform it one more time. A longer pause follows, after which they both look down at their notebooks. In the next sequence, made of alternate and slightly overlapping phrases, whilst Burrows repeats his partner's first movement phrase, Fargion introduces a new jerky gestural pattern, where the tips of his fingers touch, the hands suddenly twist and bluntly move down to touch the knees. The next minute or so is a combination of repetitions of patterns already performed, with variations of the speed, rhythm, succession, duration, energy, size, quality and details of the movements.

The structural and compositional characteristics of the whole choreography can be deduced already from the opening section. Steady, regular rhythms are often interrupted by pauses or changes of speed; synchronised actions are followed by alternate or overlapping execution; long sequences of repetitions are interspersed by short, unexpected new phrases; movements are now vigorous now soft, now big now small; precise, almost pedantic gestures alternate with a relaxed, casual attitude; phrases are replicated almost identically or with visible or imperceptible alterations. Generally, the movements involve interaction of the right hand with the left and contact of the hands with other parts of the body, such as thighs, knees, feet, chest.

shoulders, head and face and occasionally with the floor and with the partner's hand and shoulder.

The piece was choreographed sequence by sequence. Burrows and Fargion followed the principle that they should not look for interesting patterns, but simply execute the movements that felt most 'spontaneous' to them, with no reference to their inscribed meanings.⁴ The work has its antecedent in the five-minute solo piece *Hands*, initially created for the camera and subsequently also performed live, consisting solely of hand movements.⁵ The 2002 duet develops the theme of this short choreography – 'a beautiful miniature', according to Duerden (2001, p. 553) – into a full-length production and, by taking its reductive approach to an even more radical stage, produces what critics have described as 'a seemingly endless variety of possibilities of execution and combination' (Siegmund, 2002, n.p.).

Although the choreography is performed in silence, the performance has a distinctive acoustic dimension. Sounds are produced by movement itself – the clapping and smacking of hands, their rubbing and brushing on the rough material of the trousers, the knocking of knuckles on the soles of the shoes – and the performers' breathing can be heard after sequences of fast and frantic gesturing. If these swishing and smacking sounds, together with the vocal outbursts emitted by the two performers towards the end, are the main elements of the soundscape of the piece, the musicality of this work is nevertheless to be ascribed mainly to its complex rhythmic arrangement. Since the movement sequence is conceived as a 'transcription' of a piece of music, where bodily moves are constructed as physical responses to the score's acoustic and rhythmic inputs, both the concept and the compositional structure of the duet are informed by a strong musical dimension.

The composition that the two performers execute in gestural 'transcription' is the 1982 violin and piano piece *For John Cage* by the American composer Morton Feldman.⁶ This score served as a basis for the construction of the movement phrases, whose gestures and patterns are recorded in the form of personal annotations in the notebooks lying at the performers' feet: numeric sequences and words in Burrows's and notes in Fargion's. These notebooks are referred to throughout the piece and the performers occasionally interrupt a movement sequence to turn a page.

On another level, however, the simple movements of the choreography are constructed from culturally transmitted, corporeal behaviour and, in evoking body language, gestures and signs, they carry significance in themselves. They encompass, consist of, and refer to, traces which suggest that meaning is to be found beyond the formal boundaries of the text, in the ‘play of differences’, ‘the spacing by means of which elements are related to each other’ (Derrida, 1981, p. 27). At the heart of the piece’s underlying concept is an exploration of relations and *différences*: between dance movement and everyday movement, between meaningful gestures and empty gestures and, above all, between the modes of dance and those of music.

Feldman, a member of the so-called New York School, comprising both visual artists and composers, created works using individual notes and microtones which, instead of being arranged closely together to create continuity, are treated as fragments, as sounds that ‘exist in themselves’ (Feldman, 1965, p. 35).⁷ *For John Cage* is a delicate composition of quiet sounds that plays with the repetition of notes and their length (Feldman, 1999, note accompanying the CD). It is an ongoing dialogue between the violin and the piano, constructed around reproductions of sequences of sonorities and variations of their rhythm, emphasis and colour. As with most of Feldman’s late works, this piece is arranged in patterns, a compositional tool that the composer became fascinated with in his mature years, inspired by Jasper Johns’s crosshatch paintings of the 1970s and, especially, by Central Asian nomadic rugs, which Feldman started to collect around the same time (Johnson, 2002b; Bernard, 2002).⁸ In both these types of visual work, the inevitable occurrence of change in reiteration seems to put into question compositional ideas such as symmetry, development and hierarchy. Indeed Feldman has talked about ‘disproportionate’ or ‘crippled symmetry’ and about ‘balance between movement and stasis’ (1981, pp. 134, 138). This interest in the organisation of the material and in its textural quality signals a correspondence with Burrows’s and Fargion’s compositional methods, in which the application of alternation and variation to arrangement and patterning plays a crucial role (as specifically discussed in Chapter 6 with regard to *The Stop Quartet*).

Thus, in Feldman’s work, if the arrangement in patterns gives the impression of a fixed weave of sounds, subtle and unexpected changes in the tone, duration and energy of the notes break the apparent flatness and immobility of the music and show their illusionary nature (Bernard, 2002). Feldman has described his music as being

‘between categories’ (cited in Bernard, 2002, p. 179) and indeed in his compositions dichotomous qualities seem to coexist: duration/timelessness, closure/openness (Bernard, 2002); simplicity/complexity, uniformity/difference (Johnson, 2002b); unpredictability/sameness, continuity/discontinuity (Sabbe, 1996); order/disorder, self-similarity/surprise (York, 1996).

Hence, in *For John Cage*, despite the lack of linear development in the composition, the score is static only to a certain extent, since the reproduction of patterns always implies a degree of change. Furthermore, the interaction between the two instruments, whose respective notes seem to be involved in a dialogical exchange, reinforces the potential for transformation within the piece. Differences in timing, pitch or energy create the impression of agreement or disagreement, unity or division, emulation or individuality, ease or tension between the two instruments.⁹

Feldman has been quoted as saying about *For John Cage* that ‘it’s a little piece for violin and piano, but it doesn’t quit’ (Feldman, 1999, note accompanying the CD, n.p.). This observation seems to acknowledge the unrelenting quality of the work – a score made of little, unpretentious elements that keep replicating each other in a seemingly identical way, which nevertheless does not let go of our attention. Burrows’s choreography often presents similar attributes in its use of raw, simple elements arranged in repetitive patterns, and, besides *Both Sitting Duet*, works such as *The Stop Quartet*, *Altogether* and the later *The Quiet Dance* display clarity and coherence of structure alongside a meticulous shaping of the details and layering of the parts.

Feldman’s piece seems to bear the same quality that can be found in the waves of the sea or in the flames of a fire, with their continuous, incessant movement that, in its being repetitive, almost obsessive, and yet utterly engaging, we could sit and watch for hours almost hypnotised. Burrows himself has talked of an ‘obsession’, when referring to the motives behind his and Fargion’s choice of this score as the ‘template’ onto which to construct the duet:

we ... decided to look for something that we could place between us as a starting point. We deliberated about that for months. We looked at texts, movies, music and concepts. In the end we found nothing and we decided that we would go into a studio and work for a week and see what happened. On the first day, Matteo walked in and he said, ‘I’ve found the thing that we were

looking for and it's so obvious that we couldn't see it.' He pulled out the score of a piece of music by Morton Feldman, the violin and piano piece *For John Cage*, which Matteo and I had both been obsessed with about seven or eight years ago.

Burrows, 2002, p. 28.¹⁰

The same kind of surprising predictability can be found in *Both Sitting Duet*. The patterns of gestures that constitute the choreography create a fabric of movement that is at the same time recurring and varied, repeated and different. Moreover, in the piece as in the musical score, the element of change and uncertainty is given both by the modulation of the various dimensions of the movement, such as speed, energy and tone, and by the interplay of similitude/dissimilitude, unity/discord between the two performers.

7.3 Pattern and change

A first substantial contribution on *Both Sitting Duet* was published in 2005 by Valerie Briginshaw, who analyses its structural dynamics in the light of Deleuze's theory of repetition and its intrinsic potential for change. In interpreting the innovative form of signification constructed by the piece, this chapter draws on Briginshaw's notion of its transformative quality, but it also focuses on the choreomusical collaboration that the duet embodies, analysing the structural devices and semantic strategies employed in the work alongside the mode of repetition.

Briginshaw explores the resonances between the 'transgressive character of Deleuze's notion of repetition, which does not repeat the same, but reveals singularities', and the minute variations of the duet's movement patterns, which expose the repetitions to uncertainty, making them unpredictable and therefore 'productive rather than reductive' (2005, pp. 16, 19). This element of surprise accounts for the openness of the work, which, as Briginshaw argues, challenges the notions of replica, origin and representation, suggesting new ways of conceiving the relationship between dance and music and thus acquiring a radical, transformative potential.

The idea that repetition always implies a 'desire for the new' is also explored by Heidi Gilpin in her study of the performative strategies of contemporary European movement performance (1996, p. 111). In her analysis, Gilpin draws on Søren

Kierkegaard's notion of repetition to reveal its 'philosophical and practical significance' (p. 107). In 'Repetition: A Venture in Experimenting Psychology', written in 1843, Kierkegaard argued that repetition is ultimately impossible, in that every reiteration inevitably implies the transcendence of what is being reproduced. The use of repetition in performance is thus seen as a practice that eventually produces change, 'challeng[ing] the spectator to discover new reactions and to create new interpretations' (p. 111).

Repetition clearly informs the process of construction of *Both Sitting Duet*, since transcribing a musical score into a choreographic piece involves reproduction and duplication. Yet a translation is never an exact copy of an original and always assumes an element of adaptation, which implies unplanned and possibly unintended changes. One of the main unexpected effects of the translation of *For John Cage* into *Both Sitting Duet* is related to the mood and atmosphere of the work (Briginshaw, 2005). While working on the choreography, Burrows and Fargion were surprised to see that what they had always considered as a 'hovering, rocking, quiet' piece of music was transforming through their gestural execution into a 'more jolly and folkdancey' work (Burrows cited in Hutera, 2003, n.p.). Commenting on this unexpected shift, Fargion said: 'Feldman's music is very reductive, abstract, very quiet, but surprisingly we did not end up doing small hand gestures with intricate detail. ... We were not following the mood, but using the score as a map' (cited in Cripps, 2004, p. 18).

Nevertheless, in *Both Sitting Duet* difference is not only the ineluctable result of the replication process. As in Feldman's score, it is also deliberately employed in shaping the composition. Variations are introduced in the repetitive sequences of patterns to modify their duration, rhythm, form and tone, as well as to alter the relationship between the two performers. The same patterns of movements can be used as a basis to create new patterns: they can be replicated in a simplified, almost short-hand version, manipulated to create more complex phrases, or given a coda or an extension. They can be performed slowly or fast, repeated a varying number of times, executed with careful precision or nonchalantly. Burrows and Fargion move now in unison now in counterpoint, performing either the same phrase or a variation, following a common tempo or an individual one.

When at one point, about six minutes into the piece, they simultaneously swing their arms down along their torsos, with fast and energetic movements, Fargion's hands stop and rest on his knees every four swings, against Burrows's every five. A couple of minutes later, when Burrows starts a pattern placing his right hand on his right knee, palm up, and his left hand on his left knee, palm down, and then turning both hands over towards the left, Fargion picks up the phrase, executing it each time shortly after Burrows, but in a shortened version, without the final turning over of the hands – in what seems to be a deliberate and almost obstinate attempt to avoid the exact replica of his partner's gesture. Later, about twenty minutes into the performance, as they repetitively turn their torsos sideways, jerkily and energetically, holding their arms close to their body with bent elbows, Burrows follows a fast rhythm of short movements, whereas Fargion breaks up the phrase by pausing between each torsion.

Analogous variations occur also on other levels. For instance, when Fargion, a moment later, places his hand on Burrows's shoulder it is to introduce a change into the types of physical contact featured in the piece – so far confined to each performer's own hands, arms and legs, and now extended to touching the other. Similarly, when Burrows stands up for the first time about twenty-five minutes into the performance, it is to break the sedentary nature of the piece; and when, towards the end, they use their voices, uttering monosyllabic sounds and interjections, it is to interrupt the silence – firstly when Fargion mumbles a 'yam' sound, repeating it to accompany Burrows's 'quiet clapping' (with hands stopping just before they touch), and later when they both repeatedly shout 'hey' whilst 'counting to five' by touching one by one the fingers of their left hand with the forefinger of their right hand.

Changes are also introduced in relation to the musical score, especially with regard to the tempo. In contrast with its regularity throughout Feldman's piece, the tempo is altered in three specific moments in the choreography, with the intention of breaking the 'monolithic' uniformity of the score (Fargion, 2005, n.p.).¹¹ Although entailing a modification of the material on which the dance is constructed, these variations are nevertheless carried out in line with the spirit of Feldman's work, which, as Fargion puts it, is about being 'true to the material', that is, composing in a linear fashion rather than following preconceived ideas, and thus being open to change (2005, n.p.).

The introduction of variations in the chains of gestures undermines the regularity and centrality of the piece's structure and exposes its fluidity and instability. Difference generates shifts in the sequences of gestures, disrupting and rewriting perceived correspondences between the movements and their images and contexts, thus opening meaning to a multiplicity of interpretations. By deconstructing the unity of the gestural signs and the fixity of their arrangement, the choreography draws attention to the gaps left by what has been removed and to the place occupied by what has been added. In a Derridean sense, the discrepancies in the texture expose the 'floating' nature of signification (Derrida, 1978, p. 289).

Hence, as Briginshaw (2005) points out, although the piece appears to be composed of a series of repetitive patterns, its predictability is deceptive since variations are applied to all levels and dimensions of the work, and the dividing line between reproduction and change, stasis and mobility is blurred. This is also what seems to hold the attention of the spectators. Several reviews, both in Britain and abroad, have reported that audiences have been fascinated by the piece, and critics have declared to have been compelled and almost hypnotised: 'the audience was rapt. Will you believe me if I tell you this wasn't tedious? Far from it. Just the opposite. The more things remained, so to speak, the same ... the more fascinating the whole business became' (Tobias, 2004, n.p.); '[the] show is both entertaining and utterly absorbing; I doubt if anyone in the audience took their eyes off the seated figures for a second' (Williams, 2003, n.p.); 'one of the most enchanting things I've ever seen' (Brown, 2003b, n.p.); 'and we look, are held, are thrilled, as our eyes become accustomed to this minute and searching exercise, where a finger becomes as significant as a *fouette*, and we learn to see differently, more clearly' (Crisp, 2004b, p. 17).

Yet, despite its praised liveliness and unpredictability, *Both Sitting Duet* is a highly choreographed piece, which does not allow for improvisatory elements. Thus, when concurring with Briginshaw's definition of the duet as an 'open work' (2005, p. 16), it is necessary to specify that this openness does not reside in the way the piece is constructed or performed (that is, the work is not improvisational), but in the way in which it is perceived, both by the performers who, whilst executing the choreography, also experience it through their bodies, and especially by the audience.

Burrows's choreography embodies the textual openness that Eco (1979) identifies in contemporary artworks. In an early theorisation of this concept in *Opera Aperta*, his study on the 'open work' first published in 1962, Eco refers to the poetics of works that are not 'determined' and 'concluded' by their author but receive their final form at the moment either of their execution by the performer or of their reception by the audience (Eco, 1976, p. 33). Among the various forms of openness that an art piece can embody, Eco's first interest here is in what he calls 'moving works', essentially works whose physical structure has as many unexpected possibilities as their theoretical readings (p. 46). Thus these reflections lead to the creation of a sort of a hierarchy of openness, where the first level – that of the highest 'intensity' (p. 60) – is occupied by artistic forms whose shape and execution are as open and indefinite as their interpretation, such as serial music, action painting or kinetic art. On the contrary, Burrows's piece seems to blur this distinction, thus supporting Eco's later application of this interpretive theory to a wider notion of artistic text. Indeed, whilst the choreographer's principles of composition and performance do not presuppose the freedom of gesture of the forms of art initially analysed by Eco, the embodiment of the duet in performance and the audience's reception of it introduce an element of indefiniteness which challenges the fixity of its structure and exposes the ephemerality of its completion.

Although *Both Sitting Duet* is based on a set choreography, it appears to generate an element of change, which is both discovered by the performers in relation to the musical score, of which they are proposing a translation, and perceived by the audience who, if observing attentively, can recognise its seemingly infinite variations. Thus the work can be said to overcome the dichotomy between openness and closure, freedom and discipline, improvisation and set material in performance – a duality that Burrows himself has said he is interested in breaking down. The choreographer also seeks to challenge the 'moralistic overtones' that this distinction is charged with:

the standard view is that improvisation is more free and set material is more restricted, and my personal experience is that it is not always as simple as that. Sometimes the fact that I'm able to operate within set material and bypass my conscious mind – that's a freedom.

Burrows, Le Roy and Ruckert, 2004, p. 10.

7.4 At the intersection between two worlds

As discussed by Briginshaw, the interplay between pattern and change, repetition and difference, definition and indefinition in *Both Sitting Duet* gives the piece a ‘transformative’ quality that makes it ‘subversive, transgressive and radical’ (Briginshaw, 2005, p. 25). Drawing on Deleuze’s notions of individuation and difference, Self and Other, Briginshaw investigates how this innovative potential lies also in the relationship between the two performers, and calls attention to their intense interaction, evident intimacy and subtle complicity, which several critics have linked to their long-standing friendship and numerous years of artistic collaboration (Brown, 2003a; Frater, 2004; Mackrell, 2004b; Parry, 2004). Their relaxed attitude and the unselfconscious looks and gestures they exchange throughout the piece reveal the ease with which they work together, sharing each other’s art and inhabiting each other’s space. Briginshaw sees in this mutual affection a ‘radical blurring of subject and object and self and other’ (p. 25), which she relates to Deleuze’s idea that the Other, far from being in binary opposition with the Self, is in fact what ‘allows individuations to take place’ (p. 16), in that, by generating differentiation by means of its own expressivity, it makes processes of distinction and identification possible.

Difference is at play here also in its Derridean sense, of a deferral of completion and of the need for a ‘supplement’, which ‘is added to make up for a deficiency, but as such it reveals a lack’ (Harari, 1979, p. 34). Burrows’s and Fargion’s expressivity is enhanced by their respective differentiation from one another, which undermines the logic of centrality and hierarchy, suggesting a new way of collaborating that is neither one of dependence nor of independence of one from the other, but is built around the space between the two.

This new mode of relating to each other is embodied in the duet by the musical notion of counterpoint, which informs many combinations of patterns of gestures in the movement sequences, and by the interpretation of it that the two performers have discovered in working on the piece. As Burrows explains, whilst his understanding of counterpoint had always implied ‘a tension between the parts’, Fargion introduced the new perspective that ‘counterpoint assumes love between the parts’ (Burrows, 2002, p. 28). This reading suggests ideas of complementariness and desire, of completing

one another and filling each other's voids, which seem to be the principles upon which the choreography is constructed.

In this respect, the partnership between Burrows and Fargion is interesting also from the point of view of the relationship between a trained and a non-trained dancer. The description of the piece provided in this chapter has shown how the choreography is made of simple movements of body parts and it is performed in an understated fashion, which, whilst occasionally emphasising precision, is as far from virtuosic and glamorous as it can be. Nevertheless, several critics and reviewers have commented on the contrast between the fluid movements and 'unmistakable grace' of the dancer, whose 'arms and hands are extraordinarily expressive', and the less elegant gestures of the non-dancer, executed with 'slightly less ease and elasticity' (Williams, 2003, n.p.).

Fargion is stocky ... and his gestures have a solidity, a strong base from which they emerge, which is in dramatic contrast to the greater fluidity, the greater speed, the dancer's-body-resonances of Burrows' movements, which resonate through his torso.

Crisp, 2004b, p. 17.

Somewhere midway through the performance you see in a flash how Burrows's own past as a top dancer at the Royal Ballet comes to the surface in the precision and elegance with which he folds his arms in front and above his torso. However scrupulously Fargion moves with him, it is precisely this elusive lightness that he does not achieve: his movements swing, much more.

T'Jonck, 2002, n.p.

However, in the light of Briginshaw's argument that expressivity emanates from the space between two identities, the distinctive traits of Burrows's and Fargion's performance can be read in terms not of a binary opposition, i.e. dancer and non-dancer, but of two worlds, dance and music, interacting and being enriched by their interconnection. Thus, what the piece creates is not simply a duet by two performers, one of whom is a trained dancer and the other is not. By not reiterating this dichotomy, the piece becomes a collaboration between a choreographer/dancer and a composer/musician, whose result is more than the sum of its parts. As Deborah Jowitt has observed, 'we can admire the differences in the men's personal styles: the dancer and the musician as musician-dancers' (2004, n.p.). Fargion's movements may not flow as easily and gracefully as Burrows's, but their rhythmical precision is what gives the piece its distinctive musicality. Furthermore, since the ordinary movements

of the choreography challenge traditional categorisations of styles and techniques, it can be argued that the piece questions the existence of codified principles that legitimise the choice of fluidity and grace, for example, as the most appropriate parameters to evaluate the dance. Describing Burrows's movements as more compact and articulate than Fargion's implies the framework of a discipline which measures excellence on the basis of these qualities. Whereas, by proposing a new form of collaboration between two arts, this duet breaks away from the system of semiotic codes and audience's expectations they imply.

Exploring a new way of collaboration between dance and music is also one of the declared intentions at the origin of the project. As Burrows explains,

it seemed that it was time to do something with Matteo Fargion, and in a different way than we'd done before. We've worked together for nearly fifteen years, but I've always commissioned him. He has performed with me before, even physically, and he has choreographed sections of two pieces before, so that wasn't new. What was new was doing something as equals with an equal stake.
Burrows, 2002, p. 28.

The search for a new way of working together also played a role in the choice of the seated position for almost the entire piece. In this respect, Burrows continues: 'we thought that Matteo should only work physically if nobody questioned why he was doing it. For him to be sitting would put him more in the context of a musician' (p. 28). Thus, in this choreomusical collaboration, the musician joins the dancer in postures and gestures that resemble those of an orchestra. Hence the differing qualities of their performances can be observed from multiple perspectives, all of which are equally relevant, but at the same time partial if considered in isolation from the others. From the point of view of choreography, the duet seems to challenge the fine line between simple, everyday movements and dance, also questioning the description and evaluation of their execution in terms of degrees of perfection and virtuosity. From a musical point of view, the piece can be observed in terms of its rhythmical qualities and of the possibilities of interaction between two different instruments. From the point of view of the equal partnership it establishes, *Both Sitting Duet* challenges preconceived ideas of what the relationship between a choreographer and a composer should be and suggests new ways that they can collaborate and enrich one another.

7.5 Generating modes of signification

Innovation at the level of composition, which proposes an unconventional approach to the relationship between music and dance, can be seen to extend its transformative quality also to the processes of reception and signification. Because of Burrows's interest in exploring the potential of ordinary movement, in challenging choreographic conventions and in questioning the boundaries of dance, his work can be read in the context of what Foster (1986) has described as 'reflective' rather than 'replicative' dance, a dance that reflects upon itself rather than representing thoughts and emotions. This type of choreography was pioneered by Cunningham in the 1950s-1960s, in opposition to the mode of representation employed by the previous generation of modern dancers, and explored further by the Judson choreographers in the 1960-1970s. Whilst external references and subject matters can often be identified in Burrows's pieces (although more easily and more clearly in the case of his early works than of his latest ones), their focus is not on the expression and illustration of feelings and ideas. Their main concern seems to lie with structural and compositional aspects of the dance, such as its vocabulary, the interaction between its different elements, and its functions. Read from this perspective, Burrows's pieces can be understood as 'dances about movement', which is also how Foster portrays the works by Cunningham and the post-Cunningham choreographers (p. 168) – whom Burrows recognises as reference points for his choreographic research (Burrows, 2005c; see also Chapters 1.3 and 6).

The reflective quality of Burrows's choreography can be read in the light of Menna's (1975) study of the 'analytic' attitude of several twentieth-century artistic investigations, which he sees as no longer concerned with issues such as expression and representation, but focusing instead on a theoretical and self-reflective analysis of their own language. Within this analytic dimension, Menna identifies an 'iconic' and an 'aniconic' line. The former – from Georges Seurat and Paul Cézanne to Cubist painting and collage, Marcel Duchamp's readymades, Hyperrealism and illusionistic painting – questions the referential and mimetic nature of art, challenging its principles of representation; the latter – from abstract forms of painting to Conceptual Art – is described as a 'degree zero' of artistic language, in which the research is centred on basic linguistic units, devoid of denotative meaning, and on the rules of their syntactic organisation. As a result, these forms of art engage in investigations

which find their object in art itself and, by questioning its old codes, result in the creation of new systems of laws. Menna argues that this analytic approach, by limiting art within its own domain and negating its relation with any external reality, allows it to discover 'new contexts of reality', by means of what he calls a 'hermeneutic' function (1975, p. 99). This gives art the capacity to comment on its own social context and to assume a critical position, that is, to gain political value. Hence it could be suggested, following Menna, that the semiotic dimension of Burrows and Fargion's duet, despite its apparent disengagement from what is beyond its own linguistic codes, is inevitably accompanied by an interpretive quality, which enables the work to transcend its own boundaries and engage in a dialectical and critical relationship with the real.¹²

Burrows explains the process of creation of the movement material as a somehow arbitrary one, whereby he and Fargion did not follow any specific criteria in suggesting and choosing the gestural patterns.¹³ However, drawing on a semiotic analysis of the movement sequences and on the examination of various reviews of the work, I suggest that, from the point of view of their relationship with external references, and therefore of their mechanisms of signification, the simple gestures of the piece can be loosely grouped in three categories. Some patterns reproduce movements that have a relationship with a specific context, whether they are drawn from the everyday or from dance techniques, and, although separated from it and juxtaposed with unrelated gestures, continuously replicated or varied in their size and shape, still bear traces of that connection. Other movements do not appear to be linked with any external reference and are read as trajectories that specific parts of the body execute in space and time, which do not obviously resonate with cultural meanings. Other gestures, despite not being explicitly connected with a recognisable context, have evoked images and associations in the minds of some spectators and can be invested of various meanings. The first movements can be described as 'displaced', the second ones as 'deferred' and the third ones as 'discursive'. These three types of movements should be read as fluid groupings that can intersect and overlap, and are intended essentially as useful tools for a preliminary, structural reading of the choreographer's work. Moreover, it is only in relation to the background, sensitivity and expectations of the spectators that connections between the gestures and any external reference or context can be drawn.

Included in the first group are several gestures in the piece that resemble ordinary, practical actions (pushing something away, grabbing something, picking up a speck of dust from the floor or from the trousers with a finger, stopping one's ears, counting to five on the fingers of one hand, clapping hands), movements belonging to a commonly shared gestural language (thumb-up sign, flat-palm stop sign, okay sign, hands-up surrendering sign), as well as phrases from specific dance and music techniques (a classical *port de bras*, an arm pattern from English Morris dance, sol-fa exercises).

The second group contains those movements that are best described in formal terms. These are generally more complex and involve the rotation, swinging and raising of arms, the sliding of hands on other parts of the body or on each other, the gesturing of fingers, the rolling of shoulders, the bending and straightening of legs and so on. The non-referential quality of these movements emerges also in relation to the structure of the piece and in the merely accidental order of the gestural patterns. As Burrows explains, both in the score and in the way in which the two artists perform it, the composition is a series of individual consecutive moments (Burrows, 2004, n.p.).

The last group, the most volatile of all, comprises those gestures to which meanings have been attributed as a result of personal associations sparked in the mind of the viewers. For example, a repetitive turning of the torso sideways with elbows bent brings to mind the act of making one's way through a crowded market; hands rotating in the air are reminiscent of the arm patterns of the tarantella; blunt and jerky hand gestures resemble a heated discussion between two Italians. Or, as reviewers have written, 'the gestures ... sometimes suggested recognizable activities like shooing pigeons' (Dunning, 2004, n.p.); 'their gesticulations seem to mime waving or washing or greeting' (Frater, 2004, p. 43); 'a lot of their material is rooted in the gestures and mannerisms of grumpy old men' (Mackrell, 2004b, p. 30); 'two men on stage are an instant story. Brothers, rivals, work-mates, lovers, Laurel and Hardy, Blair and Brown, the Flowerpot men. All these evocations emerge like a wispy genie out of [the piece]' (Brown, 2003b, n.p.);

here's what *Both Sitting Duet* made me think of: pairs of Parisian intellectuals, sitting in cafes, exchanging abstruse ideas for the fun of it. My uncles hunched over a card table, playing infinite games of pinochle at my grandmother's

house, every Sunday afternoon of my childhood. Deft practitioners of American Sign. Obsessive-compulsives.

Tobias, 2004. n.p.

These different gestures are in some way removed from a context of reference and used in the choreography's movement patterns in combination with extraneous elements, in a sequence of repetitions, or with variations of speed and rhythm. As several critics have observed, they seem to reproduce the dynamics of a conversation. This can be described as a dialogue in different 'languages', all mixed together, some of which are familiar, whilst others are unknown and some others are invented *ad hoc*. The audience for this conversation can therefore appreciate its musicality and enjoy the moments when they can recognise a 'word' or when they think they can make sense of some 'sounds' and 'utterances'.

Besides these three types of movements, a fourth group can be identified, made of the looks and gestures that Burrows and Fargion exchange throughout the performance, of the vocal outbursts and of the pauses to sit back and breathe for a few seconds or to turn a page of their notebooks. Within the logic of a language with its grammar and syntax, the role of these elements can be compared with that of stock phrases and deictic expressions. In the context of a talk, for example, they give rhythm to a verbal exchange, keep the audience involved by attracting their attention and allowing them a break at the right intervals, and set the mood of the conversation and the atmosphere of the gathering. These are the elements that in *Both Sitting Duet* establish a more direct contact with the spectators, make them focus on minute details and on their complex interweaving, and allow them to experience the intimacy and familiarity between the two performers.

On the basis of this examination of how Burrows's dance vocabulary generates signification, the different ways in which his 'signs' seem to work can be related to semiotic theories of the relationship between signifier and signified. The resemblance of the duet to a conversation between two interlocutors in front of an audience makes linguistic notions all the more applicable to the piece, supporting the choice of this theoretical framework for an interpretation of the duet, at least from the point of view of the analysis of the work's strategies of signification.

The movements in *Both Sitting Duet* that have been described as ‘displaced’ can be examined in the light of Ferdinand de Saussure’s (1959) principle of the arbitrariness of the sign and of its relational nature, already referred to by Menna in his study of analytic, non-referential forms of art. These are gestures removed from their context of reference and employed in a new context, within the ‘artificial’ system of the dance piece. The estrangement is operated also through the application of compositional strategies, such as repetition and variation. This dislocation of signifiers from their frame of reference jeopardises their connection with their respective signified, thus showing the constructed nature of this relationship. A trace of that link remains via their retained denotation, but their displacement, which puts into question their connotative meanings, enhances the ambiguity of the signs. This strategy of signification is not new in Burrows’s works and can be found already in his early pieces, such as *Hymns* (Chapter 4) and *Stoics* (Chapter 5). Here Burrows plays with the juxtaposition of elements from contrasting cultural contexts, for example combining well-known and strongly connoted musical scores with unconventional, almost irreverent, movement material (religious hymn tunes with child-like playful and aggressive behaviour in *Hymns*, and the *Blue Danube Waltz* with a comic, almost cartoon-like choreography in *Stoics*), thus wrong-footing the expectations generated by the music and creating an effect of displacement.

Burrows’s ‘deferred’ signs can be read in relation to Barthes’s notions of ‘myth’ and of a ‘degree zero’ of writing. Examining the issue of traditional literature as a myth, in *Mythologies* (first published in 1957) Barthes defines ‘writing as the signifier of the literary myth, that is, as a form which is already filled with meaning and which receives from the concept of Literature a new signification’ (1993, p. 134). He then analyses the crisis that traditional French literature underwent from around the middle of the nineteenth century, in which

the writer violently shifted his position in the direction of an anti-nature of language. The subversion of writing was the radical act by which a number of writers have attempted to reject Literature as a mythical system.

Barthes, 1993, p. 135.

The terms and results of this revolution are analysed in detail in *Writing Degree Zero* (1953, translated 1968), in which the adoption of a transparent, neutral style of writing, that is, its reduction to a ‘degree zero’, is seen as a means of taking a position

against the literary myth. Despite the differences in time and context, it is possible to recognise a similarity between the methods by which writers try to beat the literary system, as described by Barthes, and the strategies adopted by Burrows in challenging conventional codes and techniques of dance. In particular, the non-referential and non-expressive movements adopted in *Both Sitting Duet* can be seen as analogous to the form of extreme ‘degree zero’ of writing identified by Barthes in his study.¹⁴

The most radical way to defeat the literary myth is described by Barthes as an ‘ideal absence of style’ (1968, p. 77), whose aim is

to create a colourless writing, freed from all bondage to a pre-ordained state of language. ... Writing is then reduced to a sort of negative mood in which the social or mythical characters of a language are abolished in favour of a neutral and inert state of form.

Barthes, 1968, pp. 76, 77.

A similar ‘neutral’ quality, which ‘reaches the state of a pure equation’ (pp. 77, 78), can arguably be recognised in those signs of *Both Sitting Duet* that appear to have lost both their denotative and connotative meanings. These movements, which don’t seem to work as signs but only as ‘forms’, and whose purpose appears to be that of challenging traditional vocabularies and grammars of dance, can be found already in some of Burrows’s works from the mid-1990s, and especially in *The Stop Quartet*, which is mainly concerned with issues related to the construction of the piece according to a set of internal rules and with the relationship between the different elements of a choreography (see Chapter 6). This strategy of signification in Burrows’s pieces can be described as metalinguistic, in that, by radicalising its formalisation, the dance ceases to refer to an object outside of itself and becomes self-referential. It becomes a dance about dance, that is, according to Barthes’s definition of metalanguage, ‘a system whose plane of content is itself constituted by a signifying system’ (1973, p. 90).

Both these first two types of movements, the ‘displaced’ and the ‘deferred’, show a degree of de-contextualisation, which nevertheless – as it can be argued following Menna’s (1975) and Barthes’s (1968) discussions – is not symptomatic of an uncommitted attitude. On the contrary, the adoption of strategies that question codified processes of composition and signification in dance with the intent of reflecting on the formal aspects of the discipline and on its boundaries shows

Burrows's position towards the 'institution' of dance and demonstrates his radical choice and critical engagement. But with the third type of movements, the 'discursive' ones, which arguably make their first appearance in *Both Sitting Duet*, Burrows's reconfiguration of the language of choreography is taken further. Through the deconstructive force of its concept and the performative embodiment of it, the piece defies traditional semiotic readings of choreography and challenges conventional strategies of signification. By subverting relations between signs, contents and contexts and by questioning their binary correspondences, the piece generates a mode of communication in which the distinction between meaning and absence of meaning is blurred.

As the literature on the piece points out, the patterns of movements and rhythmical combinations of gestures of the duet have liberated the imagination of some viewers, fostering free association of ideas. Occasionally spectators even confided to Burrows that, watching this silent, yet intensely rhythmical choreography, they thought they could hear the music.¹⁵ Burrows himself acknowledges that the reception of the piece has gone beyond the creators' intentions and finds this particularly fascinating: 'people ... have been interested in how *Both Sitting Duet* references gesture but in a non-specific way. ... It takes gesture out of its normal context, so that the meaning of the gesture is there in one sense and not there in another sense' (Burrows, 2004, n.p.).

Although some reviews have reported perplexed responses from a minority of the audience, and one critic has declared to have been left unsatisfied by this 'theater of the mundane' (Witchel, 2004, n.p.), these negative reactions appear to have occurred only very occasionally. Percival, for instance, wrote: 'one woman clearly disagreed, and scurried away from her seat bang in the centre of the front row after only five minutes The rest of us I think felt very much on [the performers'] side' (2003-2004, p. 75). The use of bodily movements apparently devoid of denotative meanings has generated a communication with the audience, opening the piece to a dialogue with other worlds and contexts. Together, displaced, deferred and discursive gestural signs transform the duet in a weave of 'texts' and 'traces' to which the spectators can give voice by ascribing to them their own personal images and connotations. *Both Sitting Duet* deconstructs oppositions: between telling signs and empty signs, between signifier and signified, between choreography and music composition, between text

and performance, between self and other, between absence and presence; thus the dance can be said to become the site of an intertextual discourse.

7.6 Reverberations of self-reflection

From the perspective of what the work deals with, *Both Sitting Duet* can be described as an example of self-referential dance, a choreography concerned essentially with the movements performed by the dancing body. It can be argued, though, that the piece introduces elements of innovation within the mode of representation that Foster calls 'reflective'. In *Both Sitting Duet*, dance does not only deal with its own articulations and principles, but it investigates their possibilities of interaction with those of music. If, as is argued by Briginshaw (2005) following Deleuze, difference is what makes identification possible, then the interplay of dance and music in the piece allows both arts to define their own potentials and to discover the productivity of their collaboration.

The result of this interaction seems to be that the dance, by focusing on musical principles such as rhythm and counterpoint, develops an alternative mode of signification, which can be seen as realising a fruitful synthesis between the strategies previously adopted in the choreographer's works. This synthesis appears also to bring back, in a new, discursive form, the subject matter that critics have often identified in Burrows's early pieces – an interest in human behaviour and interpersonal relationships. By exploring the modalities and codes of dance in relation to those of music and by employing rhythmic patterns of movements displaced or divorced from their external references, the piece also becomes a reflection on the dynamics between two people, a dancer and a musician, of their intimacy and friendship and of their ways of collaborating.

Finally, by breaking conventional strategies of signification and questioning the distinction between meaning and absence of meaning, the choreography seems to have stimulated the imagination of members of the audience, thus producing a mode of communication in which an apparently self-reflective piece can tell us about the cultural dimension behind and beyond the dance.

Notes

- ¹ An edited version of this chapter has been accepted for publication in Lansdale's collection *Decentring Dancing Texts*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (expected date: June 2008) under the title 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion's *Both Sitting Duet* (2002): a discursive choreomusical collaboration'.
- ² On occasion, the performance space has been a non-typical arena. For example, in Milan (September 2003) the piece was staged in the atrium of La Triennale, the city's museum of modern art and design.
- ³ The term 'analytic' is also employed by Banes in defining the phase of American post-modern dance that came after the 1960s 'breakaway' period (1987, pp. xv, xx). This work demanded the analytic, rather than emphatic, attention of the spectators, who were required to develop an awareness of the conventional frameworks of dance and an understanding of the structures and rules of the performances.
- ⁴ Burrows discussed the creative process of the piece during an undocumented conversation with me on 15 December 2003.
- ⁵ The film was broadcast on BBC2 as part of the *Dance for the Camera* series in 1995. Its stage version was included in the Dance Umbrella 1998 programme and was performed at The Place Theatre as part of *Things I Don't Know*.
- ⁶ *For John Cage* is a seventy-minute work composed by Feldman on the occasion of Cage's seventieth birthday.
- ⁷ As John Cage put it, the New York School composers 'felt the ... necessity to get rid of the glue so that sounds would be themselves' (cited in Nicholls, 2002, p. 21). The term New York School refers to both a number of American painters (including abstract expressionists, abstract impressionists and action painters, among whom were Pollock, Rothko, Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline and Philip Guston) and a group of musicians (including Cage, Feldman, Earle Brown, Christian Wolff and David Tudor) who for a few years around the early 1950s worked together in a climate of mutual exchange. They shared a rejection of tradition and conventions and an interest in personal expression. For a detailed study of the intersections and influences between visual artists and composers within the school, see Johnson, 2002a.
- ⁸ In Anatolian rugs, for instance, the repetition of stitches from the borders to the centre creates patterns that are continuously modified through the use of slight variations (Zukofsky in Feldman, 1990, note accompanying the CD). This effect of almost imperceptible change on a seemingly uniform surface is also given by the slight differences in shade that the dying process produces in the same colour (Bernard, 2002).
- ⁹ For an analysis of *For John Cage* see the note accompanying the recording of the piece by Joje Ter Haar and John Snijders (Feldman, 1999). A detailed study of the composition and its structural principles can be found in York, 1996.
- ¹⁰ About the use of a 'found' score as a material onto which to construct the choreography and about the reasons behind this choice, Fargion has commented: 'that was the right score at the right time. I would find it very boring to make a piece with another "found" score. It was just the idea that this was a piece that we both loved – I actually gave up writing music for at least a year because I kept trying to reproduce this piece, and even before I was completely obsessed by this piece, because for me it's the greatest piece ever written (although now I'm not so sure!). So it had that history as well. It wasn't just a piece, it was *the* piece' (2005, n.p.).
- ¹¹ Although Burrows and Fargion have described their duet as a 'direct transcription – with the same tempo, bar for bar, note for note' of Feldman's score, they have also acknowledged some changes that they have made in translating the music into choreography: 'we did cheat, only in small changes of tempo. That's why the performance lasts about 45 minutes. It shrunk' (Burrows and Fargion cited in Hutera, 2003, n.p.).
- ¹² Menna's discussion of how art operates in relation to its object (whether it is external to it or within it) draws on structuralist theories of the linguistic sign, namely on Saussure's principle of the arbitrary relationship between signifier and signified, which the Italian scholar sees as having influenced the development of an analytic dimension in modern art. Linguistic observations on how the signifier and the signified relate to each other within the unit of the sign can be useful to clarify Burrows's movement vocabulary and grammar, which critics and reviewers have often classified as 'abstract'.
- ¹³ See Note 4.
- ¹⁴ In Barthes's analysis this style is represented by Albert Camus.

¹⁵ As a critic reports, ‘Burrows ... has been delighted to hear gales of laughter from French, Italian and Swedish audiences, or comments afterwards that “I’ve heard the music – only there is none.” “That excites me, that something happens that make [*sic*] the senses become confused”’ (Brown, 2003a, p. 19).

PART 3

INSCRIBED CONTINUITIES

CHAPTER 8

Traces of dance

Following the threads of repetitions and citations (*The Quiet Dance* and *Speaking Dance*)

The mapping and exploration of Burrows's choreographic landscape proposed in Part 2 of the thesis have led to the identification of modes and approaches through which dance performance and dance making are reconfigured in his work by rethinking their conventions and possibilities. In this last part of the thesis I draw together the multiple lines of the detailed analysis that supports the readings of individual pieces formulated in previous chapters to construct an interpretation of the most recent and, I propose, especially suggestive developments of the work, and of its value and significance as a whole. In particular, in this chapter I examine how Burrows's trilogy of duets with Fargion draws on linguistic, compositional, imaginative and conceptual approaches explored and employed in previous creations to arrive at a synthesis of their artistic and signifying potential.¹

8.1 Compounding signs, suggestions and stories

The innovative partnership that Burrows and Fargion established in *Both Sitting Duet* can be seen both as the result of their long-standing artistic association and personal friendship and as the catalyst for an interesting development in the choreographer's work. This choreomusical collaboration sparked further research on the relationships between dance and music, which subsequently led to the production of two more works in a relatively short period of time: *The Quiet Dance* (2005) and *Speaking Dance* (2006). Burrows has talked on more than one occasion about the urgency behind the creation of these two latest works, which deal with recurring interests and unresolved issues of his and Fargion's artistic research in dance and music and in their dialogic intersections, as well as with more intimate questions and themes of an emotional nature (Burrows, 2005a; 2005b; 2006d).

When I saw *The Quiet Dance* for the first time at its premiere in Munich in August 2005, what I read was the life of two people, their journeys, their experiences and intersections, and the different moods and phases of their relationship. In the forty-five minutes of the performance, Burrows and Fargion 'walk' separately and together, towards each other and away from each other; they interact on an equal level or they alternate in guiding and pushing one another. Now they play like children, now they pause and think. When Burrows repeatedly looks up to the ceiling and then suddenly lies down on his back with a succinct series of almost robotic actions, an image of dying springs to mind. Repeatedly, at different moments during the piece, they perform quick and contorted arm patterns in counterpoint, which echo gestures of prayer and the sign of the cross. Towards the end of the piece, as they walk with their torsos bent forwards and touch the floor with the back of their right hands, with cadenced movements of the arm in various directions, I wondered whether such gestures, suggestive of spreading seeds, were a metaphor for sowing life. At periodic intervals, they meet in the centre, softly clap their hands once and crouch down facing each other, thus marking the end of a phase of activity and signalling a pause. During several sections of the performance they produce vocalisations with ascending and descending notes, which are tightly interwoven with the movement patterns, and appear to mirror the ups and downs of their journey. After seemingly incessant repetitions of winding trajectories and brisk diagonal crossings of the stage, they come to a halt and let their hands do the wandering instead: moving back and forth and around in circles, their hand trails seem to condense these moving journeys, which in turn summarise their life adventures and encounters.

The duo's latest work, *Speaking Dance*, which received its premiere at The Place Theatre in London as part of the Dance Umbrella programme in October 2006, also draws on personal references and impressions, which, if connected to the traces and suggestions intertwined in the previous two works, can be read as a continuation, a development of the same 'story'. The works are framed as a trilogy, which may justify a reading that looks for connections and intertextual references between the dances. In this new collaboration, Burrows and Fargion build on their first two duets and go a step further, moving from the silence and stray sounds, the seated posture and the walking patterns of their previous compositions to create a new form of language, made of words, texts, music and folk songs, as well as of gestures,

movement phrases and bodily attitudes. In fact, the ‘sitting’ and ‘quiet’ elements of the first two works of the trilogy were anything but stillness and rest; rather, they embodied a condition of latency, a sort of calm before the storm (Perazzo, 2007). In this respect, it is significant that, whilst Burrows described *The Quiet Dance* as the piece that ‘lies just underneath’ the rest of his work and explores what ‘unfolds more slowly and in its own terms’ (cited in Perazzo, 2005c, pp. 3, 6),² for *Speaking Dance* he talks about a resurfacing of images and materials that played a part in the creative processes behind previous performances but did not make it into the final compositions (Burrows, 2006d). Ideas and choreographic fragments that had been haunting them throughout their collaborations and kept coming back, but never seemed appropriate material as they did not fit into the clear logic of the other two duets, were consciously allowed to enter in this new work, where they fought for their right to some space within the overall structure.

The interpretations of Burrows’s choreography proposed in this thesis draw on the researcher’s imaginative engagement with the work as much as on theoretical and critical references (Chapters 2 and 3). Through a reading that turns more openly to my intuitive and empathic dialogue with the evocative and suggestive power of the dances, in this chapter I discuss the way in which the choreographer’s recent works with Fargion are composed through a close dialogue with previous creations, from the point of view of both their methodological procedures and their subject matters. The threads, whether evident or subtle, that link these pieces to each other and with artistic references that Burrows has professedly looked at for inspiration throughout his career – as disparate as Nijinska and the Judson Church choreographers, minimalist composers and folk traditions – are at the root of the argument constructed here that the trilogy comprising *Both Sitting Duet*, *The Quiet Dance* and *Speaking Dance* can be read as the epitome of the choreographer’s creative work to date, of his attitude towards composition, of his treatment of reference material and of his choice of themes and ideas. Throughout the chapter, threads and correlations, whether inscribed in the dances or ascribed to them in the act of reading, are investigated and attention is drawn to their relational dimension. These correspondences might be seen to generate a distinctive and unusual form of narrative, which challenges conventional notions of structure, development of the subject matter and depiction of characters. It could be argued that the narrative constructed in these three works finds unity and

coherence in the continuity of the modes, contexts and situations of its telling rather than in the linearity and progression of what is said.

From a methodological perspective, this interpretation draws on a close analysis of the choreographic material, inextricable from a dialogic, intertextual and intersubjective interrogation of the dances and of the creative processes behind them. A significant role has been played in this examination by the ongoing dialogue with Burrows, which has led to a continuous questioning of the notion and process of interpretation and a constant negotiation of the choreographer's and researcher's respective positions in the exchange. The dynamics of this dialogue, the shifts in the nature of the choreographer's engagement in it and the formulation of readings that reveal a concurrence of ideas and sensitivity between artist and interpreter are crucial elements in the acknowledgement of the existence of a multiplicity of voices in the construction of the meanings of the work and of the dialogical, hermeneutical nature of interpretation (see Chapter 2).

8.2 A fascination with old-fashioned ideas

The Quiet Dance is composed of short sequences of basic steps and moves, organised in seemingly endless repetitions. Burrows and Fargion, in everyday clothes, walk from the back wings onto the stage (which, in their usual fashion, is a bare space, generally a studio theatre) and stop next to each other. Soon Burrows begins: he moves eight steps forward, crossing the space diagonally in a straight line, his knees and torso bending progressively forwards, as if shrinking; then he suddenly stops, bending his right arm sharply inwards and turning around. Meanwhile, Fargion stands still and, for the whole duration of Burrows's walk, vocalises an 'aahh' sound in descending tones. This combination of phrases is repeated ten times, then three more after a short pause. Next, the roles are inverted: Fargion does the walking and Burrows stands still vocalising a 'ssh' sound. This sequence is executed six times, followed by the same phrases and vocalisations repeated in alternate order. Diagonal trajectories change into walks in a circle or random wandering, accompanied by either of the two types of sounds, by a staccato 'a-m' note, by a birdsong soundtrack, or by silence. Then, facing each other, they execute a semaphore-like arm pattern, with

arms lifting up, rotating, bending and straightening around their shoulders and heads, until they clap hands, crouch down and pause.

The mechanics of entries and changes has a clock-work precision already noted by critics in *The Stop Quartet* (see Chapter 6); the movements are jerky and sharp; the walks are flat-footed, almost cartoon-like. The actions appear deliberately estranged from a context or purpose, which gives the scene an odd, surreal quality. The simplicity of the steps is startling, yet their ordinariness is challenged by the exaggeration of the number of repetitions, which, at least in the first minutes, keep taking the audience by surprise. At this stage, the spectators respond with both puzzlement and amusement, still uncertain as to what the appropriate reaction would be. Nine more sections follow, constructed around several series of repetitions of similar phrases and patterns; they all end in the same way, with a clapping of hands in unison and a pause.

As can be deduced from this description of the first section of the dance and of its general structure, the movement score of *The Quiet Dance* is mainly made of walking patterns and their obstinate repetition. However, the piece is also constructed around emotional references of personal relevance. In this sense, it embodies both the strictest realisation of Burrows and Fargion's compositional ideals and their betrayal. On the one hand, it centres around a clear working principle, to which it remains faithful from start to finish. In other words, the movement patterns are made of simple pedestrian movements and never deviate from them, with walking being the recurrent action that the choreography constantly draws on. On the other hand, the piece ventures into a territory that is not typical of Burrows and Fargion, in that it allows imaginative elements and processes to enter the work and affect compositional choices. Whilst in its intentions this collaboration with Fargion is what Burrows describes as 'the piece that we really always wanted to make and never dared to make', that is, a piece that only uses walking (cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 3), in the process of its making, and in the reader's response, it opened up to an artistic procedure that he calls 'old-fashioned' (p. 4) because it relies on the involvement of an emotional perspective in the act of creation:

the way that we've approached this is to concentrate on images. In other words, not on pattern, rhythm and structure, but on very strong images, which is something I never do. I mean, there is pattern, structure and rhythm in the

work, but there's also an emphasis on the images that you see and on their impact.

Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 3.

Whilst the tension between these two conflicting stances may be seen as the sign of a contradiction in the rationale behind the piece, it is also indicative of the relational nature of Burrows's creative practice, which proposes a synthesis between the compositional methods that he draws inspiration from and his individual choices. As in previous choreographies, but possibly here even more transparently, the work is constructed in dialogue with minimalist and abstract tendencies, the heritage and influence of which are both accepted and questioned through their combination with other elements. These are either borrowed from other artistic traditions, especially folk and balletic ones, or are references of a personal nature. I argue that the simplicity of the movements and of their arrangement in sequences of repetitions shows a link with formalist practices, whilst the presence of a thematic content and of narrative elements challenges the self-sufficiency of the choreography as a mere combination of formal patterns.

In the handful of reviews that followed the London performances of the work in October 2005, references to minimalism are the common denominator (Gilbert, 2005; Haight, 2005). Some critics highlighted the 'limited' and 'constrained' nature of the movement vocabulary and patterns (Mallinson, 2005, n.p.), as well as the 'deadpan' execution by the two performers (Hutera, 2005, p. 21). Expressing the idea of the choreography's reduction of the physical material to the bare minimum with rather colourful language, one of the German reviews of the Munich premiere earlier that summer described the simple walking patterns as a 'monkey' affair: 'they locomote like primates' (Fischer, 2005, n.p.). In commenting on the 'narrow range' of the movement vocabulary (Hutera, 2005, p. 21), these articles draw attention to one of the features of the work that Burrows himself considers to be distinctive: 'there's very little movement material in the work. I've never been involved in a performance with so little material' (cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 5). Nevertheless, critics have often failed to appreciate the complexity of the choreographer's relationship with minimalist aesthetics.

Whilst a convergence with minimalist and abstract tendencies can be recognised in Burrows's work throughout his career, and became more evident in dances such as

Hands, *The Stop Quartet* and *Altogether* (see Chapter 6), in the choreographer's more recent work this legacy is acknowledged even more openly – for example through the choice of starting points such as a musical composition of minimalist inspiration in *Both Sitting Duet* (Feldman's *For John Cage*) and a dance made of walking sequences in *The Quiet Dance*. However, it can be argued that in the collaborations with Fargion, although Burrows's relationship with minimal and abstract art has become more explicit, it has also taken on a new dimension, where the involvement with these artistic positions implies the development of a certain distance from the reference material and demonstrates the elaboration of a personal approach towards the relationship between form and content.

Burrows has often described his creative method as based on the observation, from the beginning to the end of a composition, of precise parameters of exploration of the dance material through a series of tasks (Burrows and Etchells, 2004). This is a procedure that he shares with Fargion, whose minimalist background is evident in his choice of constructing each piece from a set of principles, according to which the compositional material is treated and arranged (Fargion, 2005; Burrows, 2006d). This methodological stance is in line with the choreographer's fascination with the clarity of the vocabulary of minimalist dance, made of a limited range of pedestrian movements. Nevertheless, in Burrows's work, an interest in these principles is always coupled with a strong awareness of the context they have grown out of – that is, early postmodern dance – and with a questioning of their appropriateness in current work, more than thirty years later. In this respect, in the case of his recent collaborations with Fargion, the requirements that come from working with an untrained dancer seem to provide a new justification for this aesthetic choice.

The first thing about making a piece is that you need somewhere to begin. And if you are collaborating you need to find somewhere to begin that you and your collaborator agree upon, an itch that both feel a desperate need to scratch. In the case of this duet with Matteo Fargion, we had always had a longing to make a piece which used walking. This always seemed impossible to do because that piece belongs to minimalism. But this time we talked about it a lot, we agonised about it and we decided that it was time that we had to risk that. Partly because we wanted to make another performance together where we both moved, and walking is something that Matteo, as an untrained dancer, has; it's his as much as it's mine.

Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 3.

Although in *The Quiet Dance* minimalism is once again the reference point, it is called into play so explicitly that it is taken out of its context and becomes a form of quotation. This form of textual relationship with heritage and history is identified by Hutcheon as one of the main traits of postmodernism, whose ambivalent position towards the past fluctuates between ‘rupture’ and ‘connection’ and implicates the ‘acknowledge[ment of] ... the inevitable textuality of our knowledge of the past’ (1988, pp. 125, 127). Drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of ‘art within the archive’ (p. 125) and on Kristeva’s, Barthes’s and Eco’s (amongst others) elaborations of notions of intertextuality, Hutcheon argues that

among the many things that postmodern intertextuality challenges are both closure and single, centralized meaning. Its willed and wilful provisionality rests largely upon its acceptance of the inevitable textual infiltration of prior discursive practices.

Hutcheon, 1988, p. 127.

A similar ‘willed and wilful’ openness to other texts and approaches characterises Burrows’s body of work, from his early pieces through to his latest trilogy, through deliberate references to forms of his training and background and a consistent and unrelenting research into the modes of dance. In this sense, Burrows’s rethinking of the place and parameters of dance is in line with other current European choreography, which, according to Lepecki, ‘rather than rehearsing a modernist rupture with the past, ... sees the past as a common ground, as the surface it is inevitably destined to wander on’ (2004, p. 170; see also Chapter 1) – and in the case of *The Quiet Dance*, this ‘wandering’ aptly takes the literal form of a walking through stages of Burrows’s relevant past. Furthermore, Lepecki’s insightful analysis that ‘this wandering happens both as a resteping of known paths and as a stumbling upon the unexpected reconfigurations of what might have been there’ (pp. 170-171) appears appropriate to a reading of Burrows and Fargion’s two most recent works, in which the past is brought back through, respectively, a mapping of its disparate courses (*The Quiet Dance*) and a rediscovery of its surprising potential (*Speaking Dance*).

It is my contention that in *The Quiet Dance*, Burrows’s relationship with early postmodern tendencies appears to have matured into a highly personal elaboration of the methodological and stylistic conventions characteristic of this type of art, via their combination with a multiplicity of other references and texts. This allows the

choreographer a greater level of freedom in the treatment of the material, with the result that images and emotions are distilled and condensed to fit in the geometrical shape of the composition. Thus *The Quiet Dance* appears to marry Burrows's rigorous formalist research of the 1990s with the warm, human qualities of his early work.

What ... makes [this work] slightly different from other pieces that I've tried to make is that normally I had the philosophy that the best way to make a dance is to accept that the movement that you make is in some way arbitrary, that anything is available to you, that everything is valid, and that it's how you place it in relation to itself and in relation to what other people are doing at the same time, and how you place it in time and space that can completely shift its meaning and arrive at an unexpected and much bigger meaning than the original movement could possibly ever have suggested. But with this piece I decided, and I kind of persuaded Matteo, 'that's enough with the arbitrary. Let's choose material that means something to us.'

Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 3.

Hence Burrows resorted to the 'old-fashioned' procedure of drawing on personal emotions to construct the dance, coupling the modernist stance of expressivity with the minimalist rationale of clarity of means and methods. Despite, or possibly because of, its old-fashioned character, this recourse to intimate references can be linked to what could be seen as a distinctive trait of postmodern artistic, literary and critic positions, that is, a renewed concern with the world of the 'subject' in the form of a 'challenge to any aesthetic theory or practice that either assumes a secure, confident knowledge of the subject or elides the subject completely' (Hutcheon, 1988, pp. 158-159; see also Chapter 3.1). The way in which subjective references enter the discourse of *The Quiet Dance* appears to contribute to the postmodern argument of the unknowable, fragmented and ambiguous nature of the subject. These references are in fact simple movement and sound sequences with a vaguely figurative content (holding hands, fighting, falling, scribbling), which is made more enigmatic by the formal arrangement of the patterns, where the use of compositional techniques such as repetition and variation, symmetry and contrapuntal relations displaces the images from their conventional contexts of origin.

As a spectator, I was kept on the threshold of seeing and not seeing, given a glimpse of fragments of two people's lives, thoughts and imagery and left to wonder whether using my own imagination and subjectivity to fill the gaps in the picture I was

presented with would mean taking the narrative and figurative clues of the performance a step too far. But the work seems to invite such an intervention, since the lack of pathos in the treatment of personal references, together with the geometrical complexity of its structure and the insistence of its repetitions, provides the audience with a grid of traces to follow and lose themselves within.

If the reference to minimalism is openly declared through the choice of walking as the main physical pattern and the reduction of movement to basic gestures and actions, the themes behind these images are left unsaid, with the exception of the faint clue that ‘in some way, they are “elegiac”’ (Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 4). Nevertheless, according to Burrows, these images were not meant to be mysterious and obscure, as he and Fargion ‘were trying to look at something personal enough that it would still have a door open for somebody else watching from the outside’ (p. 4).

On a thematic level, if references to death and sorrow can be read in the movement sequences, these are inserted in a choreography that in contrast shows an overall humorous and comic quality. On a compositional level, the movement phrases chosen to construct these images are often made of patterns drawn from previous pieces, such as *Hymns*, *Stoics*, *The Stop Quartet* and *Both Sitting Duet*, or from works that represent Burrows’s choreographic reference points, such as minimalist dance, Russian ballet and folk dance. These correspondences create a weave in which thematic and compositional aspects appear intertwined, thus accounting for the ambiguous and multidimensional nature of the work.

Despite the laughter it provokes at times from the audience because of its odd repetitiveness and awkward physicality, the piece has a certain melancholy, which springs from the sense of inevitability conveyed by its consistent and circular structure and from the frugality of its means and its understated performance. The other side of its steady, solid, matter-of-fact form is hence a softer, more fragile trait, which discreetly allows the spectator into the intimacy of the world it discloses. The piece generates a subtle form of empathy which relies on the willingness of the viewer to be drawn into the work and look for meaningful details beyond the unseductive plainness and unfamiliar uniformity of its surface.

In this chapter it is argued that the ‘images’ of *The Quiet Dance* should be interrogated in relation to both their thematic allusions and their textual references to

previous and other choreographers' works. I suggest that they can be perceived as a sort of palimpsest, in which Burrows's dearest motifs, his own works and external inspirations intersect in a multilayered configuration of carefully arranged ideas.

8.3 The quiescent images that lie beneath

If the surface of the work, with its sequences of repetitions of movements and patterns, presents a strict geometrical regularity, with a cadenced structure, and replica and studied variation as the main compositional devices, similar strategies can be seen at work also on a temporal axis, where correspondences can be established with previous works and recurring images. The oddity of the cartoon-like steps is reminiscent of the comic, exaggerated quality of the movement in *Stoics*, where bodies are handled precisely but unceremoniously, in a matter-of-fact manner (Chapter 5). The wandering walks in random directions can be connected to the casual, gangly moves of *The Stop Quartet*, with patterns of steps alternately placed in the different corners of an imaginary floor box (Burrows, 2006c; see also Chapter 6). The semaphoric arm phrases executed by the two men standing in front of each other remind the viewer of the sequences of gestures of *Hymns*, where hands and arms performed moves that alluded to gestures of prayer (Chapter 4). On a broader narrative level, the work clearly refers to the previous duet by Burrows and Fargion: the ordinariness of their clothes and the simplicity of the stage setting, their attitude on stage and the intimacy of their gestures signal that this piece is a continuation of the type of relationship they inaugurated in *Both Sitting Duet* (Chapter 7).

On a more detailed level, some movements are reminiscent of social and folk dancing. One pattern in particular is taken from an English Morris routine: in the sixth section of the piece, whilst Fargion stands and produces an 'aahh' note, Burrows crouches down, bounces his fists on his knees, then brings them to his ears. But the most manifest example of this quotation procedure is a pattern executed by both performers in unison at two different moments in the piece, in the eighth and ninth section of the dance, which involves bringing their fists to their ears and walking forward with stiff steps. This phrase is a citation from Nijinska's *Les Noces* (1923), which accords with Burrows's declaration that 'there isn't a piece [he has] made which doesn't steal something directly from *Les Noces*' (Burrows, 2005a, n.p.; see also Polzer, 2004).

This practice of quoting from other works and sources can be found already in *Both Sitting Duet*, where a section with a distinctive arm pattern is an open reference to Morris dancing.³ But with *The Quiet Dance*, it is as though Burrows had brought into the choreography a fragment from all the material that has played a significant part in his artistic development. In this respect, he has talked about the sense of necessity that always lies behind the creation of a work, making specific reference to this recent duet:

the general perception about people who make performances, or make any art, is often that we ‘choose’ an idea and then we ‘make’ that idea. But the reality is that, actually, you have very little choice: you are going to make the thing you are going to make. This was something that Rosemary Butcher taught me a long time ago. You may find one way or another to make it, but basically that’s the piece that you have in you and the job that you have is to uncover that, or discover it. And once you begin to uncover it or discover it, you have to follow what it wants. In some ways, I think of this performance now as being an attempt to make the piece that lies just underneath all the other pieces we have ever made. And that’s why we called it *The Quiet Dance*.

Burrows cited in Perazzo, 2005c, p. 3.

The artistic citations which are scattered throughout the work are closely intertwined with references of a different kind. These allude to ideas and emotions that are significant for the choreographer on a personal level – like ‘quiet’ visions that have been in a state of latency and are now brought to life. By recognising them as traces of underlying impressions and themes, Burrows suggests that they may refer to recurring motifs, central notions belonging to a sort of fundamental value system encompassing ideas from the past that never went away (see also Chapter 9). Understanding what he means by the term ‘images’ requires further investigation of the choreographic material.

A reference to the imaginary and the symbolic may seem at odds with a self-reflective dance such as Burrows’s, although the composition of these visions into formalised sequences makes their identification by the audience uncertain and thus does not entirely break with his analytic choreographic modality. On the other hand, however, the choice of working from images suggests a reversal of the seemingly non-referential quality of his dances from the mid-1990s and a return to, as well as a development of, the narrative dimension of his earlier works. Moreover, the imaginary character of the work is also problematic within the general realm of

contemporary art, as interpreted by Gadamer: 'there is today a great distrust of all traditional forms of expression. ... It is precisely the dearth of symbol, the very renunciation of the symbolic, that characterizes contemporary art in all its forms' (1986, p. 74). If Gadamer draws his examples of this property of contemporary art principally from painting and music, which he calls 'absolute' to identify their non-objective, analytic qualities (p. 75), dance equivalents can be found in the non-representational strand of contemporary choreography from Cunningham onwards, including minimalist and early postmodern practices, in which the value of movement does not lie in the depiction of images, in the expression of feelings or in the allusion to elements external to the work, but in qualities that can be found in movement itself and in its arrangement in time and space (Foster, 1986; Banes, 1987).

Gadamer maintains that images and symbols imply a process of 'recognition', which is a contentious concept in a world that has grown more and more 'unfamiliar' and 'impersonal' (1986, p. 74). However, Gadamer argues,

all art of whatever kind will always be a language of recognition. Even the art of our time ... remains a kind of recognition: in such art we encounter the undecipherability of our surroundings. Even the 'absolute painting' of our own time has not simply abandoned the realm of meaning in which we continue to live.

Gadamer, 1986, pp. 74, 75.

For Gadamer, the challenge of contemporary art lies in finding a way to express meaning in 'human form' in today's dehumanised world (p. 79). It is this question that leads him to recognise the potential of gesture.

I would suggest that this can be done through the language of gesture. What a gesture expresses is 'there' in the gesture itself. A gesture is something wholly corporeal and wholly spiritual at one and the same time. The gesture reveals no inner meaning behind itself. The whole being of the gesture lies in what it says. At the same time every gesture is also opaque in an enigmatic fashion. It is a mystery that holds back as much as it reveals. For what the gesture reveals is the being of meaning rather than the knowledge of meaning. ... Like language, the gesture always reflects a world of meaning to which it belongs.

Gadamer, 1986, p. 79.

Gadamer's interpretation of the corporeality and spirituality, self-containment and opacity of gesture provides a useful framework for the understanding of the use of connoted movement in Burrows's work. The role of gestures in Burrows's

choreography has already been discussed at length, especially in relation to early pieces such as *Hymns* and *Stoics*, which show an idiosyncratic treatment of pedestrian movement (Chapters 4 and 5), and to the more recent *Both Sitting Duet*, where gestures and their combinations seem to generate a new form of signification independent of the referential one (Chapter 7). In this respect, *The Quiet Dance* represents a continuation of these previous works in the way in which it challenges conventional uses of everyday gestures by separating them from their original contexts and rearranging them through many series of repetitions and correlations, and by intertwining gestures loaded with references to other dances.

In another sense, though, these gestures are also employed in the choreography to convey particular images, thus restoring a form of communication based on representation and ‘recognition’. Gestures are interspersed throughout the choreography in the form of patterns of basic movements and vocal sounds: for instance, shrinking, decelerating and calling sequences are respectively conveyed by lowering and bending motions of the body, walking sequences of stiff steps at an increasingly slower pace, and sounds uttered and shouted at varying voice pitches. These scenes allow the viewers to recognise in them aspects and situations of their own worlds and lives and to interpret them as a reflection of meaning in ‘human form’ (Gadamer, 1986, p. 79). Images of dying (looking up and lying down), falling (lowering movements accompanied by an ‘aahh’ descending sound), aging (walking whilst progressively bending knees and torso), being lost (wandering in random directions), overpowering and being overpowered (pushing the other down by his head) can be read in these sequences and come to symbolise the different phases of life and the completion of its cycle.

Some of these scenes, which in the moment of their creation were intended to be elegiac, generated a comical effect in the moment of their reception. The audience’s laughter can be ascribed to the ambiguity produced by compositional techniques such as repetition and rhythmical arrangement, and to the deliberate estrangement of these movements from their contexts: for instance, gestures that push the other’s head down are not part of a larger fight scene, they do not show antecedents and consequences of the action and are executed in a matter-of-fact manner; holding hands is not accompanied by other elements suggesting intimacy but appears on the contrary in a sequence of stiff, fast back-and-forth walking trajectories. Indeed, the gestures

remain 'opaque' and maintain the 'mystery' of the 'world of meaning' to which they refer (Gadamer, 1986, p. 79). However, these images, through the openness of their associations, their intersection with phrases borrowed from past performances and their organisation in a minutely studied structure, become the cohesive element of the piece. Laughter and mourning, old and new, abstract form and emotional content lose their distinctions and together contribute to the reading of the work as a metaphor of life. In Gadamer's words,

the images before us present human life In them we can recognize ourselves, even though we are unable to understand or decipher them fully. They are symbols of the unfamiliarity in which we encounter ourselves and our unfamiliar world.⁴

1986, pp. 81-82.

In their mysterious simplicity and obsessive returns through overstretched sequences of repetitions, the images of *The Quiet Dance* generate a web of correspondences that seem to emphasise the links between the work and its creative history, thus, I argue, creating a compendium of Burrows's choreographic research. If in *Both Sitting Duet* it was the life and friendship of the two creators that could be read between the lines of hieroglyphic gestures of the choreographic and rhythmical sequences, in *The Quiet Dance* the explicit use of narrative elements and 'recognisable' images draws attention to the textual nature of their relationship with their history, in the postmodern sense of 'a past that can be known only from its texts, its traces' (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 125) rather than from its 'pure occurrence' (Grass cited in Hutcheon, 1988, p. 125). It can be suggested that this approach to the use and combination of textual references and personal images challenges the irreducibility of form and content and reconciles the abstract and the figurative, the minimalist and the expressive, the object and the subject, although without merging them and obliterating their differences.

8.4 Material loaded with history: a controlled implosion

In the same way that *The Quiet Dance* links back to previous works, and especially to *Both Sitting Duet*, it also opens a connection with work that is still to come, constructing a narrative that appears unfinished and requires continuation. Although

The Quiet Dance can be seen to challenge the dichotomy between form and content by drawing images and characters' portraits through sequences of repetitions of basic movements and patterns, the tension between these two modes of (re)presentation appears to some extent unresolved. The stylised, almost robotic quality of the gestures and the seemingly mechanical insistence of their reiteration require a generous effort from the audience to bridge these two worlds and read beyond the plainness of the form. As critics have commented, 'you can never quite nail what's going on' (Gilbert, 2005, n.p.); Burrows and Fargion 'create a private world and beckon us to come in and, somewhat mystified, most members of the audience seem to accept their offer' (Mallinson, 2005, n.p.). The work has appeared 'constrained' (Mallinson, 2005, n.p.), and has been seen as 'lack[ing] the easy accessibility of *Both Sitting Duet*' (Williams, 2005, n.p.), 'if it weren't for the comic humility of Burrows and Fargion and their gnomic dedication' (Gilbert, 2005, n.p.). In this sense, it could be argued that the piece leaves the spectators unsure of their reading(s) of the dance and of the connections they have made between its different elements – the birds' chirruping and the movements, the vocal sounds and the changing spatial trajectories, for instance: 'it could be a private game played with a light touch. We may not know the rules, yet nothing is hidden from us' (Hutera, 2005, p. 21).

As the third work of the trilogy, *Speaking Dance* feeds on its precedents and partly relies on the contextual knowledge of the spectators. It does not necessarily presuppose an expert audience, but it certainly rewards those who, having seen the two previous works, have an understanding of them and have a sense of what might follow. It can be argued that the piece meets and subverts these expectations at the same time, both responding to and surpassing the anticipation of its public. Whilst it still draws on references to the past in rethinking their significance, it does so in a way that pushes the boundaries of the known and, in Lepecki's terms, breaks into unexplored territories thus 'stumbling upon ... unexpected reconfigurations' (2004, p. 171). In doing so it also addresses another key issue of contemporary dance's reconfiguration of conventional choreographic parameters identified by Lepecki: whilst continuing to embody a rejection of technical virtuosity, reduction of theatrical elements, critique of traditional ideas of spectatorship and rethinking of the relationship between scenic presence and representation (see Chapter 1.4), *Speaking Dance* also challenges the accepted 'emphasis on dance's autonomy with regard to the

verbal' (Lepecki, 2004, p. 170). However, it does so without developing into a piece of dance theatre and treating instead spoken words, physical movements, singing and music as equal elements of the choreographic composition.

At the start, there is the familiar entrance of the two performers in plain clothes and the short walk from backstage – understated and matter-of-fact, where relaxed and nervous body language blend into each other. They sit down on two chairs in front of the audience, in a manner that has become recognisable since *Both Sitting Duet*. For a moment the spectator thinks that, after the walking diversion of *The Quiet Dance*, they have now gone back there, to the 'static' position of a musical duo. The first surprise is that this time the ping-pong game is not of hand gestures but of words, although the title already suggested this – from the rhythmical repetition of 'left', 'right', 'left', 'right', or the production of chains of signifiers that could almost function as a demonstration of the Saussurean principle of the syntagmatic relations of phonemes ('left', 'lift'; 'stop', 'step'), to the more evocative 'small dance', 'tired dance', 'fragile dance', 'doubting dance', 'weak dance',⁵ and 'thinking', 'silence', 'voices', which seem to tell us about the multifarious and multilayered qualities of the work and of dance itself.⁶

But after the first ten minutes of this cut-and-thrust exercise, which relies on the duo's expert confidence in handling complex rhythmical sequences, the work takes a different direction, catching unaware those in the audience who, on the grounds of the two previous duets, thought that the piece would continue in the same fashion until the end. This time it does not happen. In working on the piece, Burrows and Fargion struggled with rebellious material that did not seem to fit into any overarching structure (Burrows, 2006d). After strenuously resisting breaking their loyalty to their own working principles, they finally surrendered to this intrusion and arrived at the decision of allowing the composition to be diverted and transported by a variety of impulses. This could explain critics' descriptions of the piece as 'more episodic' than the previous two (Simpson, 2006-07, p. 82). As Burrows explains,

Matteo and I agreed that we really didn't have the stamina or the patience to make a third piece which held to one thing, as *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* do So then we thought, 'what if we allowed ourselves much more freedom to have ideas and work on them, and make a lot of material, in music, in dance, in words and all the combinations, and just work fast and not question too much what we are doing ...?' Matteo was very doubting because this is not

how he works; he wanted a *raison d'être* to begin with, he wanted a principle: but I said, 'I don't think we have a choice. We have to let ourselves work and, at this point, we have to trust ourselves to some extent.'

Burrows, 2006d, n.p.

So the piece travels from the world of words to those of dance and music, with a common denominator connecting them all, rhythm. Burrows stands up and performs a dance swinging his arms and twisting his upper body, whilst Fargion sits quietly or sings Italian folk songs accompanying himself with clapping at a faster rhythm. After the reduction to silence, vocal lines and ambience sounds in the previous two works of the trilogy, music comes back in *Speaking Dance* in the form of recorded tunes, apparently coming from a small stereo lying on the floor next to the performers, and of notes and melodies produced by the duo on mouth organs played loudly and intensely.

The audience's expectations are further challenged when, quite late in the piece, Fargion stands up for the first time whilst Burrows remains seated. The situation seems to signal that the roles are about to be inverted and that the musician is preparing to dance, whilst the dancer will provide the rhythmical base. But Fargion remains still, whilst Burrows recites with urgency a long text containing the phrase 'only in his dreams did he know how to fly.' With a poetic leap, the audience can imagine Fargion's stocky body follow his fantasy and soar, whilst Burrows reads off his notebook, in a loud, high, overacted tone, 'tracing the strangest patterns on the ground ... he felt excited ... he reached out to touch the ends of the world ... he turned to the spot where he was standing, clinging to it, for this was where he would make his dwelling ... The lifting and sinking came in endless repetition.' Applause and laughter marked this moment the night of the premiere at The Place, indicating that the spectators watched the performance with a certain sense of where they wanted it to take them.

Even more than in previous works, the movement and sound scores are interwoven with references and correspondences. These are both intratextual and intertextual, thus connecting together different moments of the performance or establishing links with previous works, as well as with other episodes in the history of dance. Burrows (2006d) says that these relationships were unplanned, they occurred accidentally: like, for instance, the connection between the text he declaims on flying in one's dreams

and Fargion's earlier chain of phrases such as 'trying to stop' and 'trying to fly'. But this interplay of coincidences is further complicated with the poetic image of the flying dreamer, which is a direct quotation from a section of Rudolf Laban's *Mastery of Movement* describing examples of movement scenes.⁷ Burrows explains:

we didn't know it was Laban; we just found a piece of paper stored away in a vast file of ideas months and months before, and we thought I had written it. I knew I hadn't, but it did sound like me, somehow; but that was more because it was the kind of thing that I like. Then I looked through my bookcase, I saw the spine of a Laban book and I remembered it was from there. So I pulled it out and I found the extract. It seemed very nice that, in a piece which would be about trying to visualise a dance that you can't see, even though we do it in some way not how Laban would have intended it, at the end of the day you come back to Laban! I liked that.

Burrows, 2006d, n.p.

This convergence with Laban's principles for making dances is interesting from the point of view of Burrows's opening to personal and emotional material in his recent choreography. Laban's expressionist approach to dance and the words he used to illustrate it become a sort of commentary on Burrows's own poetics, as well as one of the textual references that substantiate his creative work. Despite the obvious differences between their two worlds and practices, similarities with Laban's theories of movement can be identified both in Burrows's rigorous approach to composition and in the underlying human dimension of his dances. This rediscovery of the role that such a distinct dance tradition can play in new work demonstrates the surprising potential of past material discussed by Lepecki (2004) in relation to contemporary European dance's rethinking of its stance towards history. The encounter with the past does not consist simply in revisiting its known forms and methods, but also in allowing the emergence of unpredicted possibilities which are generated by the dialogue between two seemingly unrelated practices. In this sense, with *Speaking Dance* the 'old-fashioned' procedure that Burrows talked about in relation to *The Quiet Dance*, of constructing the choreographic sequences from images and visions, finds a possible antecedent: through the reference to Laban's suggestions on how to make dances, the recourse to the imaginary and the symbolic can be read in the context of a reconfiguration of the function and message of expressionism and the consequent rediscovery of the role of history and subjectivity in current work.

Another configuration from the past that Burrows and Fargion unpredictably encounter in their walking through the paths of history and memory is classicism, which implicitly brings back the traces left on the two artists by their respective early training in dance and music. Burrows and Fargion have repeatedly compared the surprisingly (in the sense of it being unplanned) balanced structure generated by these three collaborative choreographies to the organisation of a classically composed music piece: like in a sonata in three movements, the trilogy features an allegro, which introduces and sets the premises of the work (*Both Sitting Duet*), a middle movement, slower and more lyrical (*The Quiet Dance*), and a lively finale (*Speaking Dance*).⁸ Hence, as already noted by Meisner (1996a) with reference to the architecture of *The Stop Quartet* (Chapter 6), after the critical questioning or marginalisation it was subjected to in the logic of experimentation, classicism unexpectedly (although, ultimately, consciously) returns in Burrows's recent work in the form of the structural equilibrium it bestows on the dance.

Other correspondences can be traced between this work and the two previous ones in the trilogy. There is a section that almost every critic has commented on (Burt, 2006; Simpson, 2006-07; Williams, 2006), for its funny character of slapstick comedy: a sequence of three hand gestures accompanied by the words 'chicken', 'yes', 'come', written on pieces of papers which Burrows and Fargion produce from their pockets, unfold and show to the audience. The general interpretation found in the reviews is that the gestures were devised as illustrations of the words, reinforcing a predictable hierarchy between mind and body (Burt, 2006; Williams, 2006). In fact, the gestures came first and they are quotations from *Both Sitting Duet*, where they are executed with no reference to chickens and calling. But since, as Gadamer says, 'we can never escape from the fact that in our everyday experience of the world, our vision is oriented towards recognizing objects' (1986, p. 38), words were subsequently attached to the hand movements, transforming them in a form of linguistic communication. Whilst this process of connecting perceived material to known images could be linked to the practice employed by dancers of giving suggestive or illustrative names to their steps in order to remember them and talk about them with other dancers, it is also an implicit reference to the way in which the audience of *Both Sitting Duet* read the gestural patterns of the choreography, relating them to objects and situations from their own lived experience (see Chapter 7). This can be linked

back to the title of this new work, where ‘speaking dance’ may also refer, in Gadamer’s terms, to ‘how art unites us in its communicative dimension’, plunging us amongst ‘the profound tensions’ between ‘the wordless language’ of art and ‘verbal language’ (1986, pp. 38, 39).

The openness of the creative process of the work relies on the use of what Fargion calls ‘found’ objects (2005, n.p.), with an explicit reference to an artistic procedure that dates back to Duchamp’s readymades and cubist collages, which places the artistic value of the work in the gesture by which the artist gives an ordinary object the status of art. Another example of this procedure can be seen in the choice of the musical score of the piece. The starting point for the main tune is a Bach chorale from the *St. Matthew Passion* and appears in the piece in different forms, including a score that Fargion wrote for a particular circumstance of Burrows’s life, which is itself based on the Bach score.⁹ The piece, which had already been performed by Fargion, is titled *Love* and comprises lyrics which are made of the repetition of the word ‘love’. This tune is used in the work in different versions: it is sung by Fargion and Burrows together after the first ten minutes of alternation of spoken words and the first intermission with a folk song by Fargion and a dance by Burrows; it is sung by Fargion sixteen minutes into the piece whilst Burrows executes arm patterns mostly borrowed from sequences of *Both Sitting Duet* with hands moving, turning and sliding over laps and knees; more than ten minutes later, it appears in a version for brass band and drums whilst the duo sing two minutes of sequences of verbs like ‘shove, punch, poke ... shake, cut, squeeze, stretch, jump’¹⁰ in an energetic, galvanising manner, which sounds almost like the instructions shouted by a trainer during a workout class at the gym; finally, ten minutes before the end, it is played in a slowed-down version on the organ during the ‘chicken, yes, come’ section, continuing up until when Fargion stands up and Burrows recites Laban’s text on situations and actions for dance scenes.

Another form of found material can be identified in the repeated use of clapping: alongside Fargion’s clapping to the Italian songs he sings, a clapping sequence is performed by the duo around twenty minutes into the piece, and again, after a short intermission with a folk song by Fargion and a dance of waving and slicing arms by Burrows, accompanied by text sung at fast speed. In the same way that the Bach tune is borrowed via Fargion’s rewriting of it, these sequences can be seen as second-order

references to Reich's 1972 piece for two pair of hands, *Clapping Music*, via the version of it that Burrows and Fargion performed at the Greenwich Dance Agency in July 2006 during The Small Dance programme,¹¹ and on a few other occasions (including at Kaaiteather in Brussels in October 2006). In this five-minute stage intervention, which has the economy of means of Burrows's recent works, the duo simply stands in front of the audience behind a microphone and a music stand holding a score, and engages with the contrapuntal dynamics of Reich's clapping piece.¹²

It can be argued that, whilst Duchamp's readymades reinforce the role of the artist in determining the value and status of the work, Burrows and Fargion's insertion of found objects in their compositions appears to open up the role of the viewers, allowing them to read these objects' connections, relationships and associations with what surrounds them within and without the work – both horizontally and vertically, that is spatially and temporally. This enhances the communicative potential of the work and opens it up to a variety of interpretations.

In *Speaking Dance*, the elements that the dancer and the musician experimented with in *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* are brought together with a new confidence and the daring yet humble attitude of artists who have come to grips with each other's discipline through years of collaboration and who, after the two previous ventures into the other's territory, can now afford a different degree of freedom. Words, gestures and sounds are used, combined, intertwined, transformed, translated, displaced and distorted, so that unusual, surprising connections arise from the association of extraneous and conventionally unrelated elements. It can be argued that in this piece Burrows and Fargion explore the possibilities of their creative materials and challenge their conventional uses and contexts to an extent that stretches the limits of the composition itself and generates a sort of implosion.

8.5 Rethinking ways of communicating meaning: a new form of storytelling

Coincidentally, I recently came back to a piece of writing by Dunn, reproduced in Banes's *Terpsichore in Sneakers* (1987, pp. 200-201). It is titled 'Talking Dancing' and is composed of sixteen couplets, in which all lines contain different combinations of four words: 'dancing', 'talking', 'is', 'not', which form affirmative and negative.

contradictory and complementary sentences on the nature of dancing and talking and on their relationships. They are arranged in a circular manner and they go from saying that the same is the same (that is, 'Talking is talking / Dancing is dancing') to saying that the same is the same but in an inverted order (that is, 'Dancing is dancing / Talking is talking') via saying that the same is the other (that is, 'Talking is dancing' / 'Dancing is talking') and a series of negative and double negative (that is, affirmative) sentences. This text struck me for its affinity with the theme and mode of investigation of Burrows and Fargion's work. Reflecting *a posteriori* on the work, Burrows talks about the peculiar relation to meaning that seems to have arisen from the way in which *Speaking Dance* was created. He describes it as the experience of a kind of 'impossibility of meaning':

performing the piece now feels like we are chasing meaning but then constantly undermining it from another direction, or from another form; so if we are making music, then it's undermined by the dance, or the dance is undermined by the words. As we chase meaning, the piece becomes breathless, and the breathlessness arrives at a kind of ecstatic state.

Burrows, 2006d, n.p.

The interconnection between music, dance and speaking simultaneously enables and eludes signification, since the dialogue between these languages generates a play of meaning which entails both its possibility and its deferral. In a deconstructive sense, the interrelation between songs, movements and words can be understood as a condition of *différance*, in which each element of the chain 'is always a signifying and substitutive reference inscribed in a system of differences' (Derrida, 1978, p. 292). Within this context, from the performers' act of undermining the meaning that they are chasing, the potential for other meaning emerges: a trace of signification, a suggestion, which the spectators seemed to have felt in a strong way the night of the premiere, when their response was overwhelmingly warm. Different aspects and qualities of the work might have held the attention and interest of members of the audience. Being Italian, I connected to the folk songs sung by Fargion – lyrics that I learnt in my childhood and used to sing in the car with my parents on the way to our summer holidays – but this might not be the only key to the engagement I felt. 'Even if you don't know the songs', Burrows says, 'or you don't know what the words mean if you don't speak Italian, they have the feeling of other songs, the kind of songs you sing with your family when you are a child' (2006d, n.p.). And he continues, 'but the

other thing that the songs did was that they gave this reassuring continuity in the midst of something that was kind of exploding' (2006d, n.p.) – like a refrain, a recurring motif.

The opening to the verbal in *Speaking Dance* represents a territory that Burrows had already expressed a desire to explore but had never ventured into beyond the vocalisations he and Fargion utter in *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* (Burrows, 2006d; Burrows and Etchells, 2004). It can be linked to the use of language found in performances by other European choreographers, and especially by Bel who, in works such as *Shirtologie* (1997) and *The Show Must Go On* (2001), makes critical use of the verbal to investigate the relationship between movement and thought. In *Shirtologie* a performer stands at the centre of an empty stage and takes off, one by one, the numerous t-shirts he is wearing. Each top shows a phrase, a slogan, an icon, an image: all signs of the Western, globalised world of logos and brands, of advertising and propaganda, of appearance and strategies of belonging. As is argued by Lepecki, the work 'points quite strongly to conceptual art' through a challenge to technique and virtuosity and 'a resistance to the spectacular', which can be read 'as a political statement on the market value of the dance object' (2004, pp. 177, 178). It also relates directly to the mediatised consumer culture that shapes our perception and understanding of the world, through both the adoption and a critique of its very modes of expression:

Shirtologie reveals how the culture of representation, when allied to late-capitalist subjectivity, thrives in a ceaseless reproduction of a poetics of commodities, logos, and trademarks. ... But, as Jérôme Bel stated, the piece also reveals how performance may allow liberation from capital's relentless branding of identities under the sign of the (trademarked) name.

Lepecki, 2006, p. 56.

In *The Show Must Go On*, a large group of dancers move, one by one, to the tunes of well-known pop songs, executing gestures and actions that reproduce literally what is said in the lyrics in an utterly straightforward manner. Siegmund (2003) reads the re-conceptualisation of the role of the performer's body that this piece realises as a critique of traditional paradigms of bodily expression, from the naturalist one of bourgeois theatre to the estranged one of the avant-garde. It is no longer a matter of matching or mismatching words and bodies: Bel's 'bodies no longer have words,

because they don't need them anymore. They are, on an ontological level, always already words. His bodies speak literally by moving' (2003, p. 87).

Speaking Dance also appears to question the theatrical possibilities of language: it uses words composing them together in chains and sequences according to their rhythmic rather than semantic qualities; it resorts to the declamation of a descriptive text which deliberately overemphasises its expressive potential; and it includes folk songs in a language and from a tradition that are generally alien to the majority of the audience. However, whilst these verbal strategies show a consonance with the conceptual rethinking of the function of language away from its dramatic dimension developed by recent dance, the use of words in *Speaking Dance* also appears to reconcile the textual and the corporeal, the formal and the narrative qualities of choreography – not in the sense that one is added to the other, as in the case of hybrid forms of dance such as physical or musical theatre, but in the sense that movement and verbal elements are chosen and treated according to the same rules.

On the one hand, rhythm is the principle through which all material, whether linguistic or physical, is arranged; on the other hand, words and gestures are not devoid of content, and are in fact brought into the composition because of, or even in spite of, their relationship with it. Neither of the two elements is a function of the other; the bodies of the two performers do not move to illustrate the words, nor do the words explain their movements. Their relationship is not of juxtaposition, accumulation or redundancy, but of inextricability. As in Dunn's text, (not) dancing is (not) speaking and (not) speaking is (not) dancing. Furthermore, the relationship between the performers and both movements and words does not draw on a detached, critical observation of the dynamics of the world we live in; it is an intimate bond, with phrases, gestures and objects that come from personal memories and stories. These are offered for sharing, thus embodying the idea of an historical and collective dimension that starts from private, individual events.

The folk songs are only one of the aspects that contribute to what is certainly one of the main qualities of the piece, a trait that critics have unanimously commented upon: its distinctive sense of intimacy, which gives the occasion of the performance the feeling of an informal gathering of friends. The matter-of-fact, unpretentious attitude of Burrows and Fargion during, and towards, the performance, is one of the defining

traits of the piece, together with the open, almost collaborative behaviour they adopt in relation to the audience. As in *Both Sitting Duet*, but even more so in this new work, due to its freer structure, the dancer and the musician look at each other, communicate via almost imperceptible gestures and signals, laugh at their own mistakes and react to the spectators' responses, allowing them to feel equally at ease. 'They cribbed their notes in exercise books, glanced across at each other, looked into the audience, laughed where they didn't mean to, nerves visible' (Jones, 2006, n.p.). It can be suggested that this form of sharing a space and an experience bears a certain similarity with the modes and dynamics of traditional storytelling, which Walter Benjamin describes as 'an artisan form of communication' (1992, p. 91). The craftsmanship involved in this art, which relies on the ability of the storyteller 'to fashion the raw material of experience, his own and that of others, in a solid, useful, and unique way' (p. 107), is what determines its difference from other forms of communication, which aim at delivering information or at analysing the emotional and intellectual implications of an event or situation. Storytelling does not dwell on details or psychological investigation, but 'sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again' (p. 91).

The power of communication of *Speaking Dance* lies in how all the material is filtered through the experience of its two performers-creators. It can be argued that the significance of this recent work is in the new confidence it shows in the elaboration of both external references and self-citations in an innovative, idiosyncratic way. Its meanings are constructed through the ways in which the audience follows the numerous threads of the work and disentangles its weave. This web works on different levels: not only philologically, with links to previous works or within the piece itself, but also, and most of all, by establishing a connection with the spectators' own lives and experiences. If *Both Sitting Duet* was ultimately about Burrows and Fargion telling the audience a story about themselves, their friendship, artistic collaboration and cross-disciplinary work, and *The Quiet Dance* made that history more explicit by retracing the steps of that research, *Speaking Dance* seems to open the communication up and allow the spectators to see beyond the 'story' and its tellers, and into their own imaginative world. With its use of random words and suggestive phrases and its references to folk traditions and dreams of aerial dances, *Speaking Dance* speaks to the audience and makes them fly. Through its combination

of humour and seriousness, lyricism and detachment, chaos and order, it transported me to a place both familiar and surreal, where opposites are in dialogue and benefit from their mutual interaction.

By engaging with the intertextual dimension of subjectivity and history, these two recent works by Burrows and Fargion further the choreographer's rethinking of the relationship between compositional rigour and personal expressivity, non-referentiality and empathic recognition. In challenging the association of Burrows's choreography with formalist and abstract stances often present in the literature, I argue that an appreciation of the narrative and intimate qualities of his pieces is essential to an understanding of the distinctiveness of his artistic world. Rather than excluding the subject and the past in a modernist gesture of affirmation of the self-sufficiency of the artwork, these dances incorporate historical traces and intimate images through textual references that both represent and elude them. These intertexts show the plural and fragmentary nature of the subject and of the past, whilst also demonstrating the productive potential of their elements of continuity.

It is this inextricability of unity and rupture, connections and differences, form and content that I draw on in the next, and last, chapter of this thesis to construct a poetic interpretation of Burrows's dance and of its contribution to a reconfiguration of contemporary choreographic practice and theory.

Notes

- ¹ Sections of this chapter concerning *Speaking Dance* were recently published in *Dance Theatre Journal* in an article entitled 'Speaking Dance: The Storm after the Calm' (see Perazzo, 2007).
- ² This article is based on two consecutive interviews with Burrows (Burrows, 2005a and 2005b) of which it is a collation (see Appendices B.6 and B.7).
- ³ 'Both *Sitting Duet* has a section called "Bampton", which is an arm movement' from English Morris dancing (Burrows, 2005a, n.p.). See also Chapter 1.2.
- ⁴ Here Gadamer (1986) refers to Werner Scholz's pictures inspired by Greek mythology, where the use of a symbolic pictorial language and the depiction of the characters' gestures bring back to life the meanings of ancient legends in today's world.
- ⁵ Possibly a reference to Burrows's piece with Jan Ritsema *Weak Dance Strong Questions* (2001).
- ⁶ As Marion Jones commented, 'what was particularly lovely was hearing how even banal words build meanings; how some were like fragments of thought while watching a performance' (2006, n.p.).
- ⁷ See Laban, 1971, p. 56 (examples 1, 4, 5, 6). Hungarian theorist of dance movement, Rudolf Laban (1879-1958) is one of the main exponents of dance expressionism, which focused on the

manifestation of emotions through the use of intense, powerful movements. Laban's theory of motion is based on the recognition that dance, and movement in general, follow essential motor rules that can be traced and identified. These elemental principles are combined and arranged into patterns and sequences which constitute the architecture of the dance, and can be observed and described according to a system. 'Movement compositions as well as poetry and music, have to be consciously constructed and built up according to the general rules of artistic composition. ... Just as poetry, in every language, can be written down, phonetically, so every stylised movement can be written down "motorically"' (Laban, 1954, p. 15).

⁸ This comparison was formulated, for instance, by Burrows during the post-performance talk held at The Place Theatre, London, the night of the premiere on 18 October 2006 (see also Burt, 2006) and by Fargion in a public conversation with Davies (Fargion and Davies, 2007).

⁹ I am grateful to Matteo Fargion for sharing with me this and the following information about the musical score of the piece through a series of informal conversations.

¹⁰ Also quoted from Laban's *Mastery of Movement*, these verbs are examples of basic bodily actions and 'derivatives' (1971, p. 77).

¹¹ The Small Dance was a programme of short and small dances hosted by the Greenwich Dance Agency, London, on 15 July 2006, as part of London's Big Dance festival.

¹² In Reich's piece, the two pairs of hands begin clapping in unison but, whilst one player performs an unchanging rhythmic pattern, the other regularly moves forward by one beat, until the unison is restored (Reich, 2002). In an email exchange, Burrows commented on his and Fargion's interpretation of the work: 'we like it because we are interested in counterpoint, and particularly in the effect that the sharing of a counterpoint has on the performers in a live context. This means the way in which each performer has to give up something of themselves to the music which arrives between the two players, or dance in the case of dance. Having said that, it's important to say that the way in which *Clapping Music* operates isn't how Matteo and I do things. *Clapping Music* is quite conceptual, in that it's a single idea worked out as a pattern that begins and goes through a series of logical changes until it works itself out and returns to its beginning. What we try to do, however, is to work free of logical patternings and follow rather intuitive decisions. In this way, we're influenced more by Morton Feldman' (2006b, n.p.).

CHAPTER 9

Jonathan Burrows's poetic(s) (of) dance

Dancing poetry and practising theory

To look for continuities, recurring motifs and unifying features in contemporary artworks is a controversial activity. It is in open contradiction with postmodern ideas of fragmentation and lack of centre and with conceptualisations of history as rupture and change, and of the subject as a discursive, textualised entity – that is, as William Schweiker puts it, with the fact that, ‘we meet the world in jolts, gaps, and differences’ (1988, p. 22). Nevertheless, it is my contention in this thesis that a number of ‘constant qualities’ can be perceived in Burrows’s work: the corporeal as well as conceptual depth of his movement material, the references to the forms and texts of his dance background, his matter-of-fact attitude to performance, the subtle allusions to intimate themes, the delicate relationship he establishes with his partner(s) in performance, his enduring and uncompromising methodological research, his humbly meticulous attention to detail, his constant quest for coherent choreographic principles and, above all, his insatiable curiosity about the ways and meanings of dance. I therefore argue for the importance of finding a way to acknowledge, as well as problematise, ideas of continuity, coherence and consistency alongside concepts of discontinuity, difference and discrepancy. In this final chapter I revisit and interrogate notions concerning the relationship between the present and the past, the subject and the world, as well as theories of representation and signification in order to investigate how these are constructed and operate in Burrows’s choreography.

Within the context of the postmodern world’s paradoxical and ambiguous relation to history (Chapter 1), Burrows develops an artistic position which receives its specificity and appeal from the way in which it deals with the tensions inherent in the contemporary artistic condition. An intense dialogue with the past and its forms is identifiable in Burrows’s choreography, as the detailed analysis of six of his pieces proposed in this thesis has shown (Chapters 4-8). Overt references to dance traditions and artistic positions locate his production in a discursive field: from ballet to early postmodern choreography (which can be observed throughout his works), from abstraction to minimalism (especially in works from the mid-1990s) and, more

recently, from expressionism to dance theatre (in the trilogy of works with Fargion). Demonstrating a modernist belief in progress and in the advantage of 'standing on the shoulders of giants', Burrows holds examples of dance experiments and conventions from the past in high esteem, employing them as starting points for further choreographic research and explicitly acknowledging them as references in numerous interviews and public talks (e.g. Burrows, 2005b, 2005c, 2006a, 2006c).

At the same time, the ease with which he accepts the connection with the past enables him to develop a detachment from it, which allows him to problematise this relationship, that is, to be within it whilst also being outside of it. If, on the one hand, this position can be identified with the postmodern mode of parody, which, according to Hutcheon, marks both 'difference from' and 'connection with' tradition (1988, p. 125), on the other hand, the critical, ironic reflection on the past which allows Burrows's own personal voice to emerge is a result of his empathy with, rather than his rejection of, tradition. Thus, whilst the postmodern challenge to the past is destined to reach an impasse, and ultimately the 'death of art' – because it embodies a rupture which cannot achieve (since it rejects the very idea of) the 'overcoming' of what it breaks from (Vattimo, 1988) – Burrows's declared acceptance of and deferential attitude towards the teachings of history may be read as an attempt to avoid the closing of art on itself and its ultimate decline.

Through the recognition and appreciation of the role of artistic traditions Burrows has constructed a choreographic language which appears to escape the postmodern vicious circularity of rejecting modern historical progression whilst attempting to overcome it without falling back into its logic of development. Without representing simple citations in a superficially postmodern sense, forms and conventions drawn from the various strands of his artistic background have become part of a vocabulary whose elements elude the hierarchical and progressive logic of diachronic linearity by being employed for their newly acquired synchronic value. Nevertheless, their historical connotations can still be deduced, thus enriching the work with a wealth of intertexts (Kristeva, 1980) which, I argue, challenge the dichotomy between past and present, modernist and postmodernist positions and enable the work to exist as both continuation and rupture – to be both old-fashioned and innovative, and embody the conditions of both development and its own impossibility.

A similar, constructive ambiguity characterises the place of subjectivity in Burrows's choreography, which articulates a distinctive response to the ambivalence towards the subject of multifaceted contemporary artistic discourse (Chapter 3). Compositional and performative elements of his dances, such as his primary attention to the structural elements of the choreography and his consistent adoption of a deadpan interpretation of the dance in performance, would appear to give his pieces an impression of objectivity, in which qualities such as narrative and expressivity are not developed. However, the presence of subtle, often implicit or disguised, allusions to intimate matters through the treatment of private themes or through the choice of compositional elements bearing personal significance – the childhood and religious references in *Hymns* (Chapter 4), the musical score after which *Both Sitting Duet* is devised (Chapter 7), the main tune of *Speaking Dance* (Chapter 8), to name but the most obvious – allows subjectivity to emerge in an understated way in his dances, hinting at something unsaid, concealed behind the reticence of saying.

This suggests that Burrows's works can be read as narratives encapsulating a subjective world in the interstices of their linguistic fabric and modes of presentation. His dances are made of methodically constructed texts performed in a rigorous manner, where spontaneity and ease are reserved to the way in which scenic presence (both individual and relational) is articulated on stage. In this respect, it is significant that Burrows has nearly always been interpreter as well as creator of his own choreographies (with the exception of a few early works, of some performances of the *Stoics Quartet*, of the piece *Our* and of the two commissions for Guillem and Ballett Frankfurt).

If the choreographic text develops within the boundaries of a fixed score, composed through a painstaking process involving the shaping and adjusting, measuring and balancing of the material, openings are given in performance by the way in which Burrows accepts his own being there, and that of his dance partners, to happen and unfold in an informal and unformalised way. His dances do not presuppose a stage persona, in the same way that they do not pre-devise their own narrative. As Burrows himself has observed (2006c; Burrows, Le Roy and Ruckert, 2004), it is possibly the limitation of freedom in the choreographic score that allows spontaneity and the artistic intimacy he shares with his dance partners to emerge in performance – especially with Rice in *Hymns*, Montes in *The Stop Quartet* and Fargion in the 2002-

2006 trilogy (Burrows, 2005c). Burrows traces the ideal of the form of presence and attitude he aims at in performance back to the delicacy and intimacy he achieved in his stage relationship with Rice whilst working on *Hymns*:

when I look at the tape of *Both Sitting Duet*, when I look at the tape of *The Quiet Dance* and when I look at the first twenty-five minutes of *The Stop Quartet*, which is the duet with Henry Montes, it's all the same piece. It's all the same as that first little, delicate fragment of *Hymns*.

Burrows, 2005c, n.p.

This is of course a slippery quality, which can be lost as accidentally as it can be found:

in a way the thing about that first tape of *Hymns* is that it remains important because there was something about it which seemed to be a seed of something that felt right for me. ... The other things I've made since have been attempts to understand what it was – and what it still is – that I like about that first fragment, and what was lost, why it was lost.

Burrows, 2005c, n.p.

Arguably, it is significant that, whilst Burrows has generally been performer of his own pieces, he has rarely created solo works, with the exception of early choreographic attempts made during his Royal Ballet training and of the work *Hands*. In this short video piece, however, the relationship with Fargion's score for string quartet and with the radical limitations imposed by the camera framing appear to be fundamental factors in the definition of Burrows's scenic presence. Despite being the only visible element of the film, his hand movements allow the choreography to open itself up and incorporate the unseen by drawing the attention not to Burrows himself (whose face and body, apart from his hands and lap, are not included in the frame) but to the dialogue of his dancing with the music and with the world that is left out by the camera. At the same time, whilst the fragmentation of the dancing body imposed by the film may appear as a form of objectification and denial of the subject, it can be suggested that the close and prolonged viewing of the gestural behaviour of the dancer allowed by the consistent position and clear focus of the camera generate the conditions for an unusual and intensified intimacy between spectator and performer, whose subjectivities are both called into play. Relationality and dialogue appear therefore as crucial instruments of the formulation and perception of Burrows's subjectivity. This, far from being a pre-defined entity that the choreographer wishes to portray through his work, can be understood as an 'event' which takes place in the

dialectical processes occurring between choreographing and interpreting and between performing and watching, as well as in partnered dancing and collaborative creations.¹

The investigation of the place of subjectivity in Burrows's work links to the issue of representation and presentation explored in this thesis in relation to specific examples of choreography. In the readings of individual works proposed in previous chapters I have drawn on dichotomous conceptions of these principles in exploring the non-reproductive quality of the dance – for example Foster's (1986) identification of a 'reflective', non-replicative mode of representation, and Menna's (1975) notion of 'analytic', non-referential forms of art in Chapter 7; Osborne's (1979) interpretation of the non-figurative nature of twentieth-century artistic abstraction in Chapter 6; Gadamer's (1986) reading of contemporary art as 'absolute' in light of its characteristic absence of symbolic references to the outside world in Chapter 8. However, alongside these conceptualisations, in the analysis of Burrows's dances I have also drawn upon a range of alternative perspectives, which have led to the acknowledgement of the cultural, theatrical and narrative aspects of the work – for example social studies' positions on the construction of English national identity in Chapter 5; Goffmann's (1990) theorisation of the performative dimension of everyday social interactions in Chapter 4; Benjamin's (1992) discussion of the art of storytelling in Chapter 8. In privileging, in turn, presentational and representational elements of the work, in this thesis I have also aimed to deconstruct such oppositions by arguing that Burrows's artistic stance generates an unconventional form of communication which challenges prevailing modes of signification.

Structuralist semiotic models have provided the basis for an identification of the elements involved in the processes of signification generated by the dance works. Nevertheless, a critical interrogation of the relationship between the choreographic material and meaning has enabled the construction of interpretations which challenge the formalism and binary logic of linguistic systems based on the opposition and mutual exclusion of functions (e.g. signifier/signified; form/content). Whilst the visibly significant role played in Burrows's choreographies by compositional and structural principles has suggested the adoption of systematic models of analysis as appropriate, the way in which conventional understandings of these paradigms are questioned in the dance has stimulated a rethinking of accepted patterns of correspondence and relation. In particular, as I have argued, the works challenge

analytic systems that construct signification as the result of correspondences between signifiers and signifieds, and frameworks that draw on dichotomous interpretations of the relationship between form and content. These categorisations are deconstructed in Burrows's choreography through procedures of displacement of univocal relationships between images and concepts. Meanings have been read instead in the fissures generated by the layers of signs, as well as in the intense formalisation of the content and in the deep conceptualisation and subtle subjectivisation of the form. Movement material is employed in the choreographies now for its formal qualities now for its potential of content, and ultimately for both, since the patterning of the former may generate images and resonances of an intellectual and emotional nature, whilst the latter is rigorously shaped to blend with the logic of the composition. The distinction between these two sets of material is thus blurred, initiating a rethinking of the way in which dance communicates to its audiences.

The element of bodily research and intellectual investigation is crucial in Burrows's dance. His choreographies are the product of his enduring interest in exploring possibilities of movement and principles of composition. Arguably, amongst all the threads that appear to run through his body of work, this both physical and conceptual investigation represents the strongest element of continuity and coherence, since its experimental nature is what allows both perseverance and diversion, progressions and returns. Research for Burrows has involved both learning the movement principles of specific techniques, from ballet to English Morris dance (Chapter 1), to – more recently – oriental practices such as yoga (Chapter 6) and tai chi chuan, and the deconstruction of their clichés. It has also entailed an analysis of the potential of pedestrian movement and its assimilation into dance compositions. Since 2000-2001, his exploration has extended to collaborations in which artists from different disciplines have participated as dance partners: from *Weak Dance Strong Questions* with Ritsema, in which researching the ways and principles of dance explicitly became the main focus of the work, to the trilogy of duets with Fargion. As Burrows stated in an interview,

working with two people who are not trained dancers has helped me enormously to feel less trapped in my dancer's body. The problem with dance training is that you are learning all the time patterns of movement, which are encoded, hard-wired into your brain. And once they are there, you can't get rid of them again; the brain is too brilliant. ... That's partly what makes it so hard

to stay fresh when you are dancing and performing. And the more you train the more, on the one hand, you give yourself more possibilities, whilst, on the other hand, you increasingly limit yourself because you are all the time mapping the places that you might go – if that makes sense. ... So working with two people who are not trained dancers ... has really given me the possibility to look at movement in a different way and from a different perspective.

Burrows, 2004, n.p.

Choreographic research has also meant for Burrows developing an awareness of the intellectual stances and discourses that underpin contemporary performance practices and negotiating his own artistic position. Interview material collected over the last three and a half years shows that amongst his main concerns are the way in which conceptual investigation and bodily practice may relate to one another, and the way in which freedom and constraint are perceived in different compositional methods:

for me one of the joys about doing it [*Weak Dance Strong Questions*] has been that I've grown up studying dance in a period of time when both dance and other body work has been concerned with reintegrating mind and body and with a critique of Western culture, post-Enlightenment culture, which has resolutely separated mind from body in a quite inaccurate and unscientific way, really; and this rebalancing has been very important. But at the same time, the truth is, I am the product of the culture that I live in and therefore I do feel that division between my mind and my body and when I perform *Weak Dance Strong Questions* I can absolutely accept it for once, and I don't have to do this hard work to integrate them. So allowing myself to experience this split which is always there in some way has been quite a liberation.

Burrows, 2004, n.p.

Formal ways were quite critiqued for a long time, and they still are. In dance there has often been the idea that improvisation and spontaneous physical expression are the richest way to a performance and to a connection with the audience, and the most human and creative. And I see that it can be true sometimes, but I also see that it isn't always true, and it can also be true in other ways.

Burrows, 2006c, n.p.

Reflections of this kind attest to the intellectual depth of Burrows's research and the openness and anti-dogmatic approach of his choreographic practice, which over the years has explored a wide range of creative possibilities and has constantly questioned its own modes and principles. However, if his work has entailed a number of ruptures and changes of direction and incorporates contradictions and ambiguities, these can be read in the logic of his search for consistency, which reveals a non-postmodernist trust

in rigour, progress and conceptual coherence, alongside the more postmodernist qualities of irony, multiplicity and lightness of thought.

I propose that the rethinking of the process of signification and the interplay between historicity and nowness, objectivity and subjectivity, said and unsaid, constraint and spontaneity, presence and representation in Burrows's dances suggest the interpretation of his choreography as a mode of poetic language. In particular, I explore poetry as a specific form of poetic language whose qualities may be employed as a metaphor to understand the distinctiveness of Burrows's choreographic language. With this suggestion I intend to point to those attributes of poetry that grant it a greater liberty than prose enjoys (the so-called 'poetic licence'), but also to those characteristics that make it a more regulated and disciplined form of expression than ordinary language. In this respect, poetry presents the same deconstruction of the freedom/limitation dichotomy that characterises Burrows's artistic stance, whereby maximum liberty of expression is achieved through a restriction of the possible choices (Burrows, Le Roy and Ruckert, 2004). By poetry I refer to texts that break with the conventional syntactic codes of ordinary language and that, by defying the denotative value of signs, stand outside the verifiability of their correspondence with the object of their discourse.

I should note here that this proposition, which started as an intuition resulting from the exploration of Burrows's choreographic language that substantiates this thesis, is on similar lines to an idea that Burrows himself has formulated through his own self-analytical process (see Burrows, 2006d). Whilst this coincidence of thought manifested itself unexpectedly, it can also be understood as a possibility generated by the particular form of our dialogue, which has led to a progressive convergence of views (see Chapter 2). In a recent interview, Burrows observed:

I've been reading an enormous amount of poetry in the last two years and an enormous amount of playwriting, and I've become very fascinated with the act of writing of that kind. The thing about poetry which intrigues me is that I feel that poetry has a lot in common with choreographing. I'll be curious to be challenged on this, or to discuss it with somebody that might pick holes in it or suggest other perspectives, but my reasoning for thinking that there's some connection is that I sense that, when poets write, they often come at the subject not head-on, but from the side. But a poet then uses form to compress that

meaning into something that expresses something much stronger, which you recognise but which you couldn't have articulated. There's something about choreography that I feel works with meaning and the subject in the same way. A piece of dance that takes the subject head-on often fails – not always, but often; it becomes not intriguing enough. So we come from another direction, to find other ways into it, and if there's a purpose of form in choreography, it is to condense and heighten the impact.

Burrows, 2006d, n.p.

The argument I construct is a development of my initial intuition of the poetic character of Burrows's dance and a response to his hypothesis of a correspondence between choreography and poetry. Although my discussion is not entirely immune from generalisations on the nature of poetry, my focus is on those qualities of poetic language that find resonance in certain characteristics of Burrows's work. Above all, I refer to poetry for the specific form of signification and communication that its grammar and syntax generate and for the particular kind of relationship between the subject and the world that the poetic word encapsulates. I am guided in this reading by linguistic studies of the lyric as a genre and, above all, by Kristeva's (1980 and 1984) interpretation of the relationship of poetic language with the writing subject and by Gadamer's (1986 and 1989) thesis on the speculative dimension of poetry (see Chapter 3).

Linguistic studies of the language of poetry have widely and variously examined the formal (grammatical, syntactical, structural, stylistic) devices through which the poetic word produces signification. According to Jakobson, the poetic function of language is that which, amongst the factors that are involved in the verbal act – that is, addresser, addressee, context, contact between interlocutors, code and message – focuses on the message itself, thus 'promoting the palpability of signs' (1960, p. 356; see also Chapter 3.2). Hence the poetic function is most evident in poetry, where the referential function is reduced to a minimum and words are employed more for their qualities as signifiers than for their representative and communicative purposes. I thus argue that, just as poetry enables experimentation with the relationship between signs and objects, Burrows's choreographic language challenges conventional correspondences between movement and its representative potential, generating invention in the way in which it produces meaning.

A particular attention to the formal characteristics of the language of dance has been highlighted throughout this thesis as a fundamental aspect of Burrows's artistic research. The non-referentiality of his choreography has been discussed in terms of its non-representational quality and of its complex relationship with the artistic notion of abstraction (Chapter 6); it has been investigated for its analytic potential, which can be seen to experiment with signification processes and to allow new associations between gestural signs and meanings to be made (Chapter 7). In this sense, I suggest that Burrows's choreography can be understood as a form of metalanguage, drawing on the observation of how its self-reflectivity often translates into a danced discourse on the language of dance itself (Chapter 7). In particular, in *Both Sitting Duet* the choreographic language articulates a reflection on the possibilities of interaction between dance and music, searching for potential forms of correspondence through dissimilarity and constructing a dialogue of differences.

Through Kristeva's analysis of the role played by the rhythmic qualities of poetic language in eluding and exceeding denotative signification, the emphasis on composition and musicality identified in Burrows's movement language can be read as a poetic strategy of choreography (see Chapter 3.2). In this sense poeticity is achieved when the self-reflective attitude of language goes beyond the metalinguistic concentration on its own conventions and opens up to external worlds and meanings. According to Jakobson, 'poetry and metalanguage ... are in diametrical opposition to each other' since, whilst the metalinguistic function focuses on the code and employs the equivalence between terms to construct equations, the poetic function focuses on the utterance and uses equations to select and compose sequences of terms (1960, p. 358). Nevertheless, poetry and metalanguage both centre on non-representational modes and can be seen to share the same analytic approach, towards either the specific message or the overall conventions they speak through and about. It can be argued that Burrows's movement language acquires a poetic potential when it overcomes its metalinguistic focus, that is, when its signification steps outside the boundaries of the languages it reflects upon and opens their linguistic codes to new possibilities of meaning. In this respect, in Chapter 7 I have suggested that *Both Sitting Duet* acquires new potential for meaning by deconstructing established correspondences between dance and music and between their respective modes of

signification, generating a productive dialogue between and across signifiers, signifieds and their contexts.

The significance of the formal aspects of poetry may also be observed in relation to the genre's conventions, as structuralist perspectives maintain (Culler, 1975). In the second part of this thesis I have identified a number of formal devices in Burrows's dances that play with the codes of specific disciplines and the expectations they generate in the viewer. Similarly, in poetry the word strives to overcome the arbitrariness of the sign by playing with its denotative and connotative meanings against the norms of language (see Chapter 3.2). According to Genette (1982), the main methods of this operation consist in interventions on the relationship between signifier and signified, and namely in bringing the one closer to the other through an action on either of the two: by adapting concepts to the form through which they are expressed, or by expressing ideas through unusual terms produced by morphologic adaptation or semantic displacement. Other general artifices can be found in 'onomatopoeia, forms of mimicry, imitative harmonies, effects of phonic or graphic expressivity, evocations by synesthesia, lexical associations' (p. 93).

Burrows's pieces often feature surprising juxtapositions of pedestrian movement with codified dance moves and inventive combinations of the dance with incongruous musical accompaniment (or the absence of it). In particular, procedures of semantic displacement have been read in Burrows's use of specifically connoted movement or music material in unconventional contexts, which generates effects of estrangement and demands of the viewers that they reinterpret the role of these signs (see especially the analyses of *Hymns*, *Stoics* and *Both Sitting Duet* in Chapters 4, 5 and 7). Operations of morphologic transformation can be identified in Burrows's adaptation of codified steps, phrases or pedestrian gestures in new patterns, such as those borrowed from English Morris dancing, ballet – including from specific works, such as Nijinska's *Les Noces* (see the analysis of *The Quiet Dance* in Chapter 8.3) – or recognisable actions (the religious gestures in *Hymns*, Chapter 4) or body language (the hand signs in *Both Sitting Duet* and *Speaking Dance*, Chapters 7 and 8). Examples of gestural mimicry can be read in the way in which the dance responds to the unsung lyrics of the liturgical tunes in *Hymns* (Chapter 4.4). A corporeal form of graphic expressivity can be seen displayed in the stylised movements of *Stoics* which are imitative of attitudes of social conduct.

Other poetic methods can be more generally recognised in Burrows's dance in the frequent use of compositional devices such as patterns and repetition, which often achieve highly rhythmical effects. Moreover, synesthetic results are arguably produced by those works that experiment with the interrelation of physical, aural and linguistic elements, and play with their presence/absence: *Both Sitting Duet*, for instance, gives a visual representation of absent musical patterns, thus making them present in sight (and spectators have occasionally remarked that they thought they could hear the music; see Chapter 7). It can be suggested that *Speaking Dance* is also constructed around chains of linguistic, musical and physical elements whose specificity appears to be constantly eluded and synesthetically replaced by the effects produced by the others (Chapter 8). Sequences of spoken words and phrases are perceived more for their rhythmical qualities and for the physical effort demanded by their performance than for their literal meaning, whereas with the folk songs sung loudly by Fargion and the harmonica tunes played vigorously by the two performers, semantic and rhythmical qualities are disguised by the vehemence with which they are executed. Conversely, Burrows's bodily gesturing has the graphic quality of a piece of writing, and the moment in which Fargion stands still opens (or closes) meaning as a blank page would do.

However, alongside formal and conventional aspects, poetry is defined by the way in which its language constructs meaning in relation to its historical and subjective dimensions. It is through the application of Kristeva's privileging of the intertextual status of the poetic word and of the role played by subjectivity in the articulation of both structure and meaning of the text that Burrow's choreographic language can be understood as a form of dancing poetry. 'Vertical' (diachronic and synchronic) relations with 'exterior texts' determine the heterogeneous quality of the poetic sign, since the echoes of its conversations with other texts make it a site of ambivalence and infinite possibilities of sense (Kristeva, 1980, p. 66). 'Horizontal' relations reflect the dialogic dimension of the sign between speaking subject and addressee (1980, p. 66).

Burrows's movement vocabulary is intertextual and multifarious. Its intersections with other forms and contexts make it pregnant with meaning in that its gestures and steps carry with them the stratified historical, social and cultural significance they have acquired through their multiple occurrences. Consequently, his dance is in

constant dialogue with the places and shapes that its language has previously or concurrently inhabited and embodied: classical dance, avant-garde ballet, English folk dance, British New Dance, American postmodern choreography, contemporary European choreography, as well as his own earlier works, other bodily practices, music and other art forms. The variety of these references multiplies the possibilities of correspondence between forms and contents and enhances the evocative potential of his choreographic language, whilst also locating it beyond categorisations of genre and style.

Drawing on Kristeva's identification of poetic language as a 'parodic' operation which challenges the denotative value of language and the binary correspondence between signifiers and signifieds (1980, p. 31), I argue that a similar, transgressive gesture can be read in Burrows's choreographic language, where movement is not straightforwardly used as sign, but first and foremost as signifier, whose relationship with meaning is potential but not actual in the dance itself. The play of meaning in his pieces can be understood in the light of Kristeva's (and, before her, Jakobson's) focus on contradiction as the mode informing the signifying mechanisms of poetic language (see Chapter 3.2). In Burrows's dance, rhythmical and structural devices such as repetition and distribution in patterns, as well as the interplay of movements from different contexts of reference, generate processes of displacement, deferral and discursiveness of meaning which question accepted associations of form and content and reconfigure modalities of signification (see especially Chapter 7). Correspondences between movements and meanings are both challenged and accepted, through a deconstruction of oppositions that does not lead to blurring their distinction, but to recognising and accepting their contradictory state as an element of richness, and eventually, meaning.

Contradiction characterises also the status of the choreographer's voice in Burrows's work, where the elusion of conventional signification locates the subject in an ambiguous place between visibility and invisibility, affirmation and negation, presence and absence. Kristeva's reflections on how the poetic word embodies both the 'explo[sion]' (1984, p. 15) and the 'struggle' (1980, p. 31) of the subject, its crisis and its rebellion may shed light on the artistic position expressed in Burrows's work. Through a discursive use of movement across spatial and temporal contexts and in open dialogue with established vocabularies and stylistic genres, parody becomes the

means through which his choreographic language endorses marginality as the condition for the emergence of the subject as a suggestive, individual voice (see Chapter 5). According to Kristeva, the logic of poetic language 'attests to a "crisis" of social structures' which also implies 'changes in the *status of the subject* – his relation to the body, to others, and to objects' (1984, p. 15). In this sense, through linguistic parody and syntactic transgression Burrows's dance can be seen to acquire the potential for social critique and cultural positioning.

The dancing body in Burrows's works articulates historicity and subjectivity in a textual way. Through references to other occurrences and forms within the language of choreography (or as a challenge to its conventional boundaries), his dance manifests the subject's position within a field of choices, past and present. In this respect, whilst it questions traditional modes of representation, Burrows's choreography addresses the dichotomy between 'as if' and 'is' (Phelan, 1993, p. 165) in a different way from other contemporary European dance works concerned with issues of presence/representation (see also Chapter 1.4). They both challenge the use of overtly theatrical and figurative elements, but, whereas these performances expose 'historically dense' bodies by presenting them in their nakedness (physical or virtual) (Lepecki, 1999, p. 130), Burrows's dances present bodies that are already choreographic bodies, in the sense that they incarnate a reflection on the forms and possibilities of choreography. As such, they are stripped of the certainties given by techniques and clichés, and their 'nakedness' is realised in their openness to research. Hence his choreography articulates both presence and representation: its untheatrical modes offer the dance as simple, unmediated presence, but mediation, representation, the condition of 'as if' – that is, the potential of the work to stand for something else and generate meaningful connections with other contexts – are already implied in the textual density of what is offered.

Using poetry as a metaphor to understand the signifying strategies of Burrows's dance requires the identification of a context in which to read their distinctiveness. I have argued that his work is situated in the 'margins' of established forms, embodying both a response to and a critique of their modes. Similarly, the poetic language that Kristeva talks about is that which initiated a 'revolution' (1984), that is, the post-

Symbolist literary avant-garde which faced the social and ideological crisis brought about by 'the capitalist mode of production' (1984, p. 15). Hutcheon argues that postmodern literature 'is the heir' to that radical transformation which addressed the crisis of the subject, and observes that postmodern poetry 'breaks down the conventional oppositions, such as the one between the lyrical and the ironic, in the articulation of subjectivity in literary language' (1988, p. 177).² A detailed examination of Burrows's pieces alongside examples of contemporary poetry is beyond the scope of this study, in the sense that my concern is with an understanding of the specific role that his dances play in rethinking the language of contemporary choreography. Nevertheless, it can be suggested that his dance can find a parallel in poems that challenge grammatical conventions in a more fluid syntax, that articulate experimentation through a dialogue with tradition and that construct an intimate, 'local and topical' (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 51) discourse through the arrangement of structural and rhythmic patterns, thus generating ambivalence from simplicity, surprise from the reiteration of the known.

It can be argued that, if the late nineteenth-century, early twentieth-century revolutionary poetic language of Mallarmé, Antonin Artaud and James Joyce, analysed, amongst other examples, by Kristeva, addresses the 'shattering of discourse' and of the subject (1980, p. 15) by articulating a new signifying practice that voices 'instinctual, material, and social process[es]' (p. 101), then, as contemporary artworks, Burrows's dances embody a poetic response to the 'elimination of the subject' induced by the 'technological dehumanization' of 'the world of objectivity' (Vattimo, 1988, p. 46; see also Chapter 3.1). What is expressed is a subject articulating a 'weak' presence, which accepts its 'weakness' and 'residu[al]' form as the condition for its existence as a work of art (Vattimo, 1988, pp. 85, 86); a subject whose unity and complexity can be glimpsed through the 'minor' and 'deterritorialized' formulations of its own identity (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986).

A trajectory, tracing the stages of the subject's struggle against disappearance, can be identified in Burrows's works, from the fragmented stylisation of the choreographer's world in early pieces (*Hymns, Dull Morning, Stoics*), through the partial, segmented glances on its darker, more private manifestations (*Very, Our*), its almost loss in a web of formal layers in the works that embody the most analytic compositional research (*The Stop Quartet, Quintet*) and its return in more intimate, pulverised forms

in recent works. Here, and especially in the trilogy of duets with Fargion, the choreography, from the minute, repetitive details of the performers' movements, appears to trace a story (or the antithesis of a conventional story) that encompasses their worlds, their mutual relationship, and ultimately connects with the spectators' own selves and worlds (see Chapters 7 and 8).

As poetic texts, Burrows's dances are open to various associations. Through the reading of the relationship between the poetic word, the world and the reader offered by Sartre in *What Is Literature?* (see Chapter 3.3),³ the subtle suggestions of Burrows's works can be located in the dialogue they establish with different contexts of reference and with the imaginative engagement of the spectator. Whilst on the one hand the poetic word, which 'is not necessarily the word which we use to designate [specific] objects' (Sartre, 1993, p. 6), establishes uncharacteristic associations with the world, on the other hand it is also charged with the images and ideas that compose both the poet's and the reader's histories of the word itself through 'the insidious effects of biography' (p. 7), thus expanding its signification in a multiplicity of directions. In this thesis, similar effects have been read in Burrows's eclectic uses of bodily movements, whereby a gesture recognised as a sign according to a specific convention is employed in an unusual context and generates new connections of meaning (e.g. see the analysis of elements of religious and child-like behaviour in *Hymns* in Chapter 4) or acquires a wealth of new senses through the personal connotations it holds for both the artists themselves and the spectators (e.g. see the readings of the hand gestures of *Both Sitting Duet* suggested in Chapter 7).

The productive potential of the openness of Burrows's dances to signification can be read in the light of Gadamer's understanding of the evocative power of poetry as linked to its 'mimetic' quality. By mimesis Gadamer refers to the condition through which the poem offers itself as mere presence, thus allowing meaning to be simply 'there as itself' (Gadamer, 1986, p. 121; see also Chapter 3.3). Equally, however, the discursive, intertextual nature of poetic language, as conceptualised by poststructuralist perspectives, enables a reading of the relations that Burrows's works establish with a variety of cultural contexts and suggests an interpretation of subjectivity that takes into account 'the interactive power of ... the subject positions of producer and receiver' (Hutcheon, 1988, p. 83). Hence the reader's/viewer's subject is involved in the signifying processes of the works themselves, in the

intellectual and intuitive gesture that recognises in the offering of the work itself a potential for meaning. In this respect, Gadamer, who claims that the work of 'transitory arts' such as 'poetry, music, and dance' 'demands to be apprehended in itself as pure manifestation', also argues that the value of the creation as 'representation' has to be 'constructed by the viewer to whom it is presented' (1986, p. 126):

in a sense, it is not simply what it is, but rather something that it is not – not something we can simply use for a particular purpose, nor a material thing from which we might fabricate some other thing. On the contrary, it is something that only manifests and displays itself when it is constituted in the viewer.

Gadamer, 1986, p. 126.

It is in this sense that Burrow's dance constitutes itself as poetry in my reading – in my construction of the small, fragmentary, ambivalent traces of its 'mimetic' and (re)presentational quality through a subtle process that fluctuates between imaginative engagement and analysis, between perception of the work as mere presence and identification of the strategies by which it opens itself to subjects and realities.

A further analogy can be drawn between the speculative dimension of poetry discussed by Gadamer (see Chapter 3.3.) and traits of Burrows's choreography identified in the literature, which have been questioned and problematised throughout this thesis: its enigmatic nature, its abstract qualities and its idiosyncratic relationship to meaning. According to Gadamer, the poetic statement is speculative in the sense that it does not 'invok[e] the aid of occasional knowledge' and hence, by not presupposing verification, it produces a form of knowledge in itself (1989, p 469). Similarly to poetic texts, Burrows's dances often do not relate to a given external reality, against which they can be read and verified. They also do not abide by conventional grammatical and syntactic rules, thus eluding the logic of linearity and maintaining a sense of ambiguity. Movements and gestures interact with one another generating chains of suggestions and evocations upon which the viewer's interpretations are based. In this respect, his choreographic language reveals a productive quality, in the sense that it is capable of generating new realities and new contexts of meaning. Like in Gadamer's poetry, in Burrows's dance 'something is always being understood' (Gadamer cited in Baker, 2002, p. 151), whether meaning is read in the form of intellectual reflection, emotive suggestion, fragmented narrative or

in the mere gesture of presence of the dance itself. Hence I suggest that the poeticity of Burrows's choreographic language gives his dance the dimension of speculative and theoretical discourse.

Furthermore, I argue that Burrows's work is also a form of poetics of dance, in the sense that it is in itself an analysis of the language of choreography. His pieces are constructed in dialogue with specific dance techniques, everyday movements, the physicality of other art forms (e.g. of music) and explorations into the issues of presence and representation in recent performative practices. In this respect, the research towards new parameters, procedures and structures for dance is at the core of his investigation, and his work is a study conducted as much *on* the language of choreography as *through* it. In Genette's terms, the poetics of language concerns 'the innumerable forms of linguistic imagination. For men dream not only with words, they also dream ... about words, and about all the manifestations of language' (1982, p. 92). I leave the reader with this image, of Jonathan Burrows's work as a choreographer-dancer's dream with and about movement – serious and funny, recurrent and various, meticulous and extravagant, explicit and ambiguous.

A final note

I seem to have gone full circle – from arguing that I construct a poetics of Burrows's choreography, to suggesting that Burrows's work across practice and theory gives rise to a poetics of its own. Throughout this thesis elements of commonality and convergence have often been given more attention than those of difference and divergence. This has been so also in relation to the interpretations of the work formulated by me, the researcher, on the one hand, and by Burrows, the artist, on the other hand. Indeed, separating the two has seemed at times difficult, even impossible. The readings I have constructed here have been the result of a conflation of ideas, views and opinions generated through the research process itself, which, by its own nature, has been a form of dialogue (see especially Preface and Chapter 2). It seems natural to think that this exchange has been instigated by a commonality of interests and sensitivities, the condition for a 'fusion of horizons' to take place (Gadamer, 1989). Hence, rather than attempting to separate what is intrinsically the product of an interaction, I suggest that the specificity of my contribution to this hermeneutical

process lies in the articulation of the modalities of the process itself and ultimately in the formulation of a theory of a poetic interpretation of choreography. Further conclusions can be drawn from this interpretive experience, in the form of wider reflections on Burrows's work and on contemporary choreography in general, as well as on modalities of research in dance.

It is my contention that the poeticity of Burrows's dances is not simply intrinsic in the works themselves, but rather is situated in the connection they (may) create with the viewer/reader and in the possibilities of critical and theoretical enquiry they generate through this exchange. If, in Kristeva's terms, poetic language is that which is parodic and paradoxical, it is against a context of existing rules and perceptions that its contradictory and transgressive nature should be measured. In previous chapters I have reflected on the number of disciplinary codes that Burrows's choreography challenges, in order to discuss its distinctiveness within the field of contemporary dance. Nevertheless conventions and expectations can be identified also in the broader realm of performance and of art in general.

In defying technique and virtuosity, Burrows's dance reconfigures the 'exchange' that stage productions are conventionally expected to offer the audience – an exchange that, according to Barthes, in traditional theatre is based on the reduction of 'quality to quantity' and 'on a pure quantification of effects: a whole circuit of computable appearances establishes a quantitative equality between the cost of a ticket and the tears of an actor or the luxuriousness of a set' (1993, pp. 153, 154).⁴ In this sense, his work shares a 'reductionist' approach with other recent European choreographic experiments in which Lepecki reads the articulation of a critique of spectatorship (1999; see also Chapter 1.4). However, in other examples of contemporary European dance the challenge to established techniques often takes the form of a rejection of the reference code and of a stripping of the dancing body of all its disciplined traits, to arrive at a naked body, shorn of technique and 'ready to be exchanged with the audience's body as a mutual gift' (Siegmond, 2003, p. 90; see also Chapter 1.4). On the contrary, in Burrows, the questioning of accepted disciplines does not lead to a dismissal of reference principles, but rather to a deeper engagement with them and their rethinking. His work does not constitute itself outside the language of dance. Instead, it is created in dialogue with it; it reformulates its codes and modes in a 'poetic' way, by focusing on rhythm and composition. Using these two aspects of

choreographic language as tools of enquiry, and as a means to remain within the idiom, his choreography realises a rethinking of the principles of dance (with particular reference to specific disciplines) and of the ways in which they can produce signification and thus generate meaning.

The inclusion of Burrows's work in accepted theorisations of the performative and conceptual stances that have been recognised as defining the European experimental dance scene is arguably the result of an uncritical generalisation (e.g. Lepecki, 2004). I suggest instead that Burrows's position in this context is anomalous, demonstrating an individual interpretation of common issues. As I have argued throughout this thesis, this singularity is to be perceived in relation to the artistic and cultural contexts of his practice. Examples of recent European choreography have been seen to incarnate explicit forms of social critique, since their rejection of formal movement techniques allows a more direct focus on cultural and political aspects of the performing body (Siegmond, 2003). On the contrary, the critical potential of Burrows's work is realised through the language of dance, not through its abandonment. As I have proposed in Chapter 5 drawing on Deleuze and Guattari's notion of minor literature, the innovative and political value of Burrows's choreography lies in its positioning as a 'minor', idiosyncratic use of a 'major', established code, hence still within it, not away from it.

If Burrows's work distinguishes itself from continental European dance, maintaining a dialogue with the discipline and not rejecting it entirely, it differs from most practices composing the British contemporary scene for the 'deterritorialisation' of the language of dance it realises by challenging accepted narrative, figurative and representational modalities (Deleuze and Guattari, 1986). One of the few, if not the only, British choreographer to enjoy a productive exchange with, and a working presence within, the European experimental scene, Burrows appears isolated in the British contemporary dance landscape. Here, with the exception of a few rebellious figures, such as Clark and Anderson,⁵ and of Butcher's research into the relationship between the details and the spatial dimension of movement, dance is often characterised by a less critical relationship with codified techniques, narrative modes and theatrical conventions. If, in the late 1990s, Mackrell claimed that what British contemporary dance was 'doing best' was 'a poised, confident and richly satisfying balance between narrative and form' (1996-97, p. 58),⁶ a decade later it can be argued

that the value of Burrows's choreography in relation to what appears to be an unresolved dichotomy in British dance lies in his experimentation with new ways of conceiving and articulating the relationship between content and structure, subjective stances and compositional codes.

It would be interesting to investigate to what extent this more conservative attitude of the British scene is linked to the parameters of funding systems in the United Kingdom and to the considerable number of contemporary dance schools that disseminate standardised versions of dance styles. However, these considerations aside, my focus here is on the role that Burrows's choreography plays in relation to this cultural and artistic divide. In Burrows, formal research goes hand in hand with a parodic, transgressive attitude, which, poetically, allows the emergence of the subject's voice. Without explicitly narrating stories and as far away as possible from the shock effect of so much contemporary performance, his dances unveil the intimate and the personal through the details of their compositions and the formal and cultural contradictions they play with. Their critical and transformative function, in response to both the sterility of virtuosity per se and the loudness of much artistic rebellion, is realised in the subtle and delicate ways through which they invite the audience to see the strangeness of the everyday, the humour of rigour, the variety of repetition, the passion of method. His work requires that the audience develop a different approach to watching performance. It is so distant from the quantification of quality that Barthes (1993) talks about in relation to conventional theatre that, in a sense, it could almost be described as a qualification of quantity: repetition, the precision of form and the detail are quantitative elements of which we are asked to perceive subtle, hidden qualities. Quantity and quality lose their distinction in his dance, and so do technique and interpretation, rule and transgression, convention and invention, as one does not go without the other.

Another opposition that his work deconstructs is the dichotomy between the physical and the conceptual dimensions of dance, and ultimately between practice and theory. The relationship between movement material and compositional ideas in Burrows's choreography is not of a hierarchical kind, in favour of either one of the two. Whilst intuitions and mental principles are never accepted without being tested experientially, the selection of physical elements always follows a certain overarching logic. In this sense, his practice is informed by an inquisitive attitude which assumes

the form of a theorising on the ways and modes of dance through physical research which is inextricable from intellectual questioning.

I believe this approach has consequences for how dance research may be conceived. In addressing tensions and contradictions of choreographic practice and in deconstructing dichotomies regarding its nature and functions, Burrows's work suggests a need to rethink the ways in which performance is watched, examined and read. The relationship between compositional details and intimate images, rationality and physicality, practice and reflection in his choreography calls for an analytic and interpretive perspective that engages with both the minute choreographic elements and the intellectual rationale of the works, the structural precision and the personal allusions, and that reads dance as a form as much of representation as of investigation and construction of the self and of the world. Moreover, his questioning and speculative approach to dance creation suggests a reformulation of the conventional relationship between scholar and artist towards a dialogical practice/theory of research that challenges this divide.

Notes

- ¹ This formulation of the idea of subjectivity as event is modelled on Vattimo's notion of Being as event (1988), which draws on Heidegger's questioning of metaphysical conceptions of presence and of humanistic theories of the subject.
- ² This observation is made by Hutcheon with specific reference to the work of the contemporary American poet John Ashbery.
- ³ Sartre's investigation of poetry is interesting from the point of view of his observations on the openness of the poetic word to associations. A discussion of the (debatable) position it expresses in relation to the ways in which artists may engage with their social, political and existential 'situation' is beyond the scope of this research.
- ⁴ I have already explored this issue in Perazzo, 2004.
- ⁵ Clark and Anderson, however, can be seen to have made of their eccentricity an instrument of their mainstream success.
- ⁶ See also Chapter 6.1.

APPENDIX A

CHOREOCHRONICLE

CHOREOCHRONICLE¹

1. EARLY WORKS²

Catch, 1980

FOR: Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet

MUSIC: Douglas Gould

PREMIERE: Exeter, 20 June 1980

Listen, 1980

FOR: Extemporary Dance Company

PREMIERE: Shaw Theatre, London

approx. 14 minutes

With a Gaping Wide-mouthed Waddling Frog, 1980

FOR: Royal Ballet Choreographic Group

WITH: Jonathan Burrows

MUSIC GENRE: traditional

PREMIERE: 2 November 1980

Cloister, 1982

FOR: Spiral Dance Company

MUSIC: Edward Lambert

A Man at the Zoo, 1982

PREMIERE: Riverside Studios, London

The Energy between Us, 1982

WITH: Ashley Page, Ravenna Tucker

MUSIC: Edward Lambert

PREMIERE: June 1982, first Frederick Ashton Choreographic Award

Driving Rain, 1983

WITH: Beverley Sandwith

MUSIC: Charles Alkan (*Allegro Barbaro*)

PREMIERE: Royal Ballet Choreographic Group performance, Mac Owan Theatre, London, January 1983

The Winter Play, 1983

FOR: Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet

MUSIC: Dudley Simpson

PREMIERE: Birmingham, 13 April 1983

Hymns, Parts 1-2, 1985

WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Simon Rice

MUSIC: Hymns Ancient and Modern

approx. 7 minutes

Squash, 1985

WITH: Emily Barney, Jonathan Burrows, Liz Lauren, Sue Glasser

MUSIC: Nicholas Wilson

PREMIERE: Riverside Studios, London

approx. 26 minutes

A Tremulous Heart Requires, 1986

WITH: Fiona Brockway, Fionuala Power

MUSIC: Nicholas Wilson

DESIGN: Andy Klunder

PREMIERE: Riverside Studios, London, October 1986

2. MAIN WORKS

Hymns (duet), 1986

WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Simon Rice

MUSIC: Hymns Ancient and Modern

PREMIERE: Dance Umbrella, Riverside Studios, London, 28 October 1986

approx. 12 minutes

Hymns (complete version), 1988

WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Simon Rice, Jeremy Sheffield, William Trevitt, William Tuckett

MUSIC: Hymns Ancient and Modern, Bach, Chopin, Wilson Simonal

PREMIERE: The Place Theatre, London, 23 June 1988

STRUCTURE: trio (Sheffield, Trevitt, Tuckett); duet (Burrows, Rice)

approx. 45 minutes

Dull Morning (originally *Dull Morning Cloudy Mild*), 1989

WITH: Peter Abegglen, Lynne Bristow, Neil Geraghty, Deborah Jones, Gillian Revie, William Trevitt

MUSIC: Matteo Fargion

COSTUMES: Craig Givens

PREMIERE: The Place Theatre, London, 26 September 1989

approx. 50 minutes

Stoics Part 1, 1990

WITH: Lynne Bristow, Jonathan Burrows

MUSIC: Johann Strauss Jr., Matteo Fargion, Felix Mendelssohn

PREMIERE: Riverside Studios, London, July 1990

Stoics, 1991

WITH: Lynne Bristow, Jonathan Burrows, Luke Heydon, Deborah Jones, Natalie McCann

MUSIC: Felix Mendelssohn (*Songs without Words*), Johann Sebastian Bach (*Chorales 326 & 267*), Curly Putnam (*Green Green Grass of Home*), Matteo Fargion (*Piece for 2 Pianos*), Johann Strauss Jr (*The Blue Danube Waltz*).

SET DESIGN AND COSTUMES: Craig Givens

PREMIERE: The Place Theatre, London, 15 April 1991

STRUCTURE: 5 parts (duet 1: Burrows, Bristow; duet 2: Burrows, Bristow; solo: Heydon; trio: Bristow, Jones, McCann; quartet: Burrows, Heydon, Jones, McCann)

Stoics Quartet, 1991

WITH: Luke Heydon, Deborah Jones, Natalie McCann, Simon Rice

MUSIC: Felix Mendelssohn (*Songs without Words*)

SET DESIGN AND COSTUMES: Craig Givens

PREMIERE: Royal Opera House, London, 20 November 1991

STRUCTURE: 1 part (quartet)

Very, 1992

WITH: Lynne Bristow, Jonathan Burrows, Deborah Jones

MUSIC: Matteo Fargion

LIGHTING: Peter Mumford

FILM: Adam Roberts

COSTUMES: Joe Casely-Hatford

PREMIERE: Dance Umbrella, The Place Theatre, London, 30 October 1992

approx. 50 minutes

Our, 1994

WITH: Lynne Bristow, Susana García, Deborah Jones, Edwin Lung, Henry Montes, Fionuala Power

MUSIC: Matteo Fargion

LIGHTING: Tina MacHugh

PREMIERE: Phoenix Theatre, Leicester

approx. 50 minutes

Hands (film), 1995

DIRECTOR: Adam Roberts

WITH: Jonathan Burrows

MUSIC: Matteo Fargion (performed by The Balanescu Quartet)

LIGHTING: Jack Hazan

PRODUCED BY: Fiona Morris and Peter Mumford (Dancelines) for BBC/The Arts Council of England

approx. 5 minutes; black & white

Blue Yellow (film), 1995

DIRECTOR: Adam Roberts

WITH: Sylvie Guillem

MUSIC: Kevin Volans

LIGHTING: Jack Hazan

COSTUME: Issey Miyake

PRODUCED BY: Ben Woolford (Tall Stories) for RD Studio Productions/France 2/BBC TV

approx. 12 minutes; colour

The Stop Quartet, 1996

WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Kate Gowar, Henry Montes, Fin Walker

MUSIC: Kevin Volans, Matteo Fargion

LIGHTING: Michael Hulls

PREMIERE: Kunstencentrum Vooruit, Ghent, 7 October 1996

STRUCTURE: duet (Burrows, Montes); trio (Burrows, Montes, Walker); quartet (Burrows, Montes, Walker, Gowar)

approx. 45 minutes

Walking/Music, 1997

WITH: Ballett Frankfurt

MUSIC: Kevin Volans (percussion: Robin Schulkowsky)

SET DESIGN: Michael Hulls

PREMIERE: Frankfurt, 30 January 1997

STRUCTURE: ensemble for nine dancers

Quintet, 1997

WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Dana Fouras, Henry Montes, Ragnhild Olsen, Fin Walker

MUSIC AND TEXT: Tom Johnson (performed by Henry Montes)

LIGHTING: Michael Hulls

PREMIERE: The Place Theatre, London, 15 April 1997

approx. 15 minutes

***Things I Don't Know*, 1998**

WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Dana Fouras, Ragnhild Olsen; Matteo Fargion

MUSIC: Kevin Volans (for *Things I Don't Know*), Matteo Fargion (for *Donna Che Beve* and *Altogether*)

PREMIERE: Kunstencentrum Vooruit, Ghent, 14 May 1998

STRUCTURE: four parts (*Donna Che Beve*, solo: Fargion; *Altogether*, trio: Burrows, Fouras, Olsen; *Things I Don't Know*, solo: Burrows and duet: Fouras, Olsen)

***Singing*, 1999 (added as the fifth part of *Things I Don't Know*)**

WITH: Lynne Bristow, Jonathan Burrows

MUSIC: Matteo Fargion

LIGHTING: Michael Hulls

PREMIERE: Poderwil, Berlin

REVIVED: Bonnie Bird Theatre, Laban, London, 19 February 2003

approx. 15 minutes

***Weak Dance Strong Questions*, 2001**

BY AND WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Jan Ritsema

PREMIERE: Panacea Festival, Stockholm, 17 March 2001

approx. 50 minutes

***Both Sitting Duet*, 2002**

BY AND WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion

PREMIERE: Kaaitheater, Brussels, 10 October 2002

approx. 45 minutes

***The Quiet Dance*, 2005**

BY AND WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion

PREMIERE: Tanzwerkstatt Europa, Muffathalle, Munich, 7 August 2005

approx. 45 minutes

***Speaking Dance*, 2006**

BY AND WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Matteo Fargion

PREMIERE: Dance Umbrella, The Place Theatre, London, 18 October 2006

approx. 45 minutes

3. OTHER PROJECTS

Work in Progress, 1991

WITH: Lynne Bristow, Jonathan Burrows, Luke Heydon, Deborah Jones, Natalie McCann

OCCASION: South Bank Show, 1991

As It Is (programme), 1998

one-off evening of solos and duets by five other choreographers

OCCASION: inauguration of Jonathan Burrows's one-year residency at the South Bank Centre

VENUE: Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 9 July 1998

FEATURING CHOREOGRAPHIES BY: Michael Clark, William Forsythe and Dana Caspersen, Amanda Miller, Paul Selwyn Norton, Meg Stuart

Other Bodies (video-installation project), 1999

WITH: Wendy Houston, Peter Newman

VENUE: Royal Festival Hall, London (as part of Jonathan Burrows's one-year residency at the South Bank Centre), September 1999

Duet, 1999

BY AND WITH: Jonathan Burrows, Akram Khan

MUSIC: Kevin Volans (cello: Joan Jeanrenaud)

Commissioned as part of 'Desert Steps', an evening of the music of Kevin Volans

VENUE: Queen Elizabeth Hall, London, 14 July 1999

Schreibstück, 2004

PROJECT BY: Thomas Lehman

CHOREOGRAPHIES BY: Jonathan Burrows, Hooman Sharifi, Christine De Smedt

WITH (Burrows's piece): Claire Godsmark, Mark Lorrimer, Chrysa Parkinson

VENUE: Kaaithheater, Brussels, October 2004

4. AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

Ursula Moreton Choreographic Award, 1978

Frederick Ashton Choreographic Award, 1991

Digital Dance Award, 1991

Resident Company, The Place Theatre, London, 1992-1994

Associate Artist, Kunstencentrum Vooruit, Ghent, 1992-2002

Time Out Award, 1994

Prudential Award for Dance, 1995

Choreographer in Residence, South Bank Centre, London, 1998-1999

Arts Council of England Dance Fellowship Award, 2000-2002

Foundation for Contemporary Performance Arts (New York) Award, 2002

Bessie Award for Choreography, 2004

Visiting Professor, Drama Department, Royal Holloway University of London, 2006-ongoing

¹ This choreoChronicle is a collation of details gathered from a number of sources. These are acknowledged in Chapter 1.1 in the context of the reconstruction of Burrows's career. Where possible, data have also been verified against Burrows's own memory and archival documentation. However, a limited number of details is missing or remains uncertain.

² Earlier student pieces created for Royal Ballet School performances include: *Kaleidoscope* (1978), *Songs of Travel* (1978), *Nemeton* (1978), *Three Solos* (1978), *Hotfoot Dances* (1979), *A Tragedy* (1979).

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEWS

INTERVIEW 1

[Burrows, J. (2005c), Unpublished conversation with the author, 26 November.]

Burrows on *Hymns*

London, 26 November 2005

Daniela Perazzo Domm: What I am especially interested in about *Hymns* is the relationship between the musical score and the choreography. It appears that you made a selection of hymn tunes, choosing particular stanzas, repeating them and combining them with others.

Jonathan Burrows: Well, I don't really remember... But the thing that you need to know is – and, in a way, this is going back a bit, this is more like the history of why I started choreographing, which is something that I spent a lot of time thinking about, about five years ago. What I realised was that there was a certain moment, when I was a student at the Royal Ballet School, when they started to lose interest in me slightly as a potential ballet dancer. I've realised since that the Royal Ballet School had a habit that, when they started to be unsure about how somebody was going to turn out as a ballet dancer, they would try and launch them towards other things. So they kind of made it out as though they were very interested in little things that I had choreographed when I was a student. I mean, in some way, I think there were some people who were genuinely interested; but, on the other hand, I think it was also a way to deal with me, because they didn't quite know what to do with me, and this was when I had been training there for six years or so. But anyway, I kind of bought the line that they spun me and I did start to become genuinely interested. And I was very lucky that at that time at the Royal Ballet they were afraid that the two choreographers who had been working with them for many years – Frederick Ashton and then, of a slightly younger generation, Kenneth MacMillan – had been there many years (and Ashton, certainly, was an old man by then), and they hadn't taken much care in encouraging other generations of choreographers; they had, if you like, relied on these two huge figures. But around the time when Norman Morrice became the director of the Royal Ballet, the organisation made some more serious efforts to encourage young

choreographers. Norman Morrice had been in many ways a very important figure in the development of dance in England, because he had been the director and choreographer for Ballet Rambert, and he had changed Rambert from a ballet company to a modern dance company. He, as far as I understand it, was the person who really introduced the idea of modern dance to the UK. It was a long time after that that he became the director of the Royal Ballet, but he was somebody who thought differently about choreography from many of the people around the Royal Ballet. So one of the things that they did was that they started a Saturday morning choreographic course at the Upper School of the Royal Ballet School, where you went between 16 and 18. One of the people that they invited to come and work with the students was Kate Flatt. (She now does rather wonderful movement direction work in theatre.) Interestingly enough, she herself had studied at the Royal Ballet School on a teacher's training course, but at that time she had also gone on from there to be a research assistant with Léonide Massine, who had been one of the choreographers of the Diaghilev period, while Massine was trying to conceive his masterwork of an analysis of choreography – which is a huge thick book, which is almost completely ignored and has disappeared, but it was a kind of bizarre and fantastic attempt by Massine to articulate things about choreography.

DPD: Ballet choreography?

JB: No, in a way he went much beyond ballet; he really was trying to get at something much more fundamental about movement and the composition of movement. And Kate Flatt ended up as a research assistant with him. And she was also part of the group of people who had founded the X6 Dance Space, down at Butler's Wharf¹ – she was certainly a part of the things that happened around there. In a way, they were the first people who embraced the kind of newer thinking about performance and dance which had grown out of John Cage's work and then the Judson Church choreographers, and it was a very interesting group of people. Anyway, to cut a long story short, Kate Flatt was invited to come and work with us on Saturday mornings and she was a really vital link to completely different ways of thinking from the ones I knew, coming as I did from ballet. So it was through her, really, that I, and many other people, ended up going to see other performances, going down to Riverside Studios, hanging out of Riverside Studios, seeing all sorts of other

things. She also worked with some of these ideas from Massine; they were very difficult physical concepts to grasp, the ones that Massine was trying to work with, but they were very interesting. And the thing that was most interesting about them was that they were about a much quieter and more detailed sensibility about how the body moved and how the body fought its way through movement. And Kate Flatt, when she was working with us on these studies of Massine, encouraged us to work without music. This was a revelation, because ballet saw choreography as based on the idea that you took a piece of music and you choreographed something to it. Whereas on those Saturday mornings there was this kind of discovery that there could be this whole world of a music in movement which was separate from music itself.

And then what happened to me was that, when Norman Morrice became the director of the Royal Ballet, he invited me to become an apprentice choreographer with the Royal Ballet. I've still got my original contract and that's what it says: I was an apprentice choreographer. And, in a way, it was a brilliant thing, but I actually remember sitting in the office with Norman Morrice saying, 'but I don't really want to join the Royal Ballet. And what would I do as an apprentice choreographer?' But somehow he persuaded me that he would help and that we would find what my role could be. When I say I kind of discussed it with him, it sounds like I was being quite smart, but I wasn't; I was very naïve, really. But in the end I turned up with the Royal Ballet, but it was just too difficult for any of the other members of staff to grasp remotely what my role was supposed to be. They had no clue: 'apprentice choreographer: what are we supposed to do with him? He can't dance, he can't do ballet.' I mean, I was a terrible ballet dancer. So if my then wife hadn't got pregnant with Bridget, my daughter, I probably would have left after a year. But then I couldn't, because at that time it was too uncertain for an independent dancer, financially – I mean, the world and mechanisms of funding which are in place now, or just about in place still, didn't exist in the same way.

So I stayed. I spent quite a number of years standing around carrying spears and then I was lucky that Kenneth MacMillan, who was then the choreographer in residence, liked me, so he started feeding me bits and pieces and gradually I ended up being a character dancer of some kind. And I did quite a lot of nice roles in the end. But I did still have hanging over me this thing that I had been supposed to be an apprentice choreographer. So when I first arrived there, they gave me twice a commission to

choreograph something for the Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet (which then became the Birmingham Royal Ballet).² And both were really really difficult experiences for me. I made ballets which were not right for me and were a real struggle. And then I just gave up, I didn't choreograph anything for two years. So by then I was about 23 or 24 and the first thing I did when I started again was *Hymns*.

So this was a long preamble, but I think it is important that you know that stuff because it gives some history of how it's really taken me a very long time to figure out how I place myself as a choreographer in relation to everything else. And that's partly because I think I'm a slow learner and I started off very naïve, and partly because coming from a ballet company is really difficult. They were just very unhappy times really, I didn't know what I was doing and I didn't know how to do it, and I felt terrible pressure on me. The thing is that when I started to work on that first fragment, the first twelve minutes of *Hymns*, I had stopped for two years and I was really determined that I wanted to do something that was not for the Royal Ballet, that was not because I felt this pressure. But of course I also felt I needed to prove something. And by that time I had seen a lot of work by the generation of the Judson Church people, who had started to come to perform in the UK.

DPD: Did you see them perform in London?

JB: Yes, they came to Riverside Studios: Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Steve Paxton, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown. I never saw Simone Forti at that time, for some reason. But anyway, this initial work on *Hymns* was very important for me; it was a real attempt to define something for myself in relation to all these new experiences of dance, and I was really conscious of that.

The hymn tunes choice just came because I just liked the pathos of it. I wouldn't like that now, I would want to do it in a different way, but there was something about that, and I quite liked the odd four-squareness of the music and the repetition of the music. And it was also music that kind of belonged to me, and I had struggled with working with new music or classical music; I had no feel for it and I didn't want to work with rock music (although I used to go to a lot of rock concerts and punk concerts and stuff) because for me it didn't seem to need anybody to do arty-crafty dance into it. That wasn't what it was about. I'm not knocking Michael Clark or something,

because I loved what he did from the start. So the hymn tunes seemed a way to use something, in a very pragmatic way, that wasn't about classical music and at the same time wasn't going down this road, which seemed to belong at that time to Karole Armitage or Michael Clark, and I didn't have a feel for that, much as I loved it. So I just picked the hymn tunes that I liked the most, as simple as that, and I sat with Tim Sutton, a pianist who had been at the Royal Ballet School (he was a very interesting man, who I always used to talk to about art and poetry and so on) and we just figured out a structure – just like, 'okay, play it x number of times and stop, and then play the next one x number of times', and so on. And we put together these blocks of tunes played really dumbly on the piano. That was the idea.

Then I broke my thumb and my hand was in plaster, and with Simon Rice, whom I had asked if he would do this thing with me, we had to start working on a showing we had been asked to do during a choreography workshop, and I had my hand in plaster. So, in a way, that's what determined this strange not very much happening, quite gentle wandering around. Actually, you see it at the beginning of the piece, when we walk around with one hand on our belly: it was because I had my hand in plaster. But also, there was something about the attitude of performing it which was definitely influenced by seeing Kantor's *Dead Class* at Riverside Studios and by Beckett. I mean, *Hymns* wasn't as sophisticated as that, but there was something about the atmosphere that was reminiscent of those works. The problem with *Hymns* was that people warmed to it. In a way, because we were part of a ballet company, we were ballet people, audiences came to see it and they saw it as eccentric and quaint and English and ironic. And because we were ballet dancers, the only experience of performing we had was ballet. As we performed it, we moved towards the thing that people wanted. And by the time it got filmed for the BBC [MacGibbon, 1992], it had become something a bit cute, and that rather confused me because it didn't feel like it had started out that way. So that was a horrible learning curve. Recently I've looked at the very first tape that we made of it – bizarrely enough it was actually videoed by Ross MacGibbon, who also did the filming for the BBC much later on, so he was there at the very beginning (it's a funny old video, shot in rehearsals when we did the first seven minutes [Burrows, 1986a]) – and I still really like it. It has something that we lost quite quickly. It's not cute, it has a toughness which we kind of lost, and its relationship to the music is much more tangential; it's not being funny around the

music, it's much drier than that. In a way it's deadpan, but it's not played-up deadpan; it's like saying, 'we are just going to do this and we are just going to go on doing this' – it has that attitude. And the relationship between Simon and me is very sideways and very reserved and very delicate, between two boys, and when I see that first tape it has a kind of emptiness which I really like. So I feel quite sad that that was lost, although now that it's a long way on from then I feel like, okay, we lost it, and I got lost in many other directions after that, but at least we had found something for a moment, and I think that losing it was probably inevitable trying to do that thing inside a ballet company. In a way the thing about that first tape of *Hymns* is that it remains important because there was something about it which seemed to be a seed of something that felt right for me. And my hunch is that in many ways a lot of the pieces that I've made since then are attempts to put right the thing that went wrong when that little delicate fragment of a duet turned into a bit of a cute, ironic routine. The other things I've made since have been attempts to understand what it was – and what it still is – that I liked about that first fragment, and what was lost, why it was lost, what was the thinking behind the fragment and then what was lost. On the one hand, that really frustrates me and, on the other hand, I guess that's what keeps me going now, because I don't feel like I've quite finished with that. I find it very difficult to remain so naïve for so long and to be such a slow developer, it's very frustrating. But on the other hand it gives me something to push against, I suppose. So for me, when I look at the tape of *Both Sitting Duet*, when I look at the tape of *The Quiet Dance* and when I look at the first twenty-five minutes of *The Stop Quartet*, which is the duet with Henry Montes, it's all the same piece. It's all the same as that first little, delicate fragment of *Hymns*. So that's why I still have a real feeling for what I was trying to do but didn't know how to do when we first did it. Matteo and I did seriously think about trying to do it again, because Matteo, funnily enough, saw *Hymns* and liked it. When I watch that old video I think that maybe there would be a way to do it and it could be fresh. And again, I'm not sure, I think it might just look a bit dated and, actually, it's better just to go on remaking it endlessly, constantly trying to make it better! Maybe that's better than trying to do it again.

DPD: I do see a similarity between the relationship that you have in the performances with Matteo and the one you had with Simon Rice in *Hymns*.

JB: Yes, it's horizontal relationship, somehow, not very direct.

DPD: And I would say it's true that you see this much more in the older tape, but also in the other rehearsal one from 1988 [Burrows, 1988], than in the BBC documentary [MacGibbon, 1992]. In the BBC version, it feels like you are driving the whole thing, whereas you don't get this impression from the other two videos.

JB: Having said that, there have been performances of *Both Sitting Duet* when we ended up driving it.

DPD: What I mean is also you driving the other performer, you leading.

JB: I see, that's interesting. The other tape that I gave you [Burrows, 1988] is something like half-way between this first one and the documentary. It does happen to pieces, the thing is so familiar to you that you don't know when it's starting to fall out of your hands and change into something else. As I said, it happened even with *Both Sitting Duet*: Nigel Hinds, our manager, hadn't seen *Both Sitting Duet* for about eighteen months at one point and he came to a performance and said something about the fact that I was driving it, because I have a tendency to do that, but also that we had lost something in the performance of it that was a bit more like that thing, 'this is what we are going to do and we are just going to go on doing it.' And he felt that something was lost because of that; the whole thing, again, had become an image of the thing that the audience liked when they saw it, which is interesting, but then eventually what happens is that it moves too far beyond what it was that the audience first began to respond to. But it was really interesting when Nigel said that about *Both Sitting Duet* because we argued: 'this is ridiculous, it's marvellous!' But actually the next night, just before the performance, we said, 'but what are we going to do?' Because there's a terrible danger that you become so self-conscious about it that you are not free within it, it's not breathing anymore, you put a straight jacket on it. But we found some notes, the principles of how to perform *Both Sitting Duet*, which were in the back of the scores, and there was something there which just gave us a clue. We had written down, at a certain point, when we were making *Both Sitting Duet*, that the energy must come from the thing you do and not be imposed on top of it. And that performance that night, the night after Nigel made this comment, was like

a revelation. Suddenly the whole thing came back to life. But it was only by somebody else from the outside seeing it that that adjustment was made. I suppose the things I make are slightly prone to it because, first of all, I love performing, and I did spend an awful lot of time doing the kind of performing where you play up performing. So, as much as I like to be cool, at the end of the day there is something that comes from ballet, which is about mugging it up. And because there's a kind of sense of humour in the work, both in the attitude and in the way audience's expectations are subverted within the performance, you get this response of laughter. And when you get a response of laughter, I don't like to be deadpan in the face of the laughter. There has to be some acknowledgement or recognition, or acceptance of that, but the question is just how far to let that go.

So, I suppose, what I'm saying is that, although I feel a certain sadness for what happened with *Hymns*, now, in retrospect, I can see that there was something stronger that I found, which I quickly lost again. In some ways, all the pieces have gone through journeys like that, where they start to disappear a bit and become over-performed, or overdriven, which is the thing that you noticed about the BBC film of *Hymns*, and then you pull them back again. And I think, at the end of the day, you also have to accept that, and you just learn ways to be aware of it. It is also interesting that Simon Rice is somebody as a performer who danced very similar character roles to mine in the Royal Ballet; we often played small funny people or something like that. So we were also slightly typecast or stereotyped, which means that it was very hard to resist that sometimes. It wasn't much the world of serious choreography and contemporary art that we were part of at the Royal Ballet, it was something much more commercial in a way, and populist. That was also running in our bloodstreams. And now, in a funny kind of way – I mean, I used to find that very difficult, I used to want to prove all the time that I was tough, that I was intellectual, that I was cool – as I get older now, I begin, in some ways, to allow a certain pleasure for those more show-business sides of ballet performing, really. They don't seem so much of a threat anymore, somehow.

DPD: You have said that the difference between the first stage of the piece and the one documented by the BBC is also in this very strong irony that comes out. But I would say that an element of irony was already there from the start.

JB: Yes, it was.

DPD: With regard to the relationship with the music, I'm also wondering whether the criterion you followed in choosing the hymns was only about their tunes or whether you also played on the relationship between the movement and the lyrics.

JB: Well, I do like 'for those in peril on the sea'!

DP: So you knew the words very well?

JB: Yes, I still do.

DPD: Do you think that most people do, or at least did at that time?

JB: Yes, quite a lot of people do. In fact I just rang my dad two days ago and asked if he'll send me a hymn book for Christmas, because I lost the one that I had and I love Anglican hymn tunes.

DPD: So you did have the lyrics in mind when you choreographed the piece?

JB: The lyrics don't affect the choreography, we didn't build it from the words or something.

DPD: But if I saw a relationship between the lyrics and the choreography, would you accept that?

JB: I'm trying to think. With 'for those in peril on the sea', there's something like Simon leant back against me and I'm wobbling from side to side. But it was done more playfully than anything else. The same goes for 'hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.' But of those hymns I only ever know the first verse. Normally at church you read it, so I only know the first verse of any of them by heart. And I never looked at them when choreographing.

DPD: So you didn't expect the audience to make connections necessarily between the lyrics and the choreography?

JB: No, I knew they would, whatever we did.

DPD: Because I don't know how many people in a British audience would know them well.

JB: It depends what background people come from. I mean, say, amongst my group of friends, two or three of them would be people who would have gone to church and sung hymns and it would be part of their life.

DPD: But maybe even if they didn't know exactly all the lyrics, they would know the odd verse?

JB: Mainly 'for those in peril on the sea', because I can't remember what the other hymn tunes are. *Dear Lord and Father of Mankind*, which is a beautiful hymn...

DPD: *Onward, Christian Soldiers*...

JB: Ah *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, of course. Well, *Onward, Christian Soldiers*, people would know. So, if anything, in *Onward, Christian Soldiers* it was more like we were being completely unsoldierly, so that was more the point.

DPD: So whereas the hymn is about this force driving on...

JB: Yes, we were trying to be completely ineffective.

DPD: So if I see this kind of relationship, do you agree?

JB: Yes, that was much more what it was. I never thought about it before. Something like this brassy kind of forward marching hymn.

DPD: Yes, the 'mighty army' and you look totally lost.

JB: Yes, we were just kind of lost and wandering around. Yes, that was the feel of it. Which we didn't really think of as ironic. I mean, it was ironic, but it was kind of gentle ironic.

DPD: Also, in some of the reviews that were written when you performed it, back in 1988, the critics were making connections with the hymns but also with the image of schoolchildren at school assemblies, playing and fighting with each other and so on. Do you recognise this kind of behaviour as influencing the choreography in some way?

JB: It's hard to say, because Simon Rice and I did go to school together, we just did have that relationship. Maybe I'm being disingenuous, because I don't like the idea of that child-like thing. Maybe it is there because I was certainly very naïve and child-like even when I was in my twenties, but at the same time perhaps there was a habit amongst dance critics to talk about more contemporary dance as though it was something more simplistic. If I think of early reviews of Rosemary Butcher's work, for instance: you often found this language which was a bit patronising. So I think there might be an element of that in the response to *Hymns*. But then again, in retrospective, for most people *Onward, Christian Soldiers* would mean standing in assembly at school. So it was probably inevitable that that's what they saw. We would have had to do something much more brave and daring as an image to overcome that, and I've never had that in me to do that. It would have to be Michael Clark playing the national anthem and crawling naked across the stage with the Union Jack on his back.

DPD: And what about the last hymn, *The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is ended?* That's quite different from the other ones in the piece, in a way.

JB: After the first seven minutes I think the choreography gets a bit dumb and a bit naïve. But I do love that hymn, I think it's beautiful. Actually, when you say that, it makes me think that, for all I'm going to deny anything about children at playgrounds or school assemblies, there was definitely something about it, about singing in a choir, because I did sing in a choir, and that evening song hymn we always sang on a Sunday night when it was going dark at night; it's a beautiful hymn. And the words

for that would have been part of the atmosphere. I can't remember what the choreography for it is like, but I think you're right, it loses something. Whereas the first twelve minutes dare to do this kind of wandering around not doing very much. being a ballet boy, I didn't dare think that I could keep that going.

DPD: The last hymn is much more balletic, you spin around and it's all very gracious, and it's almost diva-like.

JB: Yes, that's right. It's like I was thinking 'we'd better do something!' Whereas now, of course, I wouldn't do that, I would try and keep it going. But it's not so easy to keep it going. Matteo and I have had a hard time thinking, 'okay let's go on not doing very much!' You have to know how to do it and it took me years to figure out a way to do it. No, we made a finale, because that's the background we came from. That's a bit annoying really, because I would have loved to have been tougher than that.

DPD: But sometimes it's okay to allow for things like that to come through.

JB: Well, I think that a bit more now. But it wasn't the image of myself I wanted, I wanted to be Steve Paxton or Douglas Dunn or something! But I wasn't, I was a ballet boy.

DPD: The duet ends with a coda danced to Bach and Chopin. Could you tell me a little bit about that section?

JB: That's also a much more balletic bit. The piece had to be longer because Val Bourne from Dance Umbrella and John Ashford from The Place got together and said, 'we have got to take this thing forward in some way.' And they helped me to put on a full evening, so I extended the duet and I made a trio to the music of the Brazilian bossa nova star Wilson Simonal.

DPD: How did you come across that music?

JB: I came across Wilson Simonal because the parents of a friend of mine in the Royal Ballet had lived in Chile and had the album of it. It was an album from 1964 or something. Interestingly enough, the main tune from it has become very popular in Brazil and all over now, because the movie *City of God* has one of those tunes – and it was the first time I had heard it for ages, and now there are remixes of it all over the place. And I like that trio, I must say; I would love to do that again. It was a very nice group of people, with William Trevitt, who is now one of the Ballet Boyz, Jeremy Sheffield, who became a big star of *Holby City*, the hospital soap, and William Tuckett, who is another choreographer, still with the Royal Ballet. In a funny kind of way, the trio that we made to fill in the other half of the performance had the same wandering around not doing much thing. But it kept going with it. For some reason, I managed to find a way to keep going with it. Actually, the very first time we ever did a bit of that, Ashley Page, who is now the director of Scottish Ballet, was in it. I showed the tape to Matteo recently, and to Adam Roberts, the film-maker we work with, and Matteo and I kept laughing so much saying that it's the best piece I ever made. I think we only did it about four times, but every time we performed it those three guys did less and less, and it was virtually invisible by the end. And now I love that, but it was very strange watching it disappear.

DPD: What kind of relationship were you trying to create with the music? I'm saying this because the music is very cool, whilst the performers are almost sleepy, wearing their pyjamas, lazily moving around.

JB: Yes, it was very literal in that respect. But the pyjamas thing was just a solution for when we did The Place Theatre performances of *Hymns*, where for the duet we wore brown pyjamas and for the trio we wore blue pyjamas, and that was it.

DPD: Where was the videoed rehearsal held?

JB: I think it was in a studio at the Royal Ballet School, where the Royal Ballet rehearsed. They had curtains that you could pull. It was always Ross MacGibbon who filmed it, who is now the curator of dance at the BBC. He always did us a favour.

The only other thing about the physicality of *Hymns*, which has come forward in every piece since then, has to do with the physicality of the English Morris. This is something that I always try to explain to people but it's very difficult to talk about because Morris dancing has this image of being something a bit silly and funny, and it has a kind of Monty Python aspect, whereas that's not what it is for me. I always say to people, 'you must go to Bampton, near Oxford, on a Whit Monday and you'll see some of the most extraordinary dancing, and dancing together and men's dancing, that you'll ever see.' It's a very peculiar physicality, very distinctive. Ron Smedley and Bob Parker were the two marvellous men who taught a whole generation of boys of the Royal Ballet School this form. It was Ninette de Valois's idea that, since the Russian ballet schools all learned Russian folk dance, the English ballet school should learn English folk dance. And I have no idea how they found Ron Smedley and Bob Parker, but they were wonderful teachers. Ron once described to me very brilliantly what this physicality is, and he said, 'it's a jump that doesn't go up, it goes down.' I love the contradiction of that, I think it's an absolutely accurate description. And it's definitely there in something of the physicality of *Hymns*. And Simon Rice was another person who had gone through that whole thing and loved it.

DPD: You were also a teacher of folk dance at the Royal Ballet School.

JB: Yes, well, I needed money, I had a kid and I was desperate for money, so I took that on. I was a terrible teacher! But I suppose, like all those things, it had some good effect in that, in the face of terrible opposition from the horrible attitude towards Morris dancing in England, it helped me keep faith with the thing that actually I now still love very much when I see it in its real form. And we were quite radical because we started a sword dance team in the Royal Ballet and we were recognised by the other Morris dances of England, which was rather brilliant. And that was the sword dance from Northumberland, which is an utterly beautiful dance. It's very fast, very skilled; it's extraordinary, you are part of a machine in which you lose sense of self completely, and that's something that I still love about it. In many ways, *Both Sitting Duet* is very much about a way of performing that loses sense of self and gives everything up to the other person. I was always very shy to talk about this thing because, you know, in many ways, the world of contemporary dance was a much

tougher, more rigorous, more provocative world. And I still do find it hard to talk about, but I'm slowly getting old enough not to care and to be honest.

DPD: Of course, this is such a distinctive trait of your work. One last question: in the duet there's a moment when you snap one hand on the other and do a finger jiggle. What is it? A request?

JB: Yes, 'give us your money!' There's always a certain point when you are at church and the collection box comes around, and we just thought that was very funny. Audiences always got it, they always thought it was funny. But there's also something very nice rhythmically about it.

DPD: Yes, there's a pause and then another hymn starts.

JB: That's right. That kind of rhythm is also in *Both Sitting Duet* or in *The Quiet Dance*. There's also another part between two hymns where we do a funny hopping step, which is completely out of time from the thing that comes before and then we go right back into the rhythm.

DPD: A little digression: earlier we were talking about Steve Paxton. Were you trained in contact improvisation? Maybe when you worked with Rosemary?

JB: In 1982 or 1984, I can't remember which, Steve Paxton taught a week-long workshop at Riverside Studios and there were people in the workshop like Gaby Agis, Kirstie Simson, Emily Barney, I think, and there was a group of us who went from the Royal Ballet, about four of us. And what was really wonderful was that Steve Paxton was surprised but also delighted, and also interested and welcoming that some people from the Royal Ballet would turn up for his workshop. He was generous in his response, and he could see that for some of us it was very difficult to grasp these completely different ways of thinking about the body in motion. At the same time he, being the man and the artist that he is, didn't see it as a failure but as a learning possibility, both for us but also, you sensed, for him. 'How do you do this? What happens when that...? What does this feel like? Where could you go with this?' And that was remarkable, really, because he was at that time at the height of his initial

impact. But it wasn't until 1985 that I worked for the first time with Rosemary. At that time Rosemary had a Friday evening class for two hours in the old cinema space at Riverside Studios and there was a hard core of people, which perhaps included Gaby Agis and... I don't remember if Kirstie Simson went to that, but there was a floating group of very interesting people that went to that Friday night class. We went on for some years, and it was a real focal point for a lot of people. I went to that class whenever I could. The other interesting thing about that class was that there were people who went who weren't trained dancers – there was one man, I remember, who was a lawyer, who somehow found his way there. So that was very interesting.

DPD: And was it contact improvisation?

JB: We did a lot of contact work, but we did many other things as well. We were, in some ways, researching with Rosemary whatever she was researching. And then, once I did start to work with Rosemary, we went on doing a lot of different kinds of that research. I was never very good at contact improvisation, and I'm still not, actually. Although I don't understand why, because I can fake it, but somehow I've never quite had a feel for it and I've never understood why. But I've always loved the way that Steve Paxton thinks, and even not very long ago I spent a month doing class with him, when he was teaching at PARTS in 2000, I think. I turned up the first morning, and I knew Steve to say hello to him – he had come to see *The Stop Quartet* in Utrecht and he said this brilliant thing which I still love. We were in the festival bar and he came over, and I was as nervous as hell, because I so admire him and respect him, and he said, 'strong work. Why isn't it more erotic?!' Which was his way of wanting to provoke something that causes other ways of thinking.

So when he was teaching at PARTS five or six years ago, I went in and said, 'I'm working in the afternoon, I would really love to join the class.' And he said, 'why?' And I said, 'to be honest, I don't know why. But maybe I can tell you why afterwards.' And, again, I liked that he asked why, because it wasn't just that he would be thinking that I was kind of pinching all his ideas, it was also about the fact that it's important to know why. I was about 39, and if you are going to make a research like that at that age you need to think about why. And I really liked that he asked and this is just an example of why I love how he thinks and why his way of

thinking has been so influential on me. His question altered my whole experience of the month of workshop with him, because it echoed in my mind and made me go on questioning, so that the experience became richer, because I didn't take it for granted. I guess what it did was that it stopped me either from doing it simply as a physical kick or as a way to try and find virtuosity physically; it made me approach the workshop with a spirit of enquiry. And I think that month with him that I spent not so long ago was one of the things that set a pattern towards me finding a way to go on working, and that way was very much to do with going on enquiring and not taking things for granted, and not taking the surface of things. So I remember very well, in the last week of the workshop, he made the students, and I was there too, begin each session exploring ballet movements, very simple ballet movements like *plié* or *tendu*, from the point of view of his way of thinking about the body and gravity, which he had been working on with us over the previous three weeks. And I remember that this was quite challenging for the students, but I sensed that that enquiry which he was asking them to make was in some way fundamental to them getting beyond an image of the thing he was doing that was so familiar to them that they wouldn't necessarily see it or take it away with them.

Another thing that stays very much in my mind from that period of time was that he would talk about an idea and then invite us to work on it experientially, physically, but often only for a very short time, and then we would go on with something else. And eventually we spoke about this and the way he put it was that when you first do a thing you have a brief moment when you can perceive it and after that your perception of it begins to change, because you become self-conscious about the thing perceived. And this was a radically opposite way of thinking from what I had come across before. I had always understood that with physicality the more you experienced it and the more you practised it, the stronger it would be. And here was an invitation that actually the body is intelligent enough, or the body-mind relationship is intelligent enough to glimpse something briefly and the strength of that experience goes on echoing in what you do afterwards. That is something that slowly, over the years since then has changed my practice. For instance, I think I'm better able to work with Matteo as an untrained dancer, because an idea like that means that I'm not driving him – sometimes I do, 'try this, try this etc.', but I can have the confidence of this way of thinking. So we are not doing anything remotely like what

Steve Paxton would work on physically, but it's the way of thinking that is similar. It was the way of going on enquiring that I took away from the month of workshop. Saying this to you now as we talk makes me realise that, perhaps, now I'm ready to say to him why I did the workshop. And even when at the end of the workshop he said, 'okay, so why did you do it?', I don't remember what I answered, so perhaps it means that, as with all work that you do with somebody, it's often years afterwards that you begin to perceive what came forwards with you from the work.

Notes

- ¹ On the south bank of the Thames, east of Tower Bridge.
² *Catch*, 1980, and *The Winter Play*, 1983.

INTERVIEW 2

[Burrows, J. (2006a), Unpublished conversation with the author, 22 June.]

Burrows on *Stoics*

London, 22 June 2006

Daniela Perazzo Domm: What was the starting point for the creation of *Stoics*?

Jonathan Burrows: I suppose the first thing to say is that making *Hymns* was a big deal for me, because it had taken me a long time to find something that I really wanted to do and that wasn't directly replicating the kind of postmodern dance that was my biggest influence – although, of course it's all in there. And after I had made *Hymns*, I almost thought, 'that's it, I've done it now. I should stop.' Well, in a way, I did stop – since then I've just gone on trying to remake *Hymns*. With *Stoics*, for the beginning of the first duet with me and Lynne Bristow, I just thought, 'alright, I'm going to try and make something.' So I booked myself some space with the Royal Ballet's first video camera and, because I didn't know what to do, I set myself a task: I booked a room and a camera for about ten sessions and I think I made myself make a minute every day, or a phrase every day, something like this. Then when I got them, I started teaching them to Lynne Bristow. So the duet begins with alternation: I do something, she does something. That's because we used the original phrases: I did the ones that I liked and she did the ones that she liked. And then we went on choreographing. I used to love that duet but, to be honest, when I watched it recently, I thought it wasn't that well done. I think the beginning is the most interesting, really, and then it starts to noodle a bit – but then that's the usual problem with how to keep something going.

We didn't work with music and at one point I wanted to use these songs by Chris Newman, a composer and artist that was quite influential for Matteo Fargion. Chris Newman had a band and Matteo was in the band, he played the bass. So I dubbed the songs onto the dance and it worked brilliantly. I didn't really know Chris Newman, and he never really much liked me; and he mistakenly thought that I had choreographed the pieces to the songs so he was slightly annoyed. Actually, it wasn't

what I had done. Anyway, quite rightly he said no, because in a way his songs were much better than what I choreographed! I didn't blame him. The Mendelssohn idea was because I happened to have that record, *Songs without Words*. For some years afterwards I thought it was much too whimsical to have used them, but then, in a funny kind of way, I quite like them again now.

Anyway, Lynne and I finished this duet and, as far as I remember, we performed that by itself.

DPD: In Dance Umbrella 1990?

JB: Or something like that, or somewhere else in Amsterdam – there was this performance once that I shared with Ashley Page and somebody else, perhaps Matthew Hawkins. But then, because the era of the full-length dance works had begun, one had to figure out how to make full-length dance works, and of course it's really hard to do. So I went on making bits, as it were, and I don't know what came next, it might have been the quartet. As far as the movement was concerned, I suppose the thing about it was that it was like *Hymns* but much faster, and it was much more eccentric and manic. But I like it best now when I see it in the quartet, mainly in the Royal Opera House performances of the quartet, where I think it becomes something else and it's all about rhythm in some way. We choreographed the quartet to the *Blue Danube Waltz*, which was, in a way, much too ironic. And then it was much more interesting when we took the *Blue Danube Waltz* away, I think, which we did at a certain point. I watched it again recently and for me about half of it is intriguing, and the other half not so much. It's quite interesting because I watched it recently with a friend who had a tape of stuff he choreographed in the same year and there was clearly a flavour of a certain time of making dance here in the 1980s and 1990s. It was the Dr. Martens period. There's something of that about it, I think.

But if there was something interesting to say about the way we made it, that interests me now, is that we often made things to a piece of music in a way that it was with the rhythm of the music but much more odd and at angles to it, and then we took the music away and you were left with this rhythm of the dance. And I've often wanted

to do that again but I've never managed it. And when I see it now there's a certain unpretentiousness about that which I find quite appealing.

But a lot of it was also about finding a way to work with the dancers. *Hymns* was all men and the men in ballet are allowed to be much more individual than the women, and they are allowed, in some ways, to try on more different ways of being in performance or moving – you more often do character parts and things like this, where you are not just being a ballet dancer. So, with *Stoics*, it was about trying to find a way that we could all, but especially the women, feel confident to move in a different way.

DPD: In the duets you can read a kind of rivalry between you and Lynne Bristow, which can be interpreted in terms of gender relationships. Was this something that you wanted to communicate – with the 'stoical' poses, for example?

JB: It was much more to do with the sense of humour that we shared; it was also about being deliberately competitive with each other, but in a way that was more humorous, but just serious enough. It's probably also to do with gender relationships, but not in a very clever way. But this experience was quite an influence on me, because Lynne is one of the most full-bodied dancers that I've ever come across; she throws herself into things, and I've never seen anybody fall over on stage more often than Lynne, but it was always great, it always seemed worth the risk. I think it was good for me because it took me off balance a bit – I got firmly back on balance now because I'm not really good at being off balance! But there were big shifts of weight in it which were a bit of a step forward, I think.

DPD: So more risky, in a way.

JB: Yeah, with a bit more velocity and centrifugal force.

DPD: What can you tell me about the idea of the stoics and of the stoicism?

JB: Well, that just came afterwards – that was just like, 'what should we call it?' But it was more from the sense of humour that was shared between the people in it.

Because Luke Heydon is a very funny man and Natalie McCann is also a very funny woman. These were people who could really make me laugh, so in rehearsals it just inevitably went that way.

DPD: So you didn't decide to make a piece on this theme, the English stoicism?

JB: No, it was really from movement, and then it kind of came up. There's something very balletic about the humour too. It's a little bit like the overt humour that you get in ballet, and we were steeped in that at that point. So, as much as we thought that we were doing something very radical, it also clearly reveals who we were and where we came from.

DPD: In the BBC documentary you described this piece as a particularly English one [MacGibbon, 1992].

JB: But I had only just made it when we made that documentary, so I was a bit full of it, because it felt nice to do and people responded to it, because it's funny and light.

DPD: But do you still see it that way?

JB: In a way, but it's a difficult balance. I tried hard, on the one hand, to resist those categorisations, because I am English and I do have a sense of humour, so it is an English sense of humour. I have always thought that if there is humour in a piece it's not about trying to be funny but about saying, 'that's how people are, so let's include it', and we don't have to freeze our faces and freeze our funny bones in order to dance.

DPD: But in *Stoics* the Englishness is not just in the humour. In the documentary you talk about the stiff upper lip, the resilience.

JB: Yes, but it was more about sending that up a bit, in a way.

DPD: But there are other English or British choreographers who project a completely different image of Englishness or Britishness – if you think of Michael Clark, for example.

JB: Yes. I'm not sure about the Englishness in my work though, because I feel a bit uneasy with that kind of stereotyping, but on the other hand I am English. But it gets a little bit whimsical in *Stoics* and I'm not sure about that now. I think it's jolly and I like the rhythm and the slight eccentricity of it, in a good way, but I also dislike it in a kind of whimsical way. It has a lot to do with coming from ballet and that is a little bit the kind of humour you find in ballet. And the English thing has also to do with the people, because Luke Heydon, for example, that's the persona he tries on and plays with in a brilliant way, so he brought it into it as well. But the fact that I said that on that documentary is more to do with having a camera pointed at me and saying things that I thought that I should say, to sell it! But of course it has something of Monty Python's silliness about it. You grow up with that...

I probably know less about *Stoics* than I know about any of the other pieces, because I think it wasn't made as consciously. The thing that surprises me now is the speed of it: it's really fast. It's like we were on speed or something. And I don't remember it being that fast. I like the way that the material keeps surprising you, but it gets a bit long for me when I watch it – except for the quartet.

DPD: When you did the quartet at the Royal Opera House, you did it without music, is that right?

JB: Yes, but we used a bit of Mendelssohn just at the end, for two minutes or so.

DPD: And it went very well, didn't it?

JB: Yes, the audience really liked it. And it's quite interesting in the tape, because it was the first night and it was dead silence for about four minutes – you could just hear the footsteps – and then there's a certain moment when the audience suddenly laughs, and then they were with it. And when I watched it I thought that it's such a shame that they didn't do it again. We only did six performances and that was it; now it's

gone and it feels a bit of a shame to me. I rather liked it on the big stage; we cut the *Blue Danube Waltz* because I was bored of it and it was too corny; also, it has a certain ironic value if you play the *Blue Danube Waltz* in a studio theatre, but if you play it in the Royal Opera House it has no ironic value because that's the place where you would play the *Blue Danube Waltz* or a similar kind of music.

DPD: When did you actually do it with the *Blue Danube Waltz*?

JB: I don't know, I've lost track. I've got so many videos, and it was changing all the time. But at one point, I think the very last performance, we cut all the Mendelssohn completely out of it, so the first duet was in silence, and for the solo of Luke that has Tom Jones's *The Green, Green Grass of Home*¹ played on a Bontempi organ with me drumming, we took away the organ and just had the drums, and it was all going a bit hardcore.

DPD: But there was also a piece by Matteo Fargion.

JB: That stayed in, the *Piece for 2 Pianos*. He didn't write that especially for *Stoics*, but it was a piece that I really liked. But the choreography was made over a year or eighteen months and it was all made in bits – like, 'what shall we do next? Let's have a trio, let's have a solo...' So it was like trying to put together an evening of dance and make it coherent.

DPD: Another image that you may have of Britishness, if you want – in those years, late 1980s-early 1990s – is being transgressive etc.

JB: Yes, I wanted to be transgressive, but I was never very good at it.

DPD: But you were, just in a different way, much less aggressive and in your face.

JB: This English quality that you see is also a little bit boarding school humour. Three of the five of us went to the Royal Ballet boarding school, so there's a certain quality there, a little bit public school.

But I think the rhythm is much more sophisticated in *Stoics* than it was in *Hymns*. much more elaborate. And it was a kind of reaction against postmodern dance. Although I loved it, and I loved the release and contact improvisation scenes, and I loved the work that was happening with X6 and Rosemary Butcher, Kirstie Simson, Miranda Tufnell and Dennis Greenwood, a lot of their work was spatial more than about time. I mean, it was about time, but it wasn't about rhythm, and it was about a different sense of time.

DPD: So you are saying that yours was also a reaction to that kind of work?

JB: Yes, a little bit. But also, we were all still dancing in ballet and ballet is danced to music: you make a counterpoint to the music and it's jam-packed full of steps. So when you come from a rehearsal or performance of that and then you go into rehearsing yourself, you are not going to get that far away.

DPD: But soon after that you left the Royal Ballet.

JB: Yes, quite soon. And it was partly because it was the first year that they did what's now the British Dance Edition and there were quite a lot of people who wanted to book *Stoics* and we couldn't go to the places. The Royal Ballet wouldn't let us. I mean, they were quite good to me, they gave me six months off to tour with Rosemary Butcher, they gave me a sabbatical, which was great. But this was too much for them, it was a step too far, because it meant releasing five people. So I thought, 'well, I'm either going to take it seriously or not.'

DPD: So did you all leave?

JB: No but Lynne [Bristow], Deborah [Jones] and I left. So then it was easier for the Royal Ballet because it only meant releasing two dancers. But I think, actually, we performed it more during the holidays; when they had a five-week summer holiday we did a little English tour, in a van. And then we went to Brussels, Copenhagen and somewhere else...

DPD: What can you tell me about the movement vocabulary?

JB: It's all the same movement vocabulary that I still use, but that's my limitation!
Lots of swinging arms.

DPD: And stomping feet!

JB: Yes, it's stomping feet and swinging arms!

DPD: So if you had to say what there is in *Stoics* that you can still find in your more recent pieces, would it be the rhythm and the movement vocabulary?

JB: Yes, but I would like to think that the movement vocabulary has become more subtle than it was then. But the momentum led by the arms and lots of foot patterns – that probably comes from Morris dancing, really, because I was good at that and I wasn't so good at ballet, by comparison with my peers.

Notes

¹ Originally written by Curly Putnam.

INTERVIEW 3

[Burrows, J. (2006c), Unpublished conversation with the author, 7 September.]

Burrows on *The Stop Quartet*

London, 7 September 2006

Daniela Perazzo Domm: One of the things that interest me the most about *The Stop Quartet* is to do with its composition – its fabric, the layers of which the piece is composed, the tensions between structure and freedom it appears to embody. I'm also trying to explore and question the link between your work and artistic modes that can be described as abstract and minimalist.

Jonathan Burrows: When I began to think about making *The Stop Quartet*, the first thought was about working with Henry Montes. I have a sense that, with almost all work, really the most important decision you make is who you work with. In the case of *The Stop Quartet*, in many ways the whole physicality of it comes from Henry. I've now kind of learnt it off him, or absorbed it from what he was doing, to the point that it has become very much part of how I move, but I think a lot of it came from Henry.

The other idea that I had was related to the fact that Matteo Fargion, Adam Roberts and I had made the *Hands* film. When I was choreographing it, Matteo had encouraged me to work with a metronome; he had been instrumental in composing the choreography of the first part of *Hands* and had used a metronome himself. What he felt was that using a metronome kept me a little bit calmer, because my tendency is – which is very evident in *Stoics* – to go incredibly fast, to try and make everything interesting by going very very fast. Funnily enough, *The Stop Quartet* did end up very fast, but with *Hands* Matteo wanted this kind of calmer pace, and somehow, if you can find that, it can become just as exciting as something that's moving very fast. The other thing about *Hands* was that I was beginning to work with counterpoint between the right hand and the left hand. But since *Hands* was only four and a half minutes long, it seemed that this idea of working with a metronome, this idea of counterpoint and the idea that I explored in the piece of building basic blocks of

movements which then, when they are combined, become something completely different from what you would have imagined – all of that business seemed quite unfinished with after *Hands*.

So these were the conditions that generated the starting points for going into the studio with Henry. The first one, the most important, was: what if Henry is the right hand and I'm the left hand? The next one was: what if we really use a pulse from a metronome, so that we are not making free flowing movement phrases, but we are making something which has at its heart a beat? And then the other thing was that, whereas in previous pieces, especially *Our*, I tried really hard to find interesting movements, to push the boundaries of the movement, to be a bit extreme and a bit virtuosic, when Henry and I started to work on what became *The Stop Quartet*, I was following more the new line of work that came from *Hands*. Here everything started from six hand gestures that were just static; then Matteo put them in an order and then eventually I ended up, in the second part of the *Hands* film, going through that order of six gestures but so fast and with so many changes that it suddenly looked like a really complicated language. So my question was: can Henry and I find a way to do that with our whole bodies – rather than how we'd worked on *Our*, which was more about trying to find some kind of physical expression, technicality and virtuosity by improvising and by having visual ideas and so forth? I got a sense, when we worked on *Hands*, that you could do it in a different way and it would arrive at something that you couldn't imagine, that would be very unexpected, to the point that you wouldn't be able to see how you had done it.

So about the question of the way in which some sense of ideas of minimalism comes into what I do, I never want to call it minimalism, because I always think that, physically, I'm always trying to do something as rich as possible, especially at that time. Perhaps *The Quiet Dance* is possibly the most minimal piece, but even that, for how it changes, I would think of it as rich. And I always wonder what would happen if you dressed *The Stop Quartet* up in colourful clothing and had very loud rock music, changing sets and flashing lights... I don't know, I've always wondered if the fact that people feel that what I'm doing is minimal is more to do with how I want to concentrate on the thing itself and not dress it. But at the same time I do love things which you don't question and which seem to be very effective, but which are made of simpler ingredients. But with *The Stop Quartet*, since we were taking this idea of

exploring what would be the equivalent of the hand gestures in *Hands* which became a blur of movement, we were using really simple elements, and in a way you couldn't break movement down more than we broke it down. So that gives it a certain feeling of something stripped back which then arrives at a flight via a different route. But the idea of 'less is more' doesn't really underpin my way of thinking.

DPD: I think the difference lies also in the fact that your work is not about putting on stage a concept or an idea that has formed in your mind, but it's about working with the material that you have chosen and finding things through working with it.

JB: Yes, that's really a good way of putting it. And in fact it sometimes trips me up because I like to hang around with people who work more from an idea, and then I always think that they are a bit disappointed when they find out that, really, I'm very old-fashioned.

So what happened was that Henry and I had set up a residency in Angers, where there's a school with a lot of facilities, and they were helping to produce and promote work. We were supposed to go there for five weeks and we went down there and they were incredible – they said, 'here's the key to the studio, you can go in and work any time, day or night; here's the key to your apartment, you just work, that's what you're here for.' So Henry and I started to work on these ideas and we got some little scratchings of something but they were rather wooden: I would do one thing on a beat and he would do something else. They were either a bit wooden or they were so complicated that they ended up looking very unfocused and you couldn't really read them. And after two weeks we had started to struggle and then we began to go a bit mad. And I am ashamed to say that we went in to the Angers office and we just said, 'we feel awful because this has taken money and time to set up, but we've had enough, we haven't got the tools. We have had a brilliant two weeks and this is going to be very helpful, but if we spend another three weeks here we are not going to get anywhere and we are going to kill each other!'

DPD: But at that time you were also artist in residence in Ghent?

JB: Yes, I still was at that time, and in fact Ghent was the next step. But first Henry and I came back to London. But another very important clue as to how the piece was made was that, before I left, Matteo had said, ‘Shobana Jeyasingh, when she choreographs, uses graph paper.’ Kevin Volans had told me this too: she uses graph paper and plots out relationships and counterpoints and rhythms on graph paper. Matteo suggested that I might try to do that myself, just as a way of seeing things in time. Because when you are in it, which I was, you can feel it and you can trust that to a large degree, but you can’t always trust it, because sometimes something feels very dull and it’s actually wonderful, sometimes something feels very simple and it looks very complicated, sometimes something feels great and it’s terrible. But with this graph paper idea I thought it would be great to be able to see time on the page and have some way of sculpting it, but outside of the feeling of being in it.

So I had this book full of attempts to use graph paper, with boxes and numbers and things, and it was a mess. I brought it back and I showed it to Matteo; we sat down and he said, ‘this is all too complicated. I’ll show you a system, which is in fact a way that a lot of counterpoint in African music is notated, with a line and marks on the line.’ He looked at the tape of what Henry and I had done and he looked at other things, and he said, ‘you have got to start more simply than this.’ So he gave me some clues, like a homework to do about how to look at it on paper. I went away and found some other ways and things to add, musical things, or in fact things that came from when I had to study Benesh notation, which is a very visual music stave. Then I went back to Matteo and he gave me some more ideas and then I went to Ghent with Henry, but this time I also took another dancer, Kate Gowar, because I thought that I had to get outside of it if I was to make any headway with this thing.

I had a lot of prepared stuff: try this, try this, try this. We worked for a week and out of that there was one thing which I thought, ‘this is very interesting.’ The one thing is the very beginning of the piece, which I tried with Kate and Henry: it’s the relationship between one person moving half speed and one person moving double speed. That is what I showed Kevin Volans and Matteo, and that is what they started writing music from; it was literally 30 or 40 seconds, but it just had something, some quality. But then I decided that the one thing I didn’t like was it being a man and a woman, because it introduced a narrative which I felt would be lessened if it was either two women or two men. So I decided that I had to come back into it again, and

Kate came back into the piece in the quartet. So that was the trajectory of thinking about how to begin to make the piece.

About the idea of breaking the movement down to almost its most basic way, the first thing I figured out was that if you want the beat to be visible – especially if two people are doing two different things, for example one double speed and one half speed, like at the beginning of *The Stop Quartet* – you’ve either got to tap it in some way, or beat it with your arms, or you’ve got to walk it with your feet. If you do a flowing movement from one place to another place, the beat disappears, or becomes vague or it’s not quite clear what’s happening. I may be completely wrong, it may be that somebody else would find a brilliant way of showing it: I’ve tried for years and years and it frustrates me terribly, but I’ve never really found a way, which is why *The Quiet Dance* uses a similar technique of stepping with the feet. So the most basic ingredient was a step, and you could in effect call the piece ‘The Step Quartet’, because that’s what it is, that’s almost all the material, it’s just a series of steps.

There were two materials that I took to Ghent with me: one was these African notation systems with a line and marks on it, and the other was grids drawn on a piece of paper, in which I would put numbers and say – a little bit like an old-fashioned ballroom dancing diagram – you put your right foot in the box that says one, your left foot in the box that says two, right three, left four, and I did it in random ways. In a lot of *The Stop Quartet* I actually used a chance process to trip me up; it was the only piece I ever did that. I don’t like it because it’s not a chance-derived piece, it was just in order to make a simple decision and not get too caught up in the decision. So we had these grids and that’s what Henry and I are walking at the beginning of the piece, and that was the material that Kate and Henry did in Ghent: it was two different people walking two different grids at two different times.

DPD: Does the difference of speed only appear at the beginning of the piece? Because it’s very clear at the beginning, but then the piece becomes so complicated with all its different layers that I miss these details.

JB: No, it’s all the way through and it goes from single speed to double speed, to sometimes four times faster, to sometimes syncopated speed, and sometimes combinations of those, amongst different people, and then stops put into it which trip

it up; and the double speed when it happens is so fast and shuffly that you notice the body more than the feet. But then, on top of that, I made a chart for arms – this was borrowed from Cage and Cunningham because they had this thing of using what they called a ‘gamut’ of sounds or a ‘gamut’ of movements, where the piece would be made up of between one and forty movements, or one to forty sounds, and I really liked the idea of making some limitations. Later we had this idea of the steps and grids; I think I made around six grids to start with, so that was the first gamut, to borrow that expression from Cage. Then I took ballet arms; I think there were six or eight possibilities using one arm, and you could use combinations of those. Then I did the same with the head, so there were six or eight possibilities of where the head could look. And then there was another thing, which was also borrowed from Cunningham, to do with the fact that the body could be high, medium or low. Finally there were some actions – I’m going to read to you a gamut of actions from the second half of the duet: ‘step, step wide, close, stamp, shoot, jump, turn, swivel, duck, “rond” (meaning like in ballet, *rond de jamb*) and heel drop.’ So this is very simple material to begin with. The other thing that is at the beginning of the piece is that we use yoga positions, because Henry and I were both studying yoga; you don’t see them though, because they run incredibly fast. So basically Henry and I made a ten-minute duet.

Meanwhile, Kevin and Matteo were trying to work on ways to flatter this movement and give it a world in sound. The title *The Stop Quartet* conceptually comes from Kevin, Matteo and I going to see an exhibition of Gerhard Richter’s abstract paintings. Kevin was enthusing us about these paintings that Richter had created by putting on layers of paint in different colours and then wiping, sweeping something across the canvas which took off layers of paint and revealed what was underneath – so where red had been buried under ten layers, you would suddenly get it reappearing in holes where he had swiped with a wooden implement, or something similar, across the canvas. And Kevin said, ‘this should be the model for the piece, that with the music, with the light and with the movement we each cut holes through which you see or hear the other elements.’ So this was the concept to connect the different media. and Adam used the same when he made the film, which explains the blackouts that are in there.

DPD: But the lighting, the grid of light, was it fixed?

JB: No, in the live performance that changed all the time.

DPD: But not in the film.

JB: No, we didn't change it in the film because it didn't show; it was really powerful on the stage, because sometimes it would just be the white grids, sometimes just the blue field, sometimes any combination of the two. And it changed in a structure which was completely independent from the piece. So, really, there are two different sides: one was how to derive the movement, and the rhythm and time of it in the choreography, and the other were the principles for how the different artists collaborated: Michael Hulls with the lights, Kevin Volans and Matteo Fargion with the music, myself with the choreography and Adam Roberts with the film when he made it.

DPD: Did Adam start collaborating whilst you were working on the piece?

JB: No, but he shot it quite quickly afterwards. When we shot the film, I remember both Kate Gowar and Matteo with stop watches doing intricate timings to do with how the camera should move – because in the film the camera pans left to right in a similar structure to the choreography: it pans left to right at a different speed each time, and that was put together randomly with blackouts put in, and it was all timed. So the whole team in effect was working on the film.

Then Henry and I decided that we would go on making the duet; there was no idea that it would be a quartet; we were making a duet but we would go on making a duet until we felt that we had run out of ideas. So we made the ten-minute beginning of it, which is my favourite bit. Then we made what we called part two of the duet, which has quite different choreographic principles. In the second part of the duet I had eight one-beat phrases, eight two-beat phrases, eight three-beat phrases, eight four-beat phrases, eight five-beat phrases, eight six-beat phrases, so they were made in phrases – this is another Cunningham technique, in a way. And it was all because I had been

reading *The Music of John Cage* by James Pritchett,¹ which was full of these ideas of working. By the time we had done that, we had twenty-five minutes of the duet.

DPD: At this stage, were you already working with the music?

JB: Yes, we were. We already had the music for the first part, which is this slow, rather lyrical, lovely piano line with a lot of silence. It was the only thing Kevin could do with it, nothing else worked; everything else that he did with the music destroyed the rhythm of the movement. But he and Matteo wanted something completely different in the second half, so then Matteo – together with Kevin, but it was more Matteo's work – did this thing with multiple pianos, with this horrible, crashing music. And then we performed this duet at The Place in a UK platform performance. But we couldn't make any more duet, and it had taken a year to eighteen months to make those twenty-five minutes. So then I had the idea that if we had a twenty-five-minute duet – and we had already been talking about asking Fin Walker to join us for a trio – it would be great if we had a trio which was shorter than the duet, and finally a quartet which was shorter than the trio. So, just arbitrarily, I thought, if the duet is twenty-five minutes, then use all the fives, so make the trio fifteen minutes and make the quartet five minutes, and it would make for a really interesting shape: you get this huge activity at the end, but it only lasts a very short time.

DPD: It does feel very balanced in the end.

JB: Somehow, yes, because it's duration versus the force of the number of people on stage. And then we just went on and worked.

DPD: Did you go back to working with the elements that you had at the beginning?

JB: We kept adding elements, to try and keep the thing alive.

DPD: You said to me that the movement is very simple, but that's if you look at the ingredients, whereas when you look at the way it's composed, it seems very complicated.

JB: It does. But movement is funny like that; it's funny how the mind can be tricked by movement. But what's most interesting about *The Stop Quartet* is the way that it arrives at something that is completely away from these conceptual building blocks. I said that Henry was instrumental in creating the feel of the whole movement. What happened was that when I gave Henry the floor grid, like ballroom dancing, with a slow metronome beat, he just looked silly, like a clomping horse or something. And he practised it like this for a bit, but then I told him to do it twice as fast. Then I turned away and I was busy working with Kate, and when I turned back there was Henry doing this thing where his body was flowing like a eel or something and his head was flicking, and you didn't notice his feet. So we all practised it, and the only way he could make his feet move fast enough was to shuffle them, but when he shuffled them it made his body kind of flow. So a lot of the work that we did afterwards was to try and arrive at things that made the body move in a certain way, what William Forsythe calls 'residual movement', which is not the movement that you choreograph, but the movement that happens by accident from the choreography. We tried to find rich residual movement: that's what we were trying to do. And I got more and more influenced by the way Henry was doing it, once I started to work in it again.

So, just to try and summarise it, the different steps were: wanting counterpoint, wanting to use simple blocks to build complicated movement, and wanting to use a beat; then working on graph paper and finding a way to visualise time using the African notation system that Matteo gave me; finding the idea of using floor grids where a step is a movement, and that being the basic ingredient of the piece; and then seeing what happened when Henry did that very quickly, which was the equivalent of doing the slow hand gestures in *Hands* and then doing them very quickly until they blurred. Then there was the idea from Kevin of making dense layers and cutting holes in them, hence the title *The Stop Quartet*; and then there was the same idea shared between the lighting, the music, the choreography and, finally, the film. And, just as a tool, there was me making lists of things, which was an idea borrowed from Cage and Cunningham.

There was also one final step, which only happened in the five minutes of the quartet. because by then it was getting hard to keep all these ideas going, as we had fairly exhausted things. Up until the quartet, whenever somebody is moving double speed

and somebody single speed, they are always exactly together, so, for instance, Henry and I may do this thing that looks very flowing and suddenly stop, exactly at the same time. But with the quartet, what I discovered was that you didn't have to be in time with the person next to you. In fact, if you moved very fast and just did what you had to do, completely ignoring the person next to you, it worked, and it was different from Henry and I being glued together by the beat. So the whole of that last five minutes is based on this idea – and in a way it was slightly wasted, because I tried to take this idea onto other pieces but it was gone from me and I never felt enthusiastic about it again. So it's a shame it was only five minutes, because, in a way, had the whole piece been made like that, it would have been great! So that was one last step.

DPD: But were you still stopping at the same time?

JB: No, you didn't have to. In the quartet people don't stop at the same time, it's much more rugged, but that's good for the end of the piece, somehow.

So that summarises the main elements. What I haven't said is how I worked. I did use scores, but as the piece went along, we were finding ideas as we needed them; it wasn't like having a big idea and then doing it. That's why there are so many layers to it. So I had this African notation system, which, as far as I remember it, changed with different materials. The first ten minutes of the duet were completely made up, there is not much logic with them. But then I got a bit stuck and, for example, I decided that the pulse should change, so it gets faster for the second part of the duet, it slows down again for the trio and then the quartet speeds up to something much faster. So the pulse was changing. Then I created scores with phrases of the same number of beats for each section and notated them on bar lines, each representing one of the dancers, so you could see the counterpoint, the overlapping, the pauses, the changes of rhythm and of direction in space. In the duet, the scores have two parallel bar lines and in the same phrase we could be doing the same thing, or different things, or the same thing but facing different directions. So it was all about finding ways to organise time and space. The trio then adds another bar and the quartet has four bars – although by then I had abandoned being so clear in the scores. Each block was constructed according to a particular idea, so the whole is changing all the time. I think in the duet a block could be twenty seconds, forty seconds or sixty seconds, and

we would make one block a day – and the idea of having different lengths came from Matteo. I would just decide randomly what the next thing should be; we just figured it out and I had a little table and kept writing all this stuff down. You have to have a certain personality to enjoy this way of working. We got tense at times because it was really hard to do. When we first performed the piece, in Birmingham, it felt really tense. I wasn't really sure about it.

DPD: Was that the premiere? I thought it was in Ghent.

JB: No, the premiere was in Ghent, but we did a little trial run in Birmingham. And it took quite some months of performing it before it started to loosen up a bit. And then, when we started to get the feel of it, we would always rehearse using a game that we would run one section of the piece and anybody could do anything they wanted but one person always had to hold the beat and the fabric of the piece, but without deciding who it would be. So we did this kind of improvised performances of it for ourselves, where the thread of the thing was still there and kept going, but we did whatever we wanted.

DPD: Did you do this in order not to lose the principles of the choreography by simply repeating it?

JB: Yes, just because it was boring – we performed the piece a lot. Henry and Fin were keen that we'd give a performance of this improvised version, and I really wanted to and I regret now that we didn't. But people by then had heard about the piece, so you would go to a place to perform it and you would think, 'we can't give them the non-version', I mean the 'un-version'. It's a shame, we should have made an effort to programme a performance of the non-version of it, of the loose version. But the more we performed it, the more we tried to find some freedom elements in it, so that spatially you had certain places where you should go but you could deviate widely from them, as long as you always knew what everybody else was doing and you kept tuned in. And you could pull and push time as long as you kept the sense of where it was, and that improvised game helped doing that. So the later performances were really lively, whereas when we first did it, it was a little stiff, really; it took a long time.

DPD: But the responses of the critics were very good.

JB: The thing about *The Stop Quartet* is that now people speak of it as a very popular piece that people liked and so on, but the truth is that we went around performing it at a lot of places where we didn't get any feedback. We would go up to the bar and nobody would speak to us, and I think for some people it was quite hard, it was a bit boring.

DPD: I think it can feel very hermetic and you may feel that you need a code to read it, until you just let go and simply enjoy it for what it is, without worrying about possible codes and trying to decode them. This is also something that quite a few critics pointed out at the time, but they also recognised it as the most innovative work you had made until then.

JB: Yes, the critics liked it, but I just felt sad because we could have toured more than we did: we were touring a lot and we were getting more invitations, but I felt like it was also getting quite hard to tour it and I wish I had felt the enthusiasm for the piece at the time that I felt subsequently when we stopped performing it. But I do think of putting it on again at some point, I think it would be nice to put it on again.

DPD: William Forsythe made a comment on it and called it a masterpiece.

JB: He liked it, but he's always very nice to people!

DPD: But he also asked you to choreograph for Ballett Frankfurt. Did he do it after seeing *The Stop Quartet*?

JB: No, it was after *Very*, actually. But when I went to Frankfurt I was trying to do something with the same idea of *The Stop Quartet*, but it didn't really work; the piece that I was trying to make for Ballett Frankfurt ended up like a pale imitation of *The Stop Quartet*.

DPD: What I think is really fascinating about the piece is the relationship between constriction and freedom, between the grid of the composition and the fluidity of the movement. Was this something that you were trying to get to?

JB: I think it was from Henry: he is a great improviser and one of the most fluid dancers I've ever seen. He also has, in everything he does, an ability to do almost nothing and it comes out as really powerful. He works very hard for it and it's very thought, but I don't really know what it is that he does. But Fin too was coming from being a great improviser at that time. So I had people around me that had more of a knowledge and a sense of that than I did. But like everything, the problem is that often you stumble across things when you are trying to do things that you don't know how to do, or that you want and don't have or that you think you should be doing and don't know how to do. And then you do what you think is the thing that you should be doing and, actually, it ends up as something completely other, so it's all about the contradiction. The contradiction between it being a little obsessive with the way it's built together and the way that it then arrives at something fluid is just about the contradiction of me trying to figure out what it was that I thought that I should be doing, and it ends up as that. The problem is that after the event you go, 'oh, now I know what it is. It was that!', but once you know what it is, it just disappears, I can't do anything like that again. When I tried with Ballett Frankfurt it was gone; I only seem to be able to work by going on with the next thing that I feel frustrated about or don't know how to do.

DPD: But this interest in finding freedom within structure also seems to be a kind of thread throughout your work.

JB: Yes but a lot of it is from kind of guilt! Because I grew up in the strongest years of the impact of release technique and contact improvisation, the New Dance scene and the influence of Judson Church through the X6 generation and through Dartington College. I could see all these things going on, but I was a ballet dancer, and also, being the person that I am, I would, on the one hand, be drawn towards working with these very formal ways – which is why I hit it off with Matteo – and on the other hand, I've got a great love of all of the things that came out of that period of time. Formal ways were quite critiqued for a long time, and they still are. In dance there

has often been the idea that improvisation and spontaneous physical expression are the richest way to a performance and to a connection with the audience, and the most human and creative. And I see that it can be true sometimes, but I also see that it isn't always true, and it can also be true in other ways. But for me this leads to the inherent contradiction and tension within everything I do. *The Stop Quartet* was ten years ago: I think it's about me working out a lot of those dilemmas: it's called 'I was a ballet dancer who went to contact improvisation classes.' And I think it's as simple as that, really. At times I used to feel that I should have been more courageous and leave the Royal Ballet earlier than I did – I mean, the funding opportunities that exist now didn't exist then, and I had a child to support and all that. But I also do have a sense that I would have absorbed myself wholeheartedly in that alternative scene, and perhaps might have lost some of these contradictions which become more fruitful to me the older I get. I now can see where they are interesting and where they are not.

DPD: About the relationship with the audience in this piece: with *Both Sitting Duet*, for example, which to a certain extent has a similar way of working to *The Stop Quartet*, spectators have come to you to say things such as, 'I could hear the music' and so on, which shows that they could get beyond the 'formal' appearance of the piece. Did you have that kind of relationship with the audience of *The Stop Quartet* or did you feel that it was more difficult for them to leave the formal aspects of the piece behind?

JB: No, it was beginning, because we had the principle of performing 'how you feel is what you do.' So if something makes you laugh you laugh, if you are angry you let that tension go through your movement: you stay alive with the thing that's happening, and therefore with the audience. And the audience did use to laugh at *The Stop Quartet*; there were quite a lot of things that made the audience laugh in *The Stop Quartet*, especially when Henry and I would laugh, and the more we performed it the more playful it got. The trio was more sombre and the quartet was more sparkling, but, especially in the opening moments of the duet, the audience would laugh, so that kind of communication was beginning to develop. Interestingly enough, both Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy saw *The Stop Quartet* and kind of got it. I only found that out much later on – we had performed it in Paris and nobody spoke to us. But recently I found out from Jérôme that he and Xavier had seen it, and that seemed quite

important to me, to find that out, actually. It made me think that, although there are people who see it as ‘*The Stop Quartet* is when Jonathan used to work with dancers and he was making dance pieces, and now that he’s working with Matteo he’s not making dance pieces’, actually it was interesting that those two artists got it, and it made me think that there is some kind of trajectory going through the pieces. There are some things in common, although I sometimes wish that there was a bit more of a ground to it that I could build something on. Not all the pieces are as good as the others and it does always feel a bit like I’m falling accidentally from one piece to the next piece. But I think I’ve got to accept that that’s just how I am.

DPD: Yes, but at least people don’t know what to expect the next time!

JB: Yes, I like to think that that’s not a bad quality, that there’s some sense of that. I certainly think that *Speaking Dance* will be like that.

Notes

¹ Pritchett, J. (1993), *The Music of John Cage*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

INTERVIEW 4

[Burrows, J. (2004), Unpublished conversation with the author, 7 April.]

Burrows on *Weak Dance Strong Questions* and *Both Sitting Duet*

London, 7 April 2004

Daniela Perazzo Domm: I would like to know about the idea behind *Weak Dance Strong Questions* with Jan Ritsema. How was it conceived?

Jonathan Burrows: When Jan and I started working we hadn't decided that we would make a dance piece. We got together in Jan's house in France and we began by talking and reading, but at a certain point, during the second day I think, Jan was keen that we didn't get stuck talking, he thought we should start moving, so I suggested to him that he should move as though he would always ask a question. That wasn't something that I had tried before. The reason I said this to Jan was because I wanted to allow him a way to be really clear about what he was doing when moving, but without giving him an order or a particular movement or manoeuvre. And Jan is a thinker and is engaged a lot with his mind, so I suppose this task to move as though he would always ask a question was a way for me to connect his body to his mind, so that he was able to work from where he is and how he is as a person. As soon as he did it, it was very clear that there was something quite specific that happened, and then of course I did it and he watched and he thought the same looking at me.

After that we went on working and tried many different ways to find something to do with this idea. For instance, we tried a similar way of working but to do with speaking, but this was much more difficult because a question, when you speak, is always concrete, whereas what we realised about the movement is that, when you ask a question through movement, it's about a state of questioning; it's not a concrete question. So it's not, 'where is my arm now?' – I mean, it can be that, but it can also be a state of questioning which could either be a general doubting or a general looking for possibilities. We also had been reading a lot the T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*,¹ and I think what came out of them was something to do with how we decided to work

with time and space in the piece. What we decided to do with time and space was that we could really free ourselves from the normal way that you work with time and space in a choreography. In other words, we decided that we would try to make no decisions about time and no decisions about space. That came a little bit from Katy Duck, who has been involved in improvisation for a long time, and whom I have had a small connection with; she once talked to me about not negotiating space and time.

DPD: What does it mean exactly?

JB: It means that when I would be moving in the state of questioning, I wouldn't think, 'now I've moved slowly for a bit, so I should move fast; now I was over here for a long time, so I should go over there.' But we tried just to go on being in a state of questioning until the time of it changed and the space of it changed. And we were videoing all the time and we saw that it did change. And I think that the Eliot had some influence on that because the *Four Quartets* are a meditation on the impossibility of perceiving and articulating time and space. But anyway, the more we worked the less we found anything, other than this thing itself of moving in a state of questioning. Nothing we tried seemed to add anything. We had only these three ideas: one was to move in the state of always asking a question; the second was not to negotiate time and space; and the third was to be connected to the other person. Being connected to the other person was carried out in a number of different ways, we had a number of different ideas: one was to feel the other person on your skin all the time, another was to pass every question through the other person, and the other was not to watch the dance that you are doing but to hear the dance that's happening that is a combination of the two dances, so to hear the rhythm that's in the middle, between the two people. Listening to this rhythm makes you less afraid of what you are doing and it makes you feel less responsible that you have to do something interesting, and then it's more likely that something interesting happens. So by this time we were still looking for things, we were singing, we were speaking, we were using text, but at the same time we were rehearsing twenty-minute runs of just this strange, 'empty' duet.

DPD: Repeating it or finding new material every time?

JB: There's no material, in a way. There's only the idea to move as though you would ask a question. Having said that, we videoed it every time that we did it, and it always was the same piece.

DPD: In terms of the intentions of the actions performed?

JB: Even in terms of the way it looked. And I think that made for a particular continuity, so that, because we are in a state of questioning, nothing is ever allowed to be finished, or resolved or answered. So each thing has gone before it's finished and then the next thing is in its place. And that gives it even a particular style, I would say; mine is slightly different to Jan's, but still recognisably the same thing. So the idea became very distinctly the material. The work that I normally make is more like *Both Sitting Duet*: highly structured, and highly musical: even writing the score down. And I had never worked before the way that I did with *Weak Dance Strong Questions*. But what I noticed about it was that, because of this strange continuity when nothing ever landed and because we didn't make decisions about time and space, if we concentrated hard enough on the job that we had given ourselves, the thing choreographed itself moment by moment. So for me *Weak Dance Strong Questions* has a very strong structure but it's a structure of 'moment by moment.' *Both Sitting Duet* has a structure that starts at the beginning and goes right through to the end, and it's a very clear whole structure, of the whole piece. In *Weak Dance Strong Questions* the structure is only in this moment-by-moment change.

DPD: But the length of the piece is always the same.

JB: Yes, because we have a clock.

DPD: But do the movement sequences stay the same?

JB: No, we don't know the movements that will happen at any time. But of course the same movements come up because the same bodies move and we have the same patterns encoded into our bodies. We thought that this was interesting but, when we looked at twenty minutes of it on a videotape, we thought that it would be too boring to have just this. So we showed it first of all to some people in Brussels – artists and

promoters, maybe nine people: we made twenty minutes in silence and then we played a piece of Matteo's music for ten minutes and at the end of this we asked people what they thought. Half of them hated it and half of them loved it, but the strange thing was that they all agreed, the ones that hated it and the ones that loved it, on two things: that thirty minutes wasn't long enough and that it should be silent, there shouldn't be music. So then we went on inviting people and showing it to them, maybe once every two weeks; we did it seven times and we made it five minutes longer each time until people said this was the right length, and that's why it ended up fifty minutes. And fifty minutes always feels very long but lots of people comment that it passes very quickly, if they are liking it. And of course there are always people who know straight away that nothing is going to change and it's too much for them, and I understand that viewpoint too. I think if I saw it, it would very much depend what mood I was in whether I liked it or didn't like it. But the interesting thing that happens with fifty minutes is that you reach a point after thirty-five minutes, possibly, when it really feels not possible to go on, because you've done everything that you could possibly do. That's how it feels, that we've reached a low; and if I talked to somebody who's watched it, they would feel the lows exactly where I feel the lows, it's not a mystery. But, after the low, often comes something which is fresher, and I quite like that quality of *Weak Dance Strong Questions*; it has a little bit of Beckett: 'I can't go on, I'll go on.' I quite like the endurance (not 'endurance' in the sense of making it hard for the audience, but 'endurance' in the sense of allowing it to empty itself and then refill). I think I had always wanted to make a piece like that, and I had tried before, but it took me to be with somebody as radical and courageous and smart as Jan to take that risk.

DPD: Would you say that *Weak Dance Strong Questions* has answered your questions about dance, especially in relation to your way of constructing pieces? You said you normally work with very clear structures, whereas with this piece you have created a different type of choreography. But then with *Both Sitting Duet* you have gone back to a strictly choreographed piece, so I was wondering what you have taken with you that you have found when working in a different manner with *Weak Dance Strong Questions*.

JB: The intelligent answer would be, ‘no, it hasn’t answered anything but it’s given me sufficient new questions to go on working.’ But I couldn’t have made *Both Sitting Duet* unless I had made *Weak Dance Strong Questions* because I learnt a lot about working with somebody who isn’t trained in dance and has a different way of approaching movement than I have. It gave me the confidence to do that. And, more importantly for me, working with two people who are not trained dancers has helped me enormously to feel less trapped in my dancer’s body. The problem with dance training is that you are learning all the time patterns of movement, which are encoded, hard-wired into your brain. And once they are there, you can’t get rid of them again; the brain is too brilliant. The brain is so brilliant that if I’m trying to learn a new pattern and the brain thinks it might be like one that I already know, it will actually take my body in the direction of the pattern that I already know. That’s partly what makes it so hard to stay fresh when you are dancing and performing. And the more you train the more, on the one hand, you give yourself more possibilities, whilst, on the other hand, you increasingly limit yourself because you are all the time mapping the places that you might go – if that makes sense. Your brain is all the time filling in a map with more and more details and that can be limiting. So working with two people who are not trained dancers, and doing that that for three years, four years running, has really given me the possibility to look at movement in a different way and from a different perspective.

DPD: I am fascinated by the subtle and almost indefinable relationship between *Weak Dance Strong Questions* and *Both Sitting Duet*. The way I see them is as the same piece, carried out in two very different ways, but I’m not really sure how to describe these differences and similarities.

JB: I agree, I think they are the same. But, although *Both Sitting Duet* is very structured and has continuity in the way that it works with the score, the way that we perform it is very much ‘moment-by-moment’, and we achieve that by a different method in *Both Sitting Duet*. In *Weak Dance Strong Questions* we achieve that by sticking to the three tasks (ask a question, don’t make decisions about time and space, stay in contact with the other person). In *Both Sitting Duet* we have a series of guidelines to perform it, and one of them is: use the amount of energy for each section that that section needs and don’t use the energy of the whole piece to help you to

perform it. In other words, don't sing it from start to finish, just sing the part that you are doing and then sing the next part that you are doing and each part needs a different energy. Another principle that we used to perform the piece is that all the actions in *Both Sitting Duet* are on a pulse, but the preparations and endings of each action must not be pulsed. And that also has an effect of constantly interrupting it. So there is something similar to that constant interruption of *Both Sitting Duet* and the constant interruption of the state of questioning of *Weak Dance Strong Questions*.

DPD: But I would say it's also the idea of 'emptiness'. Because even though *Both Sitting Duet* is very structured, you said that when you were creating it you weren't trying to make particular movements, to push to find difficult or interesting movements.² So in a way they were just 'empty' movements that would be filled only within the piece as a whole.

JB: There are quite a few people who have been interested in how *Both Sitting Duet* references gesture but in a non-specific way. In other words, it takes the gesture out of its normal context, so that the meaning of the gesture is there in one sense and not there in another sense. But the truth is, that wasn't something that we talked about or decided to try and do. I can recognise that it happens and I like it very much, but I think that, had we tried to achieve that, we would inevitably have failed, because you can't make a gesture without the meaning behind the gesture. It's not how we work as human beings. You can pretend intellectually that that's what you are doing, but what we are actually doing, Matteo and I, is that the job to follow the rhythm of the score occupies our minds so much that we make the gesture without focusing on it because we are focusing on the rhythm. And, I think, that's what makes it have this quality that has intrigued some people, of allowing for the concrete meaning of a gesture but at the same time it seems to evaporate as we do it. I think it comes more from how we focus as performers. But that has to do with the fact that we decided to sit down. We decided to sit down so that Matteo looked like a musician, not like a dancer. That was a big difference between *Weak Dance Strong Questions* and *Both Sitting Duet*. With *Weak Dance Strong Questions* we wanted to say: 'Jan is an untrained dancer, Jonathan is a trained dancer.' But we had done that, so *Both Sitting Duet* had to have something else; then it was more like saying: 'Matteo could be a musician or a dancer, Jonathan could be a dancer or a musician.' In a way, this was

the starting point. But then if you are sitting down you are going to use your hands and arms, because you don't have much else. If you use your hands and arms you are going to have gesture. In a way I thought it would be more of a problem than it was, whether something was a concrete gesture or it could be taken as an abstract beat or movement. But in the end we were so busy with the rhythm between us that it left us free a little bit. But it wasn't a deliberate thing, it was one of those cases in which you arrive at something interesting by trying to do something else; and that's usually what happens, I think, in making anything. It's often misunderstood by people who comment on art; they usually think, 'the effect of this was such and such', and they assume that that's what the artist intended to do. But usually it's only that the artist is working and, by working accidentally, stumbles across that thing. I mean, if they are smart, they use it well, so that's greatly to their credit if they manage to do that. But I think it's very rarely about deciding to do something and then doing it, because usually you get it wrong if you are too conscious.

DPD: For me probably the two main aspects where I can see a similarity between *Both Sitting Duet* and *Weak Dance Strong Questions* are this idea of the 'emptiness' and the idea of you asking questions about dance, which I see very much in *Both Sitting Duet* as well. And I see them both as dance pieces on dance, on what dance means to you.

JB: Yeah. Well, one thing that I noticed about *Weak Dance Strong Questions* the last time that we did it, which I hadn't noticed before was that I think it operates like a very conventional dance duet. I think the reasons why it works, when it works, have to do with the reasons why dance duets work; but it arrives at that by a quite unusual route. And I think that's why it was popular with the people who liked it because the unusual route that it took was in a way conceptual, but what it arrived at was like a dance duet, and all the ways that you see two people communicate or not communicate in a dance duet – and then echo each other and do the same thing or not do the same thing; the shapes that you make, the way that you move around each other – all of these things are present in good dance duets. But the 'emptiness'. I don't know... Yes, I think *Weak Dance Strong Questions* has an 'emptiness', because it's never allowed to land, it's never allowed to answer, it's never allowed to resolve itself; so that's always like being nowhere, and being nowhere is something

that has preoccupied people for millennia – many mystical aspects of different religions have this curiosity about being nowhere. *Both Sitting Duet* feels much more concrete to me than that, but it has a subtlety, I think, but I don't know whether that might have something more to do with being English than with continuing to make a statement about emptiness, if you like. I mean, there is a subtlety of manners about English culture which does come out.

Another thing about *Weak Dance Strong Questions* is that, for me, one of the joys about doing it has been that I've grown up studying dance in a period of time when both dance and other body work has been concerned with reintegrating mind and body and with a critique of Western culture, post-Enlightenment culture, which has resolutely separated mind from body in a quite inaccurate and unscientific way, really; and this rebalancing has been very important. But at the same time, the truth is, I am the product of the culture that I live in and therefore I do feel that division between my mind and my body and when I perform *Weak Dance Strong Questions* I can absolutely accept it for once, and I don't have to do this hard work to integrate them. So allowing myself to experience this split which is always there in some way has been quite a liberation.

DPD: I'm not sure I perceive it as a split when looking at the performance though.

JB: No, it doesn't look like one, but it's just that when I'm doing it, my body is doing one thing and my mind is in a state of questioning often out of synch with the state of questioning that my body is in. And I think that's what makes what I'm doing the way that it looks; it's as though one was constantly interrupting the other.

DPD: But would you be surprised if it was perceived as exactly the opposite?

JB: No, I think that's what I'm saying. I think that sometimes when you try too hard to say that the way our culture separates mind and body is not good, therefore we must bring these things together, in fact you make it very difficult. In some ways I found that, with *Weak Dance Strong Questions*, it's by accepting it that I have allowed myself to reintegrate it.

DPD: There is at the moment, and there has been for about a decade, a recognisable ‘new choreography’ scene, of artists that are invited to the same dance and performing arts festivals and venues. It is normally identified as a continental European scene and you, being English, seem to belong to it in a kind of ‘borderline’ way. And apart from this nationality issue, there are also other elements that distinguish your work from that of other contemporary European choreographers, perhaps especially in the use of the body, which is very much ‘exposed’ in other choreographers’ recent works whereas it is not ‘exposed’ in the same way in your pieces.

JB: No, that never interested me, really. But for sure my first influences were American, I don’t have that influence of European dance theatre, for instance.

DPD: But do you see yourself in some way as belonging to this kind of new European dance scene, and do you recognise a common trend of research?

JB: Yes, I feel myself incredibly lucky to be working in Europe at a time when I think European dance is where things are happening. And that wasn’t true of the 1960s and 1970s, when America was where things were happening. I mean, things are still happening in America, but there’s a particular focus in Europe, and a confidence, at the moment.

DPD: I think it is possible to find similarities between your work and that of Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy, for example, but there also seems to be some kind of clear division between the European scene and the British scene, especially in London.

JB: The London scene is quite isolated, in a way. I worked with some final-year Laban students recently and they had heard of neither Jérôme Bel nor Meg Stuart, which is strange. But that French conceptual movement has been very exciting in a way and I very much enjoy my communication with those people. I think what I do is very different, but I understand why there’s a mutual curiosity. I mean, I think that in what Jérôme Bel does there is very rarely dance, but it is dance very much in how musical it is; if you look at the timing of a Jérôme Bel piece it’s very delicate, very sure (considered how long something takes, both the whole and each individual

thing), it's very worked, it really sings itself, often. I don't know whether he would agree, but that's what I see.

Notes

- ¹ See Burrows and Ritsema, 2003, p. 31.
- ² In a previous, undocumented conversation, which took place on 15 December 2003 (see also Chapter 7, notes 4 and 13).

INTERVIEW 5

[Fargion, M. (2005), Unpublished conversation with the author, 14 September.]

Fargion on *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance*

London, 14 September 2005

Daniela Perazzo Domm: I'm interested in knowing how you worked with Feldman's score to create *Both Sitting Duet*. What parameters did you use to 'transcribe' the musical score into movement sequences? I assume that you played a key role in this operation.

Matteo Fargion: Yes, the score was always next to me and the translation always went through me. Jonathan would say, 'how does this bit go?', and then we would usually write down the rhythm first and then find physical material.

DPD: So it was more about the rhythm than the actual notes?

MF: To be honest, from what I remember, I think it started off very precise; the initial thought was, 'if the same note comes back, we should use the same movement.' But I think we abandoned that by the first page, it was too limiting. But what's interesting is that, when I suggested the idea of translating the Feldman score to Jonathan, I imagined that we would do a piece like *Hands*, but on a larger scale, something as clear as 'one note equals one gesture'; whereas I think what we did is much more interesting because, for instance, already the first movement, say mine, is a lot more than the two notes that are in the score. The notes translated into the body already become more than just two points. And from the beginning, for me that took it away from the Feldman, but in a good way.

I have to say that there was quite a bit of rhythmic simplification of the score in the translation; some of it I kept to myself, and some of it I discussed with Jonathan. I got faster and faster at seeing what was next and I would kind of simplify on the spot what it was, knowing that it would be too complicated to follow the score literally.

DPD: So one of you is the piano and the other the violin?

MF: Yes, all the way through I'm the piano and he's the violin; that doesn't change. But when you hear the music you can probably hear how much of it is to do with imitation. The violin plays two notes and the piano plays the same two notes but they sound completely different; or it reverses the order of the two notes. There are very simple contrapuntal devices.

DPD: Could you give me a definition of counterpoint?

MF: Musical counterpoint is certainly something that has always fascinated Jonathan. Musical counterpoint by definition is 'point against point', that's very simple counterpoint. It used to be two different melodies played by two instruments always following each other rhythmically. But this is way back at the beginning of the history of music. Then things got a bit more complicated, so you could have two notes against one, three notes against one, etc. Counterpoint started off very basic in music and then became a lot more complicated and much looser. When Jonathan asked me to define counterpoint, I said that thing that is often quoted [e.g. Burrows, 2002; Hutera, 2003], that counterpoint assumes love between the parts. Because often it's seen as conflict and tension, but in music you can have dissonance and harmony – and it took me many years to realise that there's actually no physical equivalent, you can invent it but it's not really there. You can never recreate physically two melodic lines that pull against each other because of what you expect them to do, because of the rules of Western harmony. I mean, we can talk about it, there's tension and resolution in dance, but it's not as clear as two notes of which one wants to go somewhere else, causing tension. So, obviously, in music, I think, counterpoint can be much more complicated than in dance, and that's something that we realised through the years of working together: that visual counterpoint has to be much more 'stupid' than musical counterpoint. Things that would be too obvious in music work in dance. The kind of imitation that we do in *Both Sitting Duet* is not really in the Feldman score, literally; it doesn't exist at such a simple level. But every time we got more complicated it would confuse the result.

DPD: But the effect, I would say, is quite similar. When I listened to the Feldman score, it gave me the same impression that the piece gave me – this kind of dialogue, the two instruments following each other but also doing things slightly differently.

MF: But in the music, especially rhythmically, it's much more complicated and floating, whereas the same thing in a physical sequence would be weak or not clear enough. But having said that, the 'cheating' thing was really only about complicated rhythmical details. Most of the repetitions were definitely always already in the score. So if there was a rhythmical cell repeated five times, we would write down what it was rhythmically and then find the material and repeat it five times.

DPD: But what about the overall structure? I have read [York, 1996] that *For John Cage* is constructed on a quite symmetrical structure, to which slight variations are applied – what Feldman calls 'crippled symmetry' [Feldman, 1981]. The whole piece is made of five symmetrical sections with elements of change.

MF: I'm surprised that it's been analysed this way. Unless Feldman was fooling us all... he would never think like this. This is certainly an analysis that has come after the fact. From my knowledge of Feldman, and from being quite close to him in some periods, he definitely always talked about really starting from the beginning and composing in a linear fashion, following only your concentration and your intuition. He was the most intuitive composer that I know. I don't think he had any plans to do with making a piece of five sections. I can't hear five sections, the piece is very flat, that's the whole point – and that's what *Both Sitting Duet* isn't, I think. The score has a kind of monolithic, floating and flat quality; when you listen to it, it's this kind of timeless thing that goes on and on. There's no dramatic change whatsoever. In *Both Sitting Duet* we realised after twenty minutes that something should change; and tempo was the obvious thing, which the Feldman score doesn't do: it's the same tempo all the way through. That's one of the really big differences: we changed the tempo three times in the piece.

DPD: I don't think that this analysis of the score in five sections implies that there's a development in the composition. It's just that because the score is made of patterns of

sound, these patterns are organised in a precise way, without saying that there's a development or a hierarchy between the patterns.

MF: But it surprises me anyway, as Feldman often talked about just writing a page, and then in the evening he would copy it out and that was it. Maybe it's all a lie, but that's what I've always admired: this ability to start from the beginning and work with material. Of course there are patterns, but I always thought that they were much more small scale, that he would map out the whole cage and then create small patterns. Maybe you can hear different sections, but in *Both Sitting Duet* I think the sections are more extreme; there are bigger changes, because of the tempo changes more than anything else. I think the reason for that has also to do with not wanting to make this monolithic minimal piece that went on without change. Jonathan especially is very sensitive to when something is enough, more than me. That's why he always says that I always want to push something, keep it going, and he's always wanting to change. So maybe somewhere in between we get it right! I say, 'no, not yet', and he says, 'it's time, let's move on, enough of this'!

DPD: So, for example, in *The Quiet Dance* the piece starts with the repetition of the same movement sequence for a long time; was it your decision to repeat it so many times?

MF: That's what I thought the whole piece should be, but we realised that we could do that for the opening material, whereas the other materials we found didn't suggest that. So I think, like Feldman, we were true to the material: it's not what we want but what this material wants. For the first material it was clear – we made it in there [he points to his living room], Jonathan showed me the opening material and I said, 'okay, let's start: how many times?' And it was really like this: he would do it and he would say, 'stop me when it's enough.' So I would just sit there and say, 'stop!' and he said, 'that was ten times.' 'Okay, what should we do now?', 'Wait, six, go again, stop.' So it was really fast at the beginning. But when we went on to the next material it was different.

DPD: Yes but when you say that it's about what the material wants, in a way it's you who decides when it's enough, you with your sensitivity and artistic knowledge; it's not a measure that everybody would universally agree on.

MF: It's a bit disingenuous of me to say that, but there's something about really watching and listening and not a conceptual idea of, for instance, making a piece by throwing dice, where an idea is superimposed on the material, you map out the whole piece and then you fill it in regardless of what the material is. That's what Feldman says, that composers make plans and music laughs, and that's very interesting. He got that from the Yiddish proverb 'man makes plans and God laughs.' It's as though composers make plans and music than says, 'no, I don't want to do that.' So, in that same way, you have to ask what the material really wants. Just concentrate on this and see when it's the right time to change. I think this kind of composition is an obsession for both of us, on both a small scale and a large scale. When is it enough? When should we change? There are no rules, it is intuitive. I suppose you get better at it the more you do it. Which is why Jonathan was the right person to make this piece with, because he has the patience to make this kind of hand-crafted kind of work. It's quite laborious.

DPD: Is there something that you think that *Both Sitting Duet* has that the Feldman score doesn't have? Some quality that you found only in the dance, apart from the mood – which you have already said is different?¹

MF: I think the music is much more 'abstract' – dangerous word. With *Both Sitting Duet*, not when we were making it, but when we had made it, it was very clear that it was also a piece about friendship, because movement can do that: the fact that we are sitting together, next to each other – like musicians. But had it been two musicians, it would have been different. I mean, I don't listen to the Feldman and think, 'this is about... anything', nothing as simple as that. *Both Sitting Duet* is about friendship, it's about the fact that we have known each other for so long, it's about the dancer and the non-dancer, and for me it's more of a folk dance than abstract art – which the Feldman is; for me it's the highest, most aesthetic and beautiful twentieth-century music, the most refined. But at the time when we were doing it we had no idea. We knew we didn't want to imitate Feldman in any way. I seem to remember that at

some point there wasn't even the idea of making the whole piece; it seemed impossible, no way we would get through. The intention was more, as is often the case with choreographers, to do a couple of pages and then put it away. But then we got into it and realised that we could keep going, but completely linearly: we went on page by page. And some days you look at the page and you think, 'oh no, no repetitions...' But we always found different ways of dealing with the score; towards the end we got tired of this kind of straight counterpoint, so we made a fast section where rhythm seems to be thrown out of the window, and we do individual very fast movements which are like a split screen where we are not counting anymore, we are not being kept together. Of course that's not in the Feldman at all, we just reached a point when we thought, 'what does the piece need?' Well, it needs a different type of relationship, which again the Feldman doesn't have – the violin is always the violin and the piano is always the piano.

DPD: But this, as you said, is following Feldman anyway, because of his idea of always being with the material and doing what the material needs.

MF: That's true, we followed our instinct at this point. It was just getting too boring to make, so we thought that we needed to do something else. So the first thing we changed was the speed: after about fifteen minutes, when the movement goes down to the feet, that's a different tempo, deliberately different. And the next big change is the fast section, which has this very different relationship between us, much freer; so it's the same kind of material but it's not a very tight plot, where I do two and he does one, for example. Then it changes tempo again, and then of course, at the end, it's when we introduce the noise [clapping]. So maybe it's too simplistic to say that the Feldman was a map;² it was more than a map, I suppose. In some ways it was treated with a healthy irreverence; it wasn't as though we couldn't change a thing, but we did it with enough rigour that we kept interested in what the score might give us. If it wasn't giving us what we were looking for, we would invent something, we would change the rules, but the score was always there. So maybe we would say, 'why don't we do this page where you take two lines and I take the other two lines and we mix them up?' But still we did that page, for the entire length of the page. In that sense it's not a conceptual way of working. And the same is with *The Quiet Dance*, where

we had rules such as we must walk and we must start from images, but you can bend the rules, they are not cages.

DPD: For you as a composer, has working on *Both Sitting Duet* in this way changed anything in the way in which you see music or work with music? I see it as a transformative piece, offering a new perspective with regard to the way in which the relationship between dance and music is generally perceived, and it seems to suggest a new way in which a composer and a choreographer can collaborate. So it is quite innovative in what it proposes and offers.

MF: I'd like to do the equivalent in music with Jonathan, but I never persuaded him to come to my 'house'.

DPD: So you don't feel that that was your house? You feel that you have gone into his territory?

MF: Sure, with both pieces it was about what I had to offer to his art form, which is completely satisfying for me, obviously. It's made me much less interested in sitting at home writing string quartets that nobody plays. For me, having worked for fifteen, twenty years with him and lots of other choreographers, it's finally a collaboration that is engaging and as equal as it can be. But it's the art form of dance.

DPD: So you don't think that, for example, a music researcher would be interested in looking at how you work with music in this piece?

MF: I doubt it. I might be wrong, but I know that when we did it in Huddersfield at the music festival a couple of years ago it was the curiosity of the festival.³ There is a precedent in music for this kind of musical notation of movement, which comes from Mauricio Kagel in the 1960s and 1970s in Cologne.⁴ He's a very interesting composer; for ten years he produced very interesting pieces and then he reached the end of the rope and couldn't go any further with this idea of music-theatre. I'm not saying this is like that, but it's not dissimilar. He would notate even the footsteps of the performers coming on to the stage; his instructions usually were to do with making sound, but they're also very theatrical. For instance, a composer friend of

mine who saw *Both Sitting Duet* said, ‘ah yes, I could see some of Kagel.’ Which of course the dance world doesn’t know. So it’s not like... wow! I mean, I wouldn’t call this a piece of music, it’s not a piece of music. It’s a nice thing that people say, ‘we hear music’, so it’s like silent music, but, honestly, I don’t think it is music. I used to think of it as similar to performing music just to convince myself that I could do it, and I sing along when I do it and I kind of hear melodies in my head, like the audience have said; and it can be presented in a musical context, but not as a piece of music.

DPD: But also in the dance field it wasn’t received immediately and unquestionably as a piece of dance.

MF: I think that Jonathan and I share a lot of this kind of interests which, as I said, have to do with musical ideas, translating musical ideas into dance, and general compositional issues, and the importance of material, which I don’t see so much nowadays. It’s hard to define exactly how we used the score. As I said, it wasn’t quite a map, but it wasn’t this kind of thing that we couldn’t change either. But we convinced ourselves that we were true to the score and we got to the very last page, and that felt right for this piece. We have tried since to use another score, we tried other composers, for example we tried Chopin and other pieces by Feldman, but that was the right score at the right time. I would find it very boring to make a piece with another ‘found’ score. It was just the idea that this was a piece that we both loved – I actually gave up writing music for at least a year because I kept trying to reproduce this piece, and even before then I was completely obsessed by this piece, because for me it’s the greatest piece ever written (although now I’m not so sure!). So it had that history as well. It wasn’t just *a* piece, it was *the* piece. And who knows what would have happened if I hadn’t pulled it out that day on the way to the studio? It really was a last minute thing, as I was thinking, ‘enough discussion; I’ve got to take something concrete in!’

Notes

- ¹ Elsewhere Burrows and Fargion have commented on the change of mood they registered in the translation of the musical score into a choreographic work (see, for instance, Hutera, 2003).
- ² See Cripps, 2004.
- ³ Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival, Yorkshire.
- ⁴ Contemporary Argentine composer, based in Cologne.

INTERVIEW 6

[Burrows, J. (2005a), Unpublished conversation with the author, 26 May.]¹

Burrows on *The Quiet Dance* (1)

London, 26 May 2005

Daniela Perazzo Domm: You have often said that your works have different starting points, explore different issues and develop differently. What's the starting point of the new piece you are presenting in Munich this August and how are you working on it?

Jonathan Burrows: *Both Sitting Duet* has been touring now for three years, which was completely unexpected – we had no idea when we made it that it would be invited so much around the world. We have been to seventeen countries so far with it, often several times. But during the time we have been touring *Both Sitting Duet*, Matteo Fargion and I also decided that we would go on researching towards making another piece together. We knew this was a risk, because *Both Sitting Duet* was so successful, but at the same time we felt that we had begun to collaborate in a way which had a clarity and an energy that we should try and build on, while it was still alive. In other words, if we stopped and didn't work together for a year or two years and then came back together, the ease with which we were communicating on the things which really concerned us would be gone. So over the past two years or so we've researched in different directions to try and find some way of going forward, and it's taken time and some wrong turnings to discover a way that feels right.

DPD: Can you say something about those different directions?

JB: For me the starting point for making a new piece is always to ask, 'what is the burning question that I am fascinated by and need to explore?' So the first question that came up after *Both Sitting Duet* was this, 'if *Both Sitting Duet* is what we do when Matteo Fargion and I both dance, what happens if we go back to a relationship where he writes music and I dance?' This is a very old-fashioned relationship, it's the

traditional relationship of dance and music. So what happens if we approach that again in a fresh way? We decided that we would try and retranslate the score of *Both Sitting Duet*, with him writing music and me dancing. We made a twenty-minute version of this which we liked very much.

DPD: What do you mean by ‘retranslating the score’ of *Both Sitting Duet*?

JB: *Both Sitting Duet* was a translation of a score of a piece of music by the American composer Morton Feldman. So that was one translation. We decided that it would be interesting if we took our version and translated it again into a third score, so that you have a kind of passing on of translation. So, in other words, what I mean when I say ‘translation’ is that we would take the ‘instructions’ in the *Both Sitting Duet* score but interpret them in a completely different way.

DPD: Both physically and with a musical score?

JB: Yes, both physically and musically. We did this and we made a piece of twenty minutes, which we liked very much. But when we showed it to some people their feeling was that this was still too much the world of *Both Sitting Duet*, and we kind of agreed and reluctantly decided to start again.

So then we tried to find another burning question for ourselves and came up with the thought that we always tend to work in short phrases, and that something vital for us was to work in a way that used long long lines of expression, something we’ve never managed. And we came up with the idea that we would each write one-hundred-note melodies which would form the base for what we would do, and I would still dance and Matteo would still play music. Again, a little bit an old-fashioned idea that we wanted to try and approach fresh. Again we made twenty minutes and we liked it, and again we showed it to people and we still felt that what we were showing raised too many questions. And I mean questions in the wrong way – it raised too many difficult questions in the minds of the people that were seeing it.

So we put that aside and then we had the thought, ‘what is the piece that we really always wanted to make and never dared to make?’ This piece is the piece where we only walk. You are not allowed to make that piece anymore because that piece

belongs to minimalism. But the idea was, make it anyway and it has to be fresh. The way that we've approached this is to concentrate on images. In other words, not on patterns, music and structure, but on very strong images, which is something I never do. I mean, there is pattern, structure and rhythm in the work, but there's an emphasis on the images that you see and on their impact. Now we have made twenty minutes of that piece and finally we are keeping going. And this time we've decided that we're not showing it to anyone until we're done.

DPD: This is very interesting, especially from the point of view of the creative process, of how you construct a piece.

JB: Sometimes the thing that you *need* to make is not the most comfortable thing, and it's not the thing that would best make your career more successful. But sometimes, if you can have the courage to walk towards that more difficult thing, that's when something interesting happens. And of course that's when you don't really know what you are doing – in a way, that's when you are working blind. That's where there's the most chance that you fail, but also the most chance that something will happen, which will in fact be successful and further your career. And you don't know until the moment a public watches it which way it's going to swing. One of the things that interest me about assumptions of making dance and of making performances is that I often get a sense that people think that a choreographer or a director has a choice about what they make, but really you don't have a choice: you can only make the thing that you are going to make. And then it either speaks to somebody else or it doesn't. You can't make it speak to somebody else, you can only keep your fingers crossed.

DPD: Yes, you never know how it's going to be perceived. But what do you mean by 'concentrating on images'?

JB: I'm not entirely sure and I probably won't know what that means until we perform it. But what I do know is that in my recent works – *Weak Dance Strong Questions* with theatre director Jan Ritsema and *Both Sitting Duet* with Matteo – the movement was arrived at from quite 'mental' processes. In both cases there's another layer to the work, which comes from ideas about performance and about the

relationship between the people on stage and with the audience. And this other layer, in a way, becomes the subject of the piece. Although both of those pieces don't have a theme – you couldn't say, 'this is about that' – I think when you watch them you feel very strongly a subject. For instance, I think with *Both Sitting Duet*, although it deals with a lot of abstract patterns of hand movements and so forth, the real subject is that Matteo and I have known each other and have been best friends for fifteen years. That's the story. It's the only story a dance can tell well. Whereas with what we are doing now, I think in some sense we are daring to allow an emotional process to take place, equal to the mental process. So that's quite old-fashioned, but that's why it interests me. I don't think the piece is old-fashioned, it's too odd for that, but there's something about it. And the main image in it is a kind of 'calling' that we do, using our voices, which immediately has an impact which is much more powerful than, for instance, coolly performed hand gestures.

DPD: Are the images that you start from related to 'walking'? Or is walking just the action that you perform?

JB: Walking is just the action. In fact, when you watch it, to be honest, is not like you really think that we are just walking. That was just a place to start.

DPD: But then, will we know what the images you are using are?

JB: If the piece works, you won't question what these images are, but they will speak to you. If it doesn't work, you'll say, 'this is boring old minimalism, go away!' But it's a risk we have to take. There's no doubt that the work that Matteo and I make is always seen as using less to say more. At the same time we're always saying, 'we're not minimalist, we don't make minimalism.' In some ways that's true because it's not that I've studied minimalism or that it's my only influence. In fact it's as much because I'm a Protestant that I have that mind, because that's the quality of Protestantism, and I was brought up in a very religious Protestant family. Also, I see the effect of using less to say more in many more different contexts than just contemporary minimalist art – I mean, we see it in Japanese culture, I hear it in folk music, and I find this quality in dub reggae, which I love. It doesn't only belong to

American minimalism. But at the same time I understand why people say that what I do is minimalist because, you know, it's not Pina Bausch!

DPD: No, certainly not! So you're saying that you don't set out to make 'minimalist dance'.

JB: No, what I do is all I can do. That's the way it comes out; I have to accept it. You have to accept who you are and what you do.

DPD: To go back to the composition of the piece, last time we spoke you said that in the most recent version Matteo doesn't play anymore. Is there any music at all?

JB: We're not sure yet. I'd like there to be music, but it just depends on whether the piece wants music. I have a terrible fear that it's going to say no. Like everything that I do says no to music. But we can only hope; I love music! It's just that sometimes any other layer you put with the thing that you are doing just interferes with it. We'll see what happens.

DPD: What about the tone of this work? You recently told me that it's very different from *Both Sitting Duet*, which is quite humorous and light.

JB: I think another thing about what Matteo and I are trying to do now is that in our previous research to make a new piece we were very affected by the lightness and humour of *Both Sitting Duet* and our enjoyment of the response of audiences, which has often been laughter. In a way we got trapped in that expectation of this rather kind relationship with the audience. But now we've decided quite consciously to allow ourselves to make a very serious piece. Although, I have to say, I watched the first twenty minutes of what we've made the other day and, with some distance from it, it also made me laugh. This only means that when I try to be very serious it also makes me laugh as well. But for me this is one of the paradoxes of what I do – on the one hand, the performances I make, for instance in the UK, are considered rather difficult, possibly too difficult for many audiences; but on the other hand, fifty per cent of the times we perform, the audience laughs. So this doesn't seem to make sense, and slightly frustrates me.

DPD: So you won't be shocked if the audience actually laughs at this piece?

JB: I don't know whether they will. I have no idea. I think they won't. The manner of performance is too serious, too straight. *Both Sitting Duet* has a relationship with the audience of being very at ease and putting the audience at ease. This doesn't happen in this piece, so I think the reaction will be very different. The thing about performances is to give the audience the freedom to respond as they wish to respond, and to have some principles for yourself about how to deal with that response. But at the same time you can indicate very strongly to an audience, you can give them some guidance about how you suggest that they sit with the thing that's happening. That's always very useful, if you are sitting in an audience, to have that clue from the performers, because, in a way, you are in their hands.

DPD: I've been wondering about this recently, thinking about what you often say about the relationship between freedom and limitation, that the limitations that you set for yourself when you construct a piece actually allow you to be freer than if you started from a situation of total freedom, which could almost make you feel trapped. I was thinking about this kind of 'mechanism' from the point of view of the audience, thinking that sometimes one doesn't know how to react to a piece.

JB: Yes. It can be very exciting for an audience not to know how to react to a piece, but it can also be great when a performance is clear about giving you some sense about how to sit with it. Of course the strange thing is that for the performers the audience seems powerful and able to influence whether they end the night feeling in a good mood or rather depressed. But for the audience, interestingly enough, the performer can often seem quite powerful, because you are pinned there in your seat, subjected to whatever that performer wants to subject you to. And somewhere between these two power structures there is a negotiation, which is the performance. That's what's interesting about performance.

DPD: Why Munich as a venue for the premiere? What is your relationship with Munich and Joint Adventures?

JB: The piece was already meant to open at Kaaaitheater in Brussels, but we postponed it because we were touring too much and we ran out of time to work. I've had for many years a relationship with Walter Heun, who runs Joint Adventures in Munich. It's a festival which has a very nice atmosphere, and we have been there many times. What you have to remember is that the first two performances of *Both Sitting Duet* were incredibly tense. It was agony for the audience; they could see that we were so terrified we weren't even breathing. It was only after three or four performances that the piece started to have the life that it has now. And you cannot shortcut that process, you have to go through the agony. So it's a brave audience that goes to a premiere.

DPD: Is the space bare?

JB: I don't know yet. I'm always hoping for a giant and ornate set, but it's just that I can never find the right reason!

DPD: For many years you have had a strong link with Rosemary Butcher. Do you still have a working relationship with her?

JB: The last thing I did with Rosemary Butcher was *Scan* in 1999. I started working with Rosemary in 1985 because we both had young kids and we both went to the same play-park with them; we got talking and one day she just said to me, 'I'm recreating an old piece – which Julyen Hamilton had performed – would you be interested in doing it?' And I said, 'Rosemary, you've never seen me dance. I'm a ballet dancer.' And she said, 'yes, but I quite like our chats, so it seems like it could be interesting.' That was very flattering so I said yes, although it felt a little daunting to try and step into the shoes of Julyen Hamilton. But it was a wonderful escape from the world of ballet and I went on periodically performing and making things with Rosemary, until the last time in 1999. We still have a creative relationship in the sense that, every now and again, we have long intense conversations about dance-making. For me, each piece that I see that Rosemary Butcher makes I think it's the best piece she's yet made. That's something that I love about her.

DPD: When I first met you in Milan in 2003 I associated you with the so called ‘contemporary European scene’. Do you still feel that there is a bond between you and these other choreographers? Do you have a kind of ‘ongoing’ dialogue with them?

JB: I have a strange relationship with the UK dance scene because I don’t often perform here. I mean, when I have a piece it’s generally performed in London and perhaps in Nottingham at the Nottedance festival, but not in many other places (although *Both Sitting Duet* did a few other places). I have a stronger connection with the European scene, particularly around Brussels, but also a few other cities – Berlin, Frankfurt, Munich and Ghent. The European dance scene is interesting because it’s constantly shifting in a sense, so energies of particular kinds of work seem to gather and then will disperse again and re-gather in a different way, as though the thing is always in a process of trying to define itself – and that’s how it should be. I think that if it defined itself it would die. So at the time when I performed in Uovo Performing Arts Festival in Milan, this was a very interesting festival because it captured a certain moment of something happening then which itself is now dispersed and re-gathered in a different way. (And of course there is this huge energy at the moment which still comes from the more conceptual work which came out of Paris.) The interesting thing for me in my relationship with the European scene has been that one of the dominant energies has been conceptual work, and I have a rather strange relationship with that work. I have been supported by people who are very interested in that work and by makers themselves. I was part of the wonderful Stockholm Panacea festival in 2001, where the whole energy of that kind of work flowered. We opened *Weak Dance Strong Questions* in that festival and part of its success was due to the fact that it landed in the right place, at the right time, with the right people, with the right audience who were receptive to it, and then the impact of that echoed around and we got other invitations. *Both Sitting Duet* was invited by Jérôme Bel to the festival he curated in Belgium. But at the same time, I don’t really work conceptually.

DPD: And you also come from a very different background.

JB: I come from a different background and I don’t really do things in those ways. At the same time I’m *very* interested in Jérôme Bel’s work, I’m *very* interested in Xavier

Le Roy's work and I've been *very* stimulated by the way that they are thinking. And I understand in some way why they've been interested in the things that I've been doing, but for me the dialogue I have with more conceptually made work is interesting but also sometimes uneasy. And yet I think it's been essential for dance, and the reason I think it's been essential is that, particularly with Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy, they suddenly showed a way to make a dance performance which was clear in its intentions without relying upon techniques of theatre and without using what I would call 'too easy poetics' of dance – by which I mean that a lot of dance justifies itself by saying that you can interpret a work in many different ways, and sometimes that's true and wonderful and it's a flow of images, but sometimes it's just due to not clear enough thinking. In a way what I think Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy have done is suddenly to give a different model for a dance performance where there is clarity and it isn't about empty poetics. The interesting question is: where do we go from here?

DPD: But you come from a dance background, whereas they belong more to the performing arts scene.

JB: But the interesting thing about Jérôme Bel, and I've no idea if he would agree because I've never said it to him – and he probably wouldn't – is that one of the qualities of the pieces he's made is that they have an extraordinary rhythm and music to the performance of them, which is another layer to the layer of thought and dialogue about language. This is what makes them dance.

Although the thing that I try to make now starts from a different place, and I try to find a different place for everything that I start – and again, that's not a choice: when I try to start from the same place it never works, I get bored and then the audience will get bored. I see it as much as a weakness as a strength that I have to start from a completely different place every time. I'm not saying that this is the only way to go. I love Cunningham because he starts, in some ways, from a similar place each time. In my case, the quality which I'm aware is common to a lot of the things that I've made over the years is that I am fascinated by rhythm – and I really mean rhythm, I don't mean time passing or theatre time. I understand why dance has divorced itself from its traditional relationship with music and, to some extent, from its traditional

relationship with rhythm, because contemporary dance has had to define itself as its own art form, and in doing so it has gone deeply into ways to work with the body, which involve sensation, weight and expression and are not to do with rhythm – I understand and appreciate that. But, at the same time, most of the world dances with rhythm. So I like the idea of sticking with that because I see a lot of dance performance which, in order to pursue something vital in another direction, leaves go of that; so I try to hold on to it. This is also present in what I do now; it is the one thread that links all my works. And that's why I work with Matteo Fargion, because we share that interest, because he is a composer.

DPD: Especially in the mid-1990s you have been asked a number of times by critics and reviewers how your relationship with ballet had developed and whether you still saw your work as coming from ballet. How would you describe your relationship with ballet now?

JB: My relation with ballet is complicated because, to begin with, when you study from being a child, like me, you don't know what's you and what's that thing that you are studying. I can't separate the two. So I don't really have a perspective on ballet. My feelings about ballet are also affected by the fact that I wasn't considered a particularly successful ballet dancer. At the Royal Ballet, I mainly ran around in drag or as some comic character with a large beard. It wasn't the same as being in a pair of white tights dancing Balanchine. And I only got a job at the Royal Ballet because it was the time when they were interested in new choreographers.

DPD: But you seem to be playing this down...

JB: I didn't get given the job because they loved my dancing. I got given the job because Norman Morrice, who was then the director of the Royal Ballet and who had been the director of Rambert, gave me a contract as an apprentice choreographer. He is a very important man in that he was the first who brought modern dance to England with Rambert; he changed Rambert into a modern dance company. He also made a lot of works himself and was interested in exploring new territories. But there were times at the Royal Ballet when they didn't know what to do with me – I stood around carrying spears for a lot of time, and being in the back row of a hopping dance or

something. But I did eventually end up doing much more dancing because the choreographer Kenneth MacMillan kind of liked me.

So I ended up doing quite technical things but I never quite shrugged off the feeling that I didn't belong. So this still affects now my relationship with ballet, it's bound to. But if I do try and take a distance from it, I like very much the physical intelligence of ballet, if it's properly taught. It's often seen as being damaging to bodies – I'm not talking about pointe shoes here because I don't really know anything about pointe shoes. I've always understood why there's been a debate around whether forcing women into pointe shoes for the sake of becoming ethereal beings is a kind of abuse, but I don't really know; I've never used a pointe shoe in any piece I've made, I don't know what they are. I had a pair and I loved wearing them at one point, as many boys do. But the principles of ballet make extraordinary physical sense and are extraordinarily complex. There are very few physical systems in the world that are as complex as that, to do with coordination of mind, eyes, arms, legs, head, gravity and anti-gravity. The revolution initiated by William Forsythe was astonishing to me, I just didn't think this was possible, that ballet could do that. When I first saw Forsythe I immediately soaked up the ideas that he was working with, trying to use them to help what I was doing. But in the end I had to accept sadly that, whilst I have a kind of fantasy of making a piece with ballet, I don't think I can, that's not where I'm coming from. I've tried and I don't do it very well. Maybe one day I'll try again and find a way to do it.

DPD: Especially around the time of *The Stop Quartet*, there have been a lot of articles and interviews in which you were asked whether what you were doing still had to do with ballet, because most of the critics and reviewers didn't see a relationship anymore, and you would answer that what you were doing was getting even closer to ballet.²

JB: I don't remember that; I was probably trying to justify what I was doing. In *The Stop Quartet*, for instance, I had been trying to make a very complicated dance and I wasn't doing it very well, so I thought that I would just start with really basic elements, which is what I saw that Cunningham and Cage had done. Little things build complex things out of very simple cardinal elements. The cardinal elements in

The Stop Quartet are elements for the feet, with grids on the floor with numbers on them; and the primary movement for the arms is mainly based on very simple balletic elements: diagonal arm, curved arm. Which is perhaps why I would respond to those interviewers by saying that my work was getting much closer to ballet. It was a slightly stupid response because *The Stop Quartet* isn't like ballet at all. But I suppose I was a little bit bored of those questions and I was maybe also trying to jump on the bandwagon due to the fact that ballet was very popular at the time, mainly because of Forsythe, so I wanted to align myself still with ballet.

DPD: You also made a piece for Ballett Frankfurt.

JB: Yes, but Ballett Frankfurt was at heart a contemporary dance company.

DPD: But probably now this question about your relationship with ballet doesn't make sense anymore, at this stage of your career.

JB: Probably not... I'm always reluctant to talk about this because it's always misunderstood, but a physical influence that has constantly been as strong as ballet for me has been English folk dance, because Ninette de Valois, who founded the Royal Ballet, wanted a national style of ballet and she thought that the pupils of the Royal Ballet School should learn English folk dance. I was lucky enough when I turned up at the Royal Ballet School that there were two men there, Ron Smedley and Bob Parker, who taught the boys Morris dance. For the most part this is a kind of weekend hobby for middle-class people who want to re-enact some sense of merry old England. But it's a men's traditional ritual dance. Exactly at this time of year – and I'm going on Monday – in a small village just outside Oxford called Bampton in the Bush, the men dance once a year on Whit Monday. They start dancing at 7 in the morning and they dance until 7 at night and then they don't do it again for the rest of the year. It's an unbroken tradition: their fathers' fathers' fathers' fathers did this thing. Morris dancing is mocked in English culture all the time, it's a source of amusement. And I understand why. But if you go to Bampton on Whit Monday you follow a team and you go around into people's gardens where they do a few dances, and then you follow them when they go to another garden and so on. It's deeply moving, not because they dress up, which is what people and the media generally see.

but because they are doing a dance which is unlike any other dance, in the way that it uses its weight. I was taught this dance by Ron Smedley and Bob Parker, who are now in their seventies. The way in which Ron Smedley once described to me the physicality of this dance is absolutely right: you go down to come up.

DPD: Which is also what you find in reggae, you once told me!

JB: That's it: to go down to come up! That sums it up. It's a really unique kind of physicality. It's not about using gravity in the way that contemporary dance uses gravity; it's not about feeling your weight into the earth. It's about feeling your weight into the earth which then comes up again, out of the ground. And the whole dance is suspended in this place. And these are just ordinary guys that live in a rural village. It's a heavy dance, but at the same time it has this kind of strange, ugly grace to it – that's the way I can describe it. There's hardly a thing I've made that doesn't have that somewhere in the heart of it. But I don't like to talk too much about it because, if I talk about it, that's all that people see; whereas it's completely irrelevant. It only matters that I go to Bampton, and occasionally I have the privilege to take somebody else so that they can see it. I'll show you a tape and then you'll know what I mean. The thing is, I was ten years old when I started doing that and I was good at it, and loved doing it. And even though I did that once a week and I did ballet five times a week, it kind of carried an equal weight for me. And the two people that taught me are still really good friends of mine. But that's kind of invisible and it has to be, because, like with all these things, in a way it's relevant but it's only personal to me. It doesn't really matter where it comes from.

DPD: But you do see it in your early pieces.

JB: You see it more, but also *Both Sitting Duet* has a section called 'Bampton', which is an arm movement. It's also that I can't justify it intellectually; it was just that on Saturdays I had to do this class which was fun and I was good at it, whilst I was struggling with ballet. Because ballet is really hard, and you are eleven years old and there's somebody saying to you, 'you look so ugly, point your feet'; whereas with Morris dancing I could be myself. So the whole attitude towards it was different, and that attitude informs what I do now as well.

The other enormous influence was Nijinska's *Les Noces*, and there isn't a piece I've made which doesn't steal something directly from *Les Noces*.

Notes

- ¹ Part of this interview was published in Italian in *Danza & Danza* (Perazzo, 2005b); sections were also published in *Dance Theatre Journal* (Perazzo, 2005c), in an article that collates a selection of questions and answers from this and the following interview on *The Quiet Dance* (Burrows, 2005b).
- ² See, for instance, Meisner, 1996a.

INTERVIEW 7

[Burrows, J. (2005b), Unpublished conversation with the author, 28 July.]¹

Burrows on *The Quiet Dance* (2)

London, 28 July 2005

Daniela Perazzo Domm: When we met two months ago to talk about *The Quiet Dance*, you and Matteo had made twenty minutes. How long is the piece now?

Jonathan Burrows: Now it's forty-five minutes; I can't make a piece longer than that. I gave up a long time ago thinking that I could make a longer piece, although every time I start making a piece, and especially when I make a piece with Matteo, he always begins by saying, 'this will be the two-hour piece!' But I think the reality is that the kind of work that I make, and that Matteo and I make, is in a way like classical music, it's very different to sustain from, for instance, how a theatre piece would be sustained. So I think, for an audience, a forty-five-minute work can be a very full and densely packed experience even in that short time, hopefully.

DPD: Last time we talked about how you were constructing the piece starting from images and using the action of walking as a first element to create the movement material. What has happened since then? Have you continued working from those elements?

JB: The first thing about making a piece is that you need somewhere to begin. And if you are collaborating, you need to find somewhere to begin that you and your collaborator agree upon, an itch that both feel a desperate need to scratch. In the case of this duet with Matteo Fargion, we had always had a longing to make a piece which used walking. This always seemed impossible to do because that piece belongs to minimalism. But this time we talked about it a lot, we agonised about it and we decided that it was time that we had to risk that. Partly because we wanted to make another performance together where we both moved, and walking is something that Matteo, as an untrained dancer, has; it's his as much as it's mine. Having said that.

the odd thing is – we are now in the last two weeks of working on the performance and I got up very early this morning, I looked at the tape we have been recording in rehearsals and suddenly I was very struck by the fact that, in a way, it's not that you see walking. It's become something entirely of its own.

The general perception about people who make performances, or make any art, is often that we 'choose' an idea and then we 'make' that idea. But the reality is that, actually, you have very little choice: you are going to make the thing you are going to make. This was something that Rosemary Butcher taught me a long time ago. You may find one way or another to make it, but basically that's the piece that you have in you and the job that you have is to uncover that, or discover it. And once you begin to uncover it or discover it, you have to follow what it wants. In some ways, I think of this performance now as being an attempt to make the piece that lies just underneath all the other pieces we have ever made. And that's why we called it *The Quiet Dance*. But what also makes it slightly different from other pieces that I've tried to make is that, normally, I had the philosophy that the best way to make a dance is to accept that the movement that you make is in some way arbitrary, that anything is available to you, that everything is valid, and that it's how you place it in relation to itself and in relation to what other people are doing at the same time, and how you place it in time and space that can completely shift its meaning and arrive at an unexpected and much bigger meaning than the original movement could possibly ever have suggested. But with this piece I decided, and I kind of persuaded Matteo, 'that's enough with the arbitrary. Let's choose material that means something to us.'

The last time that we spoke, you asked, 'what is it? What are these images that you are working with?' And I think the best way to put it is that for us, in some way, they are 'elegiac'. Now, for anyone that comes to see the performance, I don't think it looks like an elegy. It looks like what it is and it has some quite specific and odd quality, which I hope can speak to other people too. But the heart of that for us was trying to find these images that had something elegiac about them.

DPD: Are they all very personal images?

JB: No, not really, because I think we have been trying – although the piece has a certain intimacy, as all the pieces that I make have – that it shouldn't exclude other

people. So something that's too personal doesn't open a door for an audience to come in. I suppose I would say that we were trying to look at something personal enough that it would still have a door open for somebody else watching from the outside.

I feel in a terrible disadvantage doing this interview right now because in these last two weeks of finishing the performance – and in this very moment we are trying to find the ending – almost every day that I look at it I see it completely differently. Some days I think I've caught a glimpse of what the audience would see and other days I think again I've caught a glimpse, but it's completely different. And some days, of course, I worry that the audience won't see anything at all. I feel I'm somewhere between uncertainty and certainty and I have to bide my time. And it takes infinite patience to endure the last moments of arriving at a finished performance.

DPD: How did you work on the choreography? You have described the construction of the movement sequences of *Both Sitting Duet* as guided by very clear 'instructions'. For *The Quiet Dance* the starting point was the action of walking. How did you proceed from there?

JB: It was more than that. It started from a very specific image, and it's the first image you see. I won't describe it because I think it should be fresh as the person comes into the theatre. But we started from one image and then we went on and made the next image that related to that one, and then the next and then the next. And then, at a certain point, when we had enough of something to get a glimpse of what we were dealing with, we began to find the 'music' of it. At a very practical level, the big difference between this piece and other pieces that I've made and that Matteo and I have made is that we have always been very preoccupied with counterpoint, meaning the relationship between one thing happening and another thing happening at the same time. But with this work we decided that we would do something slightly different. There is some direct and obvious counterpoint in it, but mainly, rather than being 'horizontal' counterpoint between two things happening simultaneously, there's a kind of 'vertical' counterpoint throughout the piece. This seems to be about how one thing relates to the thing that came before it and to the thing that comes after it, and then to when it comes back later and how that relates to what surrounds it there as

well. And that's been really fascinating for me, I have never worked that way before. Every step you take affects everything in the entire piece.

DPD: Does it mean that you can see some sort of linear development? Your previous works appear to be based on principles that deny linearity.

JB: To me, when I watch what we are making, it's a piece that is moving forward all the time and remaining where it is. If you like, that's a kind of viewpoint of life – endless change that arrives back at where it began. There's very little movement material in the work. I've never been involved in a performance with so little material. And yet actually it seems to me quite rich – which is interesting.

The funny thing is that every time I set out to make a new piece, I try to find a completely different starting point. That's not really a kind of artistic or aesthetic choice. It's just that I've learnt that if I try and do the same thing again, I just do it less well and I get rather inattentive and bored. And so, in order to keep on working, I've found this way of trying always to refresh my view of what I'm doing. Having said that, on another level, when I look at it – we recently made a DVD of ten years of films of the work made by film-maker Adam Roberts – at some level it's clear that I'm just always making the same piece. But it's the same piece seen from a different angle. And I like that.

DPD: Have you had any surprises, any unexpected outcomes during the process of creation of the piece so far? For example about *Both Sitting Duet* you said that the biggest surprise for you was the radical change in the mood of the piece from that of the musical score on which the choreography is based.

JB: The surprise about this piece for me has been how working with this kind of linear counterpoint is so different from anything that I have experienced before and so tricky, and so frustrating at times, and so satisfying also, as you gradually shift things and see the work unfold and arrive at itself. It's not there yet and, of course, I wake up in the night and think that it's not going to get there, and then I counsel myself to try and stay patient, because it's always felt like that, every single performance I've made. That never changes, really, it never loses its edge in that way.

DPD: So it's a good sign!

JB: Yes, you try and tell yourself it's a good sign.

DPD: What has Matteo's role been in the creative process, especially in relation to the notion of counterpoint and to the construction of the movement sequences? How have you worked together proposing, choosing and organising movement material?

JB: This is a very good question. With this piece, our respective roles as collaborators have been quite different from *Both Sitting Duet*, and Matteo for periods of time – I think he wouldn't mind me saying this – has struggled to find what his role is, because, when it came to the movement for the piece, it's tended to be me who's been driving that. But there've been two moments in the making of the piece when suddenly the reins have been handed over completely to Matteo. And then, within the period of a week, in both instances he's suddenly stripped things away, shaped them, extended and contracted them, the way in which a photographer focuses a camera. And that work he does much better than me.

DPD: Has this to do with the rhythm of the piece?

JB: In some sense it's to do with the rhythm, but it's also to do with the fact that Matteo has more of a head for the heights of taking your time, breathing a bit slower, giving the material space and cutting holes in it. I get rather a kind of vertigo of terror that the piece would fall apart if we were to stop for a moment. And in a way that's why the partnership works, because I'm driving and pushing and he's calming, shaping and counselling against too much haste. And, somewhere between the two, we arrive at what we wanted, which was to use walking, to do very little and it mustn't ever be boring.

DPD: This makes me think of those sequences in *Both Sitting Duet* where in the time it has taken Matteo to calmly execute one movement, you have frantically repeated the same pattern many more times!

JB: Yes, because under the skin I'm still a ballet man! That's where I came from. And I have within me still that kind of visceral experience of performing all those ballets which are about giving, giving, giving to the audience in a marvellous way. And of course I also react against that, not least because I did it for thirteen years, so I earned the right to find other ways. I like the tension created between Matteo pulling and me pushing. It stops the collaboration being too nice, and when collaborations are too nice nothing happens. That doesn't mean to say that we are horrible to each other, but we each fight hard for the direction that we see emerging.

DPD: Do you always work together in rehearsals or have you also worked separately?

JB: We have mostly worked together, but the few times when we have worked separately have been very fruitful and we should perhaps do it more, although it feels a bit lonely!

DPD: What other elements are involved in the work? You have talked about the images you started from, the idea of walking, time and space. What about the soundscape? Is there any music?

JB: Music has come in and out of the piece as we have gone along – sometimes it's felt like it was the right thing and other times not. But we make sound and use our voices throughout the performance, so it's not silent by any means, even though it's called *The Quiet Dance*. In a way, for me, this title reflects something else, which is rather a celebration of that thing which unfolds more slowly and in its own terms, which is a kind of work that I have always, deep in my heart, been most drawn to. So Samuel Beckett, Tadeusz Kantor, the early Trisha Brown, Douglas Dunn, David Gordon, Lucinda Childs, Rosemary Butcher, Nijinska's *Les Noces*, the dignity and oddity of the few handful of surviving English ritual folk dances, particularly the Whit Monday dancing at Bampton in Oxfordshire – these are the reference points for me. They are examples of a kind of work that invites you to come in and look carefully and quietly at small differences, rather than the kind of work that comes out from the stage and pushes you back into your seat. I'm not against that kind of work for a minute; as a student I was obsessed by *Chorus Line* and went to see it seven times. But what has always excited me the most is that experience of being in a theatre and

feeling at one with a very special moment of communication that draws me right out of my seat and down to something that's a pin-prick.

DPD: In some of your earlier works, around the mid-1990s, you showed a particular interest in how dance and music can interact with light. Does this element play a role in this new piece?

JB: That was when I was working with the marvellous lighting designer Michael Hulls and we began to find a way to work which really satisfied me, where Michael's intervention didn't have a cause-and-effect relationship with what was happening on stage. It wasn't about 'this person goes there and then that light comes on', it wasn't illustrating anything. He was working with time, space and rhythm in the same way that I was, and that Matteo Fargion and Kevin Volans were with music. And that's something that somehow I've let slip out of my hands at the moment. That's partly for practical reasons, because to deal with that kind of technology costs a bit more money – we had to take a technician with us, we often toured our own dance floor because we needed a very clean one, so we had to take a van, and then the whole thing becomes more expensive. In the last five years, I have been surviving quite a difficult economic climate by performing out of a suitcase, and it's been a very conscious decision. That means, don't travel with a technician and all the technical information has to be very simple and very clear.

On an aesthetic level, it was also about needing a different way forward in terms of the feel of a performance. I was influenced by the extraordinary generation of French choreographers, and especially by Jérôme Bel and Xavier Le Roy, and by the way that they changed everything suddenly in dance by making performances where everything was consequent and nothing could be justified by calling it poetry, which can often end up in dance as a kind of empty poetics. They are doing this by working with an incredible rigour and clarity of thinking about the thing that's happening on stage, and this really challenged me at a certain point. So that has led me, in the last few performances that I've made, to want to really have a clear sense of what's the relationship of a light to what's happening in the dance; what role does it fulfil? In other words, beside the practical considerations about not to be working with light, I think the other reason why I shifted away from that collaboration with a lighting

designer is that I had just turned a corner and I was looking for something different, a different kind of idea of what a dance performance could be. But I really like that you asked the question because it does feel like unfinished business and something which I would be very interested to look at again in relation to what I've discovered now. But in this piece, the light, although it has some shape and time to it, is fairly simple, because it's another out-of-a-suitcase piece – perhaps the last one, after which there will be something new.

DPD: What are your plans for *The Quiet Dance* after it opens in Munich in August?

JB: The way that I like to work, which I've learnt through years of trial and error, trying to figure out how best to work the market, is that now I don't plan a tour. Rather, we are starting out with a small number of performances, in Munich, in Brussels and then in London. Usually what happens then is that a number of other promoters will come to those performances; if they are interested in the piece they'll book it, if they are not they won't. And you never know. If they book it, then that might mean another small handful of performances, and then some more promoters will come to see it, so it's kind of growing ripples of interest in the work. The advantage of that for me is that it's a quite different and richer experience to go to a venue where somebody has really desired that piece and has really made a sort of personal investment in it – and knows why it's there, knows how to speak to the people that work in the theatre, knows how to communicate to the audience, knows the right context to put it into – than when you plan a tour of something that nobody has really ever seen, except that you've written a lot of overconfident stuff about it, and you can often end up in quite inappropriate contexts, with an audience that doesn't have the right situation or information as to how to sit with the performance that they're seeing. It's always a much more organic process for me. And if it doesn't work, then you start again.

Notes

¹ A large part of this interview was published in *Dance Theatre Journal* (Perazzo, 2005c) in an article that collates a selection of questions and answers from this and the previous interview on *The Quiet Dance* (Burrows, 2005a).

INTERVIEW 8

[Burrows, J. (2006d), Unpublished conversation with the author, 9 November.]

Burrows on *Speaking Dance*

London, 9 November 2006

Daniela Perazzo Domm: The first aspect I'd like to explore is the reaction of the audience to your first performance of *Speaking Dance* at The Place on 18 October. The response was so warm that I wonder what you think about it: whether it has surprised you and what you think it was caused by.

Jonathan Burrows: The times when we performed *Both Sitting Duet* one night and *The Quiet Dance* the next night, which were Barcelona, Modena and Vienna, there were quite a lot of people who came to both nights and quite a number of them expressed the feeling that they wanted to know what happened next. So, doing it, I feel a little bit of this. It is something which approximates to narrative. And I sense that with *Speaking Dance* at The Place we had an audience who had some kind of knowledge, if not of both of the previous pieces, at least of one or other of them – but quite a few people had seen both. But now I'm curious about what will happen with future performances of the piece. You always doubt and you think it might have been a specialised audience; and you wonder what would happen with a different audience. But I have also a certain trust that something would communicate anyway. However, because we had such a vocal response from the audience to us being vocal, what would be interesting is how it would feel for us, for instance, if the audience was sitting quietly.

DPD: But someone who saw the second performance at the Place told me that on that night the audience wasn't as responsive as on the evening of the premiere.

JB: More quiet, yes. But, for instance, when Matteo stood up by himself they still laughed, so that was interesting. It meant that that moment does have this connection with people. But the first time we showed it to anybody was to our friend Gerard

Bell, who is an actor and performer, in Matteo's kitchen, and of course he sat quiet and we were still able to inhabit it.

In fact last night's performance of *Both Sitting Duet* at Royal Holloway was really interesting; what was lovely about it is that it felt like an old-fashioned university performance of the kind that very few people get to do anymore – it used to be a staple for contemporary dance: that's how Cunningham made a living, they toured campuses in America; and now I think it's very difficult in the States and we don't do it so much here in the UK either. So you have this audience of rather serious students and they are passionate about the art. And because there was a piece of music composed by a student in response to *Both Sitting Duet* that was going to be played afterwards, there was an atmosphere more of a music concert than of a performance, which meant that the audience did sit really quiet. When we came off, I said to Matteo, 'that was so refreshing to do', because I recognise that feeling of the piece: when it's like that, something is allowed that doesn't happen when you get the vocal response. At the same time, as a performer, you get hooked on the vocal response, because you know what people are thinking, whereas when the audience sits silent it's more difficult. I mean, to some extent you know what a silent audience is experiencing because you can sense whether it's a focused silence or whether it's a bored silence – to some extent, but you are never quite sure. I mean, laughter is the most obvious connection, through which you know that something is communicating.

DPD: The other thing that is very interesting for me is the dichotomy between absence and presence that seems to underlie the performance, which also plays with expectations. The strongest moment is when Matteo stands up for the first and only time and everyone expects to see him dance and he doesn't; that is, the audience expects something that then is not there. But I see it also in relation to the previous two works of the trilogy, through the absence/presence of elements and themes of *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance*. It seems to me like a very subtle interplay of references and connections that may allow you to read deeper into the work.

JB: For sure a starting point was the idea that, if when people watch *Both Sitting Duet* they often comment that they could hear music even though there was no music. then the question was, 'is there music where you see dance even though there's no dance?'

And that was okay as a starting point, but in a way it was too prescriptive, it was too much of a dead end. And once we started to work, it seemed absolutely necessary to let the piece go where it wanted to go and not try and hold it down to some kind of agenda like that. Because, after all, *Both Sitting Duet* didn't have an agenda like that; those ideas about hearing music came from the audience, not from us; it's not that we tried to make a piece like that because it would never have worked. But I did have a thought, which I said in the talk on the night of the premiere at The Place: some time in the last week of making the piece, when we had really found the last few materials, I got a sense of the piece which was clearer to me than it had been before. It was something like this: if it's about presence and absence, for me it's not about the presence and absence of music or the presence and absence of dance, but, in some way, it's about the presence or absence of meaning. Performing the piece now feels like we are chasing meaning but then constantly undermining it from another direction, or from another form; so if we are making music, then it's undermined by the dance, or the dance is undermined by the words. As we chase meaning, the piece becomes breathless, and the breathlessness arrives at a kind of ecstatic state. That's what it feels like to do it.

DPD: But then there's another meaning that comes out of this act of undermining the meaning that you are chasing. And it seems that the audience felt it in a strong way, otherwise they wouldn't have responded the way they did.

JB: The interesting thing is that the first ten minutes, which is when we begin speaking, and before the piece explodes, are what we worked on the longest. It started with me sitting down in the mornings, without Matteo and without having discussed it with Matteo, and thinking, 'if there was a language that we could use – and I was thinking that Matteo might set it to music, it might be a lyric in a way – what might that language sound like?' So I gave myself very open parameters and as much a possibility as I could to fail, so that I didn't put any pressure on myself. I thought that I would just try this thing; and I kept going for maybe a month. It was at that time that Matteo played me the music that he was writing for a piece by Siobhan Davies [*In Plain Clothes*, 2006], where he had made this kind of rather bad translations into English of Italian folk songs, and was speaking them in places. It was immediately clear that he was in effect doing the same thing: his relationship to

the language that he was finding was very similar to what I was doing. So I was convinced that it was something that we had to do, because we hadn't discussed it at all and it was coming out in what he was doing. The next day I showed him what I was doing – this kind of initial attempt at what then became the beginning of the piece – and he more or less encouraged me to keep going. Later I received some research and development money from the Arts Council, which enabled me to do that. I worked on that for really quite a long time, until I got to a point where I couldn't get any further. So I handed it over to Matteo and I said to him, 'do with this what you would do if this was raw material for you as a composer.' What he did was that he toughened it, he gave it a little bit of distance and a more genuine relationship in time and between the two of us, between the two voices. After that, in a way, we ground to a halt, because it became necessary that we took a decision about whether we should go forward with this and the whole thing would be like that...

DPD: Yes, that's another element that plays with expectations, because after *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* the audience expected the piece to go on in the same way until the end. Maybe the first time that people saw *Both Sitting Duet* they felt the opposite, that is, they expected it to change at some point; but now that they have seen how you built those first two works of the trilogy, it's the other way around: they expected it to stay the same!

JB: That's right! What we felt was that if it had been going forward easily we would have done so, but it didn't seem to be; we seemed to have exhausted that initial impulse. And, after all, words are not our field, and we felt that this was really a risky thing that we were doing. So at that point we had a kind of existential crisis, which coincided with us not getting the Arts Council funding, and I said to Matteo, 'I think we should just pull it, I think we shouldn't do it, because I don't think we know enough what we are doing and we haven't got any money, and the Dance Umbrella brochure goes to print next week and we can stop it, we can regroup and try again next year.' But then Nigel Hinds, our manager, said, 'the first thing that you have to do is to separate the feeling of depression about the fact that you didn't get the money from the creative crisis.' So then – I'm not sure what order it was, but we also then did a read through of what we had been working on for Nigel. Now, interestingly enough, the one feature of it which we thought was terribly important was that we

stood very far apart; we thought this would be theatrically very interesting, but idiotically we never actually tried it. So when we did it, the first thing that Nigel said was, 'it's not actually theatrically interesting at all that you stand far apart, it just makes you invisible and it makes me feel that I could be hearing this on the radio.' But he also said, 'I had a feeling this was what you were going to do, I recognise it in some way, but it's not quite there', and there were bits of it at that point which really went off at such a tangent that he felt confused. But this gave us enough confidence to go on.

But then Matteo and I agreed that we really didn't have the stamina or the patience to make a third piece which held to one thing, as *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* do, and also it didn't seem very healthy: it had to be something that when we got up in the morning we felt, 'great! I can't wait to see what we'll do today.' It needed some quality like that. So I said to Matteo, 'we always work with the idea of "unfinished business"', which means: what's the idea that keeps coming back and then we doubt it and we think that we can't do that, so we put it aside, but then it comes back again? Which, of course, the idea of speaking had been. But, I said, 'there must be more.' So then we thought, 'what if we allowed ourselves much more freedom to have ideas and work on them, and make a lot of material, in music, in dance, in words and all the combinations, and just work fast and not question too much what we are doing and accumulate a lot of material?' Matteo was very doubting because this is not how he works; he wanted a *raison d'être* to begin with, he wanted a principle; but I said, 'I don't think we have a choice. We have to let ourselves work and, at this point, we have to trust ourselves to some extent.' So we started to work that way and we did begin to find material; one of the qualities of the material was that there were a lot of things that resurfaced which we had thrown out in previous pieces, even as far back as the early ones. They were often ideas which couldn't sustain being carried on with for long, so then we didn't know what to do with them and we threw them out. But it is really interesting how those things come back and, of course, once we gave ourselves the principle that we didn't have to have a reason to do something and it didn't have to keep going – that is, when we had done what we could with it, we could stop – then all these things started to come.

Initially Matteo's fear was that he likes to work linearly, from the beginning going onwards, so what we arrived at was a principle which was something like this: let's

just work; if it is linear, great; if it's not, then you change it around. That more or less satisfied Matteo and it seemed to allow the piece some kind of continuity of energy and focus of work. So we quite quickly arrived at what became the core of the piece. The end part was made very quickly, and it was partly because Matteo was panicking because we had committed to doing a performance of short versions of *Both Sitting Duet* and *The Quiet Dance* in Brussels, and we hadn't made these short versions yet, but it was also the week before the premiere and we still had to make ten minutes of the piece. So by one of those ways in which pressure squeezes your energy and you focus very hard, in one day we made five minutes of work, which is much more than what we usually manage.

This is an interesting thing about working that I've often noticed: we had done an enormous amount of incredibly detailed work up to that point and, when you have detailed work like that, there is a moment when you can actually work in an undetailed way. For instance, the parts that we made were the whole manic, shouting section – 'chicken, yes, come' and then me shouting the Laban instructions for making solos.¹ We didn't know it was Laban; we just found a piece of paper stored away in a vast file of ideas months and months before, and we thought I had written it. I knew I hadn't, but it did sound like me, somehow; but that was more because it was the kind of thing that I like. Then I looked through my bookcase, I saw the spine of a Laban book and I remembered it was from there. So I pulled it out and I found the extract. It seemed very nice that, in a piece which would be about trying to visualise a dance that you can't see, even though we do it in some way not how Laban would have intended it, at the end of the day you come back to Laban! I liked that. So we did this very rapidly at the end and then we did some very delicate surgery to make the whole piece go inevitably from one thing to the next. But we struggled for a long time with the first ten minutes of speaking... It seemed very nice when the piece broke away from it and exploded in different directions, but the speaking section seemed to stand too much alone. And it seemed too obvious: they tried to do that and then they ran out of steam, so they did something else! So we tried all sorts of ways, we mixed all the material up, we put things into the speaking, we put things before the speaking...

DPD: Which is something that you normally don't do, or do you?

JB: No we do, actually; we do it at times, but only when we have to. This seemed to be a fundamental structural problem that would raise questions for an audience, we thought. But we tried all this stuff and at the end we took it all out again and, in a way, decided that it was what it was and there was no point in trying to make it into something else. And then, as we started to shift things around elsewhere in the piece, it started to feel right. That's why, for example, the Italian folk songs – some people have commented quite rightly that they are slightly irrelevant, and the only thing that I can think is that it's actually about Matteo singing shamelessly, it's not really about the subject matter of the folk songs. I mean, it is about folk songs in the sense that I'm also making Morris dance movements, and there is something about that combination of absurdity and dignity which you get in folk traditions. But it's more about the act of Matteo singing shamelessly and how that pushes against the kind of seriousness of the arms movements that I do.

DPD: What do you mean by 'singing shamelessly'?

JB: 'Dancing shamelessly' was the expression that Jan Ritsema used to use to describe what he did in *Weak Dance Strong Questions*. With Matteo there was a moment when he was singing the songs much too seriously and I had to say to him, 'you have to sing them like you do when you are drunk; it means that you have to slide up to notes and slide away from them, singing them in an Italian club style.' But the other thing that the songs did was that they gave this reassuring continuity in the midst of something that was kind of exploding. We did the speaking one time previously for Chrysa Parkinson, a dancer and performer in Brussels, and she said, 'go on, go on, I'm interested'; but after that we didn't show anything until two days before the premiere, when we asked our friend Gerard Bell, who is an actor, 'will you come into Matteo's kitchen and help us with this transition from the kitchen to the theatre?' So the poor man had to sit there while we screamed and shouted at him in this kitchen, and played mouth organs. But what was immediately obvious to us was that, in the act of performing it, the continuity between the speaking section at the beginning and what happened afterwards became much clearer, and there wasn't the problem that we thought there had been.

Allied to that was a kind of technical issue: my wife Claire thought that I was working too hard in speaking it and it looked like I was underconfident – which it probably did because I was, and would remain so, I think, for a good while yet, because I had never done something like that before, but it was also partly because we decided to speak higher than our normal speaking voice. What that did was that it became... not exactly a character, but it had the effect of an actor taking on a character, which distances you from the thing that you are saying, and it stopped it being earnest. It's very interesting: all the times that people say that they weren't sure about something in the piece, they are always right, but often what they don't know is that the choice that was made was the better of two options, it cured something worse than what it created; it created a problem but it also cured a greater problem.

And I think with working with performance that's often the case. But this slight lift in the voices also established a connection with the 'shouting' section later, although it was also only when we performed it the first time two days before the premiere that we saw the connections that were there. And this was very interesting, for both Matteo and me, in relation to trusting ourselves and our sense of structure. We both studied with Kevin Volans and, at some level, we both still feel like students. I mean, we worked with somebody who is incredible with structure, who has an incredible sense of form and is not bullish, but sensitive and disciplined, and at the same time imaginative, and I think that we feel in the shadow of not only Kevin, but also Gerald Barry, Morton Feldman and John Cage, and the people that we have been interested in and who have influenced us. And this sometimes means that we make life much more difficult for ourselves, because we try to be too conscious. You've only really learnt something, I think, when you're doing it without knowing that you are doing it, and somehow with our thinking and working around form and structure, I think sometimes we are still too conscious.

But, when we were performing *Speaking Dance* for Gerard, we suddenly saw these connections which are there. For instance, in the speaking part we alternate, and Matteo says, 'trying to stop', 'trying to stop', then he changes it into 'trying to fly', and I say, 'trying to fly', and one of the Laban dances which I shout at the end with Matteo standing has the text 'only in dreams did he know how to fly.' But we didn't see this connection, we were too close to the piece to see it.

DPD: The relationship between that text and Matteo standing still is also very poignant, because you can imagine him doing what you say that the dancer does only in his dreams.

JB: Yes, that's right. But there were other links like that, which we discovered and which gave us a certain trust in the piece, even though, in some ways, it has lots of flaws. Now I'm curious about how other people will respond to it; I always think you have to go to three cities before you know whether it speaks or not, so I don't entirely trust it from London.

DPD: How did the choice of the words of the speaking part happen? There are words which seem to carry a meaning.

JB: Oh yes, it wasn't that we were trying to avoid meaning: we were trying to find it, but we were failing a lot! Some of the words came from imagining the situation of us both standing there, and the audience seeing an empty stage. And I researched heavily trying to find attempts to describe the act of dance. But I didn't think it could ever really be just about imagining dances, because I've seen that done better; also, it would have had to be a more acted performance, whereas for us it had to be rhythmical, because that's what we are interested in. So, one of the principles was that the words are like a pop song or a nursery rhyme or a song lyric; it's not great literature, that's not what it has to be. Which is a little bit like the principle of *Both Sitting Duet*: accept the most obvious movements that come. So in that way there's quite a parallel: 'right', 'left', 'right', 'left', 'right', 'left' is a little bit like swinging our arms.

DPD: But there is also a section in which you use words such as 'voices', 'silence', which give the impression of conveying a meaning of a different kind from 'right', 'left', for instance.

JB: Yes, it's true, and that felt like one of the riskiest bits to do.

DPD: Another thing that interests me links back to what you were saying earlier about there being a kind of narrative that connects the works of the trilogy.

JB: I don't think there's a narrative. All dances develop a kind of virtual narrative; it's something that you feel when you are performing them, but it's not really a narrative. It's something that stands in for a narrative, but it's more to do with something like: the energy is high here, then it goes low there, then this person is by himself, then everybody is together. It's a kind of rhythm, so it's more like the way in which a symphony might appear to have a feeling of narrative, but there's no narrative there, it's very abstract. Normally we work on a piece and, as we perform it, we discover that feeling, whatever that is. Sometimes it helps in a performance, but sometimes you have to say, 'let's not do that', and you have to find a way not to do it because it becomes also a groove that you wear in the piece, which makes it too predictable, too comfortable. With *The Quiet Dance*, I said to Matteo, 'let's try and listen to what that kind of virtual narrative, or structural narrative is'; and Matteo said, 'that's a lot of nonsense.' And he might be right. But anyway we tried to see what happened if we tried to feel for it, as we were doing it. In the end, in *The Quiet Dance* it didn't work to do that. We found it now, but we found it the way we always find it, by just doing it over and over again, in front of an audience and then finding where the life is.

DPD: In my view, although it's obvious that *Speaking Dance* doesn't set out to do it, the piece seems to create almost a new way of storytelling. Without there being a story, it allows the audience to see their own story, to read connections and construct the story that they want to, or can, construct through other references that they may already have or that they may find in the piece. So without wanting to tell a story, it seems to have a certain narrative, an element of storytelling.

JB: I think it's as simple as this, and it comes back to Balanchine and Balanchine's comment which I can only paraphrase: when one person walks onto the stage in a ballet, they are lonely; when two people walk onto the stage in a ballet they are in love or it's a relationship; when three people walk onto the stage in a ballet, there's an outsider.² I think that's Balanchine, I'm not sure; but it makes a certain sense to do with how we read dance. And, of course, with *Both Sitting Duet*, *The Quiet Dance* and *Speaking Dance*, because of the nature of the relationship between Matteo and me, that is the story. But I think that's true of all dance that works, and once you've got that story, then everything else is just detail, because it's read through the filter

‘these two men are friends.’ I like the simplicity of that, it’s just how we are, since we have the principle: let’s be how we are.

DPD: I don’t know whether it’s to do with the fact that, obviously, the Italian folk songs meant something for me, but I had the impression that the piece was not just telling me ‘your story’; it also allowed me to create ‘my story’, or ‘a story’. But maybe other spectators who couldn’t connect to those songs didn’t feel this. For me, the work resonated with so many images and memories that, although I am aware that they are not necessarily relevant to what you were doing in the performance, they enabled me to read beyond it and see a narrative. So for me, if you want, this is where *Speaking Dance* is different from *Both Sitting Duet* or *The Quiet Dance*, in the fact that the ‘story’ seems to open up and allow the spectators to see beyond it, and into their imaginative world.

JB: Yes, that’s clear, but I think it’s not just to do with the songs. And even if you don’t know the songs or you don’t know what the words mean, if you don’t speak Italian, they have the feeling of other songs, the kind of songs you sing with your family when you are a child.

DPD: In terms of the structure, do you feel that this has led you to create a different kind of structure? Do you see it as a less structured structure?

JB: No, it is quite structured.

DPD: It does seem quite structured to me, but, for instance, a few days after the performance, I was talking about it with Martin Hargreaves and he said that he had found it difficult to see a structure, that it seemed quite loose to him.

JB: I think it is very structured, but it’s not a manipulated structure, in the way that the other two pieces are. We, like Martin, would have liked it to have been more rigorous, but somehow it needed, in order to stay alive creatively, to follow what it was suggesting, rather than impose something upon it.

DPD: I remember you saying about *Weak Dance Strong Questions* that in working with Jan Ritsema you hoped that you would get to speak on stage, but in the end you ended up dancing again instead! Does the idea of speaking go back to that time, or even earlier? Is it something that you've always wanted to explore?

JB: I think it's because I've been reading an enormous amount of poetry in the last two years and an enormous amount of playwriting, and I've become very fascinated with the act of writing of that kind. The thing about poetry which intrigues me is that I feel that poetry has a lot in common with choreographing. I'll be curious to be challenged on this, or to discuss it with somebody that might pick holes in it or suggest other perspectives, but my reasoning for thinking that there's some connection is that I sense that, when poets write, they often come at the subject not head-on, but from the side. But a poet then uses form to compress that meaning into something that expresses something much stronger, which you recognise but which you couldn't have articulated. There's something about choreography that I feel works with meaning and the subject in the same way. A piece of dance that takes the subject head-on often fails – not always, but often; it becomes not intriguing enough. So we come from another direction, to find other ways into it, and if there's a purpose of form in choreography, it is to condense and heighten the impact.

So I became very fascinated with poetry, and that for me was the connection with speaking. I think it's not because I wanted to speak; I think it's because I wanted to use words, because, after all, I'm a human being: I have this tool, I can actually say something. It's also a way of questioning: if I choose not to say something, it's a big choice, it's a very specific choice; and it comes a point when you think that you want to find out what happens when you do say something. When we started out working on it, I thought that this was the subject, but now I'm not so sure. Now what I suspect is – Matteo and I talked for years about doing 'the music piece', which Matteo, as a composer, would make. But every time we spoke about it, it kind of disappeared, and it just seemed too difficult to do – not least because I can only play a squeeze box, and that pretty badly. So it's not like I would be prime material for Matteo to work with, he'd much rather work with a brilliant violinist! But I think *Speaking Dance* is the music piece that we always wanted to make, in a way. Although I get up and wave my arms every now and again, at heart, and also through the words themselves, for

me it is music. But even though it's called *Speaking Dance*, I don't think the words are the subject. I suspect the words are there to mediate between the movement and the music, and probably unconsciously Matteo and I needed that, in the way that the Feldman score mediated between us in *Both Sitting Duet*. And it helped when I had that image of *Speaking Dance* because it took pressure off the words to carry the piece.

DPD: It's funny that you have said that you have been interested in poetry and that you see a connection between choreography and poetry, because I have also been thinking that there is a connection between your choreography and a certain kind of poetry. Now that I have begun to construct an interpretation of your work and I have formulated some ideas about it, it has become almost a frustration that every time I see you, you end up telling me exactly what I had wanted to say – or to write in my thesis! And now you have done it again! Because I had also recently started to think about your way of making dance as being very similar to writing poetry.

JB: But then, if I say it, it's not your idea anymore!

DPD: Exactly! And you keep doing this! You always end up telling me what I had thought that I was going to say!

JB: Well, that's alright. But it's interesting that you had that thought about poetry.

DPD: It's not something that I have formulated in a coherent way, it's just a connection that I have started to make, an idea, a metaphor. But I do think there are similarities between the way that contemporary poetry conveys meaning and the way that your choreography conveys meaning, and it's completely different from other kinds of choreography.

JB: Maybe you are right, that's exactly the kind of intervention I needed in my thought, and it might not be true that poetry has got a lot in common with choreography, it might be more that there's something about the way that I work that has something in common with poetry.

The only thing I would add is that, having said all that about *Speaking Dance*, in many ways I'm aware that it's too soon for me to articulate coherently what I think about it, and I might have a very different feeling about it in a year's time. This could be interesting to get an immediate sense, but we'll have to give a few more performances, to perhaps tougher audiences, before we really know what it is.

Notes

¹ See Laban, 1971, p. 56 (examples 1, 4, 5, 6). See also Chapter 8.4.

² In a text reflecting on choreographic and compositional issues, Balanchine says: 'storyless is not abstract. Two dancers on the stage are enough material for a story; for me, they are already a story in themselves' (1966, p. 99).

APPENDIX C

CONSENT LETTERS

16 November 2007

Dear Jonathan Burrows

By the end of 2007 I am planning to submit my doctoral thesis entitled 'Dancing Poetry: Jonathan Burrows's Reconfiguration of Choreography', in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Surrey, Department of Dance and Theatre Studies. I would like to include in the Appendices the transcripts of the seven interviews I have done with you between 2004 and 2006. The nine Chapters of the thesis also include occasional quotes from this material and from a 2006 email exchange.

I should be very grateful if you would grant me permission to use this unpublished material in my doctoral thesis.

I will of course include full acknowledgement both in the Chapters and in the Appendix. In the Bibliography the seven interviews and the email will be referenced as follows:

- Burrows, J. (2004), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 7 April.
_____ (2005a), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 26 May.
_____ (2005b), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 28 July.
_____ (2005c), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 26 November.
_____ (2006a), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 22 June.
_____ (2006b), Unpublished email exchange between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 13 August.
_____ (2006c), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 7 September.
_____ (2006d), Unpublished conversation between Jonathan Burrows and the author, 9 November.

Many thanks for your co-operation. I look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely


Daniela Perazzo Domm

I, THE RIGHTSHOLDER, AGREE TO THE USE OF MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED

NAME AND SIGNATURE: Jonathan Burrows



DATE: 10.12.07.

16 November 2007

Dear Matteo Fargion

By the end of 2007 I am planning to submit my doctoral thesis entitled 'Dancing Poetry: Jonathan Burrows's Reconfiguration of Choreography', in fulfilment of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the University of Surrey, Department of Dance and Theatre Studies. I would like to include in the Appendices the transcript of the interview I did with you on 14 September 2005. Chapters of the thesis also include occasional references to and quotes from this unpublished material.

I should be very grateful if you would grant me permission to use this material in my doctoral thesis.

I will of course include full acknowledgement both in the Chapters and in the Appendix.

In the Bibliography the interview will be referenced as follows:

Fargion, M. (2005), Unpublished conversation between Matteo Fargion and the author, 14 September.

Many thanks for your co-operation. I look forward to your reply.

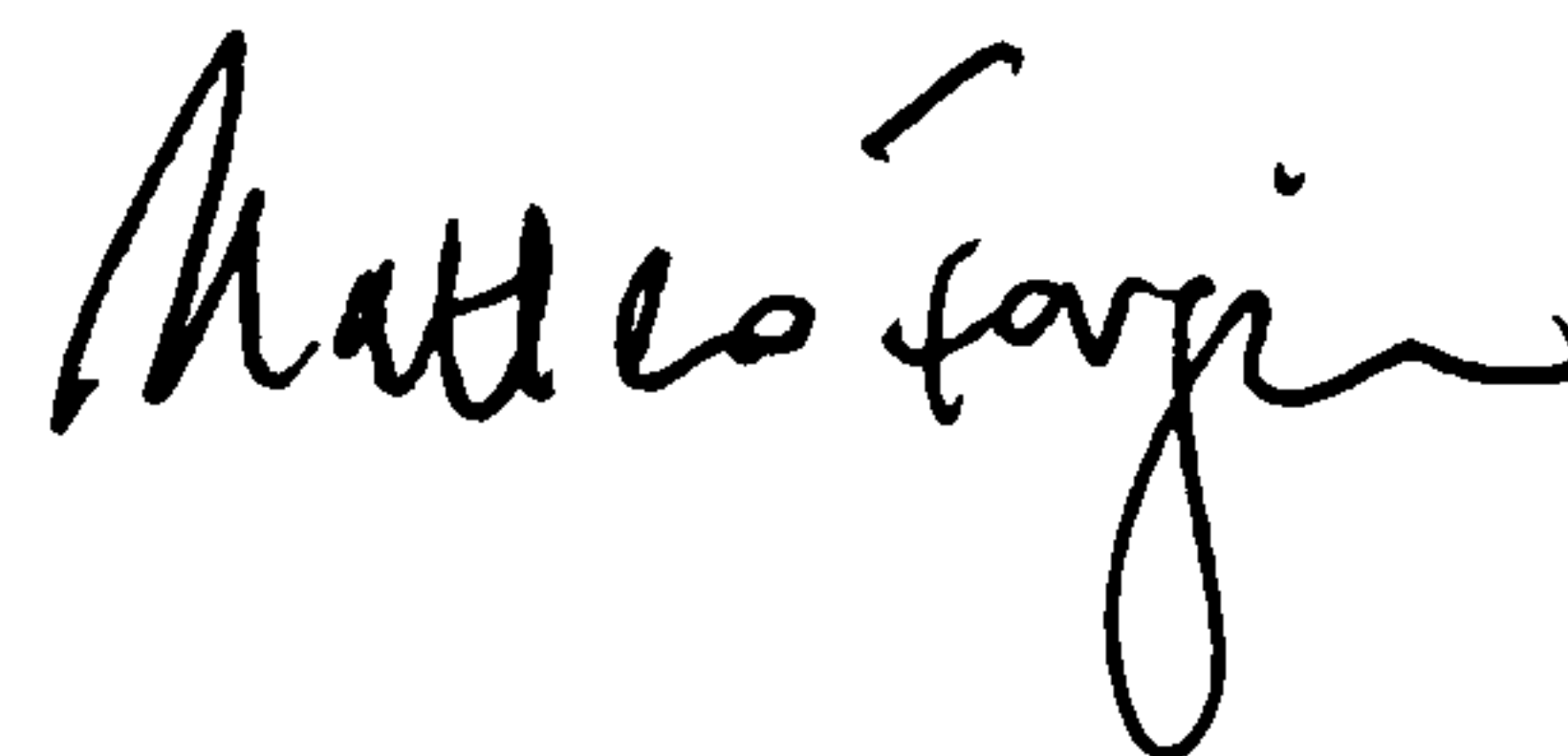
Yours sincerely



Daniela Perazzo Domm

I, THE RIGHTSHOLDER, AGREE TO THE USE OF MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED

NAME AND SIGNATURE: Matteo Fargion



DATE:

30/11/07

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adshead, J. (ed.) (1988), *Dance Analysis: Theory and Practice*, London: Dance Books.
- Adshead-Lansdale, J. (ed.) (1999), *Dancing Texts: Intertextuality in Interpretation*, London: Dance Books.
- _____ (2007), *The Struggle with the Angel: A Poetics of Lloyd Newson's Strange Fish*, Alton: Dance Books.
- Agar, M. H. (1996), *The Professional Stranger: An Informal Introduction to Ethnography*, San Diego: Academic Press.
- Alexander, R. (1996), 'The Status of Verbal Humour in British Society: Contextual Aspects of English Humour', in G. Paton, C. Powell and S. Wagg, *The Social Faces of Humour: Practices and Issues*, Aldershot: Arena, pp. 63-87.
- Anderson, Z. (2004), 'A Kitsch Christmas Cracker: The Hard Nut, Sadler's Wells; Both Sitting Duet, Clore Studio, ROH, London', *The Independent* 18 November, p. 16.
- [Anon] (1990), 'Dance Study Supplement: Part 4', *Dancing Times* 80, 952, January, pp. 1-8.
- [Anon] (1991a), 'Jonathan Burrows: Stoics', *Dance Umbrella 91*, festival programme, 1-3 November, p. 22.
- [Anon] (1991b), *The Royal Ballet, The Royal Opera House: Agon, Stoics Quartet, Present Histories, Symphony in C*, evening programme, 26 November, London: Royal Opera House.
- [Anon] (1991c), 'Rewarding Talent Within', *The Times* 24 April, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- [Anon] (1991d), 'Elated Eight', *The Times* 26 June, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- [Anon] (1992), 'Jonathan Burrows', *About the House: The Magazine of the Friends of Covent Garden* 8, 10, Spring, p. 49.
- [Anon] (1996), 'Theatre Award', *The Independent* 5 February, p. 2.
- [Anon] (1997), 'Dance', *The Independent* 12 April, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- [Anon] (1999), 'Dance Choice', *The Independent on Sunday* 29 August, p. 7.
- Au, S. (2002), *Ballet and Modern Dance*, revised and expanded edition, London: Thames & Hudson.

- Austin, J. L. (1976), *How To Do Things With Words*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, J. M. Jr, (2002) 'Lyric as Paradigm: Hegel and the Speculative Instance of Poetry in Gadamer's Hermeneutics', in R. J. Dostal (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bakhtin, M. (1981), *The Dialogic Imagination*, Austin: University of Texas Press.
- _____ (1984), *Rabelais and His World*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Balanchine, G. (1966), 'Marginal Notes on the Dance', in W. Sorell (ed.), *The Dance Has Many Faces*, 2nd edition, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 93-102.
- Banes, S. (1987), *Terpsichore in Sneakers: Post-modern Dance*, 2nd edition, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.
- _____ (1993), *Democracy's Body: Judson Dance Theater, 1962-1964*, Durham and London: Duke University Press.
- _____ (1994), *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism*, Hanover: Wesleyan University Press.
- _____ (ed.) (2003), *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything Was Possible*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Bartenieff, I. et al. (1984), 'The Potential of Movement Analysis as a Research Tool: A Preliminary Analysis', *Dance Research Journal* 16, 1, pp. 3-26.
- Barthes, R. (1968), *Writing Degree Zero*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- _____ (1973), *Elements of Semiology*, New York: Hill and Wang.
- _____ (1977) 'The Death of the Author', in *Image, Music, Text*, London: Fontana, pp. 142-148.
- _____ (1993), *Mythologies*, London: Vintage.
- Battcock, G. (ed.) (1968), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York: E. P. Dutton.
- Baucom, I. (1999), *Out of Place: Englishness, Empire, and the Locations of Identity*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Bayston, M. (1992), 'Dance on Television', *Dancing Times* 82, 984, September, p. 1156.
- Ben-Itzak, P. (2003), 'Jonathan Burrows Sits and Dances', *The Dance Insider* [http://www.danceinsider.com/f2003/f0610_2.html; accessed 20 November 2005].

- Benjamin, W. (1992), *Illuminations*, London: Fontana Press.
- Bernard, J. W. (2002), 'Feldman's Painters', in S. Johnson (ed.), *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgar Varèse, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg*, London: Routledge, pp. 173-215.
- Best, D. (1974), *Expression in Movement and the Arts: A Philosophical Enquiry*, London: Lepus Books.
- _____ (1985), *Feeling and Reason in the Arts*, London: Allen & Unwin.
- Boxberger, E. (1996), 'Liberating the Imagination: Jonathan Burrows in conversation with Edith Boxberger', *Ballett International/Tanz Aktuell* 12, pp. 46-49.
- _____ (1997), 'Between Extremes: Choreographies for the Ballett Frankfurt by Jonathan Burrows, Jacopo Godani and David Kern', *Ballett International* 3, March, p. 36.
- Bramley, I. (2001), 'Select Coverage', *Dance Theatre Journal* 17, 4, pp. 16-18.
- Brickhill, E. (1993), 'Very: Jonathan Burrows', *Dance Now* 2, 1, Spring, pp. 45-46.
- Briginshaw, V. A. (2001), 'Architectural Spaces in the Choreography of William Forsythe and De Keersmaeker's Rosas danst Rosas', in *Dance, Space and Subjectivity*, Basingstoke: Palgrave, pp. 183-206.
- _____ (2005), 'Difference and Repetition in Both Sitting Duet', *Topoi* 24, 1, January, pp. 15-28.
- Brindle, R. S. (1987), *The New Music: The Avant-garde since 1945*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brown, C. (1992), 'Confusion at the Crossroads', *Dance Now* 1, 2, Summer, pp. 58-62.
- Brown, I. (1996a), 'Doing a Jig of Funny Walks', *Daily Telegraph* 29 May, n.p.
- _____ (1996b), 'One Step Beyond', *Daily Telegraph* 22 October, p. 20.
- _____ (1996c), 'Old and New under One Umbrella', *Daily Telegraph* 25 October, n.p.
- _____ (1997a), 'Back Down to Earth', *The Daily Telegraph* 22 April, n.p.
- _____ (1997b), 'Starlife: Jonathan Burrows, The Choreographer with a Different View of Beauty', *The Telegraph Magazine* 24 May, p. 74.
- _____ (1998a), 'Was It a Comeback or a Warm-up?', *The Daily Telegraph* 17 July, p. 25.

- _____ (1998b), 'Dance: No Pants? No Thanks. Jonathan Burrows, The Place', *The Daily Telegraph* 29 October, p. 29.
- _____ (2001), 'Inflammable Passions: Jonathan Burrows, ICA', *The Daily Telegraph* 11 October, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (2003a), 'The Vanishing Man of British Dance', *The Daily Telegraph* 13 October, p. 19.
- _____ (2003b), 'Eloquent in Their Stillness', *The Daily Telegraph* 18 October, n.p.
- _____ (2006), 'It's Nonsense but Proper Nonsense', *The Daily Telegraph* 20 October, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- Buckland, T. J. (ed.) (1999), *Dance in the Field: Theory, Methods and Issues in Dance Ethnography*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Burnside, F. (1992), 'Home Thoughts from Abroad', *Dance Theatre Journal* 9, 3, Spring, pp. 30-33, 42.
- Burrows, J. (1980), *Listen*, danced by Extemporary Dance Company, video-recording of performance, Wimbledon.
- _____ (1986a), *Hymns: Parts 1 & 2*, video-recording of rehearsal, 23 January, London: Royal Opera House studio.
- _____ (1986b), *Squash*, video-recording of rehearsal, 23 January, London: Royal Opera House studio.
- _____ (1988), *Hymns: Trio, Duet*, video-recording of rehearsal, London.
- _____ (1991a), *Stoics Quartet*, video-recording of performance, 20 November, London: Royal Opera House.
- _____ (1991b), 'Work in Progress', *South Bank Show: Arts Review*, recording of TV programme.
- _____ (1992), *Stoics*, video-recording of performance, 2 February, London: Southbank Centre, Purcell Room.
- _____ (1994), 'Leading Lights', *Dance Now* 3, 1, Spring, pp. 28-29.
- _____ (1996), *The Stop Quartet*, video-recording of performance and post-performance talk, 1 May, London: Laban.
- _____ (1998), *Altogether*, video-recording of performance, London.
- _____ (2002), 'Playing the Game Harder', *Dance Theatre Journal* 18, 4, pp. 25-29.

- _____ (2003), *Singing*, video-recording of performance, London: Laban.
- _____ (2004), Unpublished conversation with the author, 7 April.
- _____ (2005a), Unpublished conversation with the author, 26 May.
- _____ (2005b), Unpublished conversation with the author, 28 July.
- _____ (2005c), Unpublished conversation with the author, 26 November.
- _____ (2006a), Unpublished conversation with the author, 22 June.
- _____ (2006b), Unpublished email exchange with the author, 13 August.
- _____ (2006c), Unpublished conversation with the author, 7 September.
- _____ (2006d), Unpublished conversation with the author, 9 November.
- _____ and Etchells, T. (2004), Unpublished public talk moderated by A. Heathfield, London, Riverside Studios, 3 November.
- _____ and Fargion, M. (1998), 'Jonathan Burrows in Conversation with Matteo Fargion, August 1998', in J. Butterworth and G. Clarke (eds.), *Dance Makers Portfolio: Conversations with Choreographers*, Wakefield: Centre for Dance and Theatre Studies at Bretton Hall, pp. 41-46.
- _____ and Fargion, M. (2005), *The Quiet Dance*, video-recording of rehearsal, London.
- _____ and Fargion, M. (2006), *Speaking Dance*, video-recording of performance, December, Findhorn: Findhorn Foundation Community.
- _____, Fargion, M. and Davies, S. (2007), 'Why Patterns?', *Parallel Voices*, unpublished public talk, London, Siobhan Davies Studios, 15 March [audio-visual file available at <http://www.siobhandavies.com/index.php/parent/68/item/478>; accessed 23 August 2007].
- _____, Le Roy, X. and Ruckert, F. (2004), 'Meeting of Minds', *Dance Theatre Journal* 20, 3, pp. 9-13.
- _____ and Ritsema, J. (2001), *Weak Dance Strong Questions*, video-recording of performance, London.
- _____ and Ritsema, J. (2003), 'Weak Dance Strong Questions', *Performance Research* 8, 2, June, pp. 28-33.
- _____ and Volans, K. (1996), 'Pas de Deux: It Takes Two to Tango. Choreographer Jonathan Burrows and Composer Kevin Volans Take to the Floor', *The Full Score* Autumn/Winter, pp. 12-13.

- Burt, R. (2003), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion's "Sitting Duet" at the Place, October 2003', *Critical Dance* 24 October [http://www.ballet-dance.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=149667&highlight=#149667; accessed 24 January 2004].
- _____ (2006), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion, "Speaking Dance", The Place Theatre, Wednesday 18th October 2006', *Critical Dance* 21 October [http://www.ballet-dance.com/forum/viewtopic.php?p=183116&highlight=#183116; accessed 3 November 2006].
- Butcher, R. and Melrose, S. (eds.) (2005), *Rosemary Butcher: Choreography, Collisions and Collaborations*, London: Middlesex University Press.
- Calvino, I. (1992), *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller*, London: Vintage.
- _____ (1996), *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, London: Vintage.
- Carroll, N. (2003), 'The Philosophy of Art History, Dance, and the 1960s', in S. Banes (ed.), *Reinventing Dance in the 1960s: Everything Was Possible*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 81-97.
- _____ and Banes, S. (1982), 'Working and Dancing: A Response to Monroe Beardsley's "What Is Going on in a Dance?"', *Dance Research Journal* 15, 1, Autumn, pp. 37-41.
- Certeau, M. de (1984), *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- Clarke, M. (1981), 'Sadler's Wells Royal Ballet', *Dancing Times* 71, 848, May, pp. 540-541.
- _____ (1983), 'The Winter Play', *Dancing Times* 73, 872, May, p. 615.
- _____ (1992), 'Royal Ballet Repertory', *Dancing Times* 82, 976, January, pp. 335, 337.
- Chapman, A. J. and Foot, H. C. (eds.) (1976), *Humour and Laughter: Theory, Research and Applications*, London: John Wiley & Sons.
- Cohen, R. (2000), 'The Incredible Vagueness of Being British/English', *International Affairs* 76, 3, July, pp. 575-582.
- Copeland, R. (1990), 'In Defence of Formalism: The Politics of Disinterestedness', *Dance Theatre Journal* 7, 4, pp. 4-7, 38-39, 37.
- Costanti, S. (1990), 'Riverside Studios: Jonathan Burrows', *The Guardian* 12 July, p. 24.
- _____ (1991), 'Swing Quartet', *Evening Standard Magazine* November, p. 132.
- _____ (1994a), 'Dance: Jonathan Burrows Group, The Place', *The Guardian* 5 May, p. 11.

- _____ (1994b), 'Spring Loaded: Restless Dissidents of the Mainstream', *Dancing Times* 84, 1005, June, p. 905.
- _____ (1995-96), 'Jonathan Burrows's New Work for Sylvie Guillem', *Dance Theatre Journal* 12, 3, Winter, pp. 4-5.
- _____ (1996a), 'Don't Box Me in', *The Independent* 27 February, p. 10.
- _____ (1996b), 'Dance: Unspoken; The Place Theatre, London', *The Independent* 15 March, p. 8.
- _____ (1996c), 'Dance: The Stop Quartet, Playhouse, Newcastle', *The Independent* 27 May, p. 22.
- _____ (1996d), 'Jonathan Burrows Group', *Dancing Times* 86, 1030, July, p. 959.
- Craine, D. (1996), 'Naked into the World', *The Times* 26 Oct, p. 19.
- _____ (1998a), 'Far from Glorious Obsession', *The Times* 13 July, p. 19.
- _____ (1998b), 'Hell is the Twentieth Century: Dance Umbrella', *The Times* 28 October, p. 34.
- _____ and Mackrell, J. (2004), *Oxford Dictionary of Dance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Cripps, C. (2004), 'Sitting out the Dance: Are You Ready for a Duo Who Won't Move from Their Chairs for Your Entertainment?', *The Independent* 4 November, p. 18.
- Crisp, C. (1988), 'Hymns/The Place', *Financial Times* 24 June, p. 17.
- _____ (1990a), 'Fumo di Londra', *Balletto Oggi* 69, January/February, pp. 28-29.
- _____ (1990b), 'Aspettando l'Inverno', *Balletto Oggi* 73, October, pp. 42-43.
- _____ (1990c), 'A Good Do: Riverside Studios', *Financial Times* 12 July, p. 17.
- _____ (1991), 'Milano', *Balletto Oggi* 77, June, pp. 30-31.
- _____ (1992), 'Very: Burrows', *Financial Times* 5 November, p. 19.
- _____ (1996), 'Dance Reinvented', *Financial Times* 10 June, p. 15.
- _____ (1997), 'Wild, Adventurous Dance for Today', *Financial Times* 19 April, p. 8.
- _____ (1998), 'Exploring Beyond the New Frontier of Dance: Clement Crisp Is Enthralled by Jonathan Burrows' Work in Unknown Territories', *Financial Times* 29 October, p. 16.
- _____ (1999), 'A Beautifully Judged Partnership of Dancers', *Financial Times* 22 April, p. 22.

- _____ (2004a), 'Dance', *Financial Times* 6 November, p. 38.
- _____ (2004b), 'Both Sitting Duet, Clore Studio, London', *Financial Times* 18 November, p. 17.
- Culler, J. (1975), *Structuralist Poetics: Structuralism, Linguistics and the Study of Literature*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Debord, G. (1994), *The Society of the Spectacle*, New York: Zone Books.
- De Kunst, S. (2003), 'The Delicate Musical Choreography of Burrows and Fargion' (translated from the Flemish), *De Morgen* 3 January, n.p. [available at <http://www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1367&ArticleID=28134>; accessed 20 November 2005].
- Deleuze, G. and Guattari, F. (1986), *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- DeLio, T. (ed.) (1996), *The Music of Morton Feldman*, New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Company.
- Derrida, J. (1978), *Writing and Difference*, London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- _____ (1981), *Positions*, London: The Athlone Press.
- _____ (1997), *Of Grammatology*, corrected edition, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Diez, C. (1993), 'Burrows, "Very" Cruel' (translated from the French), *La Libre Belgique* 26 March, n.p.
- Dorris, G. (1997-98), 'Dancing in the Isles: George Dorris Looks at How Some British Contemporary Dance Fared in New York', *Dance Now* 6, 4, Winter, pp. 46-49.
- Dostal, R. J. (ed.) (2002), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dougill, D. (1988), 'How to Play the Pyjama Game: Hymns by Jonathan Burrows', *Sunday Times* 26 June, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1989), 'Dance: Cultural Fusion on a Natural High', *Sunday Times* 1 October, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1991), 'Dancing a Party Piece: Drama', *Sunday Times* 24 November, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1994), 'Strong Scotch on the Rocks: Dance', *Sunday Times* 8 May, p. 20.

- Dromgoole, N. (1983), 'Ballet: Six of the Best', *The Sunday Telegraph* 17 April, p. 19.
- _____ (1988), 'Pas d'Ennui', *The Sunday Telegraph* 3 July, n.p.
- _____ (1990), 'Dim Delights under the Umbrella', *The Sunday Telegraph* 14 October, n.p.
- _____ (1992), 'Ballet', *The Sunday Telegraph Review* 8 November, n.p.
- Duerden, R. Chamberlain (1999), 'Jonathan Burrows', in M. Bremser (ed.), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers: A Reference Guide*, London: Routledge, pp. 47-51.
- Duerden, R. (2001), 'Jonathan Burrows: Exploring the Frontiers', *Dancing Times* 91, 1086, March, pp. 551-557.
- Dunning, J. (1997), 'Testing the Limits of Boredom, Intelligently', *The New York Times* 3 November, p. E3.
- _____ (2004), 'A Conversation Composed of Gestures', *The New York Times* 19 March, n.p. [available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2004/03/19/arts/dance/19BURR.html?ex=1196485200&en=f50c7087a5f34fbf&ei=5070>; accessed 20 November 2005].
- Easthope, A. (1999), *Englishness and National Culture*, London: Routledge.
- Eco, U. (1976), *Opera Aperta: Forma e Indeterminazione nelle Poetiche Contemporanee*, 2nd edition, Milan: Bompiani.
- _____ (1979), *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Elgin, K. (1982), 'Ballet Rambert Workshop: New Choreographers Evening, Riverside', *Dance and Dancers* July, pp. 31-32.
- Fanti, S./Xing (ed.) (2003), *Corpo Sottile: Uno Sguardo sulla Nuova Coreografia Europea. Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy, Myriam Gourfink, Kinkaleri, MK*, Milan: Ubulibri.
- Fargion, M. (2005), Unpublished conversation with the author, 14 September.
- _____ and Davies, S. (2007), Unpublished public talk, *Crossing Borders*, hosted by Independent Dance, London, Siobhan Davies Studios, 3 October.
- Feldman, M. (1965), 'Predeterminate/Indeterminate', in B. H. Friedman (ed.) (2000), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, Cambridge: Exact Change, pp. 33-36.
- _____ (1981), 'Crippled Symmetry', in B. H. Friedman (ed.) (2000), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, Cambridge: Exact Change, pp. 134-149.

- _____ (1990), *For John Cage*, recording by P. Zukofsky (violin) and M. Schroeder (piano), CD and accompanying note, New York: Musical Observations.
- _____ (1999), *For John Cage*, recording by J. Ter Haar (violin) and J. Snijders (piano), CD and accompanying note, Therwil (Switzerland): Hat Hut Records.
- Fischer, E.-E. (2005), 'Less Isn't Much or Is Also More: Butcher and Burrows at Dance Workshop Europe' (translated from the German), *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 9 August, n.p.
- Folkedal, S. B. (2001), 'Challenging Dance' (translated from the Norwegian), *Bergensavisen* 28 October, n.p.
- Foster, H. (1996), *The Return of the Real: The Avant-garde at the End of the Century*, Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Foster, S. L. (1986), *Reading Dancing: Bodies and Subjects in Contemporary American Dance*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press.
- _____ (ed.) (1995), *Choreographing History*, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- _____ (2002), 'Walking and Other Choreographic Tactics: Danced Inventions of Theatricality and Performativity', *SubStance* 31, 2-3, pp. 125-146.
- Fraleigh, S. H. (1999), 'Witnessing the Frog Pond', in S. H. Fraleigh and P. Hanstein (eds.), *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Enquiry*, London: Dance Books, pp. 188-224.
- Frater, S. (2004), 'Brothers in Arms are Making Waves', *Evening Standard* 12 November, p. 43.
- _____ (2006), 'Dance-less but Utterly Charming', *Evening Standard* 19 October, n.p.
- Fried, M. (1968), 'Art and Objecthood', in G. Battcock (ed.), *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*, New York: E. P. Dutton, pp. 116-147.
- Friedman, B. H. (ed.) (2000), *Give My Regards to Eighth Street: Collected Writings of Morton Feldman*, Cambridge: Exact Change.
- Gablik, S. (1994), 'Minimalism', in N. Stangos (ed.), *Concepts of Modern Art: From Fauvism to Postmodernism*, 2nd edition, London: Thames & Hudson.
- Gadamer, H.-G. (1986), *The Relevance of The Beautiful and Other Essays*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- _____ (1989), *Truth and Method*, 2nd edition, London: Sheed & Ward.
- Genette, G. (1982), *Figures of Literary Discourse*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

- _____ (1989), 'Modern Mimology: The Dream of a Poetic Language', *PMLA* 104.2, March, pp. 202-214.
- Gilbert, J. (1997), 'Dance: What's the Satyr?', *The Independent on Sunday* 20 April, p. 13.
- _____ (1998), 'Dance: Completely Lacking in Eastern Promise', *The Independent Sunday* 12 July, p. 6.
- _____ (2004), 'Dance: Pick It up, Dust it down and See If It Can Still Sell Tickets: Both Sitting Duet', *The Independent on Sunday* 14 November, p. 16.
- _____ (2005), 'The Quiet Dance, The Place, London', *The Independent on Sunday* 23 October, n.p. [available via <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/theatre/reviews>; accessed 30 October 2005].
- _____ (2006), 'Speaking Dance, Robin Howard Dance Theatre, London' *The Independent* 22 October, n.p. [available via <http://enjoyment.independent.co.uk/theatre/reviews>; accessed 24 October 2006].
- Gilpin, H. (1996), 'Lifelessness in Movement, or How do the Dead Move? Tracing Displacement and Disappearance from Movement Performance', in S. L. Foster (ed.), *Corporealities: Dancing Knowledge, Culture and Power*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 106-128.
- Goffman, E. (1990), *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, London: Penguin Books.
- Goldberg, R. (2001), *Performance Art: From Futurism to the Present*, revised and expanded edition, London: Thames & Hudson.
- Goodwin, N. (1981), 'London', *Ballet News* 3, 1, July, pp. 36-37.
- _____ (1983a), 'Spirited and Unconventional', *Dance and Dancers* July, pp. 27-29.
- _____ (1983b), 'London', *Ballet News* August, pp. 36-38.
- _____ (1989), 'Jonathan Burrows: The Place', *Dance and Dancers* November, p. 27.
- _____ (1992), 'Sound and Sight: Marginal Comment', *Dance and Dancers* January/February, p. 18.
- Grau, A. and Jordan, S. (eds.) (2000), *Europe Dancing: Perspectives on Theatre Dance and Cultural Identity*, London and New York: Routledge.
- Greenberg, C. (2003), 'Avant-garde and Kitsch', in C. Harrison and P. Wood (eds.), *Art in Theory: 1900-2000. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing.

- Grondin, J. (2002), 'Gadamer's Basic Understanding of Understanding', in R. J. Dostal (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Gadamer*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 36-51.
- Haight, L. (2005), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: The Quiet Dance, The Place, 18 & 19 Oct', *londondance.com* [<http://www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1829&ArticleID=30388>; accessed 4 November 2005].
- Hammergren, L. (2004), 'Many Sources, Many Voices', in A. Carter (ed.), *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*, London: Routledge, pp. 20-31.
- Harari, J. V. (ed.) (1979), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-structuralist Criticism*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Harris, S. (1993), 'Ambiguity in Jonathan Burrows' Choreography: The Paradox of Humour and Violence', unpublished MA Dissertation, University of Surrey.
- Hobsbaum, P. (1996), *Metre, Rhythm and Verse Form*, London: Routledge.
- Hunt, M. (1992), 'Jonathan Burrows and Julyen Hamilton, Purcell Room', *Dance Magazine* 66, 3, March, pp. 84-86.
- _____ (1993), 'Jonathan Burrows: Laughter of Recognition' *Dance Magazine* 67, 10, October, pp. 52-55.
- Hutcheon, L. (1988), *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction*, London: Routledge.
- _____ (1994), *Irony's Edge: The Theory and Politics of Irony*, London: Routledge.
- Hutera, D. (2003), 'Both Talking: Interview with Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion', *Dance Umbrella News* Autumn, n.p.
- _____ (2005), 'Dance: The Quiet Dance', *The Times* 19 October, p. 21.
- Jakobson, R. (1960), 'Closing Statement: Linguistics and Poetics', in T. A. Sebeok (ed.), *Style in Language*, Cambridge: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, pp. 350-377.
- Jays, D. (1996), 'Dance Umbrella', *Dancing Times* 86, 1035, December, pp. 218-219.
- Johnson, S. (ed.) (2002a), *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgar Varèse, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg*, London: Routledge.
- _____ (2002b), 'Jasper Johns and Morton Feldman: What Patterns?', in S. Johnson (ed.), *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgar Varèse, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg*, London: Routledge, pp. 217-247.

- Jones, A. and Stephenson, A. (eds.) (1999), *Performing the Body/Performing the Text*. London: Routledge.
- Jones, C. (1998a), 'Jonathan Burrows', in T. Benbow-Pfalzgraf (ed.), *International Dictionary of Modern Dance*, Detroit, New York and London: St. James Press, pp. 83-84.
- _____ (1998b), 'Rosemary Butcher', in T. Benbow-Pfalzgraf (ed.), *International Dictionary of Modern Dance*, Detroit, New York and London: St. James Press. pp. 85-86.
- Jones, M. (2006), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: Speaking Dance, The Place', *londondance.com* 23 October [http://www.londondance.com/reviews_details.asp?C=Jonathan+Burrows+%26+Matteo+Fargion&P=Speaking+Dance&V=The+Place; accessed 27 October 2006].
- Jordan, S. (1992a), *Striding Out: Aspects of Contemporary and New Dance in Britain*. London: Dance Books.
- _____ (1992b), 'London', *Ballet Review* 20, 1, Spring, pp. 11-13.
- Jordan, S. and Friend, H. (1982), 'Dance Umbrella 1982', *Dancing Times* 72, 867, December, pp. 190-192.
- Jowitt, D. (2004), 'Joyride To Noirville', *The Village Voice* 29 March, n.p. [available at <http://www.villagevoice.com/dance/0413,jowitt,52216,14.html>; accessed 20 November 2005].
- Kane, A. (1991), 'The Jonathan Burrows Group', *Dancing Times* 81, 969, June, p. 868.
- Kaye, N. (1994), *Postmodernism and Performance*, Basingstoke and London: Macmillan.
- Kristeva, J. (1980), *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, Oxford: Blackwell.
- _____ (1984), *Revolution in Poetic Language*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Laban, R. (1954), *Principles of Dance and Movement Notation*, London: MacDonald and Evans.
- _____ (1971), *The Mastery of Movement*, 3rd edition, revised and enlarged by Lisa Ullmann, London: Macdonald & Evans.
- Lennard, J. (1966), *The Poetry Handbook: A Guide to Reading Poetry for Pleasure and Practical Criticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lepecki, A. (1999), 'Skin, Body, and Presence in Contemporary European Choreography', *The Drama Review* 43, 4, Winter, pp. 129-140.

- _____ (2004), 'Concept and Presence: The Contemporary European Dance Scene', in A. Carter (ed.), *Rethinking Dance History: A Reader*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 170-181.
- _____ (2006), *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*, London and New York, Routledge.
- Levene, L. (1991), 'By Royal Assent: Jonathan Burrows Tells Louise Levene That He Has No Plans to Give up His "Day" Job', *The Independent* 13 April, p. 22.
- _____ (1996), 'Dance: Cinderella; City Ballet/Royal Ballet, London', *The Independent* 19 December, p. 23.
- _____ (2001a), 'Dance: Review', *Sunday Telegraph* 30 September, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (2001b), 'Improvised Fidgets: Dance', *Sunday Telegraph* 14 October, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- Livet, A. (ed.) (1978), 'Lucinda Childs', in *Contemporary Dance: An Anthology of Lectures, Interviews and Essays with Many of the Most Important Contemporary American Choreographers, Scholars and Critics...*, New York: Abbeville Press, pp. 58-75.
- Macaulay, A. (1985), 'The Royal Ballet: The Next Choreographers', *Dance Theatre Journal* 3, 1, Spring, pp. 36-40.
- _____ (1992), 'Dance Umbrella '91', *Dancing Times* 82, 976, January, pp. 320-322.
- MacGibbon, R. (1992), 'The Far End of the Garden', *Dancemakers*, Beaulieu Films/BBC2/Arts Council.
- Mackrell, J. (1987), 'The British Ghetto: Foreign Visitors. Umbrella '86', *Dance Theatre Journal* 5, 1, Spring, pp. 28-31.
- _____ (1988), 'The Sound and the Furry', *The Independent* 27 June, p. 15.
- _____ (1989), 'Taking a Rain Check', *The Independent* 2 October, p. 12.
- _____ (1991a), 'Post-Modern Dance in Britain: An Historical Essay', *Dance Research* 9, 1, Spring, pp. 40-57.
- _____ (1991b), 'Country Manners', *The Independent* [n.d.] April, n.p.
- _____ (1992a), *Out of Line: The Story of British New Dance*, London: Dance Books.
- _____ (1992b), 'Is New Ballet Old Hat?', *Dance Now* 1, 2, Summer, pp. 5-9.
- _____ (1992c), 'Sketches, Dreams, Games and Follies', *The Independent* 5 November, p. 21.

- _____ (1994), 'Dance: Calm Before the Storm', *The Independent* 5 May, p. 25.
- _____ (1996), 'Dance, Jonathan Burrows: Riverside/Touring', *The Guardian* 30 October, p. 14.
- _____ (1996-1997), 'Pattern and Passion', *Dance Now* 5, 4, Winter, pp. 54-59.
- _____ (1998a), 'Review: As It Is: After the Demons Comes the Delight, Queen Elizabeth Hall', *The Guardian* 10 July, p. 2.
- _____ (1998b), 'Dance: Jonathan Burrows, The Place, London', *The Guardian* 29 October, p. 12.
- _____ (2001), 'Weak Dance Strong Questions', *The Guardian* 8 October, p. 16.
- _____ (2004a), 'Preview Dance: Both Sitting Duet, London', *The Guardian* 6 November, p. 41.
- _____ (2004b), 'Both Sitting Duet, Clore Studio, London', *The Guardian* 18 November, p. 30.
- Main, L. (2005), 'The Dances of Doris Humphrey: Creating a Contemporary Perspective Through Directorial Interpretation', *Dance Research* 23, 2, pp. 106-122.
- Mallinson, J. (2005), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: "The Quiet Dance"', *Ballet.co Magazine* 20 October [http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_05/nov05/jm_rev_jonathan_burrows_and_matteo_fargion_1005.htm; accessed 14 November 2006].
- Manning, E. (1990), 'Contemporary Dance Scene', *Dance: Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing* 13, January, p. 21.
- Marigny, de C. (1994), 'Burrows: Our Thoughts', *Dance Theatre Journal* 11, 2, Spring/Summer, pp. 6-9, 48.
- McNeill, D. (1992), *Hand and Mind: What Gestures Reveal About Thought*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Meisner, N. (1991), 'Back with New Spring in Their Step: Dance', *Sunday Times* 27 October, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1992a), 'Jonathan Burrows, Julyen Hamilton', *Dance and Dancers* January/February, pp. 29-30.
- _____ (1992b), 'Seasonal Movements', *The Times* 5 February, p. 2.
- _____ (1994), 'In the Church of the Body', *The Times* 19 April, p. 41.

- _____ (1996a), 'Closing in on Ballet? Nadine Meisner and Jonathan Burrows Quibble over Styles and Influences', *Dance Theatre Journal* 13, 2, Spring/Summer, pp. 3-5.
- _____ (1996b), 'Thoroughly Modern Movements', *The Sunday Times* 2 June, p. 18.
- _____ (1996c), 'Pointe of Extinction: Dance', *Sunday Times* 1 September, p. 19.
- _____ (1997), 'Wrestlers in Golden Trainers: Jonathan Burrows', *The Times* 18 April, p. 34.
- _____ (1998a), 'Dance: The Prodigal's Return', *The Sunday Times* 19 July, p. 22.
- _____ (1998b), 'Dance: Take a Leap of Faith. Jonathan Burrows Group, The Place Theatre, London', *The Independent* 26 October, p. 17.
- _____ (2001), 'Arts: Goodbye Tradition, Hello the World', *The Independent* 28 September, p. 9.
- _____ (2003), 'What Is the Future of Ballet?', *The Independent* 23 January 28, p. 14.
- Menna, F. (1975), *La Linea Analitica dell'Arte Moderna: Le Figure e le Icone*, Turin: Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi.
- Mertens, W. (1983), *American Minimal Music: La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Steve Reich, Philip Glass*, London: Kahn & Averill.
- Mulkay, M. (1988), *On Humour: Its Nature and Its Place in Modern Society*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Nicholls, D. (2002), 'Getting Rid of the Glue: The Music of the New York School', in S. Johnson (ed.), *The New York Schools of Music and Visual Arts: John Cage, Morton Feldman, Edgar Varèse, Willem de Kooning, Jasper Johns, Robert Rauschenberg*, London: Routledge, pp. 17-56.
- Novack, C. J. (1990), *Sharing the Dance: Contact Improvisation and American Culture*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press.
- Nugent, A. (1992), 'Burrows Finds the Going Gets Tougher When You Go It Alone', *The Stage* 15 October, n.p.
- _____ (1994), 'Dream Ticket', *Dance Now* 3, 2, Summer, pp. 16-23.
- Osborne, A. (1979), *Abstraction and Artifice in Twentieth-Century Art*, Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Palmer, J. (1988), 'Humour in Great Britain', in A. Ziv (ed.), *National Styles of Humour*, New York: Greenwood Press, pp. 85-111.

- Parry, J. (1991), 'Living on Spare Time and Borrowed Dancers', *The Observer* 27 October, p. 57.
- _____ (1996a), 'Dance: Undressed, Over Here', *The Observer* 27 October, p. 13.
- _____ (1996b), 'Dance on the Edge', *Dance Now* 5, 4, Winter, pp. 67-75.
- _____ (1998), 'Dance: Why the Men Want to Be Kept on Their Toes. Dance Umbrella, Queel Elizabeth Hall, The Place', *The Observer* 1 November, p. 9.
- _____ (2001), 'Get Fell in, You 'Orrible Dancers: Weak Dance Strong Questions, ICA, London', *The Observer* 14 October, p. 11.
- _____ (2004), 'Dance: There's No Need to Be So Modest', *The Observer* 14 November, p. 11.
- Perazzo, D. (2004), 'A Reconfiguration of the Boundaries of Choreography: Jonathan Burrows's Reductionist Dance in Weak Dance Strong Questions and Both Sitting Duet', unpublished MA essay, Goldsmiths College, University of London.
- _____ (2005a), 'Gli Oggetti "Poveri" di Tadeusz Kantor', in A. Cascetta and L. Peja (eds.), *La Prova del Nove: Scritture per la Scena e Temi Epocali nel Secondo Novecento*, Milan: Vita e Pensiero, pp. 306-318.
- _____ (2005b), 'Burrows: La Complessa Tranquillità del Danzare', *Danza & Danza* 20, 183, July-August, pp. 6-7.
- _____ (2005c), 'The Sitting Duo Now Walks, or the Piece That Lies Quietly Underneath: Daniela Perazzo Interviews Jonathan Burrows', *Dance Theatre Journal* 21, 2, pp. 2-7.
- _____ (2006), 'Review. Jonathan Burrows Group: Dance Films by Adam Roberts', *Dance Theatre Journal* 21, 3, pp. 45-47.
- _____ (2007), '*Speaking Dance*: The Storm after the Calm: Daniela Perazzo Listens to Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion's Latest Collaboration', *Dance Theatre Journal* 22, 2, pp. 9-11.
- Percival, J. (1978), 'Reviews: London', *Dance Magazine* 52, 12, December, pp. 119-121.
- _____ (1980), 'Reviews: London', *Dance Magazine* 54, 11, November, pp. 92-97.
- _____ (1983), 'Boldness Rewarded: The Winter Play, Hippodrome, Birmingham', *The Times* 16 April, p. 9.
- _____ (1986), 'Dance: Review of Page; Burrows at the Riverside', *The Times* 4 November, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].

- _____ (1988a), 'Dance: Onward Christian Soldiers. Hymns, The Place', *The Times* 25 June, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1988b), 'Home Reviews: Victoria Marks, Jonathan Burrows. The Place', *Dance and Dancers* November/December, p. 31.
- _____ (1991a), 'The Nutcracker', *The Times* 1 January, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1991b), 'Stoics; Plain Song', *The Times* 18 April, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1991c), 'Royal Ballet; Dance', *The Times* 22 November, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1991d), 'The Year We Nearly Forgot Mozart: Best of British', *The Times* 31 December, n.p. [available via InfoTrac Custom Newspapers, <http://find.galegroup.com>].
- _____ (1992a), 'Sylphides/Present Histories/Symphony in Covent Garden; Sylphides/The Burrow, Birmingham Hippodrome', *Dance and Dancers* January/February, pp. 22-25.
- _____ (1992b), 'Moving Beyond Dance', *The Times* 30 October, p. 32.
- _____ (1992c), 'Trying to Puzzle out the Next Move: Dance Review', *The Times* 5 November, p. 39.
- _____ (1995), 'Beginners Welcome to a Ballet Masterclass: Dance', *The Times* 22 December, p. 27.
- _____ (1996), 'Dance: Choice', *The Times* 27 January, p. 2.
- _____ (1997), 'Trace Elements: Rosemary Butcher is a Choreographer Who Rarely Lets Her Dancers Tread the Same Ground Twice – Which Is Why They Always Come Back for More', *The Independent* 18 February, p. 6.
- _____ (1998), 'In the Footsteps of Forsythe', *The Independent* 24 November, p. 10.
- _____ (2001), 'A Mover and a Shaker: Jonathan Burrows, ICA Theatre, London', *The Independent* 10 October, p. 10.
- _____ (2003-04), 'Jonathan Burrows/Matthew Hawkins' *Dance Now* 12, 4, Winter, pp. 74-75.
- Phelan, P. (1993), *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, London: Routledge.
- Ploebst, H. (2001), *No Wind No Word: New Choreography in the Society of the Spectacle*, Munich: Kieser.

- Polcari, S. (1990), 'Martha Graham and Abstract Expressionism', *Smithsonian Studies in American Art* 4, 1, Winter, pp. 2-27.
- Polzer, L. (2004), 'Two Men, Two Chairs', *Dancing Times* 94, 1130, November, pp. 17-20.
- Postlewait, T. (2000), 'Autobiography and Theatre History', in T. Postlewait and B. A. McConachie (eds.), *Interpreting the Theatrical Past: Essays in the Historiography of Performance*, Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, pp. 248-272.
- Protopapa, E. (2004), 'Choreographic Practice and the State of Questioning', *Dance Theatre Journal* 20, 3, pp. 6-8.
- Rainer, Y. (1974), *Yvonne Rainer: Work 1961-73*, Halifax: The Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design.
- Reich, S. (2002), *Writings on Music, 1965-2000*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Roberts, A. (1993), *Very*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Jonathan Burrows Group.
- _____ (1994), *Our/film*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Tall Stories.
- _____ (1995a), *Blue Yellow*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Tall Stories for RD Studio Productions/France 2/BBC TV.
- _____ (1995b), *Hands*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Dancelines for BBC/The Arts Council of England.
- _____ (1996), *The Stop Quartet*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Jonathan Burrows Group.
- _____ (2002), *Both Sitting Duet*, by and with J. Burrows and M. Fargion, London: Jonathan Burrows Group.
- _____ (2004), *Jonathan Burrows Group: Dance Films by Adam Roberts*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Jonathan Burrows Group.
- _____ (2006), *Pieces of The Quiet Dance*, choreography by J. Burrows, London: Jonathan Burrows Group.
- Robertson, A. (2001), 'Arts: Umbrella Festival', *The Times* 12 October, p. 8.
- Roebuck, G. (2006), 'Speaking Dance', *The Stage* 20 October, n.p. [available at <http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/14586/speaking-dance>; accessed 15 December 2006].
- Rowell, B. (2000a), *Dance Umbrella: The First Twenty-One Years*, London: Dance Books.

- _____ (2000b), 'United Kingdom: An Expanding Map', in A. Grau and S. Jordan (eds.), *Europe Dancing: Perspectives on Theatre Dance and Cultural Identity*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 188-205.
- Roy, S. (2001-02), 'Flying High: Jonathan Burrows/Jan Ritsema', *Dance Now* 10, 4, Winter, pp. 74-75.
- Sabbe, H. (1996), 'The Feldman Paradoxes: A Deconstructionist View of Musical Aesthetics', in T. DeLio (ed.), *The Music of Morton Feldman*, New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Company, pp. 9-15.
- Sacks, A. (1992), 'Adventures in Body Language', *The Independent on Sunday* 18 October, p. 20.
- Samuel, R. (1994), *Theatres of Memory*, Vol. 1: *Past and Present in Contemporary Culture*, London: Verso.
- Sartre, J.-P. (1993), *What is Literature?*, London: Routledge.
- Saussure, F. de (1959), *Course in General Linguistics*, New York: The Philosophical Library.
- Sayers, L.-A. (1999), 'Rosemary Butcher', in M. Bremser (ed.), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers: A Reference Guide*, London: Routledge, pp. 51-55.
- Schober, A. (2003), 'The Desire for Bodily Subversions: Episodes, Interplays and Monsters', *Performance Research* 8, 2, June, pp. 69-81.
- Schweiker, W. (1988), 'Beyond Imitation: Mimetic Praxis in Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida', *The Journal of Religion* 68, 1, January, pp. 21-38.
- Shell, T. (2005), *A People's History: The Emergence of English Identity*, Plymouth: DarkLake Publications.
- Shilling, C. (1993), *The Body and Social Theory*, London: Sage Publications.
- Siegmund, G. (2001), 'Really Strong This Weak Dance' (translated from the German), *Frankfurter Allgemeine* 10 May, n.p.
- _____ (2002), 'The Radicalism of Omission' (translated from the German), *Frankfurter Allgemeine* 5 November, n.p. [available at http://www.londondance.com/article_print.asp?ArticleID=28132; accessed 20 November 2005].
- _____ (2003), 'Strategies of Avoidance: Dance in the Age of the Mass Culture of the Body', *Performance Research* 8, 2, June, pp. 82-90.
- Silverman, H. J. (1981), 'Merleau-Ponty and the Interrogation of Language', in J. Sallis (ed.), *Merleau-Ponty: Perception, Structure, Language. A Collection of Essays*, Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, pp. 122-141.
- Simpson, J. (2006-07), 'Speaking of Dance', *Dance Now* 15, 4, Winter, p. 82.

- Skene-Wenzel, J. (2003), 'Jonathan Burrows & Matteo Fargion: Both Sitting Duet. 17 October 2003, The Place', *londondance.com* [http://www.londondance.com/content/1284/jonathan_burrows_&_matteo_farg/; accessed 20 February 2005].
- Smith A. (1998), 'Jonathan Burrows Group, The Kitchen', *Dance Magazine* 72, 2, February, pp. 100-101.
- Smith, O. and Agis, G. (1982), 'An Evening of New Choreography', *New Dance* 22 June, p. 22.
- Somerville, I. (1996-97), 'Video Evidence', *Dance Now*, 5, 4, pp. 85-86.
- Spångberg, M. (2001), 'Weak Dance, Strong Questions. Frankfurt/Main: Jonathan Burrows Meets Jan Ritsema', *Ballett International/Tanz Aktuell* 8/9, p. 65.
- Staude, S. (2001), 'The Routine Breakers' (translated from the German), *Frankfurter Rundschau* 7 May, n.p.
- _____ (2002), 'Both Sitting Duet' (translated from the German), *Frankfurter Rundschau* 6 November, n.p. [available at <http://www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1367>; accessed 20 November 2005].
- Thorpe, E. (1991), 'Talking to an Enigma: Edward Thorpe Interviews Jonathan Burrows', *Dance and Dancers* June-July, p. 12.
- _____ (1992), 'Chaos in the Kindergarten', *Evening Standard* 2 November, p. 42.
- T'Jonck, P. (2001), 'Weak Dance Strong Questions' (translated from the Flemish), *Financieel Economische Tijd* 26 October, n.p.
- _____ (2002), 'An Unspectacular Spectacle' (translated from the Flemish), *Financieel Economische Tijd* 18 December, n.p.
- Tobias, T. (2004), 'Is Less More?', *Arts Journal* 18 March, n.p. [available at http://www.artsjournal.com/tobias/archives/2004/03/is_less_more.shtml; accessed 20 November 2005].
- Trimm, R.S. (1999), 'Being an Englishman', *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 33, 1, Autumn, pp. 129-133.
- Van Campenhout, E. (2001), 'Two Men Failing' (translated from the Flemish), *De Standaard* 30 October, n.p.
- _____ (2003), 'Score for the Ordinary Things' (translated from the Flamish), *De Standaard* 8 January, n.p. [available at <http://www.londondance.com/content.asp?CategoryID=1367&ArticleID=28135>; accessed 20 November 2005].
- Van den Broek, C. (2001), 'Soundless Movement on an Empty Stage' (translated from the Flemish), *De Morgen* 24 October, n.p.

- Van Zile, J. (1985), 'What Is the Dance? Implications for Dance Notation', *Dance Research Journal* 17, 2, pp. 41-47.
- Vattimo, G. (1988), *The End of Modernity: Nihilism and Hermeneutics in Postmodern Culture*, Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press.
- _____ (1997), *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy*, Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Verduyck, P. (1993), 'Everyday Pain in Jonathan Burrows' *Very*' (translated from the Flamish), *De Morgen* 18 May, n.p.
- Wallis, L. (2004), 'Both Sitting Duet', *The Stage* 17 November, n.p. [available at <http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/5214/both-sitting-duet>; accessed 20 November 2006].
- Watson, K. (1992), 'Very Strange: Was That a Slap or Just a Tickle?', *Hampstead and Highate Express* 6 November, p. 38.
- Watson, T. (2000), 'Maps of Englishness', *Contemporary Literature* 41, 4, Winter, pp. 726-739.
- White, H. (1973), *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-century Europe*, London: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Williams, A. (2003), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: "Both Sitting Duet"', *Ballet.co Magazine* 20 October [http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_03/nov03/aw_rev_jonathan_burrows_fargion_1003.htm; accessed 22 February 2005].
- _____ (2005), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: "The Quiet Dance"', *Ballet.co Magazine* 19 October [http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_05/nov05/aw_rev_jonathan_burrows_and_matteo_fargion_1005.htm; accessed 14 November 2006].
- _____ (2006), 'Jonathan Burrows and Matteo Fargion: "Speaking Dance"', *Ballet.co Magazine* 19 October [http://www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr_06/nov06/aw_rev_jonathan_burrows_and_matteo_fargion_1006.htm; accessed 14 November 2006].
- Witchel, L. (2004), 'The Theater of the Mundane: Both Sitting Duet, Jonathan Burrows/Matteo Fargion, The Kitchen, New York', *The DanceView Times* 12 March, n.p. [available at <http://danceviewtimes.com/dvny/reviews/2004/winter/burrows.htm>; accessed 14 November 2006].
- Wittgenstein, L. (1968), *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Woodall, J. (2002), 'City Comes Alive in the Dead Season: Dance Berlin', *Financial Times* 29 August, p. 16.
- Worton, M. and Still, J. (eds.) (1990), *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.

- Yaguello, M. (1998), *Language Through the Looking Glass: Exploring Language and Linguistics*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- York, W. (1996), 'For John Cage', in T. DeLio (ed.), *The Music of Morton Feldman*, New York: Excelsior Music Publishing Company, pp. 147-195.
- Zimmermann, W. (ed.) (1985), *Morton Feldman Essays*, Kerpen: Beginner Press.
- Ziv, A. (ed.) (1988), *National Styles of Humour*, New York: Greenwood Press.