

'I'm doing it, but I'm so in the moment...': An articulation and understanding of 'absorption' for the performer towards an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in 'dance theatre'.

Submitted by Samuel Grogan, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of *Doctor of Philosophy* in Drama, July 2014.

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Signature

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'S. Grogan'.

Acknowledgments

I am lucky enough to have been given the supportive gift of amazing people in my life, without all of whom, this work would not have been completed. Thank you to...

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Abstract

This thesis explores how we understand and articulate the idea of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer. By drawing upon pertinent aspects of the fields of phenomenology, consciousness studies, cognitive neuroscience and play theory coupled with Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow', the study develops a lexicon of terminology with which to articulate and understand the nature of 'absorption' for the performer in the context of 'dance theatre'.

By developing a focused articulation of the actual nature of 'absorption' for the performer in performance, seen as necessary to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', the study intends to contribute to the language of discourse in this area of performance studies, and, importantly become a useful resource for the enquiring performer and practitioner. Consequently, in developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer, in order to edge closer to articulating an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer, the work and actions of the performer remain the focus of the study.

The study is anchored in practice through examination of the work of three companies working within the genealogy of 'dance theatre'. This multi-company approach gives a chronological and genealogical overview of 'dance theatre' practices useful in understanding 'absorption' for the performer, whilst also facilitating examination of individual points of practice within that overview. The companies profiled are: Pina Bausch, DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre (VDT). The examination of work by Bausch and DV8 draws upon and reframes extant documentation of performance currently in the public domain. Examination of

VDT's work draws on original footage and interviews undertaken by the researcher during fieldwork.

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Part 1

Introduction

“But it isn’t Easy,” said Pooh to himself, as he looked at what had once been Owl’s House. ‘Because Poetry and Hums aren’t things which you get, they’re things which get *you*. And all you can do is go where they can find you” (Milne 1928: 145; emphasis in original)

The quotation in the title of this study, ‘I’m doing it, but I’m so in the moment’, is taken from a paper by dance researchers Professor Karen E. Bond and Professor Susan W. Stinson, (2000) in which they collected descriptions of the experience of dancing from young people. This quotation and Winnie the Pooh’s thoughts taken from *The House at Pooh Corner* both point to a positive and elusive state of being made tantalising by its very intangibility. This thesis represents my attempt to move closer to articulating an elusive and intangible ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’ in performance. Like Pooh’s ‘Poetry and Hums’, this is something which, in my work as a performer, has tended to get *me*, or find *me*, rather than the reverse. Placed within the specific context of ‘dance theatre’, this study attempts to move closer to an understanding of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’ for the performer through the development of an informed and focused articulation of ‘absorption’ for the performer. As shall be discussed later, ‘absorption’ is positioned as one necessary aspect of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’. Using extant film and video and original footage generated by fieldwork, the study seeks to address questions useful to the performer and

practitioner working in this area: What is 'absorption' for the performer in 'dance theatre'? Where might we look for it? How do we investigate it? What are the languages we might use to describe it?

In support of this search, the primary research question is as follows:

Recognised as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', what is 'absorption' for the performer working within 'dance theatre', and how can it be articulated?

In order to begin to frame and signpost later avenues of discussion, and to explore the idea of 'absorption' itself for the performer, it is useful at this early point to outline what is intended by the term 'optimal'. There are many and varied terms which have been used (and continue to be used) in describing and discussing 'optimal' states of being. Bond and Stinson, in approaching the state they describe as 'super-ordinary' in their study examining children's experiences of dance, also recognise that,

A variety of writers have given their own names to this phenomenon: John Dewey, "imaginative unification" (1934); Abraham Maslow, "peak experience" (1968); Charles Tart, "altered states of consciousness" (1972); Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "flow" (1975, 1996, 1997); Victor Turner, "communitas" (1969, 1982); Elizabeth Hirschman, "aesthetic experience" (1983); and Earle Coleman, "super-rationalism" (1998).

(Bond and Stinson 2000-2001: 73)

The language used by many performers and practitioners to describe a similarly orientated 'mode of being/doing' is also just as varied: 'the baseline is you need to be the character, totally present in the moment' (Newson 2003, cited in Claid 2006: 208); 'Being right there, riding the ups and downs, recognising and catching the crests, inwardly and outwardly aware, I experience immense generosity' (Karczag 2005, cited in Claid 2008: 209); 'When I move my body to a beat, or let it flow and ripple, I become engrossed in a magic spell. Dancing is a spark that should be felt deep inside (high school student, cited in Bond and Stinson 2000-2001: 73).

Underpinning all of the phrases, terms and language used in the descriptions immediately above is the idea that the 'absorption' of the participant in the doing of the given activity is different from that experienced in the normal activity of the everyday. Relatedly, the nature of the 'attention' (a term to be explored later which also forms part of the lexicon of terminology developed through this study) of the participant is also central in giving rise to a 'mode of being/doing' that could be described in terms of, or aligned with, an idea of what is 'optimal'. Consequently, in the context of this study and its focus upon 'dance theatre', and as an initial definition of what I mean by an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', I intend the term to denote the focused 'attention' of the performer, in, and across, several key relationships into which they enter during performance. These relationships form points of 'absorption' for the performer. At this juncture, having now introduced the idea of the 'optimal' in preparation for the study and pointed towards 'absorption' as an aspect of this 'mode of

being/doing', it is also timely to begin to outline the intended use of 'absorption' within the thesis.

To return to the quotation in the title, the idea of 'absorption' as developed in this study is meant to signal one aspect of the state of the performer when they are 'just so in the moment'. It is important to state at this early juncture that the notion of 'absorption' is only one aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the 'dance theatre' performer. Whilst the understanding of this term developed here recognises 'absorption' as *necessary* for an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', it should be clearly stated that 'absorption' alone is not *sufficient* for this state to occur. Additional contributing factors are also required for an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. These factors may vary significantly depending on the nature of each individual context. Given this, I have purposefully chosen to focus the study on the idea of 'absorption' alone, as this state is a necessary and fundamental aspect of an 'optimal' mode of being/doing.

As noted above, the word is intended to describe a quality of performance experienced by the performer wherein they become 'absorbed' in the act of doing at a level significantly beyond that experienced in the normal day-to-day activities of everyday life. As will be discussed in the chapters to come, this 'absorption' has several facets that can be usefully understood by explicating it through the lenses of phenomenology, consciousness studies, aspects of cognitive neuroscience and through writing on 'play' and 'flow'. With this in mind an initial positioning of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer sees it as an exchange through specific relationships between the performer and the other performers and objects in the performance space (including the very

space itself). In developing a working understanding to take forward into the study, three further brief points are of immediate note.

Firstly, and to be unpicked further in the chapters to follow, 'absorption' carries with it a sense of intensification, or heightening of experience; the perceptual and intentional fields of the everyday are somehow extended out into the perceiver's domain. Through this sense of perceptual extension into the domain, the division between the subject (of the performer) and the object of attention enters a state of flux; to an extent, subject and object become 'absorbed' in one another. In describing the state of 'flow', Csikszentmihalyi notes that such a relationship constitutes 'a concrete experience of close interaction with some Other, an interaction that produces a rare sense of unity with these usually foreign entities' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 64).

Secondly, whilst being absorptive, 'absorption' as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' does not fully engulf, drown or override the sensibilities of the performer. 'Absorption' is not a trance, or a state akin to deep hypnosis or a drug-induced obedience to which one succumbs and in which one surrenders one's will. Whilst 'absorbed', the awareness, intentionality and perception of the performer are very much active; as will be discussed later, free will and the possibility of choice and fluctuation in action are possible, even nurtured, whilst the performer remains 'absorbed' in and by the act of doing.

The idea that the performer retains active autonomy whilst 'absorbed' leads to a final point contributing towards a working understanding of 'absorption' for the performer. This is to note that the state of being in which 'absorption' exists is

precarious, dynamic and highly unstable. Disruptions, or interventions, in the immediate intentional focus of the performer that lie outside this focus, will easily shatter the 'absorption' of the performer. An illustrative example is provided by imagining a performance in which the performer is 'absorbed' in their work. Now imagine a fire alarm, or even a mobile phone, in the auditorium. The fragile spell is broken; a new intentional focus external to the action of the performance supersedes that of the performance score. The 'absorption' of the performer (and the audience) has been displaced.

To return to my personal reasons for undertaking this study, the dynamic fragility of 'absorption', its instability and its resistance to exacting definition in 'concrete' action, are part of what has driven me to investigate it. I wish to work towards pinning down and identifying this elusive notion by examining and understanding in detail the action of the performer and how it is manifested through this action. The *how* and the *what* of the performer's work and the *nature* of the relationships of the performer in performance constitutes the subject of the thesis as a whole as it seeks to develop an articulation of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer, understood as one necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'.

Part One of the study seeks to frame the idea of the performer's 'absorption' within a wider interdisciplinary understanding of 'optimal' experience by developing a lexicon of terminology appropriate for the examination of the performer's 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'. Firstly, 'dance theatre' is defined through establishing pertinent conditions of the form. These conditions form the foundations of the lexicon, which is then expanded through Part One by

drawing upon pertinent aspects of phenomenology, consciousness studies, cognitive neuroscience, and 'flow' and 'play' theory.

In order to then develop the lexicon further, anchor the study in practice, and facilitate suitable scrutiny of the work of the performer with respect to the idea of 'absorption', Part Two of the thesis profiles and examines the practices of three companies operating within the wider genealogy of 'dance theatre' as defined earlier. With the conditions of 'dance theatre' established in Part One in mind, this multi-company approach gives a chronological and genealogical overview of 'dance theatre' practices useful in understanding 'absorption' for the performer, whilst also facilitating examination of individual points of practice within that overview. The companies profiled are: Pina Bausch, DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre (VDT).

Rationale

This thesis is written for the enquiring performer and the practitioner; my aim in undertaking the study is to edge closer to developing working answers and a useful language for the 'dance theatre' performer searching for the 'place' where 'Poetry and Hums' are made. Consequently, I resolutely place the practice of the performer at the heart of this study. Whilst there may well be parallels between the 'optimal' experience of the performer and that of the audience or viewer of 'dance theatre' performance, consideration of the experience of the audience is not the focus of this study. The movement towards articulating an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer and, within this, the idea of 'absorption' with which this study is concerned, is located through examination of the work of the performer. I have concentrated on the

performer alone because I wish to focus on the detail of *their* actions and *their* work in relation to this 'mode of being/doing' and the idea of 'absorption', rather than unpicking the experience of the audience in relation to their perception of their own experience as a viewer being, or not being, 'optimal'. As noted further along in this rationale, the study aims to be of use in practice to the 'dance theatre' performer, practitioner and academic.

However, my desire to focus on the work of the performer presents me with significant issues from the outset. These require acknowledgement from the beginning. Whilst I write from the perspective of an enquiring performer and practitioner, the study's desire to move towards an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer presents problems in several regards. The first is the difficulty of my position as an observer in relation to identifying what may or may not be 'optimal' experience for the performer; the second, arising from this first concern, is that there are questions surrounding the very validity of my claims. Central to both these concerns is the inescapable nature of the phenomenon of 'optimal' experience itself as it is experienced by the experiencer; it is intrinsically, intangibly human and an experience that is personal to the experiencer.

These issues have been central to my grappling and tussling with how best to work towards a meaningful and rigorous understanding of the constitution of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer in performance. I have been led to consider where this phenomenon lies and question whether an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' can be seen and, in as far as it is possible, objectively known and evidenced. Central to this problematic landscape is the

consideration of how best to develop a more critical, exacting language with which to frame it and discuss it. It is through consideration of the points above that I have been led to the notion of 'absorption' for the performer as a key element within common and shared notions and reflections of 'optimal' experience. With the idea of 'absorption' in mind, and given the precariousness of this territory and my position within it, it is appropriate at this point to address the concerns above in more detail by indicating what I am, and am not, claiming through the path of investigation followed by this study.

The study draws upon archive performance footage from all three of the 'dance theatre' companies profiled, creating a canonical overview of the form. This perspective on the material is supplemented with my experience of interviews and personal rehearsal footage shot during a period of field research with Vincent Dance Theatre. Due to the historical nature of the performance material taken from Bausch and DV8, it has been impossible to interview the performers from these companies. Consequently, and as a starting point from which to move towards specific consideration of 'absorption' as a phenomenon in performance, what the study does *not* claim in its reference to the documented performance is the conclusive ability to identify when a performer is/is not in an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance.

To explain this in more detail it is useful to note the widespread acknowledgement of the difficulty experienced by researchers in meaningfully 'capturing' and measuring 'optimal' experience as a phenomenon. The very nature of the phenomenon, and the multitude of contexts and languages with which 'optimal' experience is associated and described would seem to render

conventional quantitative analysis somewhat defunct. In respect of Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow', Jonathan James Wright notes in his 2008 doctoral thesis that,

All methods have attempted to measure an internal state of consciousness either by asking people about their experiences in some way, or observing them in situations where they might be expected to experience flow. That the measurement of flow has been fraught with difficulty has been perhaps due in part to the difficulty of definition.

(Wright 2008: 79-80)

Wright also cites Csikszentmihalyi himself, who indicates that to attempt to 'measure' 'flow' is in itself an attempt to quantify that which cannot be quantified:

The important thing, in my opinion is not to reify flow. The moment we say that "flow is the balance of challenge and skills" or that "flow is a score of 'x' on the flow questionnaire" we have lost it [...] The concept of flow describes a complex psychological state that has important consequences for human life. Any measure of flow we create will only be a partial reflection of this reality.

(Csikszentmihalyi, cited in Wright 2008: 80)

Similarly, with respect to the study of flow carried out by Hefferon and Ollis, they noted that, '[t]here is great difficulty, however, in recording the phenomenon of

flow in dance. This phenomenological problem has been attributed to the dynamic nature of dance' (Hefferon and Ollis 2006: 144).

In line with the observations and reflections of the thinkers and practitioners above, to attempt to capture an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' or to *measure* it, is at best an effort which may result in no useful conclusion; as has been noted, the position of 'optimal' experience as an intrinsically personal phenomenon places the only meaningful measurement of such experience (if indeed measurement is even useful) with the individuated experience of each performer. In light of the wish for the study and the outcomes of the investigation to remain pertinent to practitioners and performers, the measurement of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' as a phenomenon and presentation of the associated quantitative data is thus an unprofitable direction in which to move.¹ However, there has been no substantial or systematic research conducted in 'dance theatre' performance which focuses not on measurement of 'optimal' experience itself, but on the nature of the actual work of the performer in moving towards, or working within, this particular state of being. At this point, the idea of the 'absorption' of the performer in the activity of 'dance theatre', understood as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', again moves to the foreground.

With the difficulties and issues inherent in measurement and quantification of 'optimal' experience duly acknowledged, I have chosen to focus this study solely on a practice-orientated understanding and articulation of the notion of

¹ In her PhD thesis, Karla Shacklock, in respect of her own research, notes that '[p]art of the initial motivation for undertaking this research was an observation, made during personal experiences as a dancer that the experiential sensation of performing can differ from performance to performance, or even within the same performance. The observation that one can be completely unaware of self or the experience of the performance during some performances, whereas one can be utterly aware of self and the experience in other performances of a technically identical dance, is particularly significant' (Shacklock 2006: 4-5). Echoing Shacklock's motivations, 'measuring' the height or the intensity of the occurrence of such activity will not be useful in the context of the rationale and the primary research question of this study.

the performer's 'absorption'. By observing the footage from Bausch and DV8, by using my ethnographic field research experience of the rehearsal and devising process of Vincent Dance Theatre, and finally, by re-watching and consequently shaping the extant footage taken from the all three 'dance theatre' companies, what the study *is* able to do is to highlight external manifestations of 'absorption' through explication of the work of the 'dance theatre' performer. Specifically, the study attempts to do this by unpicking the constitution of the 'absorption' of the performer in this context and articulating how it is realised and manifested. Understanding and articulating *what* actually constitutes 'absorption' for the performer in action and *how* it is manifested remains the primary concern; developing an appropriate lexicon of terminology through the study, which is then used in the analysis in Chapter Seven is also a primary aim of the study. In the nature of this particular focus upon the performer, this study is unique and contributes new knowledge to the field; I have selected sections of work in which I have been able to identify key relationships for the performers in which I perceive there to be certain qualities of 'absorption' in the 'attention' and 'awareness' of the performer(s) (these are to be explored and framed through the study along with associated concepts). As highlighted earlier in this introduction and developed through the discussion and lenses of Chapters Two and Three to follow, I see 'absorption' as a necessary to an 'optimal' 'mode of being\doing'.

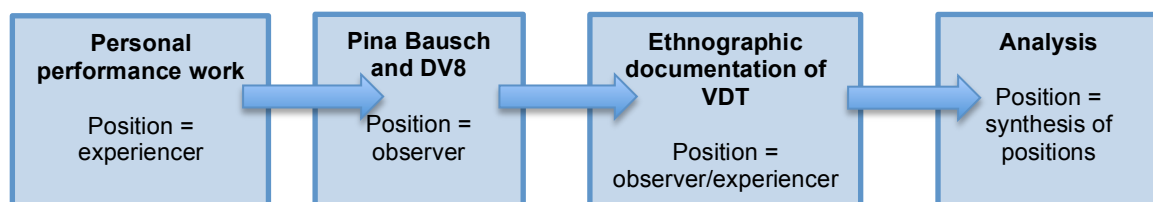
However, this decision to use my perception to identify points of 'absorption' for the performer still presents issues requiring acknowledgment as inherent limitations on the certainty of the knowledge developed through this study. Whilst the study is not claiming to identify points wherein the performer is experiencing an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', it is claiming to identify and

articulate the constitution of 'absorption' for the performer. At this point, it could be argued that this quality is, again, an individuated, *felt* aspect of personal experience for the performer. However, the methodology employed by this study (to be explained shortly in this introduction) develops a lexicon of terminology that focuses not on the personalised, *felt* aspects of 'absorption', but on an articulation and understanding of 'absorption' as evidenced in 'action' of the performer and derived from the interdisciplinary suite of lenses established in Part One. Through this, the study is able to effectively minimise the uncertainty of my position in respect of the performer's 'absorption'. Whilst the uncertainty in my position will never be completely dissolved, by triangulating the methodology of the study with the lenses of Part One, I am able to dispassionately anchor the idea of 'absorption' within an 'action'-centric linguistic lexicon pertinent to wider notions of 'optimal' experience, which can then more effectively frame the personal, the individuated and the *felt* reflections on 'absorption' and function as a resource for 'dance theatre' performers, practitioners and academics.

In addition to the points above, in acknowledging the limitations and tensions within my position as commentator and analyser, my position is also informed by my own practice as a performer. However, my use of my own experience is carefully considered and positioned here; rather than explore the phenomenon of 'optimal' experience through a study which uses my own practice as primary data and research material, I have chosen to use my own performative experience as a starting point for the study and as a means of introducing the strands of the rationale below. By using my performative experience in this manner, I am able to align myself effectively with the phenomenon of 'absorption' I am seeking to unpick, yet remain one step removed. By keeping

the focus of the study on the three companies that form an appropriate genealogical canon of ‘dance theatre’, rather than directing it to the explication of ‘absorption’ through my own practice, I am afforded the opportunity to position myself as both within and outside the focus of the study. As a performer, I am able to work within to draw upon my own experiences, sensitively and empathetically identifying detail within the work of each company pertinent to developing an understanding of ‘absorption’. Simultaneously, as a researcher I am able to work outside the companies profiled to employ an objective methodology and develop a linguistic lexicon to articulate ‘absorption’ in ‘dance theatre’ performance. Summarising the above, the evolution of my position in relation to the idea of ‘absorption’, can be represented as follows:

Fig. 1. Evolution of the researcher’s position



With these limitations and issues acknowledged, I present my perceptions as an observer of both live and mediated ‘dance theatre’ practice as constituting a valid source of data for the study. When positioned as one aspect of the overall methodology, they give me a valuable position from which to comment and analyse the experience of others. The validity of this position is also strengthened when underpinned by a critically informed understanding of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’ within the specific context of ‘dance theatre’ as developed through the use of the key lenses of the study. In addition, the selection of sections of work across all three companies has also been informed

by the interviews I have undertaken with performers from Vincent Dance Theatre as they reflected upon their experiences. As such, my perceptions of 'absorption' within this context have also been triangulated with the reflections of the performers where possible.

Rationale: A beginning

As noted above, the genesis and the 'why?' that starts this study lies in my own experience as a performer. To introduce and frame the strands of the rationale to follow, I present three short anecdotes from my own experience of performance.

#1. Performing in *West Side Story*, Stourport-on-Severn High School, February 1989.

At the age of thirteen I played the non-speaking role of a Puerto Rican gang member in a high school production of *West Side Story*. It ran for three nights. My dominant and lasting memory of my participation in the opening night is still very clear, yet very difficult to articulate. I felt like a cog in a large and living machine. This was a machine to which I was connected, and yet from which I was detached in the way a driver is from their vehicle. I also recall everything being easy. This is not meant to imply a lack of effort on my part, rather that the performance was simply within my reach. I seemed to be in sync with other cast members and I was able to adapt and work in conversation with the work of others with ease.

The next evening saw me prepare and ready myself in the same way for the second performance. Curiously, I was aware that somehow things felt different.

This identifiable yet elusive difference remained present throughout the performance. On this night, the machine of the first night was running in a gear that caused the entity of performance to become predictable and drab. I left the performance that night feeling dissatisfied, as though a promise of what might have been had somehow been reneged upon.

At that time, I did not understand what caused the difference in my experience of performance between nights one and two. I know that the first was 'better' and felt 'good', whilst the second was, in some way, a lesser experience. I wanted to understand what exactly was different for me and the other performers between the first and second nights of the production and *why* it was a different experience.

#2. Performing in *Ad* with Earthfall, Rhondda Valley, Spring 2002.

Earthfall's production of *Ad* toured the UK and Europe in 2001 and 2002. For one particular performance near the end of the run, we visited the Rhondda Valley in Wales. As a performer, I did not enjoy this performance at all. My reflection is that I performed poorly. I have several key memories of the performance which all point towards it being a far from 'optimal' experience of performance.

Firstly, the mistakes I made were connected to the rhythm of the piece; I missed steps, or was out of time with a given section of movement. Throughout the piece, I felt, on a rhythmical level, that I was behind it, struggling to catch up, or moving too fast and arriving at a given moment too early. The sense I gained

was one of jarring. This occurred on several levels²: on a proprioceptive level, in the relationship between myself, my body and the choreography; on an interpersonal level, between myself and the other performers; and on a phenomenal level, between myself, the audience and the wider phenomenal environment of the theatre space. These relationships, whilst not severed, were somehow fractured and dysfunctional.

I experienced a clear sense of uncomfortable isolation from the performance event as a whole. Moreover, as my awareness of this discord became more acute, my self-awareness grew stronger and the sense of disconnectedness more pronounced. As a performer, the experience of isolation was intensely uncomfortable and I left the stage feeling miserable.

#3. Performing in *Zoo Story*, Bakewell Arts Festival, Summer 2008.

In the summer of 2008 a colleague and I staged and performed in a production of Edward Albee's *Zoo Story* as part of the Bakewell Arts Festival.³

In this play, there are only two characters, Jerry and Peter. I played Jerry. The first half of the piece contains a story told to Peter by Jerry, which Jerry calls

² In one particular section, a parody of John Travolta's disco dancing in the classic film *Saturday Night Fever*, I remember being acutely aware of my hands and feet. The placement of my feet, the angle of my arms and what my hands were doing became an overriding concern. I experienced a heightened state of self-consciousness, which caused me to experience a sense of distance between myself and appropriate control of my own body. It appeared to me in these moments that I did not know the performance score well enough to play with it freely. Consequently, I had to consciously concentrate upon what I was doing. This caused my movement to be a great and miserable effort towards a task that was momentarily out of my grasp. I could feel the performance score and my grip on it slipping away from me as my awareness and intentionality was directed towards the effort of attempting to control my body, rather than the act of simply doing the task at hand.

³ *Zoo Story* is set in Central Park in New York in 1953. The play focuses on the meeting of Jerry and Peter. Peter is a well-to-do gentleman with a 'perfect' lifestyle. He has a wife, two daughters, pets and a house. In short, he has the 'white picket fence' modern family life of the adverts; an archetypal picture of domesticity. He comes to the park bench to read on a Sunday. Jerry is his opposite. Jerry lives alone in a cramped room in a noisy, run-down, brownstone rooming house in the shabby Upper West Side tenements. He comes from a dysfunctional family background and a broken home. He is an edgy loner, a misfit, a social outcast.

'The Story of Jerry and the Dog'. This story consists of a monologue lasting some twenty minutes. The story tells of Jerry's relationship with his landlady's dog. He tells how the dog meets him in the entrance hall whenever he returns to his accommodation and always tries to bite him. Jerry retells to Peter his experience of attempting to kill the dog with burger meat laced with rat poison.

There are several observations I would like to make regarding my performance of this section of script that would appear to be useful in considering the idea of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'.

Firstly, during the performance, at the same time as being connected to the layers of fictive reality contained within the text, I could sense quite clearly where the audience were. I could feel their absorption in 'The Story of Jerry and the Dog'. By 'feel', I intend to mean that I recall being sensorially aware (as an actor rather than as a character) of the audience being near me as active recipients of the story within the domain of the performance space. I could sense the physical and phenomenal actuality of the audience and the performance space and was aware of the details of this domain that shifted from moment to moment, causing it to remain dynamic. I sensed that my 'awareness' gave the interaction between myself and my immediate environment a focused aliveness. I felt that this aliveness was arising from, and feeding, what I was doing. On reflection, the experience was overwhelmingly positive. During those moments of performance I felt supremely confident and capable, innately knowing that I could achieve the performance.

There were two distinct aspects to my knowing. Firstly, I experienced an ease of technique and control over the delivery of the story as an actor. Whilst the telling still required significant physical exertion, the task of maintaining the level of physical technique and nuance in performance became much easier. I felt that the level of detail the performance text required was 'on tap' and that whatever I needed to produce as an actor in the live moment of performance was at my fingertips when and as I called for it; the experience was a complete ease and naturalness of physical technique.

Secondly, and most profoundly, there was a feeling of interconnectedness of myself with everything around me in my phenomenal domain, in particular the audience. I felt my awareness had become somehow extended, or expanded beyond the reach of my everyday existence. I was aware of tiny details across the entire audience; an uncrossing or crossing of legs, someone shifting their weight in their seat, or a deep breath. I felt that there was an intuitive sense of communion with the audience and that above all I could sense them from the position of a listener, receptive to subtle changes.

A rationale emerges

In reflecting upon the examples given above of my own experience as a performer it would seem that an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer is at once recognisable (and desirable), and yet annoyingly elusive, intangible and fragile. Having conversed with numerous fellow performers on many occasions, performing across a number of genres, disciplines and idioms, it is clear to me that the desire to enter, or reach, an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance is near universal, yet the actions, foci and nature of

engagement of the performer necessary to work in this state are the subject of much discussion and debate. Running through each of the preceding short reflections upon my own practice are two central concerns that, together, form the rationale for the genesis of this study. These concerns relate to two areas of discourse surrounding 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance; firstly, the actions, or work, of the performer in reaching, a state of 'absorption' and secondly, the language used to articulate this state when linked to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. However, as the title of this study suggests, I recognise the complexity of these areas of discourse; whilst the study does not entirely resolve the concerns embedded in the rationale it represents my attempt to chip away at this area, to contribute to relevant discourse and, by focusing upon the idea of 'absorption', move one step closer to the articulation and understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the 'dance theatre' performer.

In this study, I have chosen to focus on developing understanding and articulation of the idea of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer working within 'dance theatre' for two reasons. Firstly, 'dance theatre' is an area in which I have worked as a performer, predominately in the period immediately following my training as an actor and as a dancer.⁴ However, I found approaching the genre of 'dance theatre' with the values and systems of rehearsal found within the popular pedagogies of twentieth-century actor training problematic when I placed them in combination with the technique of my dance training. This caused me to note that the

⁴ My first degree was training as an actor with a focus on ensemble and devised work. I also joined all of the technique classes for the degree in Contemporary Dance run in the Faculty of Performance at Bretton Hall College, University of Leeds, developing an interest in the body in performance. This interest gradually coalesced in my early career as a performer and more latterly as a practitioner. The focus of this career has been physical performance, and the physically orientated aspects of performance.

systems and means of approaching performance in both fields needed to somehow be adapted in this context, with significant elements of both aspects of training being knowingly disregarded or discarded at points. Moreover, I found that, whilst my theatre and dance trainings were useful within their own discipline, neither aspect of my training was entirely appropriate in helping me reach a desirable 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' when working within the particular context of 'dance theatre'. Since this point, my own engagement with further developments and discourse on the engagement of the actor has grown in tandem with developing an understanding of 'dance theatre' through a focus on the 'actual' within the domain of performance. These interests coalesce within this study.

Secondly, and relatedly, I wish to focus upon 'dance theatre' as it is an area of performance which has not been the focus of a study or a detailed and systematic explication of the notion of 'absorption' as a key aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. Whilst, as noted in the literature review to follow in this introduction, research focused upon various iterations and understandings of 'optimal' experience has been undertaken, little of significant detail or analytic depth has been written directly concerning the application of the wider concept of 'optimal' experience to the artistic endeavours of the 'dance theatre' performer. As will be discussed in detail later, the attendant theatrical conventions and performance frameworks experienced by an *actor* working in a *play* are significantly different from those experienced by a 'dance theatre' performer in the 'playspace'⁵ of the 'dance theatre' performance. 'Dance theatre', by definition, crosses and combines disciplines. Whilst the

⁵ 'Playspace' is a term I use deliberately in the context of 'dance theatre' performance and as such will be defined later in the study.

performative emphasis remains on the body as a primary locus of meaning and communication, the performance form can and does include spoken text and music in a variety of live and recorded forms. In commenting on *Tanztheater*, for example, Birringer finds an 'understanding of dance that formally transcends the limiting divisions into theatre of dance, voice or music' (Birringer, 1986: 96). Similarly, Murray and Keefe, in reflecting on the inherent tensions and meeting points within 'dance theatre' note that:

Twentieth-century dance theatre challenges the hegemony of dance as codified, technically accomplished, flowing, wordless movement. Here both the technical virtuosity (and narrative banality) of ballet and the aesthetic formalism of modern dance (dis) integrates into theatre, live art, performance, installation and song.

(Murray and Keefe 2007: 76)

As will be discussed in Chapter One, 'dance theatre' also incorporates an active engagement with the *mise-en-scène* of the 'playspace', which, in some more recent practices, and as the technology of theatrecraft has evolved, has included live manipulation of sound and filmic/digital projection and media. In keeping with these comments and observations, the study to follow encompasses an examination of performance material that, whilst falling under the auspices of 'dance theatre' practice as defined through the study, may also be predominately musical in character, or contain spoken text, or may contain a concentration on aspects of performance other than movement. Consequently, and as subsequent chapters will explore at length, the demands upon the 'dance theatre' performer also change. By posing and answering the questions

of the study within the specificity of the 'dance theatre' context, the study is able to ask new questions of performance and practice. It contributes not only additional material and insight to the related body of knowledge, but pertinently, material and insight which also benefits from a specificity of focus upon 'absorption' positioned as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the 'dance theatre' performer; in this respect, the study provides new perspectives to be brought to bear on the existing material.

As noted above, behind the study is a desire for a greater shared clarity and understanding of the language with which to encompass an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. As explored at the start of this introduction, the problem of appropriate language can be seen in the multitude of terms used to describe such a state of being (in performance). Whilst acknowledging the appropriateness of the poetic and the metaphorical within the language of experience, I recognise a need to frame this language with a more exacting, pragmatic language of practice useful to the 'dance theatre' practitioner.

Through the employment of a lexicon of terminology drawn from appropriate lenses and fields of study, and used in tandem with the language of Winnie the Pooh's 'Poetry and Hums', a more informed and developmental language can be developed. This can effectively talk about, explore and advance the practice and discourse surrounding the interdisciplinary phenomenon of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance. This strand of the rationale arises from my recognition of a need to further develop a shared understanding of such a state between 'dance theatre' practitioners, academics, performers and those engaged in wider discourse in the field of 'optimal' experiences. As practices and debates evolve with the continuing and growing cross-fertilisation between

the cognitive sciences and the performative arts, there is an ongoing need to proactively and communally draw upon these developments to inform and identify language for the performer which encourages and nurtures an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance. Furthermore, in support of this and wider interdisciplinary engagement, there is a need to employ a consistently effective language in discourse about this aspect of performance. My recognition of need here is not to imply a lack of expertise or knowledge within the community of 'dance theatre' practice, but simply to note that to date, this aspect of 'dance theatre' performance, and specifically the idea of 'absorption' for the performer, has not been examined in detail with the performer at the heart of the investigation.

Within the rationale for the study as defined above, there are key emphases and foci which, both individually and combined, represent, when realised, the acquisition of new knowledge and constitute several of the unique aspects of this project.

These are:

- 1) The concentration in Part One of the study on explicating an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' as applicable to 'dance theatre';
- 2) The focus in Part Two upon explicating the idea of the performer's 'absorption' as necessary to developing an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' within 'dance theatre'. This is achieved through examination of the actual work of the performer;
- 3) The focus upon developing a lexicon of terminology pertinent to 'absorption' and the wider notion of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for performers and

practitioners.

The points above, both individually and in combination, have potential to impact and inform future developments, practice and discourse in this area with respect to 'dance theatre' performance and performance studies.

Research questions

The primary research question has several facets, each of which poses a question, or set of questions, which contribute to the overall understanding of the idea of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in this context. There are questions surrounding the nature of 'dance theatre' in respect of the actions and work of the performer. There are questions interrogating the nature and locus of 'absorption' itself as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' within this context, and finally there are questions regarding the lenses, frames and methodologies employed in the study and their impact upon the language of the emerging discourse and the data of the study. The questions are as follows:

With respect to the historical genealogy of 'dance theatre', what are the performance conditions of the form that give rise to the possibility of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer?
(Addressed primarily in Chapter One)

How do selected aspects of the fields of phenomenology, consciousness studies and the cognitive sciences aid in developing an articulation and understanding of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of

being/doing' for the performer in 'dance theatre'? (Addressed primarily in Chapter Two)

How can the notions of 'flow' and 'play' contribute to developing an understanding of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer in 'dance theatre'? (Addressed primarily in Chapter Three)

What is the work of the 'dance theatre' performer in creating a state of 'absorption' for themselves in performance? (Addressed primarily in Chapters Four to Six)

How can the lenses and material of the study contribute to developing articulation of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the 'dance theatre' performer? (Addressed primarily in Chapter Seven)

The primary research question is revisited in the Conclusion.

Literature review

Having established a rationale for this study, and introduced the primary research question and its various facets, the next section of the introduction to this thesis is the literature review. Through the literature review, I highlight other pertinent research and thought on 'optimal' experience, and also those areas of performance practice and research with which this study is aligned.

Of the many terms noted earlier in the introduction that are used to describe 'optimal' experience, Csikszentmihalyi's term 'flow' is arguably the most widely and consistently used. Early applications of 'flow' include significant investigations of its use in the fields of education and work. In his PhD thesis of 2008, Jonathan James Wright provides a table listing a comprehensive, though not exhaustive, overview of studies and articles concerning research on 'flow'. The table encompasses the application of 'flow' to the fields of information technology, medicine, education, occupational science, sports sciences, work and leisure studies, music, and psychology linked with a number of other fields of study. Much of the writing and research on 'flow' and athletics or sports⁶ focuses largely (though not exclusively) on either measuring⁷, or establishing the presence of 'flow' in such activities, or examining the motivational aspects of 'flow' activity. So, whilst the relationship of 'flow' to the notion of creativity has also been well explored, there is very little of substantial detail written regarding 'flow' and its specific application in performance.⁸ A structured search of published PhD research on 'flow' as related to performance reveals surprisingly little.⁹ There is a study by Martin and Cutler (2002) involving theatre actors and the idea of 'flow'.¹⁰ However, this research focuses largely on the motivational elements of the concept with respect to the work of the actor. More recently,

⁶ For an expansive summary of research focused upon the study of 'flow' within specific areas of application, including sports and education, see Wright, J. J. (2008) *A phenomenological exploration of the process of optimal experiences*, PhD Thesis, University of Brighton, pp. 57-60.

⁷ In his PhD thesis, Wright explores various methodologies for measuring 'flow'. See, for example, item 2.14.3, p. 41.

⁸ See Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1996) *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*, New York: Harper Perennial.

⁹ Power, C. (2006) *Presence in play: A critique of theories of presence in the theatre*, PhD thesis, University of Glasgow.

Shacklock, K. J. (2006) *An investigation into the nature and development of dance consciousness in choreography and performance*, PhD Thesis, University of Leeds.

Van Zwanenberg, N. (2005) *Flow and individual differences: An investigation of flow and autotelic personality, the big five, internal locus of control and hypnotic susceptibility*, PhD Thesis, University of Newcastle upon Tyne.

Wright, J.J. (2008) *A phenomenological exploration of the process of optimal experiences*, PhD Thesis, University of Brighton.

¹⁰ See Martin, J. and Cutler, K. (2002) 'An exploratory study of flow and motivation in theater actors', *Journal of Applied Sports Psychology*, 14, pp. 344-352.

Marc Silberschatz has examined the correspondences and divergences between 'flow' and Stanislavsky's practices.¹¹

There is also a limited body of writing on 'flow' and the act of dancing, including research conducted with dancers by Csikszentmihalyi himself.¹² Of the studies noted by Wright, above, only one was concerned with dance; this examined dance from the perspective of a sporting activity, rather than a predominately artistic endeavour. Other studies of dance and 'flow' approach 'flow' or 'optimal' experience within dance from an educational perspective¹³, or that of performance training.¹⁴

In casting the net of the literature search more widely to draw upon a greater area of related topics and fields offering possibilities for explicating 'absorption', one is able to observe the coming together and interweaving of a number of disciplines and areas of research as applied to performance practice. These areas reflect the very interdisciplinary nature and locus of the phenomenon of 'optimal' experience and represent a meeting of these fields of study, which characterises current thinking and exploration of the phenomenon of performance and practice.

¹¹ Silberschatz, M. (2013) 'Creative state/flow state: Flow theory in Stanislavsky's practice', *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 29, no.1, pp. 13-22.

¹² Csikszentmihalyi's research with dancers is noted by Wright in his 2008 thesis: see p. 38.

¹³ See Bond, K. E. and Stinson S. W. (2000-2001) "'I feel like I'm going to take off!': Young people's experiences of the super-ordinary in dance", *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Winter), pp. 52-87; Hefferon, K.M. and Ollis, S. (2006) "'Just clicks": An interpretive phenomenological analysis of professional dancers' experience of flow', *Research in Dance Education*, vol. 7, no. 2 (December), pp. 141-159.

¹⁴ See Britton, J. (2010) 'The pursuit of pleasure', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, vol. 1(1), pp. 36-54.

Creely, E. (2010) 'Method(ology), pedagogy and praxis: A phenomenology of the pre-performative training regime of Phillip Zarrilli', *Theatre, Dance and Performance Training*, vol. 1 (2), pp. 214-228. Bracey, L. (2004), 'Voicing connections: An interpretive study of university dancers' experiences', *Research in Dance Education*, vol. 5, no. 1 (April), pp. 7-24.

Zarrilli, P. (2001) 'Negotiating performance epistemologies: Knowledges "about", "in" and "for"', *Studies in Theatre and Performance*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 31-46.

Part of this direction is noted in selected writing by Phillip Zarrilli. Zarrilli has significantly informed the study and discourse relating to the nature of and work of the phenomenon of performance, in particular of acting, by drawing upon, and drawing in, thought from within a number of fields. For the purposes of this study, and, in particular, the focus of this literature search upon understanding and identifying other writing and thought concerned with 'optimal' experience and the related fields of discourse, apprehending Zarrilli's multi-stranded contributions to the topic helps convey the scope of related interdisciplinary discourse. Pertinent to the focus of this study is his use of phenomenology as applied to the modelling of the actor's experience¹⁵, whilst his use of what he calls the "enactive" in positioning the actor¹⁶ also presents a viewpoint pertinent to the search for an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer within the context of 'dance theatre' (to be explored later in Chapter Two). Similarly, selected aspects of Zarrilli's contribution¹⁷ to the discourse on consciousness and performance¹⁸ and presence within performance¹⁹ also cover related territory in respect to the work of the performer.

As evidenced in Zarrilli's work, amongst the fields that the notion of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' may brush up against is the research area focusing upon presence in performance, an area which is itself a point of disciplinary

¹⁵ Zarrilli, P. B (2004) 'Toward a phenomenological model of the actor's embodied modes of experience', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 56, no. 4, pp. 653-666.

¹⁶ Zarrilli, P. B. (2007) 'An enactive approach to understanding acting', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 59, no. 4, pp. 635-647.

¹⁷ Zarrilli, P. B. (2011a) 'Altering consciousness in performance east and west', in Cardeña E. and Winkelman, M. (ed.) *Altering consciousness, volume 1: Multidisciplinary perspectives: History, culture, and the humanities*, Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger Publishers and ABC-Clio.

¹⁸ See in particular Meyer-Dinkgräfe, D. (ed.) (2007) *Consciousness, theatre, literature and the arts*, Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars Publishing and Chapters 1 and 3 in Meyer-Dinkgräfe, D. (2005) *Theatre and consciousness: Explanatory scope and future potential*, Bristol: Intellect, also Shacklock, K. J. (2006), *An investigation into the nature and development of dance consciousness in choreography and performance*, PhD Thesis, University of Leeds.

¹⁹ Zarrilli, P. B. (2011b) "...presence..." as a question and emergent possibility: A case-study from the performer's perspective, in Giannachi, G., Kaye, N. and Shanks, M. (ed.) *Archaeologies of presence: Acting, performance, being*, London: Routledge, 2011.

convergence. The idea of the actor developing presence in performance has long been approached by the interrelated pedagogies of western twentieth-century actor training²⁰ and more recently by practice-centric literature which continues to develop an understanding of the craft of the actor using Stanislavski-based approaches to performance and the actor's work with text as a foundation from which to progress.²¹

Whilst I acknowledge that the presence of the performer is not identical to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer, other developments in the discourse on presence as a field of study are useful to note in this review, as the discourse on presence contains points of intersection with the purpose of this study and its focus on 'absorption' for the performer. I note in particular the multi-stranded Presence Project, run at Exeter University from 2006-2009. This project produced and gave rise to a wide variety of outputs focused on discourses of presence in performance. Relatedly, the work of Giannachi and Kaye²² and more recently Giannachi, Kaye and Shanks²³ on presence also bears relevance to this study. Similarly, Bert O. States²⁴ and Jane Goodall²⁵ have also addressed the issues surrounding the actor and presence, with Andre Lepecki then drawing the discussions towards the dancer.²⁶

²⁰ See Hodge, A (2010) *Actor training*, Abingdon: Routledge, as an overview.

²¹ See, for example, Chekhov, M. and Powers, M. (2002) *To the actor*. Abingdon: Routledge; Donnellan, D (2005) *The actor and the target*, London: Nick Hern Books; Alfreds, M. (2007) *Freeing the actor*, London: Nick Hern Books.

²² Giannachi, G. and Kaye, N. (2011) *Performing presence: Between the live and the simulated*, Manchester: Manchester University Press.

²³ Giannachi, G., Kaye, N. and Shanks, M. (ed.) (2012) *Archaeologies of presence*, Abingdon: Routledge.

²⁴ States, B. O. (2002) 'The actor's presence: Three phenomenal modes' in Zarrilli, P.B. *Acting (Re) Considered*, 2nd edition, Abingdon: Routledge.

²⁵ Goodall, J. (2008) *Stage presence: The actor as mesmerist*, Abingdon: Routledge.

²⁶ Lepecki, A. (2004) *Of the presence of the body: Essays on dance and performance theory*, Middletown: Wesleyan University Press.

The cognitive sciences, and particularly recent developments in cognitive neuroscience, and their intersections with other fields already developed in the study of performance practice, also provide additional material for consideration in the literature review. Whilst these developments will be engaged with through the discourse of Chapter Two, as well as elsewhere in the study, in respect of the literature search for the thesis, it is useful to note the focus of Bruce McConachie and F. Elizabeth Hart's *Performance and cognition: Theatre studies and the cognitive turn* (2010), John Lutterbie's *Towards a general theory of acting: Cognitive science and performance* (2011), and the exploration of the specific cognitive activities of the actor to be found in Rick Kemp's *Embodied acting* (2012). Like the work on presence, noted above, these interventions focus upon the experience and/or work of the performer, locating the exploration of the work and processes of the performer as the key to the discourse.

Continuing and extending the focus of Kemp's publication, writing that explores embodied performance, and the experience of the performer within this idea, is also relevant to the explication of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer within this study by virtue of the emphasis it places on the body.

Writing in *Acting: Psychophysical phenomenon and process*, Rebecca Loukes (2013) explicitly employs the term 'embodied theatre(s)'.²⁷ Loukes uses the term "embodied" practices rather than physical theatre to describe work that uses the body as a primary site of both the making and performance of 'movement material' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 269). The writing on embodied performance characteristically draws upon an

²⁷ Zarrilli, P., Daboo, J. and Loukes, R. (2013) *Acting: Psychophysical phenomenon and process*, London: Palgrave Macmillan.

interdisciplinary field of knowledge encompassing aspects of phenomenology, consciousness studies and the previously noted intersections between neuroscience and performance, all of which are explored in Chapter Two.²⁸

Whilst Loukes does focus upon 'embodied' performance in relation to the fields of acting *and* dance, and it is also notable that there is a body of writing examining the experiences of the dancer,²⁹ significant focus in this area remains upon the actor, rather than the dancer. Similarly, whilst studies of 'optimal' experiences, and in particular Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow', have been used in relation to the work of the *actor*, no significant study of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', or within this, the idea of 'absorption', has been undertaken specifically in respect of the work and actions of the 'dance theatre' performer. Those studies focused upon both dance and 'optimal' experience have not focused explicitly, or systematically, upon analysis of the work and actions of the performer, but on documenting the personal experiences and reflections of the performer.³⁰ As noted at the start of this introduction, unpicking the personal felt experience of the performer is not a point of focus for this study. In the case of Hefferon and Ollis, the focus is upon 'optimal' experience as 'flow' rather than moving to incorporate any wider iterations of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'.³¹

²⁸ For instance: Mroz, D. (2011) *The dancing word: An embodied approach to the preparation of performers and the composition of performances*, New York: Rodopi.; Allegranti, B. (2011) *Embodied performances: Sexuality, gender, bodies*, Houndmills: Palgrave-Macmillan.; McCutcheon, J. R. and Sellers-Young, B. (ed.) (2013) *Embodied consciousness: Performance technologies*, Houndmills: Palgrave-Macmillan.

²⁹ For instance: Cooper Albright, A. and Gere, D. (ed.) (2003) *Taken by surprise: A dance improvisation reader*, Ravn, S (2009) *Sensing movement, living spaces: An investigation of movement based on the lived experience of 13 professional dancers*, VDM Verlag.; Highwater, J. (1997) *Dance: Rituals of experience*, 3rd edition, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁰ For instance: Bond, K. E. and Stinson, S. W. (2000 – 2001) "'I feel like I'm going to take off!": Young people's experiences of the super-ordinary in dance' *Dance Research Journal*, vol. 32, no. 2 (Winter), pp. 52-87.

³¹ Hefferon, K. M. and Ollis, S. (2006) "'Just clicks": An interpretive phenomenological analysis of professional dancers' experience of flow', *Research in Dance Education*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 141–159.

In a similar vein, whilst elements of the interdisciplinary framework of lenses employed within this study, including phenomenology, cognitive neuroscience and consciousness studies, have been used separately and in convergence to explore states of being for the performer in performance and the presence of the performer, they have not been specifically focused upon either 'dance theatre' or an examination of the work and actions of the 'dance theatre' performer in respect of the idea of 'absorption' as it relates to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. As noted earlier (and as will be elaborated later in Chapter One of the thesis), the performance framework of 'dance theatre' offers a set of performance conditions and characteristics aside to those of theatre. Consequently, consideration of 'absorption' as it relates to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' within this specific context should acknowledge these differences.

Given the points above, the focus of this study in exploring and developing an understanding of 'absorption' through detailed examination of the work and actions of the 'dance theatre' performer offers a new vein of knowledge. This new contribution complements the existing sources noted in this literature review by extending the research in this area with new insights and by focusing on the particular practices of the 'dance theatre' genealogy. In drawing upon this body of knowledge, the thesis sits well with both the current and expanding use of interdisciplinary lenses in performance research.

Relatedly, there has been no detailed study of 'absorption' as it relates to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', which uses the work of Bausch, DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre as its primary research material. Though Bausch and DV8 have a substantial body of research material focused upon their work, with

Vincent Dance Theatre currently subject of a less expansive body of research, to date none of this research has focused in any sustained detail upon using the work of the performer to develop an understanding of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre'. Similarly, there has been no focus upon using these companies to develop the same understanding in the wider canon of 'dance theatre'.

Given the current body of literature and research focused on Vincent Dance Theatre, it is also useful at this stage in the literature review to highlight the manner in which the study contributes new material to the field through the content focused specifically upon the work of Vincent Dance Theatre and Charlotte Vincent. Whilst the coverage, documentation and discourse surrounding the work of Bausch, Newson and DV8 is prolific to say the least, the same body of literature does not currently accompany the work of Vincent Dance Theatre. In reflecting upon Charlotte Vincent as a practitioner, Dr Paul Johnson notes that whilst Vincent's work has been analysed to some extent, it has not been the subject of 'extensive academic enquiry' (Johnson 2012: 4) or documentation.³² The extent to which the work of Vincent Dance Theatre has been analysed is manifest largely in examinations of thematic content or in discussion of individual pieces. The notable exception to this is arguably Johnson himself, as analysis of Vincent's work formed part of his doctoral study. Sections of the 2012 publication that evolved, in part, from this initial study examine Vincent Dance Theatre's work through the analytical category of play as espoused by Hans-Georg Gadamer, whilst also drawing heavily upon the implementation of quantum physics as a framework for performance analysis.³³

³² At time of writing, Johnson is currently Head of Drama Department and Principal Lecturer at the University of Wolverhampton.

³³ Johnson, Paul (2012) *Quantum theatre: Science and contemporary performance*, Newcastle: CSP.

Given these points, the content and focus of this study presents a useful and detailed addition to current knowledge and research materials in two key areas. Firstly, the canon of Vincent Dance Theatre has not been examined with the aim of developing an understanding of 'absorption' as it relates to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer, nor has it been analysed for this purpose with the framework of interdisciplinary lenses used in this study.³⁴

Secondly, the chapter of this study focused upon Vincent Dance Theatre will reference and include personal material I shot during rehearsal and performances within the period of field research. This will be supplemented by first-hand information from personal interviews and interactions with the performers and Vincent herself. To date, none of this material has been published, or made publicly available. Inclusion of this material in the service of the aims of the wider thesis again represents a unique strand to the investigation and a point where the study contributes new material and data to the related fields.

As a final point within this literature search, it is useful to note the current movements in the format and presentation of published research and academic work that is similarly focused upon performance practice. With the developments in audio-visual technologies, in particular the relative ease and lack of expense with which a practitioner is now able to audio-visually record, edit and present their practice, the ability of performance research to effectively incorporate a visual element into the final presentation of information has improved in the last decade. There are a growing number of titles focused upon

³⁴ Whilst Johnson does use the concept of play in his analysis of the Vincent Dance Theatre's work, his research is written from a different perspective and positioning of play, and undertaken for a different purpose to that of this study.

performing arts practice, which incorporate audio-visual material in the format of an accompanying DVD, or DVD-ROM. Broadly, these fall into two primary categories. Firstly is the category concerned with practical instruction.³⁵

Alongside this is the category presenting academic research in for the purposes of informing a given field or area of study.³⁶

In addition to these formats is the purely digital archive of performance work most commonly seen through the websites of performance companies.³⁷ The ubiquity of YouTube also provides a rich source of open access material from which to work.³⁸ Digital archives of performance material are also formally curated and developed by institutions and organisations. A prominent example of such a resource is found in the University of Exeter's archive of performance and practice material, Exeter Digital Archives.³⁹ This archive offers a moving image resource for performance practice research.⁴⁰

In alignment with the practices above, this thesis presents both a written element and an accompanying DVD-ROM containing material intended to be viewed in tandem with the written component. As an aside, it is pertinent to note that in earlier versions of this thesis, I envisaged the final presentation to be in an entirely digital format that blended the audio-visual element and the moving

³⁵ For instance: Carey, D. and Clark Carey, R. (2008) *Vocal arts: Workbook and DVD*, London: A and C Black Publishers; Churcher, M. (2011) *A screen acting workshop*, London: Nick Hern Books; Hodge, A. (2013) *Core training for the relational actor (DVD/Pap edition)*, Abingdon: Routledge.

³⁶ For instance: Allain, P. (2009) *The theatre practice of tadashi suzuki: A critical study with DVD examples*. London: Methuen Drama, A and C Black Publishers; Zarrilli, P. B. (2009) *Psychophysical acting: An intercultural approach after Stanislavski*, Abingdon: Routledge; Ley, G. and Dadswell, S. (ed.) (2012) *British South Asian theatres: A documented history (DVD/Pap edition)*, Exeter: University of Exeter Press.

³⁷ www.vincentdt.com and www.dv8.co.uk were extensively used in this study and provide clear examples of promotional archiving of practice for information and study.

³⁸ www.youtube.com All of the content focused upon DV8 and Pina Bausch on the DVD ROM accompanying the written element of this thesis was sourced from YouTube.

³⁹ See <http://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/drama/research/projects/eda/>

⁴⁰ It is interesting to note that the Exeter Digital Archives have been curated by Peter Hulton. Hulton was also the author of the DVDs accompanying the 2009 publications by Allain and by Zarrilli. I was fortunate enough to be able to consult Hulton in considering the methodology and mode of documentation in preparation for the field work of this study concerned with documentation of Vincent Dance Theatre.

image with the written content. This presentational structure proved too complicated and issue-laden for the scope and purposes of this work to be presented as a formal PhD thesis. However, consideration of this format as a potential evolution of the current format of submission, which sees the printed title accompanied by a DVD-ROM, may be considered in the future when developing published work arising from this formal presentation.

Methodology

Having now completed the literature review, the next section of the introduction firstly outlines the methodology created for the study, and secondly, draws out relevant points and contextualises them in light of its various influences. As has been noted in previous sections of this introduction, the phenomenon of 'absorption' and indeed the wider notion of 'optimal' experience itself is intrinsically human. The nature of 'dance theatre', the nature of the key lenses of the study outlined in the framework above, and the very nature of the idea of 'absorption' within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in this context challenge the pertinence of a positivistic, reductionist approach to research in this area at a foundational level.⁴¹ Consequently the focus and locus of the investigation demands a flexible research methodology which is both aligned with the human sciences and which embraces the fundamentally interdisciplinary nature of the study.⁴²

⁴¹ This rejection has roots in the thought of Husserl, one of the founders of the phenomenological movement, which sought to validate an alternative view the research practices of the natural sciences; 'Husserl observes that the natural science's tremendous progress, including a burgeoning technology, led to a totalisation of natural science as a governing ideal and the view that the natural sciences had a general superior method to attain truth [...] it is characterized by a main definition of science as the practice of that general method, based in mathematics. Everything else is, per definition, unscientific' (Dahlberg *et al.* 2001: 30).

⁴² The distinction between human science (*Geisteswissenschaften*), and natural, or physical sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*), is often attributed to Wilhelm Dilthey, a key figure in the field of hermeneutics and the development of the human sciences in the nineteenth century (Van Manen: 1990). In opposition to the positivistic stance of the researcher in the natural sciences, a detachment of the human sciences researcher to the subject is not sought after as a means of ensuring quantitative, objective, valid data. Instead the researcher seeks to knowingly immerse themselves in the environment or domain of the

The following actions represent the key stages in the research method employed in the study.

1. The primary analytical lenses of the study are established as appropriate to exploring the idea of 'absorption' within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' within 'dance theatre'.
2. Field research with Vincent Dance Theatre commences following agreement of parameters and ownership of material with Charlotte Vincent. This research focuses on documentation of the devising and rehearsal journey for *If We Go On*.

The fieldwork focused upon Vincent Dance Theatre was generated over a ten-week period, with documentation of the work of the company occurring over seven days during that period. Each day followed a similar structure. It consisted of me arriving at the space at the same time as the company and then observing the creative process for the remainder of the day, taking breaks when the company broke. The process was documented using a combination of a digital stills camera, a handheld digital video camera and a hardcopy note pad. All digital material was downloaded shortly after each day. I also filmed any interviews I was permitted to run; these were short in nature and usually

subject, to experience it in order to reflect upon it and know it. Van Manen explains that 'since to know the world is profoundly to be in the world in a certain way, the act of researching-questioning-theorizing is the intentional act of attaching ourselves to the world, to become more fully part of it, or better to become the world (Van Manen 1990: 5). In describing the endeavours of the human science researcher, Van Manen suggests that, in simple terms, the thing being investigated in human sciences is "persons" or beings that have "consciousness" and that "act purposefully" in and on the world by creating objects of meaning that are "expressions" of how human beings exist in the world' (Van Manen 1990: 4).

squeezed into breaks and *ad hoc* pauses in the devising journey as the performers became available.

3. Following the period of documentary field research, further examples of performance work taken from either live performance, or from performance work specifically staged for the camera were collated for the other companies under study. This extant research material was all sourced from YouTube and was in the public domain.
4. This material was drawn together with the documentary material from Vincent Dance Theatre and then grouped and edited by the company. This resulted in a number of video files, each addressing specific aspects of practice from one or more of the companies profiled. Emerging themes of practice were identified and then highlighted through the addition of an audio commentary edited over the recorded image. In addition to inclusion of previously unpublished material on Vincent Dance Theatre, the particular selection and presentation of primary research material from each of the three companies, which synthesises new documentary evidence and extant material newly presented, represents a unique feature of the study. The format and presentation of this material as narrated thematic video constitutes newly-formed material, offering fresh perspectives and a new contribution to the knowledge in the field.
5. These video files are positioned as accompanying material to this thesis. This material is firstly interrogated during the company-specific discourse of Chapters Four to Six. These chapters provide an initial analysis of the

material, highlighting and signposting content that is then revisited again in the analysis of Chapter Seven. The analysis of Chapter Seven builds on that of Chapters Four to Six by focusing in on the research material at a finer level of detailed scrutiny.

Research methodology: Key characteristics, influences and practices

The use of the methodology above, and within it, the particular blend of methodological approaches from human sciences, combined with a framework of interdisciplinary lenses aligned to those sciences, provides a viewpoint and focus to the study in respect of addressing the primary research question which positions it as unique. Whilst, as noted in the literature review, there are a number of studies approaching the analysis of performance from a phenomenological perspective, detailed explication of 'absorption' with the particular aims of this study has not been carried out in the field of 'dance theatre' using the interdisciplinary methodology outlined.

In constructing the interdisciplinary research methodology outlined above, three key models of enquiry were drawn upon. These are - in no particular order - ethnography, hermeneutics and phenomenology. The methodology of the study has drawn key characteristics from the traits and emphases within these models of enquiry, which invite discussion and clarification here: reflexivity, interpretation, and inter-subjective validation and bracketing, or *epoche*. As each facet of the approach taken is clarified, it is supported by specific instances and examples of practice taken from the study.

Reflexivity

Recognising ‘absorption’ as part of a dynamic state of being for the performer, and recognising the performer as being embedded in the domain of the devising, rehearsal and performance environment, required the practical execution of research to remain entirely responsive and sensitive to the fluctuation of the research environment and its conditions. This aspect of field research was heavily influenced by conversation with Peter Hulton regarding performance and rehearsal documentation using recorded media as a means of documentation.⁴³ Hulton conveyed a conceptual framework for fieldwork, subsequently adopted in the documentary aspect of fieldwork for this study. In acknowledging issues related to the politics of perception, the framework outlines the fundamentals of appropriate engagement through the use of four letters and words as signifiers of behavioural modes and reminders for the researcher. I have translated his description of the nature of engagement as follows in the table in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2. A conceptual framework for fieldwork

Letter and word	Attributes
A - Alignment	When working in the field the researcher must strive to sensitively align themselves with the moment of action. This indicates the need for the researcher to operate in a manner that facilitates a heightened awareness of the event and develop the capacity to ‘listen’ with their whole being across all the senses.
I - Individual	The researcher must work as an individual. It is not possible to be documenting and not operating as an individual/not being individuated. The acknowledgement that the researcher’s work is, in itself, a moment of creation and endeavour places the recognition of one’s self and one’s creative signature at the heart of the act of documentation.

⁴³ At the time of writing, Peter Hulton is the curator of the Exeter Digital Archives at the University of Exeter.

P - Performative	The act of documentation is performative. Through it, the researcher also presents themselves. Again, this is an acknowledgement that the self of the researcher is central to the act of documentation.
P – Projective	As the researcher documents the events and happenings, they are necessarily having to think projectively towards the event they are documenting. Underlying this is the relationship of this event to the researcher’s awareness of the intended audience and purpose behind the documentation. This projected awareness will inform every decision of form, content and realisation during the process of documentation. When one engages this awareness, one will then be appropriately aligned with the event taking place, and ideally be there to capture it accordingly.

Drawing upon the framework for engagement provided by Hulton (in particular the ‘A’ or ‘Alignment’ of the framework), the necessary reflexivity of the research methodology was foregrounded during the portion of field research undertaken with Vincent Dance Theatre. This reflexivity also drew heavily upon the sensitivities to the research environment found in ethnographic field research. These sensitivities will typically see the researcher ‘participating, overtly or covertly in people’s daily lives for an extended period of time’ (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 1). Immersion in the field at this level, overtly or covertly, requires a reactive stance to be adopted by the ethnographer. He/she is necessarily involved in a dynamic relationship with the environment and its subjects that does not permit a divorced, detached and fixed positivistic stance. We are constantly ‘being-in-the-world’;⁴⁴ engaged in a multi-layered live interaction with all around us. Wolcott notes that, ‘[f]ieldwork involves, (literally) research in which the numbers are small, the relationships complex and nothing occurs the same way twice. The artistic challenge is to preserve, convey and

⁴⁴ This is a term closely associated with Heideggerian phenomenology. It will be revisited at length in Chapter Two.

celebrate that complexity' (Wolcott 1995: 19). My documentation of Vincent Dance Theatre over the period noted above culminated in me documenting the premiere of *If We Go On* at the end of this period. Over these ten weeks, whilst in the rehearsal space, I exercised an approach of minimum impact: I aimed to capture the extant 'culture' in description, working as an observer. Hammersley and Atkinson state that 'the social world should be studied in its "natural" state, undisturbed by the researcher. Hence "natural" not "artificial" settings like experiments or formal interviews should be the primary source of data' (Hammersley and Atkinson 1995: 6).

However, whilst I endeavoured to take the approach of minimum impact during this portion of field research, I also necessarily acknowledged the unavoidable effect of my presence in the room. Inevitably, I was related to, part of, and interacting with, the research environment. This again calls for explicit reflexivity in the methodological approach: 'In its most transparent guise, reflexivity expresses researchers' awareness of their necessary connection to the research situation and hence their effects upon it' (Davies 1999: 8). The reflexivity of the approach and my stance as a researcher in that particular environment was crucial for ensuring that any knowledge generated or gained is placed within frameworks that 'fully acknowledge and utilize subjective experience [of the researcher] as an intrinsic part of research' (Davies 1999: 5).

My reflexivity, and awareness of my personal contribution and effect on the shaping of both the research environment and the resulting research data and material, position the act of field research in this instance as an act of perception and interpretation. The act of perception and interpretation in this

context centres upon my observation and experience of the performer's actions. As noted earlier in this introduction, I am not attempting to externally identify the performer's felt experience of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance. Instead, as an experiencer/observer, I am aiming to point towards the constitution and formation of 'absorption' within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' through examination and analysis of the work of the 'dance theatre' performer. Consequently, working as an experiencer/observer in the research environment of the rehearsal studio, I necessarily employed Hulton's 'A' or Alignment, continually interpreting stimuli across a number of levels, with these interpretations shifting in flux with the changing environment as events unfolded in a continuous stream. Issues surrounding interpretation also stand at the very heart of hermeneutic philosophy, and, through the concept of lifeworld research, within the relationship of the methodology to phenomenological research traditions.⁴⁵

Interpretation

By positioning the act of interpretation as key to the interdisciplinary methodology of the study, my stance was again informed by dimensions of Hulton's framework as I consciously employed the 'I' or 'Individual' and the 'P' or 'Performative' whilst working in the live space. Centralising the act of interpretation as a valid source of research information and data also draws upon hermeneutic traditions. Hermeneutics positions interpretation not as an isolated activity but as the basic structure of human experience: 'The essence of human understanding is hermeneutic; that is, our understanding of the

⁴⁵ 'Human science research in general seeks to understand lifeworld meanings, for example in our everyday experiences, meanings that are often implicit, "tacit" or taken for granted. Reflective lifeworld research in particular seeks to know how the implicit and the tacit becomes explicit and can be heard, and how the assumed becomes problematized and reflected upon' (Dahlberg 2008: 37).

everyday world is derived from our interpretation of it' (Dahlberg *et al.* 1990: 73). Hermeneutics 'is the process of deciphering which moves from manifest content to the hidden or latent meaning of the equivocal symbols in a text or statement' (Dahlberg *et al.* 1990: 80-81). However, whilst the centrality of interpretation within the study may be akin to hermeneutics, the *nature* of this interpretation borrows more from a phenomenological standpoint with respect to developing an understanding of 'absorption' in the work of the 'dance theatre' performer. Whilst the engagement of the performer in 'dance theatre' may be engagement with an endeavour which is, on one level, symbolic, the central focus of this study does not lie in the interpretation of this symbolic text, or with the thematics of any given piece. In pursuit of an understanding of 'absorption', I am attempting to interpret the *phenomenological* text of 'dance theatre' performance. Key to my hermeneutically-influenced interpretation is, firstly, the acknowledgement that the act of interpretation is an inscribed act⁴⁶ and, secondly, stemming from this, a socially constructivist⁴⁷ notion that perception⁴⁸ is at the centre of the inscribed act of interpretation.

⁴⁶ Christopher Balme notes that 'dance, because it is so centred on the body, can and does stress how bodies transgress and critique social codes. The body is certainly a highly coded entity: it is determined by gender and ethnicity, by age and history' (2008: 165). The various analysis and readings of dance seek to construct meaning(s) by situating the work within cultural, social and historical perspectives. Layers of meaning are derived from an act of interpretation which addresses performance activity using selected lenses and critical perspectives. Colin Counsell notes that, 'first, the spectator must possess particular social knowledges [and] second the spectator must be active in the process of decoding, employing not only the necessary knowledges, but the required interpretative strategies' (2001: 177).

⁴⁷ The intrinsically human nature of the phenomenon of optimal experience points towards what Creswell when referencing ethnographic research, terms as 'socially constructed knowledge claims' (2008). This (socially) constructivist approach to research holds that, 'individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experiences [...] these meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for complexity of views rather than narrowing meanings into a few categories or ideas. The goal of research then, is to rely as much as possible on the participants' views of the situation being studied' (Creswell 2003: 8).

⁴⁸ Alva Noë suggests our powers of perception are informed and, in a sense, regulated by that which we 'know how to do'; our own experience plays a defining role in our perception of events, objects, people and occurrences. Inherent in this concept is the sense that our experience is, *de facto*, culturally inscribed. Consequently perception is, in the widest sense of the term, a politically informed action. This is echoed by Iser: 'As we cannot perceive without preconception, each percept makes sense to us only if it is processed, for pure perception is quite impossible. Hence dyadic interaction is not given by nature, but arises out of an interpretative activity which will contain a view of others and unavoidably an image of ourselves' (Counsell 2001: 180).

Crucially, in adopting this constructivist approach to interpretation, the results arise from an examination of what *is* which acknowledges and values the personal position of the researcher. It is the qualitative field data that generates meaning and this meaning is the socially, culturally and personally constructed perception through which I undertake the act of interpretation.

This approach has particularly impacted upon the research design at two key points; firstly, during the field research with Vincent Dance Theatre, and secondly, in the point at which I selected the recorded performance material for inclusion on the DVD-ROM (both the material from each profiled company which is currently in the public domain, and that which I have shot and recorded myself). Both these points have eventually shaped the resulting DVD-ROM accompanying this study. In considering these eventual artefacts and the process by which they were created, I am presented with the absolute necessity of recognising the presence and impact of my 'inscribed' self upon the constitution of the presented material. Whether this is manifest in the context of the live rehearsal or performance documentation, or in the consideration of mediated performance material I experience via a screen and select for inclusion, my presence and my interaction with the material is inescapable. At both of the key points of impact noted here, the criteria, or method, by which I select material have been affected by phenomenological, hermeneutic and constructivist modes of interpretation. Again echoing Hulton's advice, I adopt an approach combining the phenomenological field of lifeworld research and the sensibilities of ethnographic research which reject a prescriptive method in favour of a sensitised and aware understanding and handling of the relevant

material;⁴⁹ ‘the lifeworld cannot be reached through method, but rather met in an open way of approach’ (Dalberg *et al.* 2001: 76). Commenting on experience of fieldwork, Wolcott imparts the following advice: ‘Behind every strategy or technique employed in fieldwork there needs to be sound human judgement – an artistic decision guided in large measure by what passes as ordinary courtesy and common sense’ (Wolcott 1995: 86). Similarly to Hulton, the use of intuition implicit in Wolcott’s artistry advocates a methodology at the heart of which is a creative act of engagement. During the field research this has been manifest at a fundamental level in my work, affecting key choices in documentation. For example, it resulted in a very early decision to work in the studio from a single camera which would not be fixed, but which would look where I looked from moment to moment throughout each day. The interpretative act affects moment-to-moment choices: Where do I point the camera? What do I focus upon? What do I ignore and ‘edit out’ in the practice of documentation? The act of interpretation has also been the driver in the eventual selection of material for the DVD-ROM, particularly given the pointed fact that, given the very nature of ‘absorption’, it does not ‘look’ or ‘appear’ any one particular way.

Intersubjective validation and bracketing

In carrying out field research, there is a danger that the necessary and inherent subjectivity of the researcher (whilst acknowledged in the research) will result in research data that is personalised to the extent that the data becomes useless

⁴⁹ Writing at a time when the positivism of the natural sciences cast doubts of authenticity over those approaches that did not follow similar patterns, Dilthey sought to argue for a formulation and method for hermeneutic enquiry, arguably to manifest the very sense of authenticity and rigour the human sciences appeared to lack. It appeared necessary for human sciences to formulate ‘proper’ methods in order to stand at the same ‘level’ as the natural sciences. However, Hans-Georg Gadamer argued against this in *Truth and method*, ([1960]). Jean Grondin notes: ‘To Gadamer it seemed much more appropriate [...] to trace the human sciences back to something like tact or an unmethodizable “*je ne sais quoi*” [...] In this sense *Truth and method* aptly described as a fundamental critique of the obsession with method that typified those concerned with the scientificity of the human sciences’ (Grondin 1994:109).

and invalid. Intersubjective validation is one means by which the subjectivity of the processes can be counteracted: 'It is to the extent that my experiences could be our experiences that the phenomenologist wants to be aware of certain experiential meanings' (Van Manen 1990: 57). It is in the fieldwork focused upon Vincent Dance Theatre that I was able, to some extent, to draw upon this particular methodological tool, confirming my perceptions of the core material presented in the DVD-ROM of the study with conversation and interviews where possible. However, I note that the desire to confirm my own perceptions of material witnessed in the rehearsal studio was also balanced with several competing elements in the live and somewhat changeable environment of the devising and rehearsal process. Firstly, the particular schedule and availability of the performers, and my desire to impact as little as possible upon the activities of the rehearsal room meant that scheduling interviews in an ordered manner and maintaining a consistency of setting and duration for these interviews was not possible. Secondly, I was unable to review, select, edit or share the material with the performers before talking with them about their reflections on an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. Consequently, I chose not to rely on this methodological tool alone, but to combine it with 'bracketing' (Creswell 2003) a means by which the self of the researcher is appropriately recognised and situated within the body and development of research material. In the documentation of Vincent Dance Theatre, it was here yet again that I drew upon Hulton's advice in thinking 'P' or 'Projectively' towards the events I am documenting with an awareness of the intended audience and purpose behind the documentation. This projected awareness informed decisions during the process of documentation. Inherent in this phenomenologically-orientated approach is Husserl's dictum of going 'back

to things themselves'.⁵⁰ In pursuit of this, it is necessary for one to place oneself appropriately in relation to the phenomena as it is experienced. In the desire of the researcher to reach an appropriate understanding of the phenomena being investigated, all assumptions and pre-understandings must be acknowledged and explicated. Within this interdisciplinary methodology, my own experiences of performance and in particular of 'dance theatre' have led me to ask questions of this experience and to try, through engaging others in these questions, and through examining pertinent practices, to attempt to understand one particular facet of these experiences, namely the idea of 'absorption'. However my past experiences form my personal presuppositions regarding this topic.⁵¹ Therefore, I must firstly bracket and acknowledge them and secondly, in phenomenological terms, I must go one stage further and, in examining these phenomena, turn my back on myself and my experiences and revisit the 'things themselves'.

Moustakas indicates this orientating of oneself as placing oneself in a framework whereby '[t]he everyday understandings, judgements and knowings are set aside, and phenomena are revisited freshly, naively, in a wide open sense' (Moustakas 1994: 33).

This phenomenological influence within the methodology of the study has again impacted upon how I selected and grouped material for the DVD-ROM and also, in a synthesis of positions in relation to the phenomenon of 'absorption', how I analyse that material in Chapter Seven. In both instances, I have necessarily acknowledged my own intuitive thoughts and perceptions of the material, and then revisited the material by going back to the action of the selected clips. I have examined this, as far as possible, by returning to the

⁵⁰ Husserl's notion will be revisited in the work of Chapter Two.

⁵¹ Sondra Horton Fraleigh notes that, 'Phenomenology has the task of studying embodied experience; thus my own first person voice enters into my own work' (2000: 56).

actual action, the tasks of the performers, and the substance of the phenomenal setting within which this action occurs.⁵²

Outline of thesis

To answer the primary research question in all its facets, the study searches for answers through a suite of interdisciplinary lenses appropriate to the explication of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'. The final section of the introduction outlines this framework, highlights the key lenses and explains the structure of the study.

Chapter One: 'Dance theatre' and 'absorption': Conditions of the form

Chapter One addresses the following facet of the primary research question:

With respect to the historical genealogy of 'dance theatre', what are the performance conditions of the form that give rise to the possibility of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer?

To address this question effectively, the chapter clarifies what the study means by the term 'dance theatre', drawing this phrase away from a generalised 'catch-all' definition that might relate to a wide variety of 'dance theatre' practices and towards an understanding focused on a specific genealogical line. The chapter establishes the lineage and genealogy of the form by exploring in detail the context and content of *Ausdruckstanz*, arguably the primary *imprimatur* of 'dance theatre'. The genealogy is then extended through

⁵² Like all other understanding, phenomenological reflection asks us to recall and revisit experience. As we are culturally rooted and orientated beings, our perception and interpretation of experience is culturally and historically thematised in its origins. Therefore any reflections and extractions of phenomenological essences, even if in direct reaction against this cultural inscription, has it 'hardwired' into its composition.

contextual discussion of *Tanztheater* and Bausch, DV8 and finally Vincent Dance Theatre. These companies and practitioners have been chosen because of the various manners in which their practices draw upon, reinvent and rearticulate the characteristics and traits of *Ausdruckstanz*. By assembling the genealogy through examination of the context of each iteration of 'dance theatre', the chapter establishes an understanding of the form and identifies primary performance conditions relevant to the idea of 'absorption' for the performer in this context. The chapter also identifies words and phrases that contribute to a developing lexicon of terminology used in analysis.

Chapter Two: 'Absorption' and an 'optimal' 'mode of 'being/doing':

Phenomenology, consciousness studies and the cognitive sciences

Across Chapters Two and Three, I identify the key lenses and concepts of the study, signposting and contextualising the company-specific discourse and research material of Chapters Four, Five and Six, and the analytical content of Chapter Seven. Chapter Two is primarily engaged in addressing the following facet of the primary research question:

How do selected aspects of the fields of phenomenology, consciousness studies and the cognitive sciences aid in developing an articulation and understanding of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer in 'dance theatre'?

To address this question effectively, the chapter examines selected aspects from the key lenses of phenomenology, consciousness studies and the cognitive sciences, moving through aspects of these fields pertinent to

'absorption' and 'dance theatre'. Encountered in this order, a 'narrative' of lenses appears through which to view the work of the companies and practitioners profiled in Chapters Four, Five and Six. The chapter is introduced through discussion of the 'enactive' view, placing this in relation to the particular conditions of 'dance theatre' established in Chapter One. The chapter then draws together this discussion by identifying key areas of focus, establishing them alongside the lenses as part of the developing framework of articulation and analysis to be used in the later chapters of the thesis. Similarly to Chapter One, this chapter also highlights words and phrases that contribute to the growing lexicon of terminology to be used in the analysis in Part Two of the thesis.

Chapter Three: 'Flow', 'play', and 'absorption'

Chapter Three is primarily engaged in addressing the following facet of the primary research question:

How can the notions of 'flow' and 'play' contribute to developing an understanding of 'absorption' as a necessary aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer in 'dance theatre'?

To address this effectively, Chapter Three draws together Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' with notions of 'play', and relates these together to inform an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the 'dance theatre' performer. Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' and the idea of 'play' are brought together in this chapter because of the particular manner in which the two concepts relate

to, and encompass, the idea of 'absorption'. A summary of Part One of the study is given at the end of this chapter.

Chapters Four to Six

Together these chapters are primarily engaged in addressing the following facet of the primary research question:

What is the work of the 'dance theatre' performer in creating a state of 'absorption' for themselves in performance?

In these chapters, as a means of introducing themes to be expanded in the detailed analysis of Chapter Seven, I focus upon the examination of performance practice from Pina Bausch, DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre. Foregrounding the work of the performer, each chapter analyses the pertinent aspects of one company, drawing upon and developing the lexicon of terminology to do this. This examination draws upon the social, cultural and political contextual introduction to the practices of each company given in Chapter One.

The written elements of Chapters Four, Five and Six are accompanied by audio-visual material on DVD-ROM. The written discourse draws upon and highlights sections of the filmic material, which is also then referenced in the analysis of Chapter Seven and the Conclusion to the study.

Chapter Four – Pina Bausch.

Chapter Five – Lloyd Newson and DV8.

Chapter Six – Charlotte Vincent and Vincent Dance Theatre.

Chapter 7 – Analysis

This chapter addresses the following facet of the primary research question:

How can the lenses and material of the study contribute to developing articulation of ‘absorption’ as a necessary aspect of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’ for the ‘dance theatre’ performer?

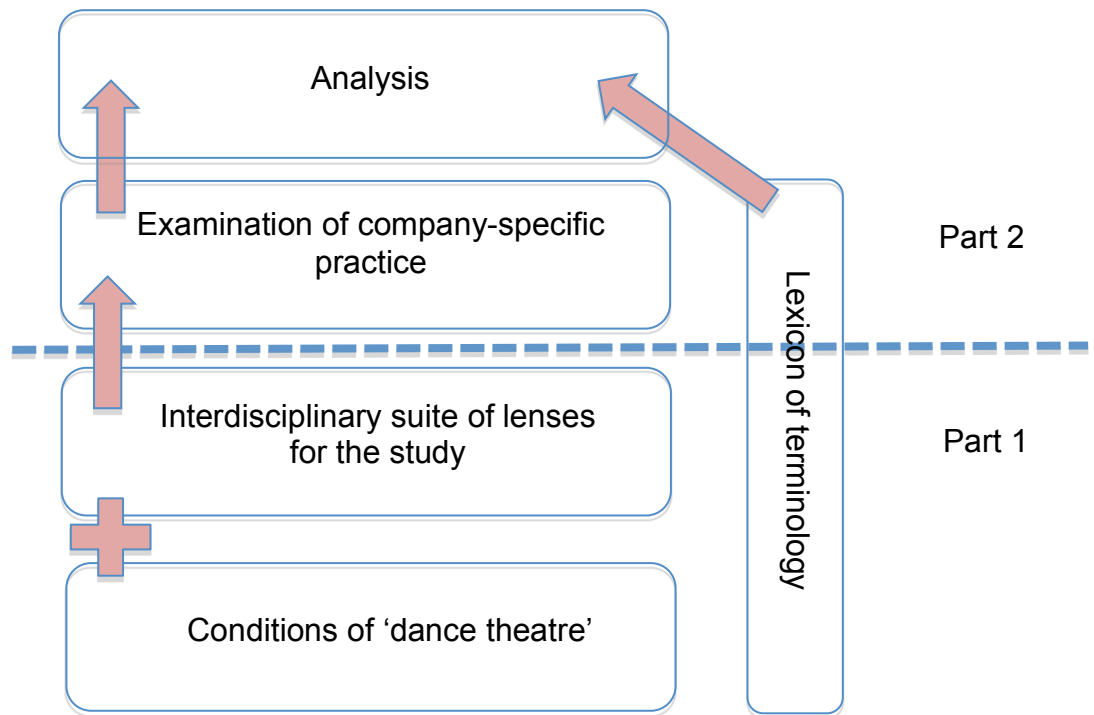
To address this question effectively, the chapter revisits the footage contained within the DVD-ROMs accompanying Chapters Four, Five and Six, extending the analysis and discussion of Chapters Four to Six in relation to the development of an understanding of ‘absorption’ for the performer. This analysis and examination utilises the lexicon of terminology developed in Part One of the thesis. It attempts to draw out the commonalities of ‘absorption’ for the performer in these ‘dance theatre’ companies.

Conclusion

The Conclusion revisits the primary research question, drawing together the strands of the study in identifying what ‘absorption’ is for the performer in ‘dance theatre’ and discussing and evaluating the language of the study in respect of this understanding. The study concludes by identifying and signposting ongoing points of enquiry and possible routes forward.

To conclude the introduction, a diagrammatic summary of the structure for the study is shown below:

Fig. 3. Thesis structure



Chapter One: 'Dance theatre' and 'absorption': Conditions of the form

This chapter has several aims. Firstly, the chapter aims to clarify what is intended by the term 'dance theatre'. To do this, the chapter initially examines the genealogical roots of the form, focusing upon the historical iteration of 'dance theatre' known as *Ausdruckstanz*.. Having established these roots, the chapter then continues to extend the genealogy through discussion of the contexts and the social, political and cultural influences impacting upon the practices of Pina Bausch, DV8 and Lloyd Newson, and Charlotte Vincent and Vincent Dance Theatre. In keeping with the aims of the wider thesis, my construction of this genealogy is focused on developing an understanding of the conditions of the 'dance theatre' useful to defining the form in which the possibility of 'absorption' might arise. At the end of the chapter, I reflect upon these conditions as the foundations of the lexicon of terminology to be employed in the discussion of the later company-specific chapters and the detailed analysis of Chapter Seven. This lexicon is then developed and extended throughout the thesis.

However, before embarking upon discussion of *Ausdruckstanz*, and whilst acknowledging both historical and continuing cross-fertilisation between the worlds of theatre and dance, there is a need at this juncture to differentiate between that which is 'dance theatre' and that which is 'physical theatre'. These critical labels cover a large spectrum of practices that would at first glance appear to resist exact categorisation. This is seen, for instance, in the emergence of DV8 Physical Theatre in the mid-1980s. The early work of this company held a performance aesthetic that at once demanded that the

performer have significant training in dance *and* that they then also partially reject this training. The increased use of the term 'physical theatre' as an all-encompassing popular tag has also led to the use of the terms 'dance theatre' and 'physical theatre' becoming at times interchangeable depending on the situation. To compound this conflation of terms, the field of dance/physical theatre seems to be continually evolving and changing at pace, particularly with use and inclusion of new media, digital technologies and filmed images in performance. The propensity for this area of performance work to encompass a wide variety of sometimes conflicting forms, ideas and practices is acknowledged by Keefe and Murray in the title of their 2007 publication, *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader* (emphasis added). They note: 'We have been ruthlessly insistent on *physical theatres* with all their consequent implications for suggesting a diversity of forms built from both common and different roots and technical traditions' (Keefe and Murray 2007: 3; emphasis in original).

In this study, I have chosen to employ the term 'dance theatre' to describe the historical and contemporary practices examined here. There are several reasons for this choice. Firstly, whilst the work of DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre continues to evolve and change, the specific practices of these companies explored within this study arguably sit more comfortably with the particular characteristics and traits of the European (predominantly German) traditions of twentieth-century 'dance theatre' than with a 'physical theatre' which has its roots in a systematised approach to the craft of the actor (which itself largely stems from a history rooted in a linear and/or written performance

text).⁵³ As shall be explored later, key to this alignment is the political stance of the form in relation to the issues of the day and, partially as a consequence of this stance, the manner in which the form draws upon and positions the individual experience and viewpoints of the performer.

Secondly, and relatedly, by recognising the practices under study as forming part of a 'dance theatre' genealogy finding its roots in the twentieth-century European tradition, prominence is given to the focus on content or message as being of paramount importance to the 'dance theatre' performer or company. As will be discussed at length later in this chapter, within this focus, the emphasis on the 'actualised', 'lived experience' of the performer in performance is also dominant. Consequently, whilst 'absorption' for the performer within 'dance theatre' may share similarities with that of the performer working within 'physical theatre' or text-based work (as in the example of my own work with Albee's *Zoo Story* given in the introduction), due to the particular conditions of the performance construct of 'dance theatre' as defined later in this chapter, it also presents itself as possessing subtle, yet significant differences. This has required me to delineate and define the work focused upon in this study as 'dance theatre', allowing the study scope and space to explore and identify the work of the performer in respect of 'absorption' that is particular to this definition.

Ausdruckstanz

⁵³ In an email discussion thread posted on SCUDD (Standing Conference of University Drama Departments) in April of 2006, Franc Chamberlain acknowledged that colloquially the phrase 'physical theatre' has been in use since the late 1960s. He also recognised the myriad practices that this phrase draws to it; a point that was picked up by Robert Daniels of Northampton University in his response to the email: 'I don't doubt that there will be people [...] who would make use of the term [...] way back in the '60s and perhaps earlier, (Craig, Schlemmer, Duncan, Decroux, Copeau, Laban, etc)' (Daniels, R. *SCUDD*. 6th April 2006, 18:07). However, the term 'physical theatre' has increasingly come to connote primary associations and relationships with practices such as those of Grotowski, Barba and latterly some practices associated with those of Theatre Gardzienice.

***Ausdruckstanz*: The ‘actualised’ performer-audience relationship**

A first point of note regarding *Ausdruckstanz* is the manner in which it reconfigured the relationship between the performer and the audience. In contradiction to the traditional divide encountered in ballet, Wigman notes of *Ausdruckstanz* that:

the audience should allow the dance to affect it emotionally and without reserve. It should allow the rhythm, the music, the very movement of the dancer’s body to stimulate the same feeling and emotional mood within itself [...] It is only then that the audience will feel a strong emotional kinship with the dancer: and will live through the vital experiences behind the dance-creation.

(Wigman, in Cohen 1992: 152)

Wigman’s words here clearly cast the dance as a means of bridging, or perhaps to an extent dissolving, the perceived divide between the performer and their audience. Importantly, Wigman focuses upon an engagement of both performer and audience with the ‘actual’ in performance, drawing attention to ‘the music, the very movement of the dancer’s body’ (Cohen 1992: 152) as the focal point or bridge between the performer and audience. The emphasis placed here upon the ‘actual’ elements of the performance, rather than a concentration on a fictive dimension to the work brings both performer and audience into the ‘actuality’ of the performance space. They share this space.

Similarly, the idea of a shared ‘actual’ space between performer and audience also finds articulation in the manner in which the work of Laban and others drew

upon the popular physical culture in Germany during the ascendancy of *Ausdruckstanz* and the wider practice of modern dance as a whole. During the summer of 1913, Rudolph Laban, having only recently gravitated towards movement practice from a background and training in visual arts, was working towards the opening of a summer school for the arts in Ascona.⁵⁴ One prominent strand of Laban's practice at this time is that which he came to term '*Bewegungsschor*' (movement choir). Commenting upon Laban's experimentation in developing movement choirs during his Ascona period, Bradley notes that, 'Laban evolved methods based on spontaneous processes and an overall sense of design [...] Drawing upon improvisational impulses, musical theory and visual design structures, this form was devised and spontaneous, participatory and performative' (Bradley 2009: 11). The Nietzschean influence on Laban's work within the model of the movement choir is clear. With the counter-culture of Ascona as a backdrop, Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy* became one of the formative influences on Laban's dance theory and practice. It was Nietzsche's vision of Dionysian collective ecstasy which proved the catalyst, with the choric dance of Greek tragedy becoming the apotheosis of artistic activity (Kew 1999: 76). Within the context of the *Bewegungsschor*, one again notes the particularly close relationship between the performer and the audience realised as 'actual' through the dance. In this context this is achieved through the blurring of lines between the spectator and the performer. During the evolution of the practice of movement choirs from the

⁵⁴ At this time Ascona (the place where Laban met Wigman) was noted for being a meeting point for artists, sculptors, painters, philosophers and freethinkers, many of whom were, like Laban, responding to the increasing industrialisation of production and a growing sense of angst and unhappiness linked to the objectification of production and the separation of the maker from that which is made. Ascona was a hub for those artists and free spirits moving in opposition to this industrial trend. They engaged in what could be seen as the counter-culture of the day. Much in the same way that just a few years earlier the emergent café and cabaret scene of Munich, (Bradley, K. 2009: 8) had provided Laban with 'an island of international culture [...] an oasis of anti-authoritarian thought and easy-going tolerance' (Preston-Dunlop, cited in Bradley, K. 2009: 8), Ascona now became the backdrop against which Laban developed his thoughts and practice surrounding movement and dance.

Ascona period though into the 1920s, Laban's movement choirs frequently involved anywhere from fifty to more than five hundred participants, and were formed all over Germany both by Laban and his followers. Susan Manning notes that, 'movement choirs were founded in association with dance studios and municipal theatres, with unions and political parties' (Manning 1995: 170). We can also see the acknowledgement of the 'actual' in Laban's later movement choirs. Kew's description of Laban's *Of the Spring Wind and the New Joy* (1936) notes that 'the dancers were dressed in identical neo-classic costumes'.⁵⁵ The few extant photographs show dancers performing simple movements in unison. The dance is described as a solemn festival designed to create 'unforgettable images and impressions for the audience' (Kew 1999: 80). As Kew goes on to describe the structure of the piece, she notes it was in four sections. Kew describes how '[...]ight and dark costumed figures *show* the symbolic struggle [...] Choirs of defeated warriors and mourning women *depict* a time [...] a slow section *denoting* "inward contemplation"' (Kew 1999: 80-81, emphasis added). The manner of description here again suggests that whilst there may be thematic and dramatic content to the piece, thus moving the work beyond a display of the mechanics of physical movement alone, the performers are *showing* a representation of a quasi-mythical setting.

The democratisation of movement within the notion of the *Bewegungsschor* was also endemic in the wider practices of *Ausdruckstanz* as a whole. With its emphasis on the ecstatic (self) expression as dominant, rather than any foregrounding of movement technique or technical virtuosity, *Ausdruckstanz* was, on the surface of it, open and accessible to many. This particular trait,

⁵⁵ Kew explains that the piece was originally intended to mark the opening of the Dietrich-Eckart open-air theatre on the new Olympic complex. It was banned by Goebbels and marked a turning point in Laban's relationship with the Nazi Party.

combined with the on-going prominence in the German nation of popular physical culture, saw that in the 1920s *Ausdruckstanz* drew many of its members from the community groups and amateur students following *tanz-gymnastik* (dance gymnastics). Manning says of this alliance between popular physical culture and dance that, '[t]his popularity meant that both the modernist and the avant-gardist projects of *Ausdruckstanz* were tied to the mass cultural interest in physical culture and sport. Indeed, the improvisational methods of *Ausdruckstanz* blurred the distinction between professional and amateur dance' (Manning 2006: 9). However, as their respective practices developed, the aesthetic gap between Laban and Wigman became more pronounced. Manning and Benson position them as indicating opposite ends of the *Ausdruckstanz* continuum:⁵⁶

Laban's ideology and Wigman's example dominated German dance in the '20's. Laban founded more than 25 schools across Germany while Wigman established a Central Institute in Dresden and several branch schools [...] Laban advocated egalitarianism and the desire to make dance accessible and integral to everyday life. Wigman espoused elitism and the belief that only a chosen few could communicate the spirit of the time through dance.

(Manning and Benson 1986: 35)

Despite these differences, what remains clear is that across its stylistic spectrum *Ausdruckstanz* enjoyed and fostered a relationship between the

⁵⁶ One instance of this split can be seen in the differing ways in which Laban and Wigman positioned and used their audiences. Wigman, maintaining a traditional structuring of the theatre asked that the audience travel with her on her ecstatic journeys, entering into an empathetic relationship that aimed for some form of shared experience between audience and dancer, whilst the divide between audience and participant in Laban's *Bewegungsschor* became blurred through physical action on behalf of the audience.

performer and the audience that was not predicated on an appreciative, distanced divide between them. This 'actualised' interplay would appear to range from the theatrically empathetic exchange and conversation of smaller pieces from the likes of Wigman and Gert, to the full-blown physical participation of the improvisatory, yet structurally organised, *Bewegungschor*. This sense of shared space, realised through a focus on the 'actual' elements of performance is of particular note in considering a performance framework in which 'absorption' for the performer might occur. The idea of the 'actual' will be discussed further in second half of this chapter as the conditions of 'dance theatre' are refined and as explicit definitions and understandings of the conditions are articulated..

***Ausdruckstanz* and the communal**

Placing this idea of interplay between performers and audience within *Ausdruckstanz* as one facet of the Expressionists' wholesale cultural and political revolt during the Weimar period also helps mark out the notion of the communal, which is inherent in the practice of *Ausdruckstanz*: 'The dancer in a movement choir discovers an awakened sense of movement in his inner being by representing himself not as an individual, but as part of a greater living group' (Laban, cited in Manning and Benson 1986: 34).

The sense of community and the communal within *Ausdruckstanz* was more than a little coloured with the idealism of the *Völkisch* sentiment of the previous decades. Valerie Preston-Dunlop notes that in 1921, whilst moving towards the zenith of his work with the notion of movement choirs, 'Laban wrote to his mother that there was beginning recognition that his work was not just a local

dance school but a trend for a renewal of cultural life, with universal potential' (Preston-Dunlop 1993: 18). Whilst being stylistically Expressionist and highly individual, *Ausdruckstanz* draws influence from the impetus of cultural revival through a shared communal event and through the collective act of dance-as-celebration inherent in *Völkisch* thought. In this light, *Ausdruckstanz* can be seen to adopt an almost virtuous stance through practice. A connection to cultural heritage and the natural world and the cosmos, practiced through ritualised communal movement, would transform the ordinary individual into a creative being. Laban saw his movement choirs as a means of re-awakening that which he termed *Festkultur* (festive culture), a culture that, through ritualised mass celebration and movement could transcend the loneliness of the age and present itself as a 'dawning of a new flowering of mankind' (Laban cited in Kew 1999: 77). Manning and Benson note that, '[Laban] believed that modern industrial society divided man against himself and that dance could restore man's original harmony with the cosmos, hence restoring the natural bonds of community' (Manning and Benson 1986: 34).

As indicated above, the practice of *Ausdruckstanz*, in keeping with the visionary emphasis of the wider movement of Expressionism, strived to move the individual towards experience of the communal not just within society, but within the wider earth, cosmos and universe. Laban comments upon this neo-spiritualist ideal of community: 'We were solely concerned with experiencing in ourselves and in togetherness the increased vigour of the spiritual-emotional-physical forces which are united in dance' (Laban, cited in Bradley 2009:19). Similarly, eschewing the ordinary states of emotion as experienced by the mere mortal, Wigman describes the work of her group as follows: 'My group does not

dance feelings. Feelings are far too precise, too distinct. We dance the change and transformation of spiritual states as variously manifested in each individual' (Wigman, cited in Manning and Benson 1986: 34). Again showing traces of a Nietzschean sense of transcendentalism, the individual is positioned in a communality with the interconnectedness of the whole cosmos. This is also echoed in the writing of another key figure in the development of modern dance: Isadora Duncan.⁵⁷ Like Wigman and Laban, Duncan saw the potential to forge a sense of community through dance. Duncan's work again points to a connection between the individual dancer and a neo-spiritual communal experience based in the relationships and connections offered through the act of movement. Similarly to Laban, Duncan stated that, '[f]rom the very beginning I conceived of the dance as a chorus or community expression' (Duncan (1927), cited in Franko 1995: 17). In the context of moving as part of a chorus, Duncan's experience as a dancer working within the Nietzschean descriptors of Apollo and Dionysus also points towards the act of 'self-overcoming and rejuvenation'. Mark Franko notes the act of self-overcoming positioned in the real, or actual:

Duncan's double sense of community also infers the familiar paradigm of expressive self-regeneration [...] the dance re-joins the community of arts in a real space (most properly the theatre of Dionysus) in order to sacrifice its specificity to the postlyrical state of disindividuation. Dance – the abstract symbol in its concrete essence – subsides back into the spatial, linguistic and sonorous community of arts it had momentarily transcended and which supports its swooning body.

⁵⁷ Born in 1877 in the United States, Duncan moved to live in the Soviet Union and Europe from the age of 22. During her career she performed to acclaim throughout Europe.

In the discussion above, one is able to note an implied connection or sublimation of the individual to an extended state of being, in this case, a communal endeavour. Importantly, and leading on to the discussion below, this endeavour centred upon the 'swooning body' and is essentially corporeal in nature; the embodied experience of *doing* is central to a state of being for the 'dance theatre' performer in which an everyday 'mode of being/doing' might be transcended and the possibility of 'optimal' experience might emerge. As before, this notion will be picked up in the discourse of later chapters wherein the lenses of the study are introduced and deployed.

***Ausdruckstanz* and the 'lived body'**

Continuing to note the theme of the 'actual' in the discussion above it is important to note the unwavering presence of the physical in *Ausdruckstanz*. Even in the spiritualism of *Ausdruckstanz*, the prominence of the body as the locus for doing, feeling and being is inescapable. 'Dance theatre' as practiced both within *Ausdruckstanz* and in later iterations of the form is not an entirely intellectual exercise, but a live embodied act.

Despite strongly advocating and moving towards a Nietzschean sense of the transcendental, *Ausdruckstanz*, through its associations with the popular physical culture of the time and its inherently *Völkisch* leanings, does not strive towards a pure, ethereal spiritualism, but rather towards an earthly ritualised sense of the ecstatic that at once attempts to free itself from the ordinarily corporeal by using the body to do so through celebratory dance.

We can again see the influence of Nietzsche here in the placement of the body at the very centre of spiritual and communal endeavour towards an aspirational ideal in which the everyday self is overcome. Whilst *The Birth of Tragedy* is a key influence on the work of Laban, Wigman also echoes the task of Nietzsche's *Übermensch*.⁵⁸ She comments that: 'We speak of the rediscovery and the re-conquering of the body [...] The interest in body -movement from sport to the art of dancing is awakened, keen and living' (Wigman cited in Copeland and Cohen 1983: 305). Kew notes that, '[t]he prime reason why Nietzsche would have influenced dancers in particular was his celebration of dance. Nietzsche's Zarathustra said, "And we should consider every day lost on which we should not have danced at least once." Laban used these words to accompany *Of the Spring Wind and the New Joy*' (Kew 1999: 74).

The notion of embodied movement as a means to a deeper connection is also seen in the practice of Valeska Gert: 'The movements and the sounds both find their impulse in the center of the organism and have to be projected at the same time. I invented sound dances, unity of sound and movement' (Gert cited in De Keersmaeker 1981: 63). Gert's indication of both a performance aesthetic and the manner in which the performer engages the very centre of their being whilst performing such work carries echoes of the Wagnerian aesthetic ideal of

⁵⁸ Nietzsche's Superman, or *Übermensch* is a being who is both the embodiment of this doctrine and one who exists through it: both the actuality and the symbol of a supreme advocacy of sublimated 'Will to Power'. Walter Kaufman describes the *Übermensch* as having 'overcome the animal of his nature, organised the chaos of his passions, sublimated his impulses' (Kaufmann, cited in Jovanovski 2008: 104). This would seem to suggest that the *Übermensch* is at once taken by the ecstasy of the Dionysian and, at the same time, a being who exercises the supreme control of the Apollonian. The Superman is the agent of 'Will to Power', a Dionysian man who embraces the totality of an existence in which there is no self-preservation or fixed points grasped at through a stasis of being. Instead the affirmation emerges through an absence of stasis that is the movement towards otherness, overcoming barriers and boundaries. The Superman joyfully sacrifices the highest form of self in order to supersede, reinvent, and redefine that which he is. In the introduction to Helen Zimmern's translation of *Beyond Good and Evil* the quest of the *Übermensch* is described as 'the indefatigable striving that disdains the deadening narcotics of traditional morality and mass conformism. The exemplar of this strenuous self-overcoming is the overman (*Übermensch*), the "free spirit" the "noble type of man"' (Nietzsche (translated by Zimmern) 1997: vii).

the *Gestamkunstwerk*. When seen in context of the soaring corporeal transcendentalism of Nietzschean philosophy, the work of Gert, Laban and Wigman also sit well with the idea of the body becoming ecstatic through total engagement with the moment of expression. This can be seen through Wigman's *Hexentanz* (1913).⁵⁹ In the clip taken from YouTube, it is possible to see an embodied emotionalism that is striving to express the essence of feeling through an extended staccato-ed movement vocabulary that employs an interpretation of the ecstatic.

The prominence and primacy of the 'lived body' as a dominant means of expression within 'dance theatre' practice is again key in impacting upon the development of conditions of a 'dance theatre' in which 'absorption' for the performer might emerge. As before, the idea of the 'lived body' will be addressed later in this chapter.

***Ausdruckstanz* and self-sacrifice**

It is the idea that the body is taken and gripped by the journey of dance and movement that leads onto a third notable element of *Ausdruckstanz*, namely the concept of self-sacrifice that would appear to accompany this form. This again will become useful in later discussions of the relationship between the performer and the work as pertinent to 'absorption' for the performer within the practices of Bausch, DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre.

In a rejection of the values of technique and virtuosity that accompanied the traditional ballet, the dancer willingly placed themselves in the grip of an Expressionistic personal journey that facilitated rejuvenation and 're-

⁵⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp-Z07Yc5oQ> - The movement referred to is from 0:21 – 0:50.

awakening'. Wigman writes that, '[t]he great ballet dancer was no longer a representative of a great inner emotion ... but had become defined as a great virtuoso' (Wigman cited in Copeland and Cohen 1983: 306).

Ausdruckstanz demanded a particular virtuosity that allowed physical technique to become subordinated to personal expression and personal 'truth' on stage. This was the aim of Wigman. Again echoing the Nietzschean ideal of the *Übermensch* and the concept of self-overcoming, there was a clear sense that the performer gave themselves over to the dance and, through the subjugation of self to the process of doing, transcended previous boundaries and limits to become something more, or to enter new territory. The body-in-ecstasy of the performer acts as a vehicle for the self-sacrifice (self-transgression) of the performer. Ana Sanchez-Colberg (1996) calls this a state of 'martyrdom' in which the experiences of the dancer are lived out on stage with the audience.⁶⁰ Similarly, Reynolds and McCormick also note that, '[e]cstasy demanded "sacrifice", a theme Wigman returned to frequently in her writing and her dances. It meant total subjugation of the ego and its pleasure principal to the creative process - welcoming the cycles of elation and depression, fatigue, exhaustion and climax that are part of artistic awareness' (Reynolds and McCormick 2003: 89).⁶¹

***Ausdruckstanz* and the 'real'**

⁶⁰ In echoing my previous comments regarding the relationship of the performer within *Ausdruckstanz* to the audience, it is interesting to note here that the experiences of the dancer are lived out on stage with the audience, and not for the audience, suggesting a particular shared 'lived experience'.

⁶¹ The 'ego' is one part of the structure of the psyche proposed by Sigmund Freud. The 'pleasure principle' is the innate instinctual drive of the individual to avoid pain and seek pleasure. In this context, the act of creating and making 'dance theatre' for Wigman meant working against the natural defences of the psyche in order to move into uncharted, possibly painful territory and create meaningful, lived expression.

Leading from the points above there are implications which have significant impact upon the nature of performance conditions and the construct of performance in which a performer might encounter 'absorption'. Crucially, Reynolds and McCormick acknowledge an explicit recognition of the 'real' within the performance arena; depression, elation, fatigue, exhaustion and climax are all descriptors servicing the life of the artist as an 'actual', rather than a fictive, virtuality.⁶² Whilst the nature of the 'action' contained within the performance text is being theatricalised to an extent, it is not presented as entirely fictive, but as what I am calling a 'liminal meta-actuality' in which the audience encounters the dancer themselves in expression rather than as a fictive character in a text. This idea will be addressed in greater detail later in this chapter and subsequent discussion. To return to the earlier example of Wigman's *Hexentanz*, we can see that there is no fictive reality playing out on stage which exists as a separate 'then and there' removed from the 'here and now'. Consequently, although theatricalised, the 'actual' contained within the liminal space of performance – the 'actual' set, the 'actual' costume and the 'actual' movement experience of the performer – become part of the moment of expression. There is no fictive setting. Reynolds and McCormick allude to a staged 'actuality' that, in rejecting a traditional theatrical mimesis, contains a very solid recognition of the 'real' as 'actuality'. This is perhaps most present in *Hexentanz* through Wigman's relationship with the music in the space. Wigman frequently employed percussion in her pieces, using drums and other instruments from India, Africa, Thailand and China. It is clear from the clip of *Hexentanz* that she

⁶² The term 'real' is used in description of both *Ausdruckstanz* (see Reynolds and McCormick above) and also in various writings describing the action of performers in later iterations of 'dance theatre'. However, whilst acknowledging the Modernist implications in the use of this word, in that the 'real' in 'dance theatre' indicates the fusion of the signifier with the 'real', the use of the word in the context of this study also explicitly links the idea of 'real' to the notion of the 'actual'. The 'actual' intends that which is a physical, tangible, phenomenological, or corporeal fact of 'being-in the world' for the 'dance theatre' performer. These terms will be explored and expanded upon in later chapters.

is reacting to and playing with this music and also leads it at some moments.⁶³ When there were instances of a move *towards* the creation of a fictive reality within *Ausdruckstanz*, such as in Wigman's later experimentations with archetypes, as seen in *Totenmal* (1930) (discussed later in this chapter), these were still placed in a theatrical setting which acknowledged that the archetype was presented as consciously being played and played with by the performer, rather than the performer adopting it as a psychologically rounded character inhabiting a constructed and staged fictive reality. In *Hexentanz*, acknowledgement of Wigman's relationship with the phenomenological actuality and a rejection of a fabricated fictive reality as *other* were also placed alongside a communication that strived to express the essence of feeling through the body. Hedwig Müller and Norbert Servos, commenting on *Tanztheater* (the genealogical successor to *Ausdruckstanz* and a form that inherited many of its traits), note that, 'its aim becomes communication of bodily experienced reality. Direct involvement is more important than rational enlightenment, physical experience of the necessity for change more essential than intellectual insight' (Müller and Servos 1984: 14).

'Lived experience'

The 'direct involvement' and the 'bodily experienced reality' of which Servos and Müller speak, combined with the 'actuality' of the playing space being shared with the audience, also points to another important facet of *Ausdruckstanz* that bears significance for the second half of this chapter, namely that of the 'lived experience' of performance. In commenting on Laban's development of the idea of movement choirs, Karen Bradley indicates that the

⁶³ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tp-Z07Yc5oQ>; the movement referred to is from 0:21 – 0:50.

developing 'form was devised and spontaneous, participatory and performative' (Bradley 2009: 11). This figures the act of performance as containing, at least in part, a guided sense of the improvisatory processes through which it was created. Elsewhere, Bradley also refers to the improvisational aspect of Laban's processes and choreographic principles as 'guided improvisation' (Bradley 2009: 84). As such, the performative work asks the performer to remain active, open and responsive to the nuances and signals of their immediate phenomenal domain in the live moment of performance. Wigman's call for 'sacrifice', as noted by Reynolds and McCormick, occupies similar territory. When coupled with highly theatricalised and emotional content which asked the audience to *experience*, rather than *appreciate*, both this descriptor and the notes above on Laban's practices position *Ausdruckstanz* as a form in which the 'lived experience' of expression was being presented. There is the strong suggestion that the experience being communicated was being communicated through the dancer connecting to the 'actual' act of doing and experiencing. As Franko notes, '[i]n the Dionysian vision, the dancer is the site of rapture. In this Nietzschean state of being rather than showing, telling or contemplating, Duncan suggests that Dionysian engagement makes dance more fully present' (Franko 1995: 18). Gert, or Wigman, or Duncan, did not stand back from the experience and present us with an Apollonian retelling of the given story. Instead, the aim, through self-sacrifice and through the body-in-ecstasy was to reach 'an experience beyond conscious design in which subject and object, artist and art merged' (Franko 1995: 18). In considering this focus and concentration upon the moment of doing, one is immediately reminded of the state of 'absorption' described in Csikszentmihalyi's iteration of 'optimal' experience as 'flow'. I discuss this in detail in the following chapter.

***Ausdruckstanz*: Politics and the performer**

The final characteristic of *Ausdruckstanz* I would like to highlight is the political dimension of the form. Given that the involvement of the voice and opinions of the performer are central to the piece in *Ausdruckstanz*, this aspect of the form provides the basis, or drive, for an important aspect of the way in which the performer is involved in and related to the work in this and later iterations of 'dance theatre'. In turn, the ownership of the inherently political voice and dimension of the work significantly informs the investment, and potentially the self-sacrifice, of the performer in the work. Similarly, the relationship between the performer and the performative content of the work is affected, as is the way in which the message and content of the work is carried, embodied and communicated by the performer. The resulting stance of the performer and their ownership of the work relates directly to how manifestations of 'absorption' for the performer within 'dance theatre' might be understood.

From its first appearances as part of the tumultuous wave of Expressionist endeavours at the birth of the Weimar period, through its continual associations with a veneration of the *Völkisch* in Germany, to its eventual re-appropriation and increased intertwining with the propaganda and rise to power of the Nazis, *Ausdruckstanz* was always inherently politically positioned in its practices. It is useful to look at the movement of *Ausdruckstanz* through this political shift through two examples of practice. Both effectively demonstrate the ability of the form to move with the times.

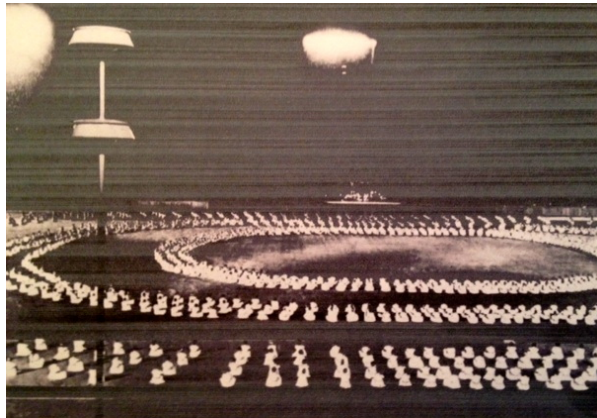
Laban's movement choirs

As indicated previously Laban's movement choirs aspired to become 'an image of the festival of the future, a mass of life in which all the celebrants in communion of thought, feeling and action seek the way to a clear goal, namely to enhance their own inner light' (Laban 1975: 137, cited in Bradley 2009: 30) The movement choirs worked towards cultural rejuvenation and leaned towards a spiritual engagement of the self with the larger world and community through the dance, aligning with the sentiments of the *Völkisch*.⁶⁴

As the rise of National Socialism advanced and positioned itself as congruent with the German-ness and the Germanic ideals previously associated with the *Völkisch*, 'Laban left the way open for the continuity of this dance form within the Nazi racial state. Under the Nazis the movement choir concept was renamed "community dance" (*Gemeinschaftstanz*) and formalised under the Ministry for Enlightenment and Propaganda' (Kew 1999: 78). The state-sanctioned form of *Ausdruckstanz* subsequently received subsidy and recognition on a grand scale. In 1936, well into the reign of the Third Reich, *Olympic Youth* was staged by Mary Wigman to mark the opening of the Berlin Olympic Games. The dance used hundreds of dancers, moving in a vast movement choir reminiscent of Laban's early work. In Figure 7, overleaf, huge circles of hundreds of dancers moving in unison can be seen.

⁶⁴ Quite in what direction this spirituality was focused remains unclear. It seems as though the spiritualism was non-specific obscurantism and generalised mysticism.

Fig. 4. 1936 Berlin Olympic Games: Opening Ceremony



(Manning and Benson 1986: 42)

On one level, the image represents the famous circular symbols of the Olympic Games. However, one is instantly reminded of the propaganda machine that produced the Nuremberg Rallies, where the sheer power of a terrifyingly unified voice became overwhelming. Manning and Benson note that, '[m]oving in unison, the boys and girls glorified the presence of the *Führer*, who reviewed them from the stands. The movement choir had become the basis for mass propaganda' (Manning and Benson 1986: 43). In this use of the movement choir, we can again see the body of the performer as the centre of the dance and the defining element within it, shaping and politicising the space around it. The concept of self-sacrifice takes on another dimension in the Nazis' use of the movement choir, in that there would not appear to be a sacrifice through ecstasy of the individual, but rather a sublimation of oneself to the power of the group. The unified precision of the dancers seen in the image suggests power and conformity. There is no sense of any room for individual expression in this dance. This is a far cry from the structured improvisational mass celebration of the early *Bewegungsschor*. The goals of the earlier practices did not 'require a

common or regimented approach. Moving together in communion and harmony is not the same thing as marching to a single drummer' (Bradley 2009: 30)

Wigman's *Totenmal*

Another example of *Ausdruckstanz*, which demonstrates it as a form possessing an inherent capacity to move and shift with the changing landscape, can be seen in Wigman's *Totenmal* (1930). *Totenmal* premiered at the 1930 Dancers' Congress in Berlin against a backdrop of unrest and unease, as noted above. The piece was intended as a memorial to the dead soldiers in the war and combined both a speaking choir and a movement choir echoing Laban's earlier work. Using mask and costume (mask was another recurrent theme in Wigman's work) the dance focused on a choir of men representing the dead soldiers and a choir of women, representing the lovers, wives, sisters and mothers of the dead.⁶⁵ Between the two choirs was Wigman. With the women, Wigman tries to bring the dead back to life, torn by the problem of choice between two worlds. With the election of 1930 looming and the battle for the country between the nationalists and the socialists at full height, *Totenmal* took on tremendous political significance. Manning notes that, 'in many instances Weimar performance reconfigured in response to fascism' (Manning 1989: 223). In *Totenmal*, the social and political landscape of the time is inscribed into the work, which then 'reconfigures' itself accordingly.

The position of *Ausdruckstanz* as a form of performance with inherently political dimensions creates it as a fluid form which was able to be reconfigured to

⁶⁵ *Totenmal* is also heavily ritualised and theatrical and, with the inclusion of the choirs, deeply reminiscent of the Hellenic traditions of theatre on which Nietzsche founded his notions of the Dionysian and the Apollonian. Again the notion of sacrifice of self is apparent in Wigman's mediation between the two worlds. 'The choreography posits an exchange of energies between Wigman and the chorus of the fallen soldiers. Conjuring the dead back to life, Wigman spends her own life force' (Manning 1989: 220).

reflect and debate with its cultural, social and political backdrop. This particular characteristic is of interest for the idea of 'absorption' for the performer when one considers it as an element of the position of the dancer as creative author of the work. Again, this position is similar to that of the Expressionist artist as inseparable from their art. Behind the various works of *Ausdruckstanz* discussed above, and behind the work of Bausch, Newson and DV8 and Vincent, there lies the deeply compelling need of the artist to articulate and manifest their thoughts and social or cultural politics.

***Ausdruckstanz* and the post-war years: The emergence of Pina Bausch**

As we witness the progression of Expressionistic dance during the post-war years from the 'irrational fatefulness' (Servos and Müller 1984: 14) of *Ausdruckstanz* to the less idealistic sensibilities of *Tanztheater*, Susan Manning notes the evolution of a Cold War historiography: 'as American Modern Dance came into its own over the subsequent decades, its chroniclers constructed an artistic heritage based on native sources [...] the postwar annals nearly erased the precedent of the German dancer and her colleagues' (Manning 2006: xxxiii). This historiography created *Ausdruckstanz* as an inherently German concept. Moreover, when positioned alongside this historiography as a practice directly associated with a destructive regime that remained all too sharp in the memories of the world audience, *Ausdruckstanz* sunk from view to a certain extent. In the post-war years, Germany also (and perhaps as a consequence of the associations of *Ausdruckstanz*) experienced a ballet boom. In a return to a more traditional aesthetic, the rejuvenation of ballet as the dominant form across Eastern and Western Europe saw the dance become a major arena for the Cold War as nations competed on virtuosic, not Expressionistic, terms.

However, with *Ausdruckstanz* being located away from the main stage, we see a lineage and connections between this primary *imprimatur* of 'dance theatre' and the later iterations of the form beginning to appear. It is perhaps this very movement of ballet to the European centre stage during this time that allowed Expressionistic dance in Europe and Germany to retain its sense of experimentation and the avant-garde.

The point of assembly for much of this lineage is the *Folkwangschule* in Essen. Gerhard Bohner, Susanne Linke, Reinhold Hoffman and Pina Bausch are all alumni of this school, which was built in 1928 as a school for the performing arts. Kurt Jooss, Wigman's pupil, taught at the school and founded a dance company called the *Folkwang Tanzbühne*. After his return from exile in 1949, Jooss re-joined the school and remained head of the Department of Dance until 1968. Jooss coined the term *Tanztheater* to describe his choreography, placing it in opposition to the dominant ballet of the theatre.⁶⁶ Servos and Müller write of the school, and in particular of the influence of Jooss, that '[d]uring the fifties and sixties, when in the course of political and artistic reaction classical ballet ruled the German stage, and memories of the revolutionary innovations of *Ausdruckstanz* were receding, the Folkwang-School, through the work of Kurt Jooss and his collaborators maintained the link with the twenties' (Müller and Servos 1984: 14).

The work of the practitioners and dancers who form this link from *Ausdruckstanz* to the *Tanztheater* of the 1970s and 1980s permeates much of the ideology and substance of the new form. As Susan Manning notes, *Tanztheater* shares many genealogical traits with its predecessor: 'The

historiography of *Tanztheater* also emphasises its formal similarities to *Ausdruckstanz*: the predominance of female choreographers, attention to the scripting of gender, the revival of solo dancing, the return to improvisation, the reappearance of the “mask,” social consciousness’ (Manning 2006: 246).

Tanztheater was a leaner, less naive child, which nonetheless retained practices and a cultural position as provocateur that reflected its cultural and historical roots.

After graduating from the *Folkwangschule* in Essen, Bausch travelled to America, familiarising herself with techniques of both Martha Graham and Jose Limon. However, Royd Climenhaga (2009) notes that the most profound influence on her work during this time was Antony Tudor. Bausch danced under Tudor’s instruction at Julliard and subsequently performed with the Metropolitan Ballet Theater. Climenhaga notes that, ‘Tudor’s strongly psychological style, with its emphasis on character built upon emotive gesture, must have reawakened and reconfigured some of Bausch’s earlier experiences with emotive gesture in the German Dance tradition’ (Climenhaga 2009: 6).

Following a return to Germany in 1962, when Bausch performed as leading soloist in Jooss’s *Folkwang* Ballet, she was offered the opportunity in 1972 to choreograph at the Wuppertal Opera Company. The success of this endeavour then led to her being offered the directorship of the Wuppertal Ballet, which, in 1972 became the *Tanztheater Wuppertal*. It is in Bausch’s early direction of this company that we see the emergence of Bausch’s particular style. Climenhaga explains:

But here, rather than following the linear pattern in the original opera or ballet, Bausch took the base condition operating in each story to act as an overriding metaphor from which movement and bodily attitudes grow. Her collage techniques surrounded the ideas to create a multi-faceted perspective of the story.

(Climenhaga 2009: 10)

Bausch's particular approach to making work drew upon and collided the formalism of ballet with the expressionistic tendencies of *Ausdruckstanz* in theatricalised undertakings which centralised a collaborative, exploratory ethic, at the forefront of which was the performer's experience. Climenhaga notes that; 'She begins with a process of exploration [...] constructs her theatrical images from questions she poses to her performers in rehearsal and weaves together the results in narratives of association built on a metaphoric ground of dream logic.' (Climenhaga 2013: 10) As will be explored fully in the examination of Bausch's work in Chapter Four, the genealogical threads from *Ausdruckstanz*, and the evolving characteristics shown in her early work, can be seen to run through and to an extent define the subsequent repertoire. Gabrielle Cody notes that, 'Bausch, among other Germans of her generation, has re-explored the subjectivist tradition of *Ausdruckstanz*' (Cody 1998: 117). In carrying the imprint and influence of *Ausdruckstanz*, Bausch's work constitutes a particular manifestation of the 'dance theatre' noted earlier in this chapter. As before, consideration of this will inform the creation and articulation of the conditions of 'dance theatre' later in this chapter.

Lloyd Newson and DV8

The performance work of DV8, in itself a body of work which has evolved and changed considerably in the company's twenty-seven year history, again re-articulates and redefines the genealogical line of 'dance theatre' as established earlier in this chapter by retaining key characteristics which align it firmly with the European roots of *Ausdruckstanz* and latterly *Tanztheater*. To signpost the work of Chapter Five, which explores specific aspects of DV8's work useful to developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer, and to continue mapping the genealogical lineage of 'dance theatre', the next section of this chapter contextualises the emergence of DV8. The discussion indicates key links between the company and its genealogical predecessors, particularly Bausch.

DV8 - Background and emergence

Lloyd Newson came from a background which mixed psychology with a pursuit of dance practice which included work with the New Zealand Ballet and a one-year scholarship to the London Contemporary Dance School (Wall 2006).⁶⁷

Newson then worked with Extemporary Dance Theatre as both a choreographer and a dancer for a short time before creating DV8 as the company's director. DV8 was formed by Newson in 1986, alongside Nigel Charnock, Michelle Richecoeur and Liz Rankin: key figures who would become regular collaborators in the work of the company.

As a homosexual man living the socio-political context of Thatcher's Conservative Britain, Newson needed to speak about the issues he faced. This need translated into DV8 quickly building up its reputation 'as an issue-based dance group which produced hard pessimistic work related to sexual politics

⁶⁷ Newson studied for a degree in psychology at the University of Melbourne, graduating in 1979.

and specifically to “queer” sexuality in response to homophobia and the AIDS crisis in the 80’s’ (Leask 1995: 49). The move by Newson to form DV8 was also a result of Newson’s dissatisfaction with his experience of being choreographed by choreographers who ‘denied who I was, my ideas, my thought, and I was nothing more than a bit of pigment for them to paint with’ (Newson, cited in Meisner 1992: 11).

At this point, it is useful to note the structure of the Extemporary Dance Theatre of the time and the impact that this structure exerted upon the artistic output of the company, as experienced by Newson. Emilyn Claid draws interesting comparisons between Extemporary and X6, an independent dance collective operating at the same time, although operating in very different ways. Claid notes that:

X6 encouraged performers as makers; Extemporary commissioned outside experts. X6 functioned as a collective; Extemporary operated as a hierarchy. X6 encouraged performance as process; Extemporary made products to tour [...] X6 philosophies required research; Extemporary had no time for research.

(Claid 2006: 138)

Claid continues to describe the emergence of independent project-based companies that are formed and then dissolved according to the needs and specific requirements of the work at hand. These requirements are typically built upon the need to say something: ‘Here today and gone tomorrow is the nature of project based companies ... Having something to say, saying it and moving

on describes the independent project system; there is no need for compromise' (Claid 2006: 138). At the time DV8 came into being, Extemporary Dance Theatre stood in stark contrast to this project-based approach to making work. It was, in the words of Wendy Houston (another frequent collaborator of DV8), 'doing lots of rep stuff and in the end it's like churning out movement, but with no thought behind it... At that time, 1984 or 1985, it was all very nice dance and not really about anything. Not even attempting to make it personal to people's lives' (Buckland cited in Buckland 1995: 372). Nearly thirty years after its inception, DV8 remains resolutely project-based in its approach to making work, coming together only 'when there is a need, a need that is artistically motivated rather than commercially or administratively driven. The work is always about issues' (Newson 1993: 11). The one constant throughout this time is the presence of Newson himself. Structurally, the company remains highly agile and flexible. Wall notes that, 'DV8 Physical Theatre is not a permanent company, which allows flexibility within the administrative organisation and subsequently much greater artistic freedom for Newson and his collaborators' (Wall 2007: 92). The artistic freedom and the project-based, issue-centric nature of DV8's work has a significant impact upon the position and involvement of the performer in the creative process, to be explored in Chapter Five. In turn, this aspect of DV8's work contributes to an understanding of the setting in which 'absorption' for the performer might emerge.

Extemporary's offering as described by Houston was mirrored in concerns focused on the wider field of the dance scene of the time, which were raised by Judith Mackrell in response to the 'Dance Umbrella' event of 1986, which caused her to note that it 'left a lot of people wondering what had happened to

British Dance' (Mackrell, cited in Constanti 1987: 26). Relatedly, Keith Watson reflects that, 'DV8 was a gale force wind across the becalmed sea of dance abstraction that dance was paddling in' (Watson, cited in Leask 1995: 49).⁶⁸ DV8 rejected the dominant backdrop of dance practice, emerging as 'a violent reaction to the commercial ideas of nicely tuned bodies doing nice things to nice tunes' (Constanti 1987: 26) Similarly, Murray and Keefe indicate that, '[a]ny starting point to consider the work of both Pina Bausch and Lloyd Newson has to be their respective reactions to the abstraction and – some would argue – vacant formalism embodied in the practice and circumscribed by the territories of modern dance' (Murray and Keefe 2007: 77).

In place of abstraction and the 'nice', Constanti describes the work of DV8 as being of 'little resemblance to mainstream contemporary dance [...] the conventions and mannerisms of standardised dance techniques are shunned in favour of a new form of expressive, demanding and dangerous movement' (Constanti 1989: 5). With a similar sense of rejection of the status quo of the mid-1980s and early 1990s, and an engagement of the performer as 'pigment' or puppet, Newson championed a focus on meaning in the work of the company and a collaborative process, which continues to demand intensive and personal input and engagement from the performer. In reflecting upon the shifting canon of DV8, Watson explains that, 'the linking thread has been an innate desire to get behind the psyche of why we do the things we do' (Watson 1999: 11). In an interview with Donald Hutera (2000), Newson explains that, "[t]he one thing I look for in all of our performers is a level of authenticity," he says, "that they truly own the material. What's inside them in relation to the themes of the piece? I want us to find a vocabulary that truly reflects something complex about

⁶⁸ Keith Watson is a dance critic who has written several articles on DV8.

people” (Newson, cited in Hutera 2000: n.p.). Echoing Newson and Watson, Christopher Winter notes that:

Central to the ethos of DV8 is that the dance is motivated by emotional/psychological imperatives, by *interior* sources. In this sense Newson is in line with the early modern dancers such as Graham, Humphrey, St Denis and Wigman. For them, as for Newson, the truth of dance does not lie outside the self because dance is essentially self-expression.

(Winter 1989: 10; emphasis in original)

Influences

Considering Winter’s nod towards earlier practices, including those of Wigman, it is useful to briefly consider how the genealogical threads carried from Bausch and the earlier iterations of Expressionist dance influence the practices of the company. This allows an introductory positioning of DV8 in which the key points directly impacting upon the work of the performer and the setting in which ‘absorption’ for the performer can then be highlighted and discussed fully in preparation for the analysis of Chapter Seven.

DV8’s lineage and links to the ‘dance theatre’ practices of Bausch (amongst other influences) are highlighted by numerous sources.⁶⁹ Amongst them is Jen Harvie’s challenge to the British ‘literary theatre of impeccable pedigree’ (Harvie 2005: 114).⁷⁰ Harvie explains that Newson has,

⁶⁹ Harvie (Harvie 2005: 128) notes Newson’s acknowledgment of the influence of Beckett in the absurdism of *Strange Fish* (1992). As with Bausch, comparison and points of intersection have been also been drawn with Artaudian concepts of theatricality and ‘total theatre’.

⁷⁰ Harvie attests that whilst British theatre does possess an ‘intrinsic literariness’ (Harvie 2005: 114) the ongoing promotion of a ‘traditional textual patriotism’ (Harvie 2005: 115) effectively and overwhelmingly naturalises this tradition at the expense of acknowledging other, more divergent, theatrical practices.

indicated his debt to the German dancer and choreographer Pina Bausch, particularly: her development of *Ausdruckstanz*, a form of German expressionist dance, to explore and express ideas and feelings [...] her invitation to performers to build movement out of their own experiences and everyday movement; and her exploitation of “theatrical” aspects of production, most notably speech and scenography.

(Harvie 2005: 128)

Similarly, Janet Lansdale recognises Newson’s link to European Expressionism in noting that his

extension of early twentieth-century Expressionist theatre and dance movements is particularly European in character, in its focus on the intensity of emotion and on the use of images, words, and movement, separately and together, treating personal, social and politically intense subject matter.

(Lansdale 2004: 118)

Bausch explained that, ‘[y]ou can see it like this or like that. It just depends on the way you watch’ (Bausch, cited in Hoghe and Tree 1980: 72); a statement also echoed by Newson himself in reflecting upon his particular approach to movement: “‘There are no dictionaries for movement like there are for words” says Newson, “so I struggle to find what I’ve called ‘specific ambiguity’ - this can hold the story together and at the same time allow individual audience members to have their own reading of what’s happening” (Newson, quoted in Harvie

2005: 132). The particular high-risk movement style noted in DV8's earlier pieces including *My Sex, Our Dance* (1986), *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1989) and *Enter Achilles* (1992) also shares tendencies seen in Bausch's work to push the physical limits of the performers. However, Leask notes that whilst there were similarities in this respect, and that 'this kind of physical/dance theatre had been demonstrated by Bausch before, this was a far more direct, fast and "modern" form, which required more of a "gym" than a "ballet studio" physicality' (Leask 1995: 50).

Echoing both the politically sensitised position of *Ausdruckstanz* and the provocative social politics inherent in Bausch's *Tanztheater*, Ana Sanchez-Colberg also positions DV8's work in the realm of the avant-garde. Sanchez-Colberg notes that, '[f]ollowing the precedent set by avant-garde theatre notions of "devised work", the material of the pieces is generated by the company using the individual cast members' responses to tasks and questions set by Newson' (Sanchez-Colberg 1996: 49-50). Sanchez's assertion of the validity of this label for DV8's work acknowledges the issue-driven focus in the work upon both the body as a politicised and transgressive site for discursive performance, and on the body as the 'centralising unit within the theatrical space' (Sanchez-Colberg 2007: 21). These last two points, and in particular the implications they have for the work of the 'dance theatre' performer and for an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer, will be revisited in detail in Chapter Five.

The final section of this chapter completes the genealogical lineage and throughline by contextualising the emergence of Vincent Dance Theatre. As

before, the discussion points to key links between the company and its genealogical companions.

Vincent Dance Theatre: Background and emergence

Charlotte Vincent founded Vincent Dance Theatre in 1994. Prior to this, Vincent read English Literature and Drama at Sheffield University, also undertaking training in trapeze, release technique and contact improvisation. It can be argued that VDT is part of a wave of companies that emerged in Sheffield in the 1980s and early 1990s, subsequently growing to prominence in the 1990s. Third Angel, founded by Rachel Walton and Alexander Kelly was formed in 1995; Point Blank, founded by Liz Tomlin and Steve Jackson in 1999; and perhaps most prominently, Forced Entertainment, founded in 1984.

All of the companies mentioned above share interests in collective, devised processes, often working with a central core of long-term collaborators to create original pieces. VDT is no exception here. Vincent Dance Theatre allies the collaborative approach in the studio to the ethos and structure of the company and is driven by five core values: 'creativity, diversity, responsibility, inclusivity and action' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2013c). Mirroring the practices of DV8 in this respect, Vincent has drawn repeatedly on a core of performers coming from various dance backgrounds, ensuring a centralised awareness of the 'lived body' as the locus for performance. This awareness of the 'dance' within Vincent's 'dance theatre' also follows the characteristics of the above-mentioned genealogy in its rejection of traditional choreographic form and content; as explored in detail in Chapter Six, the work of VDT both draws upon and asks the performer and collaborator to work beyond the conventional

structures of dance training and performance. These long-term collaborators, often multi-disciplinarians with significant musical expertise, are then supplemented by additional voices and new performers in response to the specific demands of each new piece: 'A great strength of Vincent's work is its continuity. She has committed herself to a team of performers who, over the years, have become familiar figures to her audience' (Jennings 2012). *If We Go On* was created and devised by Vincent Dance Theatre regulars Janusz Orlik, Patrycja Kujawska, Aurora Lubos (Aurora Bolis) and Alex Catona with Carly Best, Scott Smith and Harry Theaker then also joining the company. At the time of writing, Smith has re-joined the company alongside Catona, Orlik, Kujawska and Bolis for their latest production, *Motherland*.

In repeatedly drawing together collaborators in this manner, Vincent creates an ensemble of practitioners in which the shared language of the devising process and the expectations of all involved become aligned. From being with the company through the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On*, it was clear that the core members of the ensemble in particular were very much attuned to the process of self-analysis and questioning that constituted the journey toward performance. Picking up traits found in the heritage of *Ausdruckstanz*, *Tanztheater* and the work of DV8, this in itself requires performers willing and wishing to push beyond their own comfort zones and explore their own boundaries. Both Orlik and Kujawska had begun the process by telling Vincent that they did not want to do what they had always done and were seeking new directions in performance. In reflecting upon conversation with Vincent regarding *If We Go On*, John Highfield notes that, '[s]everal of her regular company were also beginning to ask themselves similar questions.

Janusz Orlik, for instance, although still only his 20s was beginning to question his commitment to dance, while musician and performer Patrycja Kujawska was suggesting that she was also looking for new creative challenges' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2009).⁷¹

Echoing the wider 'dance theatre' genealogy of *Ausdruckstanz*, *Tanztheater* and Bausch and DV8, and in considering the collaborative ethics of the company, it is clear that VDT also foreground and value the creative voice of the individual artist within the collective ensemble.⁷² 'The company's production work places emphasis on the personal contribution, individual physicality and cultural background of every collaborator involved' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2013c). Whilst steered and guided by Vincent, the pieces are devised by the company as a whole.⁷³ In the process for *If We Go On*, I watched Vincent draw upon these backgrounds with a sense of genuine collaborative exploration. The thematic content of the piece and the emphasis within this content on the company asking themselves to start from places outside their normal pattern of making give rise to a situation in which I felt, as an observer, that the nature of collaboration as espoused by the artistic policy of VDT was realised in a manner that simply left no room for the performers to hide.⁷⁴ This sense of everything

⁷¹ As with VDT's genealogical companions, the level of personal investment from Vincent and the performers requires an investigative self-scrutiny which is not suited to all. During the process for *If We Go On*, two non-core performers left the process, with only one being replaced for the eventual piece. Whilst these departures were amicable, they arose from tensions around the necessary mode of engagement required by Vincent and the size, content and themes of the piece.

⁷² Similarly to Bausch and DV8, VDT's performers present (facets of) themselves on stage. In *Broken Chords*, TC Howard, a long-time collaborator, stops the action at one point in the performance, declaring that she is sick of working with Vincent as Vincent is dealing with the process of divorce through the piece. 'I'm happily married!' Howard declares. This sense of moving away from a performative fictionalised theatricality, to a performative space that is theatricalised actuality in which each performer presents just themselves occurs again in *If We Go On*. At the close of the piece, Patrycja Kujawska addresses the audience: 'Look at us. Look at the state of us. How did we get on the stage? We must be joking. We must be having a laugh...this is shit isn't it?' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2009). These are real worries and sentiments that arose during debate and practice in rehearsal and devising.

⁷³ This trait is evidenced in *Video file Seven: Vincent Dance Theatre. Perspectives on the devising and rehearsal process* which accompanies Chapter Six.

⁷⁴ 'The dark stretches before us. There are people waiting. We would like to show you something, but we are not sure how. We are going to tell you what it is like, doing and faking, and doing and not doing.

being fluid and open to change (even the certainty of there being an eventual performance), coupled with the intensity of the collaborative dynamic and the structure and thematics of the piece, placed significant weight and responsibility on the creative and personal investment of the performers, individually and as a group.⁷⁵

Inevitably, this intensely collaborative dynamic and shared creative investment in the piece facilitates a process and piece that, in keeping with the artistic policy, places the self of the performer as individual at the heart of the work. In interviewing Vincent for *If We Go On*, Highfield notes that the

lengthy creative process that went into new show *If We Go On* has perhaps been a greater drain than ever, maybe because it touches more than ever before on personal thoughts and issues and has challenged Charlotte to question her attitude to the world of dance and theatre, the very things on which her career has been based.

(Highfield 2009)

This particular trait carried by 'dance theatre' performance, and the investment of self inherent in the manner in which the performer engages in the creative acting of doing 'dance theatre', mirrors previous discussion through the genealogy. The emphasis placed upon the individual performer within the work and the relevance of this stance to developing an understanding of 'absorption'

The dark stretches before us, but here we are, faced with the question, how do we go on? *If we go on* places the investigation of language at the centre of the work, and through miniature dances, stuttering songs and militant manifestos embraces uncertainty, hesitancy and not knowing' (Vincent Dance Theatre: 2009).

⁷⁵ It is interesting to note that the safety net of having to 'polish' something for a paying audience was taken away by Vincent. She remarked during one discussion with the company that she would 'pull the piece if it ends up being crap and piss off a few theatres, rather than compromise the journey, or put out bad work'.

for the performer will be picked up in Chapter Six and the analysis and discussion of Chapter Seven and the Conclusion.

By examining the social, cultural, philosophical and political backdrop that gave rise to the emergence of *Ausdruckstanz*, the chapter so far has been able to effectively explore key characteristics of *Ausdruckstanz* and establish a basis for a genealogy of 'dance theatre' through these characteristics. The chapter then charted the evolution of 'dance theatre', tracing it through the contextual discussion of *Tanztheater* (specifically Bausch) and the practices of DV8 and VDT. The discussion to follow now brings together this discourse to establish and specify performance conditions of 'dance theatre', which transmute across all iterations of the form as it is defined in this study. In doing this, the writing will reference practices from Bausch, DV8 and VDT, helping to signpost the discussion of these chapters. In keeping with the purpose of the study as a whole, these conditions are for the performer. They provide the study with a foundational element of the developing lexicon of terminology which aims articulate and explore 'absorption' for the performer within 'dance theatre'. Consequently, discussion of the performance conditions focuses solely on the implications for the work of the performer. Questions relating to the specifics of *how* the work of the performer is realised and manifested in each company are then addressed in the company-specific discourse of later chapters and through the analysis of Chapter Seven.

The remainder of Chapter One is divided into several sections. In each section, I identify, define and discuss a particular condition of 'dance theatre'. I imply no

hierarchy by placing the conditions of 'dance theatre' in the order they appear here.

The condition of a constructed, 'liminal meta-actuality'

I see the performance of 'dance theatre' as taking place within a particular performance construct. There are several aspects of the construct directly affecting the work of the performer and the manner in which 'absorption' for the performer might occur.

In 'dance theatre', the performance area remains configured in and through the performance as an 'actual' space. In signposting the content of Chapter Three, which focuses on the notion of 'play' and its relationship to the idea of Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' as applied to the concept of 'dance theatre' performance, I introduce the term 'playspace' here. I derive, re-appropriate and develop the term 'playspace' from D.W. Winnicott's term 'play space'. Winnicott used this term to describe the transitional and developmental 'space' between mother and child, in which the child is free to play with emerging aspects of the self. 'Playspace' has also been used in the context of organisational settings to describe a space which gives rise to the opportunity for people to play with new ideas. The area of a performance venue in which the performers work is often colloquially referred to as the 'playing space'. I will use the term 'playspace' to refer to the physical and phenomenal setting in which 'dance theatre' performance and practice occurs. This could be a theatre stage or a rehearsal studio. This exact term, used for the first time here in relation to 'dance theatre' practice, forms part of the lexicon of terminology to be developed over the coming chapters.

As previously acknowledged, whilst the 'playspace' may be stylised and constructed, the phenomenal properties of this domain are acknowledged and used as 'actual' by the performers in their work; the 'playspace' constitutes a spatio-temporal liminality in which both they and the audience are present. In a manner similar to a Brechtian configuration of theatrical space, the 'playspace' never entirely pretends to be that which it is not:

By abandoning the pretence that the audience is eavesdropping on actual events, by openly admitting that the theatre is a theatre and not the world itself, the Brechtian stage approximates to the lecture hall to which audiences come in the expectation that they will be informed; but also to the circus arena...

(Esslin 1980: 116)

The positioning of the 'playspace' as constructed 'actuality' for the performer also gives rise to an emphasis in performance on the 'real'. There is a tendency in 'dance theatre' performance towards an attempt by the performer to uncover, to lay bare and to expose the 'real'. Murray and Keefe note that in 'dance theatre' one is likely to encounter 'real time, real tiredness, real exhaustion' (Murray and Keefe 2007: 76). This desire for the experience of the performer to be 'real' echoes throughout the genealogy of the form. Pina Bausch is noted for her use of movement repetition having the effect of extreme fatigue and exhaustion on her performers. Both *Bluebeard* (1977) and *Café Müller* (1978) contain sections, referenced in Chapter Five, in which the increasing strain of the choreography upon the performers is clear to see. Likewise, Gary Carter

comments on DV8's early work as 'performed with no tricks. Real stone, real skin, real wall, real danger. Real people, real emotions. Real life, real art' Carter 1992: 7).

With the idea of the 'real' being expressed within a construct which explicitly acknowledges the 'actuality' of the 'playspace', it becomes a shared arena with the audience. This 'playspace' is different from those found in theatre that creates a fictive reality situated in a 'then and there' which lies away from the 'here and now' of the 'actual' performance space of the theatre building (For example Albee's *Zoo Story*, noted in the introduction). In 'dance theatre', only the expressive 'actuality' of the 'here and now' of the 'playspace' remains. In describing the early work of Wigman, Maggie Odom comments that,

Frequently performances were given on the podium of a concert hall, often with no curtain or backdrop, and with strong, nonadjustable arc lights that shone in the dancers' eyes. Wigman believed firmly, however, that dance was an art that need not and should not be supported by music or elaborate settings.

(Odom 1980: 91)

Here we understand Wigman to be placing the temporality and location of the work and its 'playspace' firmly in the here and now of the theatre building. However, what is important to note is that the shared 'here and now' of the conversation between a 'dance theatre' performer and his or her audience still remains liminal in as much as it interrupts the temporal continuum of life external to the performance event for both the performer(s) and the audience.

Both parties willingly suspend the temporal constraints of the everyday and, for the duration of the performance, enter into the temporal liminality of the 'playspace' and the site of the performance. Further discussion regarding this liminality will be picked up in the discourse of Chapter Three in discussion of play and performance.

In detailing and summarising this particular performance condition, I have up until this point been reflecting on the 'real' or the 'actual' situated within the liminality of the performance event. However, the condition is one of 'meta-actuality'. The 'meta' is brought about by the 'actual' working on both the level of the actual or embodied 'real', whilst simultaneously functioning as in a theatricalised thematic or metaphor. Franko describes dance as 'the abstract symbol in its concrete essence' (Franko 1995: 18). For the Expressionists, the desire to express that less tangible, ever shifting abstract was the desire to express the inexpressible; the very essence of existence. In subsequent forms of 'dance theatre' the focus has shifted towards more socially-orientated concerns. However, the 'meta' remains resolutely present as the 'real' and 'actual' in the 'playspace' are fused in liminality together with the physical expression of the dream, the intangible and the feeling of what happens. This is seen in many and varied examples across the genealogy of 'dance theatre'. We can see it in the sharp gestures of Wigman in *Lento* and *Hexentanz* and, as will be explored later in the study, in the gruelling repetition across the canon of Bausch. It is also present in the very real physical danger inherent in aspects of Newson's choreography with DV8 when expressing a thought or sentiment, to the gradual performer-inflicted disintegration of the 'playspace' in Vincent Dance Theatre's *If We Go On*. In all of these instances, a condition of the

'playspace' is the fusion of the 'real' and the 'actual' with the expressive; the ethereal shadow of the dream with the 'actuality' of bruised limbs falling onto real stones. A condition of 'dance theatre' is that the 'playspace' is configured as a constructed, 'liminal meta-actuality'.

The condition of the prominence of the 'lived body' as the primary means of expression and as the locus for performance

Whilst it may appear an obvious point to note with respect to a theatrical practice significantly focused on the physical and the corporeal, I define a condition of 'dance theatre' pertinent to developing articulation and understanding of 'absorption', as being the prominence of the 'lived body' as the primary means of expression and as the locus for performance. As Ana Sanchez-Colberg notes, '[t]he focus on the body is prevalent, particularly in wanting to explore what and how theatrical experiences are created with and through it in an attempt to question what is shared and what is specific within the human condition' (Sanchez-Colberg 2007: 24) The impact of this perceived condition has significant potential to affect the ways and means by which 'absorption' might be configured for the performer.

In attempting to develop an understanding of 'absorption' in this context, within this second condition, there are two primary and related areas of note. Firstly there is the primacy of the body over movement. Whilst the movement of the performer is of course a significant element of the given 'dance theatre' piece, the movement itself is not the endpoint, or the 'thing' to be achieved. Isadora Duncan comments that, '[o]ften I thought to myself, what a mistake to call me a dancer. I am the magnetic centre to convey the emotional expression of the

Orchestra. From my soul sprang fiery rays to connect me with my trembling, vibrating Orchestra' (Duncan, cited in Franko 1995: 11). Here Duncan is positioning both herself and the movement of her body as a means to an end; a conduit for something bigger. Similarly, in an interview with Hanya Holm, Wigman explained that, '[i]n the beginning there was the idea, but the problem was how to get it across. There was at that time no acceptable technique. The necessity was to find the way' (Holm, cited in Odom 1980: 86). Again, the emphasis is not placed on movement, but on a search for connection to a deeper 'truth' or state of being realised or expressed through the body.

'Dance theatre' uses the body of the performer to, in Wigman's words, 'find the way'. The movement itself and the technique of the movement are used as vehicles for expression, rather than the expression being subordinate to a demonstration of virtuosic technique. Sanchez-Colberg recognises that:

If the process of language devaluation in theatre production came as a result of general mistrust of language's ability to convey the experience of self-in-the-world, a parallel mistrust of codified "languages of the body" is present in the history of contemporary dance from Duncan to Bausch.

(Sanchez-Colberg 2007: 24)

It is easy to hear echoes of Expressionism in the 'mistrust' of established and codified physical languages and in the emphasis and primacy placed in the body, as opposed to movement for its own sake. Crucially, in this echo we can also see a shift away from the production and use of regimented bodies with

each one executing the same pre-ordained movement language, towards a use of movement that necessarily foregrounds the body in expression. Inherent in this is the primacy of value 'dance theatre' practices place upon the expression of the creative, individual body. This value is seen across the canon; from its inception as early *Ausdruckstanz* through to the contemporary practices from the likes of DV8 and Charlotte Vincent, 'dance theatre' places significant emphasis on the creativity and potential of the individual body with its quirks, idiosyncrasies and unique expressions. In placing the work of DV8 firmly in line with that genealogy of Bausch and *Ausdruckstanz*, Lloyd Newson comments that,

Traditional notions of dance tend to have narrow definitions of what is considered beautiful and acceptable, with people (dancers) striving towards the same constructed ideal. The rigidity of the "perfect" image gives little room for individuality or reality. This can be very destructive.

(Newson 1993:13)

The primacy of the (individual) body also creates it as the locus of the performance. The 'playspace' and the manner in which it is configured during and through the performance becomes a product of the relationship between the body of the performer(s) and the space itself. As with the politicised bodies of Laban's movement choirs in the Berlin Olympics, the body of the performer creates the meaning in the 'playspace' as it defines the space around it. The body is the shifting site on and through which meaning is inscribed and re-inscribed within the 'playspace'. A more recent example of this can be seen in

one memorable sequence from DV8's filmed version of *Strange Fish* (1992). We see Wendy Houstoun at the end of a corridor, turning back to look somewhat enviously at the couple at the other end of the corridor. The couple move slowly with each other, locked in a sensual embrace. The bodies and the spatial and physical relationships between all three performers here create and define the purpose and meaning within the 'playspace' with the significant distance between Houstoun and the couple being one of the defining measures of the meaning. It is also interesting to note that at this particular point in the piece there is very little 'movement' from Houstoun. Again, this subordination of movement to the body as the site and locus of meaning itself is substantiated by Sanchez-Colberg:

The generation of movement may be an important part of the body/space materialization, but not its main focus. Movement is relevant in as much as it may 'express' aspects of the body space nexus. Therefore the boundaries of what can constitute dance movement are opened, and consequently, so are the boundaries of what constitutes the dance medium.

(Sanchez-Colberg 2007: 24)

Drawing on earlier discussion of *Ausdruckstanz*, the second point of note with respect to the 'dance theatre' condition of the prominence of the 'lived body' as the primary means of expression and as the locus for performance, is its 'lived' quality. Within 'dance theatre' the experience of the body *as it is being moved* becomes central to the work of the performer. Whilst there is, of course, technique involved, 'dance theatre' is not an execution of movement technique

for the performer, but rather an experience of a physical aesthetic as it is being created anew in the moment of performance. Sondra Horton Fraleigh comments that:

To experience the dance is to experience our own living substance in an aesthetic (affective) transformation. To express the dance is to express the lived body in an aesthetic form. The body, understood in its lived totality is the source of the dance aesthetic. It is not simply the physical instrument of dance [...].

(Fraleigh 1987: xvi)

As outlined previously, 'dance theatre' has been positioned here as existing as a 'liminal meta-actuality'. This meta-actuality is configured and realised through and on the site of the performer's body. With the body as the site for the orientation of the 'playspace', the event of the performance becomes immediate. It is in the present and continually shifting with the present. The teller is not at a distance from the thing itself, but is the creator, the vehicle, the communicator and the experiencer of that which is given to the audience. In short, 'dance theatre' for the performer is only existing in the present tense:

As a performed art, dance is not a display of self, a show, or showing: it is simply given [...] Good dancers know that the dancing self dies when it looks back either to visualize or admire itself. The present tense is lost. Spontaneity is lost and with it the dance.

(Fraleigh 1987: 23)⁷⁶

⁷⁶ In a related vein, Andre Lepecki also recognises this imperative to remain in the present tense when writing about French choreographer Boris Charmatz's trio *Aatt...enen...tionon* (1996). Lepecki highlights

This condition of 'dance theatre' and the consequences that it presents for manifestations of 'absorption' will underpin and contribute towards the analysis of Chapter Seven.

The condition of 'play' and 'game'

The final condition of 'dance theatre' which also impacts significantly on a developing understanding of 'absorption' in the particular context of 'dance theatre' is the condition of 'play' and 'game'. The notions of 'play' and 'game' are concepts discussed at length in Chapter Three of this study. However, for the purposes of this chapter, it is useful to briefly touch upon some of the characteristics of 'play' as summarised by Johan Huizinga:

We might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside ordinary life as being not serious, but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly [...] It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an orderly manner.

(Huizinga 1950: 13)

In a manner highly reminiscent of the attributes of 'flow' activity described by Csikszentmihalyi, Huizinga positions 'play' as an activity in and for itself. One can easily draw parallels between this description and the liminality of the action contained within the temporal and geographical boundaries of the theatrical

both the actuality of the body as live and, because of this, the nature of the performance happening only in the present tense; *Aatt...enen...tionon* is rather a powerful reiteration of the generative force of the body, by means of a constant insistence on the body's presentness, its material aliveness as it transpires through pain' (Lepecki 1999: 137).

'playspace'. However, with 'dance theatre' positioned and understood as a 'meta-actuality' situated in the 'here and now', the structure of the 'play', the structure of the 'game' and the way in which the 'game' is employed between the performer, fellow performers and audience is again configured as 'actual'. The 'dance theatre' performer is not so much playing at 'being', or playing at 'doing', but instead is simply playing and just doing.⁷⁷ However, as previously indicated, the 'doing' is more than 'doing' in an everyday sense. It is purposeful playfulness enshrined in a 'liminal meta-actuality' wherein, '[t]he aesthetic and phenomenal essence of dance is defined as it exists in a relation between the dancer and the audience [...] the dance unites the dancer and the audience in a lived metaphysic' (Fraleigh 1987: xv). In order to effectively develop a lexicon of terminology to employ in the analysis and discussion of later chapters, this idea will be expanded upon in Chapter Three.

Inherent in the way the condition of 'play' and 'game' is positioned and used within 'dance theatre' is the prominence of 'task' and 'action' over drama. We can see that the prominence of 'action' within a 'liminal meta-actuality' is inherited from the earlier pioneers of *Ausdruckstanz* by contemporary practices (to be explored in the later company-specific chapters). Laban's movement choirs are a testament to the collective power of choral action. Likewise, Wigman in such pieces as *Totenmal* or *Lento* was not foregrounding the dramatic narrative, but allowing the 'action' of the movement, configured as

⁷⁷ As an aside to this idea we can see this understanding reflected in John Schikowski's intimate description of the relationship between the foot of a dancer and the floor on which it dances; 'the play between the floor and the sole of the foot varying in countless nuances. The sole kisses and caresses the floor. It plays, it jokes with it, it pushes it pointedly away, mistreats it with a punishing stamp' (Schikowski, cited in Odom 1980: 87). Contained within this passage is the notion that the 'play' contained within the act of doing the dance and the phenomenological experience of the moment of doing and playing is the stuff of the performance.

focused 'play' within the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'playspace', to give the moment its theatricality, rather than its drama.

The condition of 'play' and 'game' also signals the element of the undecided and the spontaneous in performance. Drawing upon comments made earlier surrounding the 'lived body' within *Ausdruckstanz*, this is the spontaneity of the lived moment of 'play' and 'game'. Thus, new opportunities for improvisation and difference arise in each moment of performance. It is this tension between structure and the lived moment of performatively engaged 'play' and 'game' in the 'game' itself, which provides 'dance theatre' with the spontaneity of the lived moment. At this point, '[w]e have arrived at *jouissance*. There is a paradox in play. On one hand it depends on the clear structuring and understanding of boundaries, but at the same time in order to be able to reach the thrill of the *ad infinitum*, a degree of unpredictability has to operate. Chaos from the order, which "disturbs and disorients us, shattering our composure" (Sanchez-Colberg 1996: 55). Again, these threads will form part of the discourse on 'flow', 'play', and 'absorption' in Chapter Three.

The final aspect of the condition of 'play' and 'game' useful to introduce here is the 'play' of self. As has been noted above, 'dance theatre' prizes and values the creativity and individuality of the performer, thus valuing the contribution of the self, both in the process of making and in the presentation of performance. The 'dance theatre' performer brings their self to the dance, sometimes adopting a position of self-sacrifice through the creative act. However, just as the dancer brings themselves to the act of 'dance theatre'; the condition of 'play' and 'game' within 'dance theatre' positions the dance in that arena which

Emilyn Claid has termed 'seductive ambiguity' (Claid 2006). In a manner similar to the 'absorption' spoken of by Csikszentmihalyi in his observation of 'flow' activities in a number of settings, Claid notes that:

As performers we commit ourselves to the work by inhabiting each and every physical task'. [note the lack of theatrical drama] 'In this immediate attendance to the task our pedestrian identifiable authored bodies disappear, becoming something else. Full body becomes empty body. On one hand our actions are real. On the other – as we move across tasks, switch and let go and re-inhabit – these actions become a surface of image for spectators.

(Claid 2006: 204)

This idea of the performer being 'absorbed' in the 'game' of the dance and the 'actualised' 'action' or 'task' of the dance as set within the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'playspace' becomes ambiguous from the perspective of the spectator. This in turn creates a 'play' of self for the performer as in the moment of 'dance theatre' performance they create a self which may be a facet of their everyday self, but which exists outside it. This also resonates in Fraleigh's thoughts: 'I am created in my dance, because I am objectively constituted in the structure of the dance. At the same time I am extended beyond the structure of my personal identity' (Fraleigh 1987: 38). This is the 'play' of self of 'dance theatre'. There is no defined character, positioned as an *other* in whose shoes I place myself when I perform. Instead there is the 'play' of the self in an unstable and fluid 'game' of 'action' and 'task' contained within a 'liminal meta-actuality'.

This facet of 'play', contained within the larger condition of 'play' and 'game' again has potential to impact upon an understanding of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer. Discussion of this element of 'play' will be picked up through the exploration of Chapter Three.

Summary of Chapter One

Following the exploration of the characteristics of *Ausdruckstanz* and the contextualisation of subsequent iterations of 'dance theatre', I have drawn on this discussion to identify three conditions of 'dance theatre' applicable to all iterations of the genealogical line. The stated conditions of 'dance theatre' provide a foundational aspect of the developing lexicon of terminology with which to articulate and understand 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'.

Discussion of these conditions has also highlighted some of the thinkers and practitioners to be used in later chapters. The emerging lexicon of terminology, to be summarised at the end of Part One, will be expanded through Chapters Two and Three in preparation for discussion and analysis of Part Two of this study.

Chapter Two: 'Absorption' and an 'optimal' 'mode of 'being/doing': Phenomenology, consciousness studies and the cognitive sciences

Introduction

Having defined what the study intends by the term 'dance theatre' in Chapter One, this chapter continues to develop a lexicon of terminology pertinent to articulation and understanding of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'. The chapter engages with useful aspects of phenomenology, consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience.

Chapter Two: A structure and outline

Chapter Two firstly aims to position these lenses as a contextual setting for the introduction of four key terms. Along with the lenses of the study, these terms develop the lexicon of terminology evolving through the study. Each term requires detailed exploration and definition in this chapter. These terms are: 'perception', 'intentionality', 'action' and 'temporality'.

With this context in mind, the chapter firstly examines facets of phenomenology, then moving to look at aspects of consciousness studies, focusing particularly on discussion of higher states of consciousness and 'optimal' states of being. To complete this avenue of discussion, the chapter then turns to cognitive neuroscience. Whilst these lenses are discussed in the main in an order that forms a (very) loose chronology, it should be acknowledged that they are also inextricably intertwined; aspects of each relates to the others. Consequently the discussion moves between these lenses as the need arises.

In order to draw together the discussion of the chapter, the discourse then progresses to focus on a summary of the four terms: 'perception', 'intention', 'action' and 'temporality' and their relevance to the wider study. This understanding will allow these terms to be used effectively as part of the developing lexicon of terminology in the commentary of the accompanying DVD-ROM material and in the analysis and discourse of Chapter Seven and the Conclusion.

Before embarking on discussion and outline of this chapter proper, in considering the relevance and appropriateness of the fields noted above, and the way in which they will be used in developing a focused articulation of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer, it is useful to frame the following discourse through a summary of the wider 'enactive' approach. The movement in Systems Theories of cognition from a position that drew the mind as a computational system, towards avenues of current thought in which the body-mind is an embedded dynamic entity within its domain, sits across the fields and disciplines engaged with through this chapter. This shift in position was seen in the 1990's as the computational model of cognition was challenged;

The cognitive system is not a computer, it is a dynamical system. It is not the brain, inner, and encapsulated; rather, it is the whole system comprised of nervous system, body, and environment. The cognitive system is not a discrete sequential manipulator of static representational structures; rather, it is a structure of mutually and simultaneously influencing *change* [...] The cognitive system does not interact with other

aspects of the world by passing messages or commands; rather, it continuously coevolves with them.'

(Van Gelder and Port 1995:3)

Similarly, Gallagher and Zahavi note, '[a]s perceivers and agents we are embedded and embodied agents. All perception and action involves a component of bodily self experience' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008: 142). Consequently, discussion of the 'enactive' view at this point is situated within, and representative of, the direction of contemporary thinking, which will provide both a clearer underpinning framework for the discussions to come at other points in this chapter. As the notion of 'enaction' within the cognitive sciences is in itself interdisciplinary and draws upon a number of fields, using the 'enactive' view provides sound reasoning for my employment of the related aspects of phenomenology, consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience. In a similar vein, Loukes acknowledges the 'enactive' view as being congruent with 'situated' thinking sitting across fields and disciplines:

Cognition is dependent both on neural functioning in the brain, and also on the way our organism is "coupled" to the environment through our senses. [...] The notion of "coupling" between organism and environment is a common one in "situated" perspectives on consciousness and perception.

(Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 319)

The 'enactive' approach

Evan Thompson (2005) notes that the 'enactive' approach was introduced into the field of cognitive sciences by Varela, Thompson and Rosch in 1991.

Thompson explains that the 'enactive' approach brings together several ideas:

1. Living beings are autonomous agents, enacting, or bringing forth their own cognitive domains. (Thompson calls this state of agency an autopoietic system.)
2. The nervous system is also autonomous, actively generating and maintaining its own meaningful patterns of activity.
3. Cognition is a form of embodied action.
4. For a cognitive being, the world is not a pre-determined external realm but 'a relational domain enacted or brought forth by that being's autonomous agency and mode of coupling with the environment'

(Thompson 2005: 407)

With these ideas considered, Giuseppe Riva *et al.* (2006) explain that the main claim of the 'enactive' view is that 'perceptual experience depends of the acquisition and exercise of sensorimotor knowledge' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 55).

What is evident across the ideas above is that the living being as autopoietic system is not entirely separate from the world or realm in which it exists. It does not interact from the position of a 'sealed' or 'divorced' unit. Instead, the autopoietic system is active in creating, (enacting) the world and defining (its) meaning within this world for itself. Moreover, this is carried out not through a

process of interaction between an interior 'mind' and an exterior realm, but through and with the body as it works within this realm. The 'enactive' view sees that 'the human mind is embodied in our entire organism and embedded in the world, and hence is not reducible to structures inside the head' (Thompson, cited in Riva *et al.* 2006: 55).

Consideration of the 'enactive' view as a means to underpin and approach use of phenomenology, consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience within the context of this study consequently raises questions as to how the process of enactment actually occurs. As the main claim of the 'enactive' view explains, with the embedded human organism being the embodied human mind (as noted immediately above), an understanding of the 'how' is reached through examination of bodily activity in the world. Riva *et al.* divide this activity, or process into three areas: 'this process involves three permanent and intertwined modes of bodily activity – self regulation, sensorimotor coupling, and intersubjective interaction' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 55). The continued attempt to develop the understanding of 'absorption' through an enactivist approach to cognition, which situates the autopoietic entity or system as 'being-in-the-world', will be resumed later in this chapter.

As the process/phenomenon of 'dance theatre' is inherently an embodied pursuit for the performer which foregrounds consideration and use of the body in performance, elements of the 'enactive' view would also seem to suitably underpin exploration of notions of consciousness relative to the idea of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer. Echoing some ideas within the 'enactive' approach, Alva Noë (2009), (whose work and thinking will also be

referenced later in this chapter) calls for consciousness to be understood as something we do, rather than something that we have. In congruence with 'enactivism', Noë sees consciousness as not happening inside us, but as a part of the process of our living experience of the world: 'Consciousness is not something the brain achieves on its own, consciousness requires the joint operation of brain, body and world' (Noë 2009: 10). Notions of embodied consciousness and higher or 'optimal' states of consciousness and their contribution in developing an understanding of 'absorption' through an 'enactivist' approach will also aid in addressing the facet of the research question noted above.

Explicit relationships and congruence between certain elements of the 'enactive' approach and phenomenological enquiry as noted by Thompson (2005) and Riva *et al.* (2006), amongst others, point to both being pertinent to exploring the relationship(s) between an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' and the cognitive world of the performer. Thompson notes that 'both maintain that cognition bears a constitutive relation to its objects' (Thompson 2005: 408). The discussion of useful aspects of phenomenology in this chapter, including a phenomenology of the body and experience as it relates to performance will provide the starting point for this chapter.

Having introduced the 'enactive' view and its relationship to the lenses of the study before outlining the structure of this chapter, it is useful to touch upon Zarrilli's notion of the 'enactive' performer noted in the introduction to this study. The 'enactive' view of acting as espoused by Zarrilli creates the performer as an entity which is a live, responsive being, interacting and living with and through

the moment of performance. Zarrilli puts forward the possibility of positioning acting not as a mimetic endeavour, but instead proposes that:

In contrast to representational and/or mimetic meta-theories of acting that construct their views of acting from a position as an outside observer to the process/phenomenon of acting, an 'enactive' view provides an account of acting from the perspective of the actor as enactor/doer from "inside" the process.

(Zarrilli 2007: 638)

In the context of this study, the terms 'acting' or 'actor' used here by Zarrilli could be replaced with the terms 'dance theatre performance' or 'dance theatre performer'; my use of the 'enactive' view in the context of this study follows the path laid out by Zarrilli. However, in undertaking this replacement, I acknowledge the different demands placed upon the 'dance theatre' performer as opposed to the actor, as articulated in the conditions of 'dance theatre' established through Chapter One. Consequently, where this study differs from Zarrilli's work can be located in the detail of a specific 'mode of being/doing' for the performer (to be unpicked in subsequent chapters), arising within the particular performative context of 'dance theatre'.

Phenomenology

With the purpose and scope of this study in mind, it is not possible to cover all the details of the phenomenological tradition and do justice to all its complexities and variants. In order to focus this section, at the outset I will be

concentrating on selected aspects of thought from the 'second generation' of phenomenologists including Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. These thinkers moved the 'pure' transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (arguably the founder of phenomenology) towards a phenomenology that recognises the centrality of lived, embodied experience within the phenomenological account.⁷⁸ Through recognising the body in this manner, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre cast their work within in an existential frame that moved the body, as a thing-body (*korper*), to a related, but distinct paradigm which positioned the body as lived, (*lieb*).

So, whilst still in keeping with the fundamental desire of the phenomenologist to seek 'the heart of the experience itself; the immediate and direct consciousness of man in the face of the world' (Sheets 1966: 10)⁷⁹, the body becomes the meeting point for existentialism and phenomenology, with the result being 'an effort to disclose the essential structures of human existence in the *Lebenswelt* [lifeworld]' (Lawrence and O'Connor 1967: 10). Within the existential phenomenology of this 'second generation' there are several key ideas and lines of thought to unpick and examine and which can be usefully brought to bear upon the idea of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'.

⁷⁸ Husserl focused on a phenomenological approach that reinstated the primacy of subjectivity in respect of the essence of the thing itself, marking out his phenomenology as 'pure', or transcendental phenomenology. It is not concerned with the empirical or the real, but with the essential, focusing on an eidetic reduction of experience: 'pure, or transcendental phenomenology will be established not as a science of facts, but as a science of essential being' (Husserl 1931: 45). As noted by Stanton Garner, '[I]ike Heidegger and Sartre, Merleau-Ponty existentialised the phenomenological project and he accomplished this through a radical corporealism' (Garner 1994: 28).

⁷⁹ Phenomenology, then, is the study and understanding of the world as it appears before us. As Dermot Moran notes, this description of things 'just as they are in the manner in which they appear' is the 'central motif of phenomenology' (Moran 2000: xiii). This particular epistemology rejects the scientific, objective view of the world wherein the experiencing 'I' is removed. The scientific and objective rationalisation of world knowledge implies that the possibility of gaining knowledge by representational means, or via deduction divorced from the actual experience, is rejected. A positivistic attitude, which holds that every phenomenon can be logically understood through reductive observational examination of the whole through its constituent parts, is replaced by a phenomenology situated in knowledge grounded in concrete human experience. Phenomenology therefore aims to 'disclose and clarify the meaning of the phenomena, that is, of whatever presents itself by feeling, sensation, conception, memory, imagination' (Lawrence and O'Connor 1967: 7).

***Dasein* and exploration of 'being-in-the-world'**

The term *Dasein* as employed by Heidegger can be literally translated as 'Being-there'.⁸⁰ In *Dasein*, Heidegger intended an idea of Being with which entities concerned with their being and concerned about considering or thinking about their being could be described: '*Dasein* is an entity which does not just occur among other entities. Rather it is ontically distinguished by the fact that, in its very Being, that Being is an *issue* for it' (Heidegger trans. Macquarie and Robinson 1962: 32; emphasis in original). Roy Hornsby notes that Heidegger's pursuit

was of a specific type of being, the human being [...] By using the term *Dasein*, Heidegger called attention to the fact that a human being cannot be taken into account except as being an existent in the middle of a world amongst other things.

(Hornsby 2014: n.p.)

Let us for a moment unpick this term, and then examine the implications for the idea of 'absorption'. As Hornsby explains above, Heidegger's Being does not exist as a separate entity, a sealed object alongside other sealed objects. It is not divorced from its surroundings; the 'there' within the literal translation of *Dasein* is the world in which we are being. *Dasein* is also in the world (where else would or could it be?). Garner explains that

The phenomenological revolution [...] involved a shift in positionality

⁸⁰ *Dasein* is on rare occasions broken down by Heidegger into two parts with a hyphen - '*Das-ein*' - bringing it closer to its etymological constituents.

whereby the descriptions of a detached observer “posited” in front of its object would yield ground to an account of consciousness and its objects as these exist within a field of mutual inherence.

(Garner 1994: 28)

As Heidegger’s *Dasein* is in the world, it is part of the world in which it is being. *Dasein*, therefore is ‘being-in-the-world’. In observing *Dasein* as ‘being-in-the-world’, Riva *et al.* (2006) also note that within Heidegger’s explanations of this Being, there is also the ontological feature of ‘being-with’; I exist not on my own but through my relationships with other people and things in my world. Riva *et al.* explain that,

[t]his process is always “directional”: aimed towards something, or in a certain direction. The direction is determined by our concern ... our spatial activities determine a “here” related to the objects/beings we deal with. Following this view, “existence” is the main feature of being: a temporally-structured making intelligible of the place in which we find ourselves.

(Riva *et al.* 2006: 49)

Several facets of this explanation are useful when considering ‘being-in-the-world’ and its usefulness in relation to ‘absorption’ within ‘dance theatre’. Firstly, the idea of Being as ‘being-in-the-world’ presents our world, or in ‘enactive’ terms, our domain as a spatio-temporal environment which does not exist as an objective world, but which is made intelligible and given meaning and purpose

by us as we encounter it. *I* give purpose to *my* domain by virtue of my directional 'being-with'. The reason I italicise 'I' and 'my' in the previous sentence is to emphasise that, through the directional process of 'being-with', I am the creator of the relationships, meanings and purposes within my domain. The associations and purposes I confer on my surroundings were not and are not inherently there in them for me, without me being there to create them. It follows therefore that any element of my domain is brought into meaningful existence *by* me, *for* me as and when *I* need it to be present. Without me, it does not exist for me. In discussing the enactment of a domain by a 'situated' entity. Loukes cites David Lee:

Like all animals, we exist by virtue of coupling our bodies to the environment through action [...] Perception is necessary for controlling movement just as movement is necessary for obtaining perceptual information. Perception and movement compose a cycle that is action.

(Lee, cited by Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 319)

Taking a second line of thought from Riva et al., above, one can see that he is also examining what Brentano termed 'intentionality'. Dahlberg, Dalberg and Nyström note that, 'Brentano introduced the phenomenological theory of conscious intentionality [...] Intentionality refers to the relationship between a person and the object, of her/his experience, or more simply one's directed awareness of an object or event' (Dahlberg, Dalberg and Nyström 2008: 49). Whilst an understanding of 'intentionality', and within this the 'intentionality' of consciousness, is one of the key areas to be articulated further in this chapter, it

is worth noting here that Riva *et al.* position both spatiality and ‘temporality’ as elements of ‘intentionality’, or directional processes within ‘being-with’. As directionality has to come from somewhere and be towards something (or someone), in their explanation Riva *et al.* again reinforce the position of ‘I’ as central to the phenomenological investigation of lived experiences (such as ‘optimal’ experience). However, whilst the centrality of ‘I’ is congruent with the older traditions of Husserlian phenomenological thought, Riva *et al.* also echo the phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty, which acknowledges ‘our embodied and temporally incarnated manner of living. Our bodies and the specific formation of the sense organs reveal the world for us in a very special way’ (Moran 2000: 418). The movement towards, and use of, an embodied phenomenology and consequently the attendant emphasis on spatio-temporal concerns is also echoed by Antonio Damasio: ‘Whatever happens in your mind happens in time and space relative to the instant in time your body is in and to the region of space occupied by your body’ (Damasio 2000: 145). The transcendental ‘I’ of Husserl is transposed here into an embodied and living ‘I’ bound in time and space.

The usefulness of the points above in relation to developing an understanding of ‘absorption’ within ‘dance theatre’ begin to make themselves apparent when one reaffirms the nature of the ‘lived experience’ of ‘dance theatre’ and the primacy of the body within this endeavour for the performer, introduced in Chapter One. The nature of ‘dance theatre’ as embodied ‘lived experience’ creates a particular construct of ‘being-with’ for the performer which interrupts the everyday directional processes, or modes of ‘intentionality’ which characterise ‘the most basic mode of being. When we are, we are intentional,

so to speak' (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström, 2000: 47). These everyday modes of 'being-with' are replaced with a construct allowing for the possibility of negentropic 'intentionality' for the performer in the form of an 'optimal' 'mode of being doing' of which the notion of 'absorption' is one part. In keeping with the discourse of this chapter so far, to understand the actual nature of 'absorption' in this particular context and construct, one must necessarily then foreground phenomenological consideration of subjectively configured time and space. As Maxine Sheets⁸¹ notes:

Space, time and force are certainly apparent in dance. But they are not, and cannot be objectively apparent. To conceive of them as objective factors beforehand is to overlook the very quiddity of dance: it is something created and which does not exist prior to its creation.

(Sheets 1966: 14)

Sheets also echoes here the act of bringing into being inherent in the 'being-in-the-world' of Heidegger's *Dasein*, a characteristic of the performer that is also recognised by Bert O. States: 'He is the original of the poet's "copy" in the sense he is the being that grants it an existence' (States 1985: 127).

The considerations above will contribute to the lexicon of terminology developed throughout the thesis. As with Chapter One, a summary of progress is provided at the end of this chapter. In continuing to expand and develop this emerging lexicon, it is useful to briefly continue the exploration of

⁸¹ Maxine Sheets, latterly Maxine Sheets-Johnstone. At the time of the publication cited here, the author was Maxine Sheets

phenomenology here and look more closely at ideas pertinent to the development of an understanding of 'absorption' contained within the embodied phenomenology of Merleau-Ponty.

The embodied 'I' as interweaving and fluid

Whilst Heidegger does acknowledge the lived body within this state of 'being-in-the-world', Merleau-Ponty moves further in his consideration of the lived body, arguing against the transcendental nature of Husserl's essences, recognising the body as *Leib*; the lived body, and positing the body as the crucible for experience and consciousness: 'Consciousness is being towards the thing through the intermediary of the body' (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Garner 1994: 28). 'Thing' here is used by Merleau-Ponty to denote the world of our perceptual experience. The body becomes the anchor, the point of location from which we organise and understand our world. This embodied 'I'-centered organisation of perception, (also a key area to be discussed later in this chapter) is also echoed by Elizabeth Grosz:

Space is understood by us as a relation between these points and a central or organising perspective which regulates perception so that they occupy the same perceptual field. This perspective has no other location than that given by the body.

(Grosz 1994: 90)

In a further refutation of a Cartesian Dualism inherent in the earlier transcendental phenomenology of Husserl, Lakoff and Johnson recognise Merleau-Ponty as arguing that:

Mind and body are not separate physical entities, that experience is embodied, not ethereal and that when we use the terms mind and body, we are imposing bounded conceptual structures artificially on the ongoing integrated process that constitutes our experience.

(Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 97)

More than this, we experience the *Lebenswelt* (lifeworld) holistically. Within the 'intentionality' of purposeful actions Riva *et al.* note that,

"cognitive" representations of objects as tools or equipment do not exist. This means that objects are conceived of according to their usefulness in respect of whatever task is currently being performed. This situation is described by Heidegger as "readiness-to-hand".

(Riva *et al.* 2006: 50)

In a similar vein Merleau-Ponty explains that; 'It is impossible [...] to decompose a perception to make it a collection of sensations, because in it, the whole is prior to the parts' (Merleau-Ponty, cited in States 1985: 7).

This wholeness of perception steers the act of pre-reflective experience from knowing or being cognisant of the world as it appears for us, to feeling the world as it appears to or is perceived by us. (In Damasio's (2000) terms, it is the 'Feeling of What Happens'.) In this manner we intuit the 'lived experience' of the phenomena as it happens for us or to us. By this I mean that we bring the object, as we conceive it for its particular purpose for us, into being. This is the essential relationship (Sheets 1966) between consciousness and the thing it experiences. Merleau-Ponty famously describes it as 'flesh meeting flesh' (Merleau-Ponty, cited in Moran 2000: 409). In these terms, the interaction between an entity and their perceptual domain and spatio-temporal environment becomes an embodied dialectic with both subject and object taking on boundaries which place them in 'conversational' symbiosis. The body becomes the organisational point of interface. As Lakoff and Johnson note, 'Merleau-Ponty [...] argued that subjects and objects are not independent entities, but instead arise from a background, or "horizon" of fluid, integrated experience on which we impose the concepts "subjective" and "objective" (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 97).⁸² Moreover, as has been discussed above, '[t]he phenomenologist studies perception, not as a purely subjective phenomenon, but as it is lived through by a perceiver who is in the world and who is an embodied agent' (Gallager and Zahavi 2008: 8). Consequently the fluid embodied dialectic of this interweaving is (for me) located within the specificity of *my* spatio-temporal perceptions connected to *my* 'being-in-the-world'. Moran observes that '[h]uman experience is an immensely complex

⁸² I can understand this fluid subject-object 'weave' through examination of my embodied experience in using a pen to write on paper. My corporeal experience of the paper, of touching the paper, is felt through the pen. Through the pen I am aware of, and can distinguish, the difference in sensation between fine writing paper and blotting paper. The status of the pen as an object divorced from my body becomes fluid and the pen becomes an extension of my corporeal subject. The pen, therefore, becomes a fluid subject-object: 'The body and the visible are both intimately connected and separated by a gulf. They are intertwined with one another' (Moran 2000: 409).

weave of consciousness, body and environment' (Moran 2000: 413). Moran acknowledges here that the interplay and interweave is not just a physical one existing in time and space, rather it is actually a multi-stranded perceptual relationship which incorporates our consciousness of ourselves, our bodies, the world and those pertinent relationships between them.⁸³

Whilst further discussion of 'perception' as a key area of consideration for 'absorption' is taken up later in this chapter, it is timely at this point to highlight the idea of the fluid subject-object as useful in considering an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' as a heightened form of 'lived experience' in which the normal domain of the entity seems expanded, or seems to involve perception of a greater sense of interconnectedness with a wider perceptual domain. This is noted by Loukes as she describes the tasks associated with the 'extended bodymind' of the performer:

the "situated" bodymind of the performer can develop its perceptual/sensual abilities to heighten its engagement with its environment ... one of the tasks of the contemporary performer is to find a way to be able to develop an awareness of both the bodymind and the action undertaken in order to be able to fully inhabit each moment of performance.

As an interesting aside, this sentiment is also to be found mirrored in non-western philosophy and thought. One can see the complexity of which Moran writes in Yuasa Yasuo's notion of the Meridian circuits of the body which carry what Eastern medicine recognises as *ki* energy. Yasuo describes the body having four organisational circuits of which the Meridian system is the fourth. He describes it as the system 'which is connected to the external world while circulating in the skin, which is the boundary wall between the external world and the body' (Yasuo 1993: 118). In his study of Eastern medical practices, Yasuo describes *ki*-energy as a psychological and physiological energy that is shared and exchanged with the external world through the Meridian system of the body: '*ki*-energy flowing in the meridian system has been conceived of as exchanging *ki* with the external world' (Yasuo 1993: 119). Yasuo maintains that *ki* energy is 'intimately connected with the mind and body as a whole, that is, with spirit and matter as a whole, and it is a middle system influencing their functions' (Yasuo 1993: 117-8) The exchange of *ki*-energy with the world (Yasuo describes it as 'intermingling'), is again similar to the fluid dialectic of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological horizon wherein subject and object are engaged in a reciprocal phenomenological conversation.

(Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 329)

This echoes similar sentiments of expanded horizons from Sondra Horton Fraleigh, who explains that '[w]hen I am my dance I am not limited to being myself. When I am my dance it is my self unlimited that is expressed' (Fraleigh 1987: 33).

In addition to the fluidity of spatial boundaries between subject and object, as has been alluded to above, the idea of a shifting point can also be applied to the temporal nature of the embodied 'lived experience'. Horton Fraleigh grasps at this intangible sense of 'temporality' as follows: 'Since we cannot live in a perpetual mystery, we invented dancing to give the shadows visible form, if only in the fleeting present and of that particular mystery dance can manifest' (Fraleigh 1987: 31). The 'fleeting present' of which Fraleigh speaks points to the temporal nature of dance. The moment of the dance, the quiddity of its aliveness in the present, is continually moving. This is also implicitly acknowledged by Sheets, cited previously; dance does not exist except in the moment of doing. It exists as 'lived experience' only in transient form and, for the dancer, is not a reflective undertaking but a phenomenologically immediate experience, in expression, of the spatio-temporal environment.⁸⁴ By recognising

⁸⁴ It is through considering the spatial and temporal aspects of the phenomenological body that we may arrive at what Sheets-Johnstone calls understanding of the ekstastic body in dance. The 'lived experience' of the body and the experience of the 'Man-in-the-midst-of-the-world' (Sheets 1966) incorporate a pre-reflective awareness of the body in space and time. I am implicitly aware of my being here through my body-centred spatial and temporal consciousness. As it is subjective and centred on my experience, this being here recognises past, present and future with regard to its situatedness in space and time. In respect of past, present and future Sheets-Johnstone indicates the body is therefore ekstastic; being stands out from itself by virtue of never being completely there. The body is never residing completely in one single fixed space time moment, but instead existing in a state of becoming as it moves in intentional arcs towards its goals. In phenomenological terms the act of dance, or in the context of this study case 'dance theatre' becomes a lived experience of fluid, kinetic phenomenon.

the performer's engagement with the act of dance as immediate and therefore as pre-reflective, Sheets explains that the dancers encounter the

lived experience of the sheer dynamic flow of force which is the dance
[...] The dance comes alive precisely as the dancers are implicitly aware of themselves and the form, such that the form moves through them; they are not agents of the form, but its moving centre.

(Sheets 1966: 6)

With understanding the phenomenological experience of the dancer being situated in the lived pre-reflective moment, and with the experience being temporal and shifting in nature, it is useful to examine further the relationship of the unconscious quasi-body with the idea of the 'habit body', or 'lived body', within Merleau-Ponty's overall body scheme. Merleau-Ponty's 'habit body' is the pre-material, pre-sensory self, present and active through intention. Inherent in this is the movement of pre-reflective 'intentionality' towards the world. In pre-reflection, the unconscious 'habit body' is an energetic movement in potential towards the thing in the external world upon which 'attention' is focused. Whilst connected to, and informing, the physiological action of the objective body, or corpus, this energetic movement is one of potential, existing before physiological motor functions spring into actual action.⁸⁵ This speaks of a pre-reflective intentionality-in-potential and chimes well with Moran's assertion that, 'whilst it is true that phenomenology turns to consciousness, it is proposing above all to be a science of consciousness based on elucidating the intentional

⁸⁵ The notion of the unconscious 'habit body' as described here can be understood as similar to notions of premotor neural activity and cognition discussed later in Part One of this chapter.

structures of acts and their correlative objects' (Moran 2000: 16). This idea is also echoed by Lakoff and Johnson: 'We constantly orient our bodies with respect to containers; rooms, beds, buildings [...] similarly, every time we see something move, we comprehend that movement in terms of a source, path, goal schema and reason accordingly' (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 36).

The notion of 'intentionality' within a pre-reflective context has some bearing on later analysis and discussion of the nature of 'absorption' for performers in 'dance theatre'. This is evident when noting the repeatedly acknowledged sensation that the activity is, in part 'steering' the participant. This would point to an arrangement, or particular understanding of the notions of 'intentionality' and 'action' within this context, which carries some relation to or confluence with the ideas discussed above. The key ideas arising out of this discourse will be examined further in this chapter, to then feed into the analysis of Chapter Seven.

Consciousness

This section addresses aspects of consciousness pertinent to the development of an understanding of 'absorption'. As in the previous section on phenomenology, I intend to draw out and signpost key elements of consciousness studies, which will then contribute to the lexicon of terminology used in the later chapters. It should be noted at the outset of this discussion that whilst it is necessary to frame the investigation within a wider understanding of the complex relations and positions that are invited by the term 'consciousness', in as far as possible I will abbreviate this wider understanding. I do this so as to concentrate primarily on the nature, processes and locus of consciousness as

relevant to what I will term 'extended' or 'higher' states of consciousness, a description which captures the nature of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'.

Consciousness as a process

Sometimes, if you stand on the bottom rail of a bridge and lean over to watch the river slipping slowly away beneath you, you will suddenly know everything there is to be known.

(Milne, cited in Powers 1996: 65)

But, there's a step beyond that which I experienced, but only two or three times. [...] I seemed to be part of a presence that stood behind myself and was able to observe, not with my eyes, but with my total being, myself and the audience. It was a wonderful thing of leaving not only the character, but also this person who calls himself Ray Reinhardt.

(Reinhardt in Richards (1977), cited in Dinkgraffe 2005: 41)

Both the quotations above contain an implicit recognition of a fleeting glimpse at a state of being other than that encountered in the everyday mode of life. Both instances describe a state of consciousness which can be labelled as 'extended', or 'heightened', and both passages describe a state of connection between the individual and the world, or, in 'enactive' terms, the domain, which brushes against that which might be called profound. Whilst I will return to and use these examples of 'optimal' being later in this chapter, I would like to initially focus on the idea that each contains an inherent sense of *doing* on the part of the subject. In each instance the subject (you on a bridge, or Ray Reinhardt) is not passive. The subject is not merely receiving stimuli, but is active in the creation of the world as it appears for them. You are on the bottom rail of a bridge, actively watching, or observing the passage of water beneath you. Max Reinhardt is actively engaged in performance in a manner which facilitates a

particular experience. In each instance subjective consciousness of the thing towards which the 'attention' of the subject is being directed is brought about through a process of 'action'. Consciousness, therefore, is not an internal 'thing', which we have, but a process of purposeful (inter-)action. Echoing the interweave of self and world discussed previously in this chapter, Alva Noë explains that, '[c]onsciousness isn't something that happens inside us: it is something we do actively in a dynamic interaction with the world around us' (Noë 2009: 24). This positioning of consciousness has significant implications for this thesis in its search for an understanding of 'absorption' for performers in 'dance theatre'. The places one may start this search might lie not in certain areas of the cognitive neurosciences which seek to identify the neural basis for a given condition or cognitive state; this could be seen as akin to taking apart a clock to find the 'tick-tock'. Instead, the positioning of consciousness as an active process between being, or entity, and world asks us to look for an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', and within this, the idea of 'absorption', in the relationships and interactions between the subject and the other within the 'enactive' domain of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace'. As Noë maintains, '[y]ou can no more explain mind in terms of the cell than you can explain dance in terms of the muscle' (Noë 2009: 48).

However, with consciousness being formed in the dynamic process between self and world, it is pertinent to bear in mind that experience which is 'enacted by conscious beings with the help of the world' (Noë 2009: 47) is not a process which sits apart from our understanding of our domain, but that which is influenced and shaped by it. This understanding, in turn, is subject to biological and cultural imperatives. So our consciousness, our process of active dynamic

interaction with those entities and objects in our domain which are not us, is influenced by both biological and cultural factors. To use an example immediately at hand, as I write these words I am aware of the value (or lack of value) of my work from the cultural perspective of a part-time PhD student studying in the socio-cultural frame of the United Kingdom in the early twenty-first century and the particular culture of the post-graduate sector of the Department of Drama at the University of Exeter. This culture shapes and impacts my bodily actions in pursuing this endeavour. I am also conscious of myself doing this.⁸⁶ In witnessing myself doing this, I recognise my witnessing self as subscribing to values associated with this endeavour as stipulated by the cultural frame. At the same time, my own personal biology also impacts upon the same moments. As I type, I carry tension in my shoulders, causing my back to ache. My posture in my chair, the manner in which my corpus attends to this task of typing, the way my eyes may strain when they engage with the computer screen are all factors determined by my biology. Part of this biology is resulting from my own actions (I hurt my shoulder doing a cartwheel yesterday) and part of this is my inescapable genetic inheritance. Consciousness and experience are therefore biologically and culturally inscribed. As Elizabeth Grosz notes, '[e]xperience is not outside social political historical and cultural forces and in this sense cannot provide an outside vantage point from which to judge them' (Grosz 1994: 94).

Furthermore, both the influencing factors of biology and culture are recognised themselves as fluid. Far from being static forces that act upon us, they are

⁸⁶ Whilst we are built upon biological and cultural imperatives and therefore in this respect, no different to animals, the fundamental difference is that we are conscious of our process of consciousness whereas animals are not; I recognise my witnessing self. As Jerrold Seigel explains, '[a]nimals are also shaped by their environment and their organic structure, but they do not understand themselves as being so conditioned, whereas human beings do' (Seigel 2005: 22).

themselves in a constantly shifting state of evolution. In talking about the conscious processes of consciousness engaged in by the actor in their practice, Rhonda Blair notes that, 'w]e have to engage culture as conditioned and variable and to examine its relationship to biology if we are to get at the actor's process as fully as we might' (Blair 2008: 56). Blair acknowledges here the continually shifting and implicit impact of culture upon biology. The very fact that there is a 'temporality' ascribed to this situation by Blair indicates that this is a state of being in flux. Consequently it can be seen that consciousness is also not constant, essential or fixed in its dynamic, but a multivalent temporal process that is in continual movement. The temporal nature of consciousness will be explored shortly in this section of this chapter.

The manners in which biological and cultural inscription impact upon the particular process of consciousness involved in 'absorption' for performers in 'dance theatre' and the extent to which these factors influence this state of being will form part of the discussion in the analysis of later chapters. What is initially clear is that whilst 'absorption' within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' may seem to exist within something of a pure, unfettered state of consciousness in which activity and awareness of the subject are merged in experience, it is necessarily still impacted upon by a cultural and biological framework at some level.⁸⁷ As has been evidenced in Chapter One, cultural imperatives and signifiers carried in both the choreography and the bodies of the performers themselves are inextricably embedded in 'dance theatre' practices. In commenting more widely on performance, Ralph Yarrow notes

⁸⁷ In considering the characteristics of a person who may readily experience 'flow', Csikszentmihalyi uses this word to describe such a person having an 'autotelic self'; that is, a self which contains within itself its own goals; 'it reflects the idea that such an individual has relatively few goals that do not originate from within the self' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 209).

that, '[i]n this activity consciousness is manifested as a whole range of physical events across a plurality of semiotic channels' (Yarrow 2006: 14). As will be evidenced in the later company-specific chapters of this study, socio-political cultural drivers continue to sit at the heart of 'dance theatre' practice through its various historical and contemporary iterations. Similarly the biology of the performers engaged in 'dance theatre' is an inescapable consideration when examining 'absorption' for performers in 'dance theatre' and the relevant concepts of consciousness.

Consciousness and the body

Inherent in the idea of the process of consciousness being biologically inscribed is the involvement of the body in this dynamic interaction between a subject and its world. The current thrust of research in the cognitive sciences around 'situated' cognition and the 'enactive' view (which in itself crosses disciplinary boundaries and research fields) will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. However, thinking congruent with the 'situated' view is also found in theories of consciousness which place the role of the body in the manner in which we perceive the world around us as paramount. As Martin Welton notes in the afterword to his doctoral thesis of 2002, '[t]he body has significant impact on how we perceive the world and our subsequent consciousness of it, as it is only through the interventions of our viscera that we are aware of anything' (Welton 2002: 196). Our body is our means of accessing and interacting with our world. It provides, in all its elements, the interface through which we experience. Even our imaginations and our creations of memories and images are achieved corporeally. Rhonda Blair explains that, '[i]magination and memories do not – indeed, cannot - exist without a

foundational image of the body [...] they are generated only with and by a body' (Blair 2008: 77). Welton and Blair both configure the corpus as being more than just a visceral contact with the world. It is *our* corpus, and the means by which we experience and are aware of *our* world, both internal and external. Our consciousness of our world is just that: ours, and this ownership stems from an embodied position in the world. The body provides the ('situated') anchor from which our perception extends, reinforcing the idea that the world is brought into being *by* the experienter, *for* the experienter, and is, in essence, 'enacted' by the perceiver. Noë embeds the embodied 'I' at the centre of this action: 'The world makes itself available to the perceiver through physical movement and interaction [...] Perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills' (Noë 2004: 1). Similarly, Dennett explains that '[e]vents in consciousness are, by definition witnessed; they are *experienced* by the *experienter* and their being experienced makes them what they are: *conscious* events' (Dennett 1993: 29; emphasis in original). Dennett notes that, '[w]herever there is a conscious mind, there is a *point of view*' (Dennett 1993: 101). Like Noë, Dennett positions consciousness as a *process* of knowing. I am the centre of my own developing awareness of myself and my enacted domain. Within this process it would be impossible for me to move to a subjective state outside my own corpus. Thus the process of embodied consciousness is individuated.⁸⁸ Echoing Merleau-Ponty's 'flesh meeting flesh', Damasio comments that, '[f]eelings cannot be duplicated unless flesh is duplicated, unless the brains actions on flesh are duplicated, unless the brain's sensing of

⁸⁸ To explain the idea of the individuation of consciousness Dennet describes a hypothetical situation whereby evil scientists have removed a brain from its corpus and, putting it in a jar, begin to restore the concepts of sensation, or feel and touch to the brain. He gives the example of the scientists attempting to create the feeling of a (phantom) finger wiggling in the sand. Predictably, the evil scientists do not get very far; 'Suddenly they are faced with a problem that will very quickly get out of hand, for just how the sand will feel depends on just how you decide to wiggle your finger' (Dennett 1993: 5).

flesh after it has been acted upon by the brain is duplicated' (Damasio 2000: 315).

Pre-reflective consciousness and an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'

Given the centrality of the body to consciousness, Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1962), contends that whilst consciousness is, in part, understood communally through shared language, it is still directly experienced by us, regardless of how it may be painted by the extension of language. He points to a primary phenomenological consciousness of the world that is contained in a state of experience before language, linguistics, thematisation or ideas, all of which are, to greater or lesser degrees, abstractions from a 'pure' phenomenological consciousness. He indicates that this is the 'core of primary meaning round which the acts of meaning and expression take place' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xvii). This most fundamental level of consciousness, represents what Merleau-Ponty called a 'silence'; a world of phenomenological awareness before metaphor; 'such consciousness is first of all pre-reflective; it is a direct awareness by the self of its own states or acts' (Seigel 2005: 28). Damasio, in labelling this consciousness as 'core consciousness', also echoes this sentiment. He describes it as '*the very evidence, the unvarnished sense of our individual organism in the act of knowing*' (Damasio 2000: 125; emphasis in original). Elucidating further, he goes on to argue that language does not call consciousness into being: 'I believe it is legitimate to take the phrase "I know" and deduce from it the presence of a nonverbal image of knowing centred on a self that precedes and motivates that verbal phrase' (Damasio 2000: 108). Damasio's core consciousness is akin to the pure consciousness of direct phenomenological

interaction with the object. William Seager (1999) ascribes this consciousness with non-intentionality; it is entirely the qualial sensation of being in the world, what Lakoff and Johnson term the 'feel of the thing'. This is a state below narrative or abstraction. The very qualities that make it so fundamental to us, and our sense of self, are part of the difficulty we have in describing its essence⁸⁹:

Consciousness feels like some kind of pattern built with the nonverbal signs of body states. It is for this reason perhaps that the mysterious source of our mental first person perspective – core consciousness and its simple sense of self – is revealed to the organism in a form that is both powerful and elusive, unmistakable and vague.

(Damasio 2000: 312)

At first glance, it would seem that the state of consciousness found within instances of 'absorption' is similar to the pre-reflective consciousness described above in the subject's immediacy to the object of 'attention'. Whilst in an 'optimal' 'mode of being doing' a person may respond to the stimulus or activity without waiting for what Yasuo terms 'conscious judgement'. Similarly, as will be noted in Chapter Three during the discussion of Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow', whilst in 'flow' or in an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', 'awareness' and 'action' are, to an extent, merged for the subject: 'In "flow" the self is fully functioning, but not aware of itself doing it and it can use all the attention for the task at hand' (Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 33). This seemingly pre-reflective

⁸⁹ This sense of the body being central to the fundamental nature of pre-reflective consciousness being within the body is also echoed by Yasuo. He notes that, 'This "body" instantly apprehends through feeling and intuition subtle changes in kinesthesia without waiting for conscious judgment' (Yasuo 1993: 120-121).

immediacy to the world would apparently position an understanding of pre-reflective consciousness as pertinent to developing an understanding of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' within the context of 'dance theatre'. However, I would like to differentiate between states of consciousness aligned with the 'optimal' and the pre-reflective consciousness articulated above. I position them as very different states of consciousness.⁹⁰ Whilst a certain level of receptive 'awareness' is inherent in the states of consciousness aligned to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', this in itself does not constitute the entire picture. The pre-reflective consciousness described above is Damasio's 'core consciousness', a pre-reflective state the essence of which 'is the very thought of you – the feeling of you – as an individual being involved in the process of knowing your own existence and of the existence of others' (Damasio 2000: 127). This is fundamental consciousness, or awareness, or cognition, or phenomenological knowing of the self in the world. It is a far cry from the extended consciousness of an 'optimal' experience in which the autotelic teleonomy of self occurs. The teleonomic state is knowing and goal-centred: 'The best moments usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 3).

Leagues away from a primordial awareness of being in the world, an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' is manifest through a creative consciousness. Those experiencing the consciousness of 'optimal' experience report an extension of 'awareness'. Csikszentmihalyi notes that, '[a]t the most challenging levels,

⁹⁰ I make this distinction here to avoid the misunderstanding that to enter a state of 'flow', one does not need to apply, or direct one's faculties, but instead one simply has to go with the flow. As with all considered artistic practice, this argument holds little weight for the performance of 'dance theatre' as a practiced, deliberate and purposeful act driven by a multitude of technical, artistic and cultural considerations and imperatives.

people actually report a transcendence of self' (Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 33). Csikszentmihalyi's description of the 'flow' experience here would place this in the advanced planes of Damasio's 'extended consciousness', the scope of which, 'at its zenith may span the entire life of an individual, from the cradle to the future [...] it can open wide the doors to creation' (Damasio 2000: 196).

Leading on from the above, it would appear that we experience several levels of consciousness positioned as being borne out of an individuated corporeality that exists in active 'intentional' relationships with phenomenal and conceptual or metaphorical 'objects'. The broad term consciousness in fact contains multiple strata. However, these strata are not separate entities but intertwined at a neuro-physiological level (Blair 2008). Damasio also attests to this complex structure, noting that, '[c]onsciousness is not a monolith [...] There is at least one natural break between the simple foundational kind and the complex extended kind – and it is reasonable to distinguish levels or grades within extended consciousness' (Damasio 2000: 121). As located in the higher or extended states of consciousness, an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' builds on the information contained within purely qualial experience.

The 'temporality' of consciousness within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'

Far from just possessing the immediacy of the 'feeling of what happens', an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' has a reach which extends beyond this immediacy and so consequently has a different 'temporality' to that of core consciousness. Within the state(s) of consciousness aligned to 'optimal' experience and within other states of extended consciousness, a 'temporality'

begins to emerge which stretches beyond the present moment to include both dimensions of backwards and forwards; we look behind and remember, we look forwards and imagine. Damasio indicates that in 'extended consciousness both the past and the anticipated future are sensed along with the here and now in a sweeping vista as far ranging as that of an epic novel' (Damasio 2000: 17). The sweeping vista of Damasio's epic novel indicates not a random collection of images from the past and from the potential future, but a thematised 'feeling' of what is happening in the present moment, contextualised by the narrative memory of the past and the potential continuance of this narrative in the anticipated or possible future. However, this is not a narrative, an *objective* story or set of happenings unrelated to ourselves; it is fundamentally *our* individuated embodied narrative and one that aids in creating our sense of place, space and how we exist in the world and how the world is 'enacted' by us.

This sense of a personal 'temporality' beyond the sensation of being in the world in the present moment in turn implicates the idea of memory and imagination in the creation, formation and constitution of extended consciousness and consequently also within the notion of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' (again underpinning the understanding of 'optimal' experience as a creative state of being). Similarly to the ideas contained within previous discourse on the role of the body in consciousness, memory and imagination are not objective, but individuated and contain the same autobiographical inscriptions; the 'I' that knows me is me.

In briefly considering memory and imagination as part of extended concepts of consciousness pertaining to the idea of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal'

'mode of being/doing' for performers in 'dance theatre', I turn again to Rhonda Blair. Blair notes that in basic terms a memory is a neuro-chemical event, the activation of a neural pattern. However, it must be recognised that as we grow and develop as humans our brains change and we change. I am not the same person I was on my twenty-first birthday. Consequently, the neural pathways that lead us to remember something must change as we do. I can remember becoming twenty-one, but I am using different neural pathways that have been developed in the ensuing time. Consequently my memory of this event has changed. I remember certain events, but the order is fuzzy. I may remember some events that did not happen. I imagine them to have happened based on my experience of similar events. These imaginations then become associatively 'fused' to my changing memory of actual events. Memory, then, is a *relational* imaginative reconstruction. In positioning memory as a process rather than an object, Blair also paints our consciousness as fluid, dynamic and as changeable as our experience and our evolving self. We are works in progress; we are unfixed and subject to change. Blair notes that, '[d]efining memory as a tool of the imagination rather than the reproduction of something from the actor's literal history, liberates memory to be used more freely and theatrically' (Blair 2008: 75). This understanding of memory as a part of consciousness and the fact that in its constitution the subject 'looks' backwards in relational imaginative construction and 'looks' forwards in imaginative construction also reinforces the idea that consciousness is both temporal and, in this 'temporality', is also 'intentional'.

The 'intentionality' of consciousness

In pursuit of the 'intentionality' of consciousness, Csikszentmihalyi (1990) discusses the (then-)current scientific knowledge surrounding the processing capabilities of the human central nervous system. He puts forward a numerical model of consciousness by dividing all the information that we process through this central nervous system into 'bits' of information. A 'bit' of information might be 'sounds, or a visual stimuli or recognizable nuances of emotion or thought' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 29). Csikszentmihalyi explains that we can 'process' approximately 126 bits of information per second. The number of bits of information we as humans are capable of processing in a lifetime is therefore finite.⁹¹ Whilst acknowledging that, with the rise of 'situated' thought, 'enaction' and Dynamic Systems Theory (to be discussed later in this chapter) models of cognition have moved away from the computational, linear notions of cognition suggested here by Csikszentmihalyi's model, it is clear that we navigate and process a huge amount of multi-sensory information across a number of levels simultaneously. However, in the same manner that one hears an orchestra, these bits of information, whilst being processed, informed and interacted with, are not experienced all at the same 'volume'. Some move to the forefront, become joined together or related in our perception to produce narrative for an event, and some will slide by, unnoticed by our attentive consciousness. Quite simply, we are incapable of 'hearing' and directing our attention towards all information across our senses, our imagination, our memory and our feelings all at once. To do this would result in a cacophony of information, the parts of which are all being experienced by us at the same 'volume'. The solution to this

⁹¹ Csikszentmihalyi explains that we are capable of processing seven bits of information at the same time. The shortest length of time it takes us to recognise one lot of information and differentiate between this and the next lot is approximately $1/18^{\text{th}}$ of a second. By using these figures and assuming a life time of seventy years and a waking day of sixteen hours, Csikszentmihalyi has us processing 126 bits of information a second, 7560 per minute, almost half a million every hour and approximately 185 billion in a lifetime. He notes that, [i]t is out of this total that everything in our life must come – every thought, memory, feeling or action' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 29).

potential problem of a metaphorical polyphonic cacophony of information is that we choose. We direct our consciousness towards an object, or objects. Consciousness is therefore always conscious *of* something; there is an underlying 'intentionality'. Colin Wilson describes consciousness as being 'intentional. When you "see" something it doesn't just walk in through your eyes. You have to fire your attention at it, like an arrow' (Wilson 2009: 85). However, it is not just objects at which we 'fire our attention'. To return to Blair's assertions above regarding the role of imagination within the idea of the conscious 'intentionality' of extended consciousness, within Wilson's arrow, we also may include a picture of ourselves.

Part of our extended consciousness permits us to reflect. We are reflective beings and

the very fact that human beings are able to understand themselves as determined by their cultural and social relations (as also by their bodies) can hardly be accounted for without recognising reflectivity as in some degree independent of such determination.

(Seigel 2005: 22)

Similarly to Csikszentmihalyi, Seigel proposes the notion that our capacity for reflectivity inherent in extended consciousness gives us the possibility of an 'intentionality' existing beyond the dictum of a biological or cultural imperative; again, we have the capacity to choose. I may be hungry at present and my biological imperative is therefore to eat something. My cultural imperative may

also be telling me to eat (because it is the time in the day when I am supposed to take dinner) or not eat (I am too fat, culturally unacceptable, and I need to lose some weight to meet the ideal of a culturally integrated individual in this respect). In being aware of these biological and cultural imperatives, I have, in my reflection, the capability to obey or to move against the imperative. But I do so consciously and intentionally; essentially I have the capacity for choice of action through which I am capable of changing myself. This then is movement, or 'intentionality' towards an 'other' which is an object, or imagined image of ourselves different from that which we are. Seigel notes his paraphrasing of Heidegger as he explains that 'the form of consciousness that distinguishes human beings from other creatures is the mark of the possibility humans possess always to be other than they are' (Seigel 2005: 25). In considering this in light of the subject of the wider study one might argue that this state of becoming constitutes nothing unusual. One might argue that this state of becoming is a natural consequence of our being an 'enactive' entity within our domain; we are always becoming, we are continually moving towards something, we are continually shifting our conscious attention in response to, and towards creation of, our temporal 'being-in-the-world'. In briefly considering the idea of Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' in a wider discussion of the notion of presence, Ralley and Connolly explain:

If, however, we position the mind-body as a sensory and motor exploratory tool, there is no reason to over-regard the feeling of a sense of concordance or oneness with one's environment. The experience of being in the moment simply reminds us how the mind is in the world all the time.

However, despite Ralley and Connolly's assertion that concordance, or oneness with one's environment, is to be somewhat expected, when we marry the idea of the 'intentionality' of consciousness with the emerging idea of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre', we again encounter the idea that whilst in an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' the self is somehow extended beyond an ordinary state of becoming. In this instance, the idea of the 'intentionality' of consciousness is being extended.

It is in the merging of 'action' and 'awareness' noted by Csikszentmihalyi as being endemic in the 'flow' state that we see what could be considered as an extreme of this extension of 'intentionality'. Csikszentmihalyi describes one of the key features of 'flow' as being when 'people become so involved in what they are doing that the activity becomes spontaneous, almost automatic and they stop being aware of themselves as separate from the actions they are performing' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 53). In this state, 'intention' and 'action' are as one and the subject is not conscious of itself being conscious or as having 'intention' towards something. This is echoed by Alva Noë in his explanation of the way the body is used in activity towards which one's attention is focused. In itself, the body is not consciously attended to by the subject. Noë notes that, '[w]e do have a sense of our bodies as present. But in the course of engaged activity, the body doesn't make itself felt as an object of contemplation or awareness' (Noë 2009: 77). In the extended consciousness of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', it is possible to posit that the focused 'intentionality' of

the performer extends into an 'awareness' which merges with 'action'. Rebecca Loukes, in considering and reflecting upon her work with German choreographer Eva Schmale⁹² talks of this extended connection (partly achieved in this context through developing an experiential understanding of Schmale's *Leiblichkeit*⁹³) as 'informed intuition' and notes that, 'the space is not separate from the body but rather an extension of it' (Loukes 2007: 57). In speaking of performance, Jade McCutcheon notes that, '[e]very actor I know draws upon unseen energies within and around their body to practice their craft' (McCutcheon 2006: 30). There is the sense that the connectivity, which is experienced by the performer, is implicitly stretching the normal, everyday boundaries of perception, and consequently 'intentionality'. McCutcheon notes that 'a more Buddhist approach would suggest [...] we would see that past all the noise of the conscious self there is no "I", rather an interconnectedness to all around us' (McCutcheon 2006: 27). The notions of extended consciousness as situated within an understanding of 'absorption' within the context of 'dance theatre' will be picked up and drawn upon during the analysis of Chapter Seven, and the Conclusion to the study.

Cognitive neuroscience

Having now explored pertinent aspects of phenomenology and consciousness towards developing a suite of lenses in this chapter, Chapter Two completes this suite by addressing aspects of cognitive neuroscience germane to the development of an understanding of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre'

⁹² Loukes explains that Schmale was, in turn, inspired by, and drew heavily from the work of Elsa Gindler (1885 – 1961) 'who developed a radically simple approach to developing awareness' (Loukes, R. M. (2007) 'How to be "deadly": The "natural" body in contemporary training and performance?', *Contemporary Theatre Review*, vol. 17(1), pp. 50-58.

⁹³ Schmale, as cited by Loukes, describes *Leiblichkeit* as the integration of body and mind, sensual and sensory awareness.

performer. As with the previous section on consciousness, I intend to draw out and signpost key elements of cognitive neuroscience, which will then contribute to the lenses in the later chapters.

Similarly to the previous sections of Chapter Two, this section is underpinned by the 'enactive' view that '*perceptual experience depends on the acquisition and exercise of sensorimotor knowledge*' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 55; emphasis in original). Here Riva *et al.* acknowledge that it is not just knowledge acquisition, or in computational terms, 'input in' which is essential, but also the 'exercise' of this knowledge. Key to this is the explicit acknowledgement that a linear approach, (for example; action and response) to understanding the cognitive perception of the relationship between the sensorimotor knowledge and the action of an autopoietic system or 'enactive' performer, is an over-simplification of the complex interweave of mind, body and world. Loukes notes that, 'both "situatedness", "enaction" and DST emerged as part of a wider challenge to the previously held "representational" theories of mind (i.e., the mind viewed as a "computer")' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 311). To explore this further in this section of this chapter, I will draw particularly upon the application of Dynamic Systems Theory to performance as put forward by John Lutterbie.

Bearing in mind the 'enactive' view when considering the parameters of the discourse, this section of the chapter also gives a clear indication of the direction that this discourse should not, and does not, take. Riva *et al.* note that, 'the human mind is embodied in our entire organism and embedded in the world and hence is not reducible to structures inside the head' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 55). Rather than embark upon examination of the neural pathways of the brain in the

hope of discovering and hunting down the root and area of activity that makes consciousness possible, or even that which engages in our process of consciousness, the 'enactive' approach advocates explication and understanding of the 'intricate, inextricable interweaving of mind, body and world' (Lutterbie 2011: 79) in order to better grasp our 'being-in-the-world'. Alva Noë also points to the preoccupation with the 'neural microfocus' (Noë 2009: xiii) as being the wrong place to look for a meaningful understanding of the constitution of consciousness. If, as is suggested by the 'enactive' view, consciousness is a process of doing, rather than a thing we have, the investigative activity of this chapter should concentrate upon key points from within the field of cognitive neuroscience which are useful in developing articulation and understanding of 'absorption' within the complex 'interweave' held in the relationships between the autopoietic system of the 'dance theatre' performer and their 'enactive' domain. Noë notes that, '[t]he locus of consciousness is the dynamic life of the whole, environmentally plugged-in person or animal' (Noë 2009: xiii).

Sensorimotor knowledge and the body

As has been the case throughout this chapter, the role of the body in acquiring and negotiating knowledge of our being in the world is central to our experience and understanding of being in the world. Gallagher and Zahavi note that, '[a]s perceivers and agents we are embedded and embodied agents. All perception and action involves a component of bodily self-experience' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2008: 142). Our sensorimotor knowledge and experience of ourselves and our environment can be broadly split into two areas: proprioception, which is our knowledge of our body given through our body's internal 'awareness' and

sense of itself; and 'perception', which deals with our perceived environment and our contact with our environment.

In considering each of these two areas in relation to the idea of 'absorption', several points of relevance need to be highlighted. In the proprioceptive realm of experience, whilst we may have a pre-reflective awareness of the movement or positioning of our body in space, our 'attention' is not directed towards the movement of our bodies themselves.⁹⁴ Instead, it is the goal of the moment which is focused upon. In this moment, our bodies become, in a sense, invisible to us. Merleau-Ponty explains, '[t]hat is why, in their first attempts at grasping, children look, not at their hand, but at the object; the various parts of the body are known to us through their functional value only' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 172). Similarly, when I type these words my attention is not on my fingers and their intricate movement across my computer keyboard, nor at times is it even on the computer keyboard (which is, at each keystroke, an extension of my corporeality). Instead my attention is on the 'intentional' and imaginative goal of formed words, which in turn move me towards an imagined future in which the sentence I am attempting to construct appears whole before me across the screen on my desk. In none of this 'action' do I concentrate on my bodily movement in itself. As Gallagher and Zahavi note, '[t]he body tries to stay out of our way so that we can get on with our task; it tends to efface itself in its way to its intentional goal' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2006: 145).

However, whilst my 'attention' may not be directed towards my proprioceptive experience, as I have alluded to above, it is an integral part of my experience of

⁹⁴ Gallagher and Zahavi (2006) describe this as the 'sixth sense': I know that my legs are crossed, or how to position my hand effectively on my head to scratch the itch. This sixth sense is our innate knowledge of our body's sense and relation to itself.

my domain and figures as part of my 'being-in-the-world' and, therefore, the world I bring into being for myself. As Lutterbie notes, '[t]he actor does not only respond to stimuli; she also actively engages in life, aware of the state of her body and the reality she constructs, based on the perceptual and proprioceptive experience to which she attends' (Lutterbie 2011: 128).

So whilst our bodies are, in a sense, invisible to us, they are absolutely present as the locus of experience. I do not perceive my body; it is not, as has been explained above, a thing, or object at which I aim my 'attention'; rather it is the key by which I experience my domain. I am in and of my body, therefore my body itself is not perceived as I would perceive objects within the environment, because it is impossible for me to gain a perceptual position external to my body: 'Whereas I can approach, or move away from any object in the world, the body itself is always here as my very perspective on the world' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2006: 143).

As we are bound to our bodies and as they provide our 'perspective on the world', our perceptual domain is again noted as being organised by us in an 'I'-centred manner. My world, therefore, does in fact revolve around me. Objects I perceive within my domain are organised not in purely objective allocentric terms, such as are objects and places on a map, but in egocentric terms by their relationship to me: my desk is in front of me, my chair beneath me. Blair comments that, '[n]eural and cognitive functioning is fundamentally relational, about our relationship with the environment, with each other' (Blair 2007: 129). Even more than this, I *know* that my desk is in front of me and my chair is beneath me because my sensorimotor perceptual knowledge, the purposeful

movement of my body as I am 'being-in-the-world', confirms this information for me; I enact this environment and through this enactment; I do not just experience, I *know* I experience. Noë comments:

Perceptual experience, in whatever modality, acquires spatial content thanks to the perceiver's knowledge of the way sensory stimulation depends on movement [...] the ground of our sense of perceptual presence (of, e.g., environmental detail, occluded surfaces, colours etc.) is not only the fact that we stand in definite sensorimotor relations to the features in question, but that we know we do.

(Noë 2004: 117)

When understood in the context of an 'enactive' viewpoint, one in which the perceiver is continually enacting his or her domain, sensorimotor proprioception and perception are again positioned not as knowledge we have, but as dynamic, lived processes through which we engage with and shape our world. The 'proprioceptive frame of reference [...] is the necessary embodied basis for the egocentric frame of reference' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2006: 144).

Consequently, our 'perceptual experience acquires content thanks to our possession of bodily skills. What we perceive is determined by *what we do*' (Noë 2004: 1; emphasis in original). Again here, the entity in the world, or in the context of 'dance theatre', the 'enactive' performer, is positioned as being in 'conversation' with the world, not merely reacting to it in a causal manner, but through a multitude of complex symbiotic interactions. With respect to working towards a greater articulation and understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of doing/being', adding a sensorimotor understanding of 'perception' and

proprioception to the lexicon of terminology to be employed in the analysis of the later chapters will aid in clarifying what happens in 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer.

Dynamic Systems Theory

The search within this section of the thesis for means to articulate a useful and pertinent understanding of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' could also benefit from use of Dynamic Systems Theory, or DST, and borrow some of the associated terminology. DST offers a model with which to understand our embodied cognitive interaction with our enacted domain, which again positions the cognitive system or entity as embedded within the world, as 'being-in-the-world'. John Lutterbie (2011) takes this model and demonstrates its application towards development of a theory of performance, specifically acting. Lutterbie notes that, '[a] dynamic system does not exist in isolation, but is thoroughly integrated with the world' (Lutterbie 2011: 100). Lutterbie's position echoes that of Evan Thompson who, commenting on DST, explains that, '[t]he central metaphor for this approach is the mind as an embodied dynamic system in the world, rather than the mind as a neural network inside the head' (Thompson, cited in Lutterbie 2011: 100).

Arising perhaps from DST's notion of the entity being embedded in the world, a key feature of DST bearing particular resonance for the idea of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' is the inherent rejection of a linear form of existence based on the structure of cause and effect. The simple and singular line between the entity 'receiving' an input of some form of stimuli from the external environment which, in turn, causes a cognitive, emotional or physical reaction is rejected as

a significant oversimplification of the actual multi-stranded weave which is the cognitive relationship with the enacted domain. In the linear, beginning-middle-end model of cognitive behaviour, the system runs, like a computer, through logic gates to arrive at a convenient conclusion. Lutterbie notes that in this model there is very little room for additional information, or further stimuli to enter the 'narrative' after it has begun. In a sense the computational model of the mind is, to a degree, a closed system. However, the embedded, embodied mind as described by, amongst others, Lutterbie, Riva *et al.* and Thompson is continually open to stimuli and importantly is not just 'set' to receive, but also informs and shapes the world, enacting its own existence. Lutterbie describes this open system as being self-organising and continually in a state of flux, or destabilisation:

an open system is self-organising; that is, conclusions or patterns of behaviour emerge from a system that is always in a state of disequilibrium. The influx of stimuli destabilizes the system, leading to a response expressed as actions, images or concepts relevant to the situation; but it does not return to a static, pre-existing state of homeostasis. Other excitations keep the system from returning to equilibrium.

(Lutterbie 2011: 84)

This DST model of cognition is therefore non-linear and interactive. As the actions, images and concepts are played out, they will create and shape the stimuli being received in an ongoing mutually informative process. Here Lutterbie draws upon the work of Mark D. Lewis, Professor of Applied

Psychology, in describing this cognitive loop as 'circular causality': '*Circular causality* [...] describes bidirectional causation between different levels of a system. A coherent higher order form or function *causes* a particular pattern or coupling among lower order elements, while the pattern simultaneously *causes* the higher order form' (Lewis, cited in Lutterbie 2011: 90; emphasis in original). The notion of circular causality also chimes well with the idea of the 'enactive' being as an autopoietic system; one whose 'component processes must recursively depend on each other for their generation and their realization as a system' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 55).

However, in performative contexts, specifically that of 'dance theatre' the notion of circular causality potentially then points towards a sense of cyclical stasis; the same performers are 'enacting' the same performance score in the same setting each time the piece is staged. However, my own experience as a performer suggests that this is not the case; my recollection of performing *West Side Story* noted in the introduction being a simple case in point. Each performance is the same, yet different. In relation to this difference, Lutterbie describes the emergence of a meta-stability,

which allows for a predictably stable reenactment of the score through the interactions of the different systems and patterns, yet a score still open to perceptual, or proprioceptive information. These learned patterns do not lose flexibility; they are still open to shocks from unexpected sources. Therefore although the performance becomes set and can be enacted with greater confidence, there remains potential for innovation and disruption.

Lutterbie's idea of innovation and disruption is enacted by the performer who is sensitised to the fluctuations in proprioceptive and perceptive information and who is able to then recognise, allow and embrace the ongoing imbalance in the system in order to do as if for the first time.⁹⁵ Lutterbie notes that, '[f]or an actor to be prepared to respond to the unexpected, the performer needs to be in the flow of the scene, yet with a sense of what should come next' (Lutterbie 2011: 92). Moreover, the sensitivity and openness of the performer to this detail is a sensitivity and 'awareness' which is cognisant of the particularity of their 'being-in-the-world' *at that moment*. Lutterbie comments that cognitive disequilibrium, 'an apparent weakness, may in fact be what makes creativity possible, what makes possible our adaptability to new circumstances' (Lutterbie 2011: 99). This disequilibrium, a normal sub-conscious element of our everyday enactment of our 'being-in-the-world', when understood in the paradigm of performance is what may give us our flexibility and the possibility of playing the 'game' of performance as if for the first time each time. Whilst these cognitive processes and their information are processed by us at a sub-conscious level, in the context of a search for a meaningful understanding of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' performance, it is useful to highlight the possibility for deliberate creativity and adaptability that this disequilibrium may give the performer, and subsequently the usefulness of this creativity and adaptability in relation to a pertinent understanding of 'absorption'.⁹⁶

⁹⁵ Lutterbie explains that this information will come from a number of areas of the brain and on a number of levels. (For instance sensorimotor and conceptual information) It constitutes the ongoing reciprocal flow of perceptual information within the framework of circular causality.

⁹⁶ As noted above, the processes described here are highly complex. Lutterbie explains that; 'Because we are not aware of them, we are able to focus our attention on the continual flow of experience that is living in the world - an impossible feat if we were attentive to the minute workings of the system' (Lutterbie 2011: 97).

When seen as a dynamic system, patterns of 'action' and response emerge from Lutterbie's state of disequilibrium for the 'enactive' performer. Such patterns include those of emotion, sensorimotor activity and conception. These patterns are responsive to, and inform, the stimulus and the context in a pattern of circular causality. Riva *et al.* describe this as 'situated action in different situations' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 65). Crucially, Riva *et al.* also note this 'situated' action as being supported by our dynamic creation of conceptual 'simulations' or representations:

On one side the vision of an object immediately activates the appropriate hand shape for using it: seeing a red apple activates a precision grip for grasping and turning. On the other side, thinking an apple produces a simulation of an action related to the apple in a specific context of use.'

(Riva *et al.* 2006: 65)

In this example, we see the process of dynamic representation and the process of sensorimotor function inform one another through the process of enactment. The sensorimotor function of grasping is given meaning and simultaneously gives meaning to the apple. The apple as an object becomes perceived by the entity as a meaningful element of the entity's enacted domain and the sensorimotor movement becomes, in response, an 'action' with meaning through being imbued with 'intention'. This again echoes Lewis's idea of circular causality.

Mirror neurons

Riva *et al.* maintain that the mutually informative relationship between conception, 'perception' and 'action' is possible due to the theory in which all of these share a common neural coding: the 'motor code' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 65). What is of significance is that this coding also allows the subject to recognise actions done by other native subjects. In addition to this, the research and experiments in this area of neuroscience by Rizzolatti, Fadiga and Gallese in the 1990s identified clusters of premotor neurons which contain 'canonical neurons';⁹⁷ that is, neurons which are 'activated both during the execution of purposeful, goal related hand actions, and during the observation of similar actions performed by another individual' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 60). These canonical neurons have been labelled as 'mirror neurons' as they are responsible for the same neural activity in both the entity executing the given action and the spectator entity observing this action: 'Different brain imaging experiments demonstrated in humans the existence of a mirror system in the premotor and parietal areas – similar to that observed in monkeys – matching action observation and execution' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 60-61). Consequently, in an echo of Thompson's ideas constituting the 'enactive' approach which were noted in the introduction to this chapter, the recognition of an 'action' or emotion in the enactor by an observer will therefore cause a simulation of the 'action' or emotion in the observer: '*action observation constitutes a form of embodied simulation of action*' (Gallese, cited in Riva *et al.* 2006: 61; emphasis in original).

⁹⁷ These experiments were conducted by Rizzolatti and colleagues on the premotor cortex of behaving monkeys. The experiments were focused on single neuron recordings. This work has been significant in shaping the current thought in theatrical discourse regarding the relationship between audience and performer, and notions of empathy and presence.

This work has significant implications, which, at the time of writing, constitute a growing and increasingly established field of performance research. Central to the theatrical discourse is the notion of empathy. The identification of mirror neurons suggest that the associated neural activity may provide ‘a basis for explaining the sharedness of experience between self and other [...] in that each spectator’s mirror neurons parallel the actions and emotions of other people, responding as if the spectator were performing the relevant action or emotion herself’ (Ralley and Connolly 2010: 52). Similarly, and in line with the previous discourse of this chapter, in reflecting upon empathetic considerations within dance practice, Ribeiro and Fonseca draw upon Gallese in noting that, ‘[e]mpathy is deeply rooted in the body experience – in the live body – and this experience is what enables us to recognise the others as people like us’ (Ribeiro and Fonseca 2011: 79).

Whilst the presence of mirror neurons does not entirely explain empathy in humans,⁹⁸ in relation to working towards a developed understanding of the performer’s ‘absorption’ as part of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’ in the analysis of later chapters, there are aspects of this neuro-scientific and theatrical discourse which are of interest and use.

Firstly, as has been noted previously, the neural activity of mirror neurons is premotor activity; the mirroring activity and therefore the empathetic neural activity happens in an unmediated context, before the advent of reflective consciousness. Consequently as Ralley and Connolly note, ‘empathy is to some extent automatic, sensorimotor and obligatory’ (Ralley and Connolly

⁹⁸ See Riva *et al.* 2006: 63-66 for an explanation of the limited impact of mirror neurons in social cognition. This comes in response to the experiments of Rizzolatti and colleagues.

2010: 53). This premotor activity allows us to interpret others' intentions and actions quicker than the blink of an eye and informs our conscious thought processes and decisions. Indeed, as Lutterbie notes, '[i]t is disconcerting to realize that most often we make decisions without being aware of having made them, that our logical processes are actually a rehashing of a choice that has already been made' (Lutterbie 2011: 98). However, the circular causality of the perception and 'action' of the dancer in performance is not necessarily just logical, decision-orientated action. Ribeiro and Fonseca note that,

Besides vision, proprioception, interoception and the vestibular system, feelings, observations and mental images also constitute the bodily experience in dance. These sensations enable the dancer to know about their bodily conditions. The feelings images and observations interfere in how the movement will be performed. In other words, they modulate the movement.

(Ribeiro and Fonseca 2011: 75)

Here Ribeiro and Fonseca point towards a mode of doing for the ('dance theatre') performer that draws upon a variety of sources, phenomenological and other, for 'modulated' 'action'. The idea of modulated 'action' indicates that we do possess conscious understanding and self-knowledge of our own empathetic actions and responses, albeit after the event of the premotor response of the mirror neurons. Whilst my mirror neurons may fire pre-reflexively in response to the perceived actions of a fellow performer, I may then consciously perceive certain qualities in these actions and then actively use these in preparation of my own actions. My actions or preparations will be

biologically, culturally and, in keeping with the content of the given piece of performance work, artistically inscribed. At the same time, my perceptive system will also be processing and informing other elements of my enacted domain. Ribeiro and Fonseca go on to note that,

The mirror system is anatomically connected to other regions that contribute to the preparation of information, in spite of not containing the so-called mirror neurons in these regions. Thus the motor response begins in visual motor areas that possess the so-called mirror neurons at a pre-reflexive level.

(Ribeiro and Fonseca 2011: 78)

The second point of interest to draw from the neuro-scientific and theatrical discourse regarding the formation of an understanding of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' is that the 'sharedness' of experience' noted by Ralley and Connolly above is relational. Again underpinning, and underpinned by, the idea of the enacted entity's 'being-in-the-world', placing emphasis on the empathetic relationship between the 'dance theatre' performer and the other is crucial to developing an understanding of 'absorption'. As Lutterbie notes:

The collaborative and performative nature of theatre makes it an intersubjective experience. Unlike the reclusive artist, or the poet in the garret, actors need each other, whether those others are fellow performers or the audience. A considerable amount of attention therefore must be placed on the actions of the others in the room.

This echoes the ideas of Noë outlined earlier in this chapter regarding notions of consciousness when he writes, '[an] account of consciousness as a natural phenomenon will be a tale, not about the brain, but about our active lives' (Noë 2004: 231). This train of thought points to the information and data relevant to understanding an idea of 'absorption' found in the relationships, or the empathetic connections between the performer as 'enactive' entity and the 'playspace' which constitutes their domain. As Lutterbie notes, this performative domain may, or may not, include other performers depending on the moment of performance, but will include audience or spectators. In this context, mirror neurons firing as an 'embodied simulation of action' in response to stimuli enacted by other entities constitutes a 'sharedness of experience' or a cognitive empathy. Therefore the cognition and the cognitive neuroscience in this context also take on a social dimension: '*observing actions, or action effects produced by another individual may also activate a representation of one's own actions*' (Riva *et al.* 2006: 60; emphasis in original).

The discussion above has focused on consideration of premotor empathetic neural activity in pursuit of an idea of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre'. The nature of the empathetic activity places it in response to actions, or action-effects from other people within the domain of the 'enactive' individual, or in this context the 'enactive' performer, making it the result of interpersonal contact. However, 'absorption' within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' often occurs as a result of the individual's specific mode of involvement with task or action. In many of the examples of 'flow' activity cited and explored by Csikszentmihalyi the activity is

not a shared experience but one in which the participant is alone; for example, painting. Consequently, it is reasonable to suggest that the premotor empathetic activity of a performer's mirror neurons and the subsequent conscious modulation of their actions, or their embodied conscious empathy in response to the actions of other individuals within their enacted domain, provides some useful areas for exploration and analysis in pursuit of 'absorption', but does not provide a complete picture of the entire landscape to be investigated. As indicated by the concentration on the notion of 'goal' within Csikszentmihalyi's ideas of 'flow', the cognitive perception of the 'enactive' entity is not only social, but is also directed towards their environment or domain. Moreover, whilst in 'flow', perception of the enacted domain is attuned in a manner that would appear to be more selective and focused than in normal, everyday activity. Ralley and Connolly note that, '[c]linical evidence supports the view that unusual sensations of presence might be attributed to interrupting the flow of experience rather than expanding it as the brain works to refine rather than augment the flow of impressions' (Ralley and Connolly 2010: 55). The idea of an individual's brain, or more appropriately their embodied mind, 'refining' the flow of impressions echoes the sensation of 'absorption' in 'task' or activity reported by those who have reported 'optimal' states of being.⁹⁹

Arising out of the discourse above, what becomes of interest in relation to developing the articulation and understanding of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' is the development of the recognition of the elements, people and objects within the 'enactive' performer's domain towards which, and with which, the 'attention'

⁹⁹ Drawing again on my own experiences of performance akin to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', I can comment that whilst I experienced a heightened sense of sensory sensitivity and awareness in those moments (which afforded me a unusual level of detailed experiential knowledge of the immediate phenomenal environment of the performance space and the audience) this immediate environment was all that I was aware of. The scope of my awareness and the range of subjects or objects receiving my attention for the duration of the performance became very limited.

and 'intentionality' of the performer is attuned or empathetically engaged. This is the content of the analysis and discourse within Chapter Seven and the Conclusion.

The discourse of this chapter thus far has positioned the lenses of phenomenology, consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience as a context within which to situate the terms noted in the introduction to this chapter. These areas of focus have emerged from reflection on the discourse of this chapter. As noted in the summary to follow, these terms are carefully defined and significant additions to the lexicon of terminology are made when they become necessary. Before presenting summary definitions of the focal areas of 'perception', 'intentionality', 'action' and 'temporality', which have arisen from the fields of study employed as lenses within this chapter, there are several points to be taken from the discussion of the chapter so far.

Firstly, in the moment of doing, the 'enactive' being, or performer does not experience 'action', 'perception' or 'intentionality' separately. It is apparent from the discussion above, involving the fields of phenomenology, consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience, that much of the activity carried out by an individual with respect to these areas is prereflexive, premotor or preconscious. That activity which does occur consciously is still not experienced as having separate elements of 'action', or 'perception', or 'intentionality'. These areas of activity are intertwined, reliant on each other and fused together in the dynamic process of being-with other objects and entities as the entity in question (the performer) is 'being-in-the-world'.

It would appear that within an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' of or a similar state of being, the interrelatedness and fusing of these elements of experience becomes even more pronounced. In considering Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' as an iteration of 'optimal' experience, Ralley and Connolly note that, '[t]he features of this condition entail a heightened involvement with one's surroundings, high levels of attentional engagement, an optimised level of awareness, and rapid unconscious access to procedural skills and memories' (Ralley and Connolly 2010: 56). This reflection echoes suggestions above that, at the farther reaches of extended consciousness, key activities normally attended to on some level by the 'enactive' being, will either become accessed on an unconscious level, or become merged with the task at hand through the engagement of the individual in an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. Similarly, Sondra Horton Fraleigh reflects a merging of 'action' and 'awareness', or 'perception', as she writes, '[t]he thinking that dancing strives to release in both the dancer and the audience is the thinking of the whole body consciousness. We move beyond (or release) this thinking as we merge with the dance, not strive towards it' (Fraleigh 1987: 27) Continuing with the idea that, within 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' there is the sense that elements of the activity of the 'enactive' being may appear merged in some way and that the areas of 'intention', 'action' and 'perception' are closely linked together, it is useful to note that the definitions of the terms for the purposes of this study may also coalesce and merge in places.

The second point of note which has impact on consideration of all these areas of focus is that they are egocentric, or 'I' centred. As Dennett notes, '[w]herever there is a conscious mind, there is a point of view' (Dennett 1993: 101).

Moreover, in congruence with the 'situated' viewpoint, the information gathered

by, and being disseminated from this 'I' (be it consideration of 'temporality', 'action', 'perception', or 'intentionality') is seen as embodied, embedded, holistically experienced, lived knowledge. Similarly to Damasio, Fraleigh comments that this knowledge is, 'of a particular kind – one not rendered through mental processes but experienced more directly through the body as a feeling, thinking, mysterious whole' (Fraleigh 1987: 27). Consequently, subsequent discussion and use of all these areas of focus and the associated terminology should be read with the understanding that, for the purposes of developing an idea of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre', they are ideas which represent embodied notions, rather than ephemeral notions, or disembodied concepts.

'Perception' in the context of the 'dance theatre' performer

'Perception' denotes the 'dance theatre' performer's intentional spatio-temporal experience of 'being-in-the-world' of the 'enacted' domain of the 'playspace'. The spatio-temporal nature of 'perception' causes it to be a dynamic process. 'Perception' denotes the embodied cognition of the 'dance theatre' performer, or their 'awareness' of 'objects' and other 'entities' in their domain, or 'playspace'. For the purposes of this study 'perception' is taken to include proprioception, sensorimotor cognition of the 'dance theatre' performer's own movement, spatiality and relationality to other enacted 'entities' and 'objects' with the domain of the 'playspace', and 'feelings, observations and mental images [which] also constitute the bodily experience in dance' (Ribeiro and Fonseca 2011: 75). Through their 'intentional', spatio-temporal, sensorimotor experience, the 'dance theatre' performer perceives their fellow performers, the audience or spectators and other 'objects' as existing in accordance with the purpose of

their 'intention' (see 'Intentionality' in the context of the 'dance theatre' performer' below). Finally, as an 'intentional' and dynamic process, the 'perception' of the 'dance theatre' performer is thematised. Congruent with the framework of DST, 'perception' selectively draws upon memory and imagination causing 'intention' to be formed which simultaneously causes 'perception' to form.

'Intention' in the context of the 'dance theatre' performer

Similarly to the description of 'intentionality' which describes a 'relationship between a person and the object or events of her/his experience, or more simply one's directed awareness of an object or event' (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström 2008: 47), 'intention', or 'intentionality' in this context denotes a 'being-with' for the 'dance theatre' performer which is directional, relational and temporal. The consciousness of the performer is directed towards something through (in the context of cognitive neuroscience) premotor neural activity, and also consciously through the sensorimotor system. Such intentionality is a dynamic process. Congruent with the idea of 'flow' which, as previously discussed, is the result of a deliberately directed endeavour by the individual, this study focuses largely on consciously directed 'intentionality'.

'Intentionality' can be directed intersubjectively or interpersonally towards other 'entities' in the enacted domain of the 'playspace', including audience, spectators, or fellow performers. It can be directed towards phenomenological sensations and sensory stimuli, such as sound or touch. It can be directed towards 'objects', imaginative events and the content of language, or verbalised text.

As a dynamic process, the 'intentionality' within the 'playspace' is also thematised, that is, it is selectively directed towards 'objects' or 'entities' within the enacted domain of the 'playspace', drawing upon memory and imagination in doing so. By the 'enactive' performer intending 'objects' or 'entities', they bring them into being within the domain of the 'playspace', experiencing them as being in congruence with their 'intentionality'.

'Action' in the context of the 'dance theatre' performer

'Action', in this context, denotes the reciprocal interaction of the performer with the enacted domain of the 'playspace'. As such, considerations of 'action' in this context foreground phenomenology and the 'feeling of what happens' (Damasio 2000). As 'action' is with and through the body, understanding of 'action' should also include recognition of the 'dance theatre' performer's cognition as cognition is an embodied egocentric act. Movement becomes 'action' when it becomes purposeful; purposeful movement is the embodied agent of the 'dance theatre' performer's enactment of their 'playspace' in accordance with their 'intentionality', or goal.

'Temporality' in the context of the 'dance theatre' performer

In the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace' 'temporality' is subjectively configured. 'Temporality is not a moment, or a set of moments within the 'playspace', but the temporal 'bubble' of the 'playspace itself'. As will be discussed and highlighted in Chapter Three, the 'playspace' has its own liminal 'temporality' set apart from the 'temporality' of the everyday. This impacts upon the temporal experience of the 'dance theatre' performer. With this in mind,

rather than being a separate dynamic process in itself, 'temporality' is infused within the other areas of focus noted above. A temporal element sits within an understanding of 'perception', 'action' and 'intentionality', creating them as dynamic and thematised. In the context of developing a meaningful understanding of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer, temporal considerations will encompass examination of 'intentionality' within a 'feeling of what happens' and where appropriate will include consideration of memory and imagination.

Chapter Two summary

In this chapter I have detailed elements of phenomenology, consciousness studies and cognitive neuroscience, positioning them as lenses pertinent to developing an articulation and understanding of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre'. I have also identified key terms which contribute to the expanding lexicon of terminology, namely 'perception', 'intention', 'action' and 'temporality'. The lexicon of terminology will continue to be developed through Part Two towards the conclusion.

A further and final point to be drawn from the discussion of this chapter (and the notion to lead the study into the context of the next chapter) is the emphasis across the fields above on the position of being as a dynamic process. It is clear from the discussion that we are beings in flux, existing within enacted domains which, by virtue of our enactment and by virtue of the enactment of others, are also in flux.

In the context of performance and specifically 'dance theatre' performance, there exists a type of stability within the 'playspace' that we do not encounter in our everyday existence. In each performance, the score adopts Lutterbie's (2011) state of 'metastasis' in that it is enacted by the performers to run along the same approximate route. However, as Lutterbie notes, this relatively stable state of being does not cause a system, or 'enactive' performer to become fixed in their (en)action. There is still 'potential for disruption and innovation' (Lutterbie 2011: 91). Rather than the natural state of disequilibrium of the everyday which, in the terms of DST, is experienced as our system continually interacts with the enacted environment and processes and produces a continual flow of stimuli, Lutterbie casts the dynamic flux within the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace' as 'potential' and as 'innovation and disruption'. This points to a deliberate act, attitude or 'mode of being/doing' for the performer, which capitalises on the natural dynamic flux of performance and indeed invites and encourages innovation and disruption within the 'metastasis' of the performance score. It is this act or attitude which is the subject of the next chapter: the idea of 'play' and notions of the 'playful' as contributing to an understanding of 'absorption'..

Chapter Three: 'Flow', 'play', and 'absorption'.

Introduction

This chapter focuses on further developing a pertinent understanding of Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' and its usefulness alongside the notions of 'play' and the 'playful' in contributing to a growing understanding of the idea of 'absorption'. Whilst the idea of 'flow' was touched upon at times in the preceding chapter, I have placed the majority of discussion on 'flow' in this chapter to highlight its relationship and congruence with the notions of play discussed here. As noted in the introduction to the thesis, 'flow' activity would seem to share particular traits with a 'playful' state of being. In particular, the ways in which both 'flow' and 'play' would seem to contain intrinsic and autotelic aspects of motivation, purpose, value and reward for the participant are useful to consideration of the particular qualities of 'absorption' for the performer. Placing discussion of 'flow' at the start of this chapter allows these traits to be identified in preparation for the following discussion on 'play'.

Once the chapter has outlined particular aspects of 'flow' and 'play' pertinent to understanding an idea of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre' discussion then turns briefly to look at the 'playspace'. As previously established in Chapter One, I use 'playspace' in the context of this study to denote the performance or rehearsal space occupied by the 'dance theatre' performer. By building upon previous discourse within this chapter, and in consideration of content from Chapter One, this section examines characteristics of the performance space which might usefully contribute to an articulation and understanding of 'absorption' in this context.

'Flow'

In examination of Csikszentmihalyi's work and development of the idea of 'flow', this section of Chapter Three also draws upon pertinent thinking and influences which tessellate with Csikszentmihalyi's work. In doing this I wish to position the understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' as pointed towards by this study as moving beyond the confines of the established definition of 'flow'.

'Flow' as a concept was the original focus of my investigation in respect of working towards an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer. However, as the study progressed, the nature of this 'mode of being/doing' became wider than the scope permitted by the existing uses and definitions of 'flow'. At the same time, for the reasons of wishing to identify and articulate more precisely that which can be reasonably known and seen through the documentary evidence presented and interrogated by the study, I sharpened the focus of the study upon the idea of the 'absorption' of the performer as contributing towards the wider notion of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. Consequently, 'flow' is positioned as one iteration of 'optimal' experience. This contributes to an overall understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' by influencing how I might better articulate the idea of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre' performance. In keeping with the aims and desires of the thesis as a whole to remain useful to performers and practitioners, the discussion also points towards the company-specific work of Part Two. In order to usefully inform the discussion and analysis to follow, I touch upon selected points at which the idea of 'flow' intersects with the field of performance.

As noted in the introduction, 'flow' is a concept that crosses disciplines and contexts. The position of 'flow' as a meta-concept is also borne out by the eclectic range of disciplines within which, and to which the concept has been applied. In his PhD thesis of 2008, Jonathan James Wright provides a table listing a comprehensive, though not exhaustive overview of studies and articles concerning research on 'flow'. The table encompasses application of flow to the fields of IT, medicine, education, occupational science, sports sciences, work and leisure studies, music, and psychology linked with a number of other fields of study.¹⁰⁰ The position of 'flow' as a trans-disciplinary concept is perhaps not surprising given the many and varied terms (noted in the introduction) which have been used (and continue to be used) in describing and discussing the particular state of being which Csikszentmihalyi's research and work encapsulates.

Although one may quite reasonably put forward the argument that the state, or states, implied by the various terms used to describe an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' are not all the same state, what is clear in viewing this collection of terms is that this area of experience is 'special'; it lies outside the realm of normal, everyday experience. 'With near unanimity, respondents [...] stated that they devoted time and effort to their activity because they gained a peculiar state of experience from it, an experience that is not accessible in "everyday life"' (Wright 2008: 29).

¹⁰⁰ It is of some interest to note that of the studies noted by Wright only one was concerned with dance; this examined dance from the perspective of a sporting activity, rather than a predominately artistic endeavour. There was also a study by Martin and Cutler (2002) involving theatre actors and the idea of 'flow'. Again this did not focus so much on the act of performance considered as a creative act, but on the motivational aspects of 'flow' within the work of an actor

Csikszentmihalyi contends that the 'flow' experience occurs when one's consciousness is deliberately directed in an orderly fashion: 'When the information that keeps coming into awareness is congruent with goals, psychic energy flows effortlessly' (Csikszentmihalyi 1996: 39). Our everyday experience of life would seem to sit mostly in the opposite direction or stance with there being disorder in our consciousness. Maslow notes that:

Ordinarily we proceed under the aegis of mean-values, i.e., of usefulness, desirability, badness or goodness, of suitability for purpose. We evaluate, control, judge, condemn or approve. We laugh-at, rather than laugh-with. We react to the experience in personal terms and perceive the world in reference to ourselves and our ends, thereby making the world no more than means to our ends.

(Maslow 2011: 69)

In my personal day-to-day work life, I regularly have multiple competing demands upon my time: meetings to prepare for, student emails to answer, deadlines for project and research work, the personal demands of domestic life and the general organisation and management of a fairly hectic schedule. My general life, it can be argued, is lived in a state of what Csikszentmihalyi termed 'psychic entropy'; at any one time I am receiving information, which disrupts and places tensions in my ordering of goals. However, there are periods of time within my week, or daily routine in which, as is suggested above, the bits of information I receive and process across my senses and thoughts as a living being are congruent with my goals of the moment. During these periods I am focused, and clear in my purpose and intent. I may be in 'flow'. Not

unsurprisingly, these negentropic moments are less common than the familiar state of psychic entropy. Csikszentmihalyi suggests that there are some activities which are more predisposed to inducing a state of 'flow': 'some - such as games, sports, artistic performances and religious rituals are designed to expressly facilitate the (Flow) experience' (Csikszentmihalyi 1993: 189, cited in Wright 2008: 24).

The relative rarity of these 'flow' experiences and the repeated clarity and focused separateness reported by respondents (whilst simultaneously experiencing a sense of connectedness and integration with the task in hand), is reflected in anecdotal accounts of the experience.¹⁰¹ This mode of experiencing sits apart from the more common state of everyday entropy and causes the 'flow' experience to be configured as 'optimal'. In no account of 'flow', or similar experiences noted using the terminology covered by Bond and Stinson in the introduction, or in research surrounding this field, is the 'optimal' experience deemed to be a negative encounter for the experiencer.

It is the supremely rewarding and rare nature of the 'flow' experience which has perhaps lead it to be described on occasions using ethereal terminology, or with metaphors and descriptors which lean towards denoting the experience itself as somewhat intangible. Maslow, in framing his 'peak experiences' notes that,

the mystic, or oceanic or nature experience, the aesthetic perception, the creative moment, the therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, certain forms of autotelic fulfillment, etc. These and other

¹⁰¹ For many worthy examples, see; Stinson and Bond (2001).

moments of highest happiness and fulfillment I shall call the peak experiences.

(Maslow 2011: 62)

The language itself here leans towards an intangible, fleeting transcendence verging on the religious.¹⁰² In a related thread, Maslow acknowledges the use of poetic description as necessary in communicating the essence of such states, '[e]xpression in the peak experience tends to become poetic, mythical and rhapsodic as if this were the natural kind of language to express such states of being' (Maslow 2011: 88). Similarly, Colin Wilson, when commenting on P. D. Ouspensky's description of what Wilson terms 'super consciousness', explains that, 'he found it quite impossible to say anything about it because saying anything would require saying everything because everything is connected together' (Wilson 2009: 58). If we return to the children's accounts of the 'super-ordinary' taken from Bond and Stinson, we again find metaphor and poetic language is endemic across descriptions of 'optimal' experience when it relates to dance,

In dance I found a gap and hid under a mountain.

I saw something special. I jumped off the rock.

I was flying in the night sky. That's me, the shooting star.

(Bond and Stinson 2000: 67)

It felt like there was a god or a spirit inside of me. It was making me move... From where I know I was flying.

¹⁰² For examination of the relationship between peak experiences and religion, see Maslow, A. H. (1970) *Religions, values and peak experiences*, New York: Viking Penguin.

Interconnectedness

A particular reoccurring facet of the 'optimal' experience noted through various descriptions, accounts and discourse (including those from the children above), is the idea of interconnectedness. When in 'flow', experiencing a state of being highly focused and concentrated on the given 'action' in hand, a person may also experience a sense of being connected, or, more profoundly, *interconnected* with that which is outside themselves. At this juncture I return again to my own recollections of performance at the start of the introduction, in particular my recollection of certain aspects of performing Albee's *Zoo Story*. Here we encounter this sense of interconnectedness occurring, in my case, with the reactions and movement of the audience and my immediate phenomenal environment. I did not feel I was reacting with them in the manner of the normal and the everyday. Instead, they were part of the unfolding action of the story, joining *to*, and in 'flow' with myself, as I was with them. We (the audience and myself) were all building the action together, whilst simultaneously being somehow sustained by it.

This sense of the partial dissolution of self as an entirely separate unit in performance is also noted by Dorinda Hulton in her comments on the idea of presence, 'it is only when a sense of 'self' *per se* is absent, that a sense of presence either within an individual, or within a group can emerge (Hulton 2010: 221). What Hulton refers to as 'presence' in this instance can also be seen as the possibility of a state of 'flow' being present in the 'action' of the performer. As Csikszentmihalyi (1997) indicates, this sense of interconnectedness shows

that the gap which normally exists in the more common state of psychic entropy between 'action' and 'awareness' has disappeared and 'action' and 'awareness' have merged. The self-consciousness of the everyday melts away as one becomes 'absorbed' in and by the act of doing.

In congruence with the idea of an extended sense of perception noted in the previous chapter, Maslow's discourse upon peak experiences also contain the idea that the self actually moves and works in an area beyond its normal limits. As the self operates within peak experiences he speaks of it letting go of the ego in a manner causing the 'action' undertaken as part of the peak experience not to be ego-centric, but to be subject-object-centric. Maslow is arguably pointing towards a state of being wherein we lose ourselves in the doing and the doing becomes us. Again, 'action' and 'awareness' are merged:

Some writers on aesthetics/mysticism, on motherhood and on love [...] have gone so far as to say that in the peak experience we may even speak of the identification of the perceiver and the perceived, a fusion of what was two into a new and larger whole, a super-ordinate unit.

(Maslow 2011: 67)

Wilson also shares similarly orientated reflections upon his experience of super consciousness: 'Fifty miles or so further on, as I drove through the Lake District, I could not only see the vast hills on either side of the road, but in some odd way I could sense the hills that lay beyond them, as if part of my mind was a quarter of a mile up above the car' (Wilson 2009: 60-61). Framing this in

Csikszentmihalyi's terms we see the person in 'flow' actually experiencing their *being* being in flow. The self becomes wholly integrated with the 'task': 'The autotelic individual grows beyond the limits of individuality by investing psychic energy in a system in which she is included' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 212), or, as Maslow puts it, peak experiences are, 'integrated and integrating experiences, which are, to some extent isomorphic with integration in the perceived world' (Maslow 2011: 110).

The body and 'flow'

For Csikszentmihalyi (1990), the sense of interconnectedness present in 'flow' is particularly present in activities in which the participant is creatively and physically (pro)active in shaping the outcome of the given activity. Whilst he acknowledges that mental, or intellectual activity alone can also be a form of doing which induces 'flow', he indicates that certain activities which actively involve the senses and the body as central to the 'doing' are naturally predisposed to 'flow'. He cites music, dancing, yoga and sex as examples wherein one might experience a phenomenological sense of being-doing. These involve an interconnectedness with the other beyond oneself in order to arrive at a sensory conversation between self and world; a state of corporeal *being*, being in 'flow':

the integrated cells and organs that make up the human organism are an instrument that allows us to get in touch with the rest of the universe [...] It is through the body that we are related to one another and to the rest of the world.

(Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 115)

Wilson also comments on the mode of super consciousness being a felt, 'lived experience' and not an intellectual reflection '[t]he mode of consciousness was perceptual, not conceptual - the field expanding so fast that there seemed no time for conception or identification to get in its work [...] my intellectual processes could not keep up the pace' (Wilson 2009: 45). Similarly, in commenting on contact improvisation, a movement form which focuses on the dancer's inner experience of moving and the flow of energy, Novak comments that, '[m]ovement constitutes an ever-present reality in which we constantly participate' (Novak 1990: 8). Novak's sense of reality being the 'lived experience' of movement also sits well with the previously cited notion of Zarrilli's 'enactive' performer. Zarrilli has also presented a phenomenological framework for examining the embodied experiences of the actor: 'we intersubjectively engage the world around us through our sensorimotor *surface body*, such as when we use a hand to explore, touch or relate to the world. This body encompasses the most prominent functions which shape our experiential field' (Zarrilli 2004: 656). The implication here echoes Csikszentmihalyi's emphasis on the predominance of the body as the locus of phenomenological and experiential knowledge.

As a brief aside and as a means of linking this discussion to that on phenomenology within the previous chapter it is useful to note the focus on the body and the experiential knowledge of the moment and act of doing which again positions the use of phenomenology as an appropriate lens for looking at the idea of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'. In linking his work on the aspects of his work concerned with consciousness and neuroscience with those

concerns dealing with the practicality of actually *doing* things, Csikszentmihalyi cites his use of 'a phenomenological model of consciousness based on information theory' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 25). In this he links the phenomenological descriptions of experience with the study of consciousness and neuroscience; an approach mirrored in this study.

In placing the emphasis on 'flow' as a felt, experiential state of being in which the experience of doing constitutes the valuable data, the idea of activity, or *doing* in these circumstances is not physically passive; the experiencer does not let the activity 'happen to them', but is actively shaping its development. An activity in this context, (for example, performance) is something towards which a person directs their consciousness and efforts. The activity itself does not accidentally happen, it is 'action' in which the participant deliberately engages and is brought about willingly. Csikszentmihalyi notes that '[t]he best moment usually occur when a person's body or mind is stretched to its limits in a voluntary effort to accomplish something difficult and worthwhile. Optimal experience is thus something we *make* happen' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 3; emphasis in original).

However, whilst the activity itself may require effort and exertion, being in a state of 'flow' during such activity makes the 'action' easier for the doer through the merging of 'action' and 'awareness'. Csikszentmihalyi (1997) cites the apparent effortless nature of the 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' (at once almost automatic, yet highly focused and purposeful), as part of the picture of the experience that led him to term it as 'flow'. It is at once easy and yet highly

directional. In his early research in this area he noted 'flow' was a term used by many of his respondents to describe the feeling of 'optimal' being.

Similarly, the characteristic also leans towards the 'absorptive' quality of flow (to be discussed shortly) present in the selected extracts of practice explored in the company- specific chapters later in this study. Similarly, in the instance of the particular performance of *Ad* I cited in the introduction, I found myself to be exerting significant effort and getting nowhere. I tried to perform well, but, for a variety of reasons, simply could not. My experience of performing *Zoo Story* was antithetical to this. During this performance, I found everything I needed was at my disposal almost without 'asking' myself for it. It was only after the performance that I experienced the sudden rush of physical and mental fatigue.

The notable difference here is the difference between striving to do something (not being in 'flow'), and simply doing something to the point of 'absorption' (being in flow). Maslow comments on the notion of striving as being outside the peak experience:

In this same realm of discourse, it makes similar sense to describe highest, most authentic identity as non-striving, non needing, non wishing, i.e., as having transcended needs and drives of the ordinary sort. He just is. Joy has been attained which means a temporary end to the *striving* for joy.

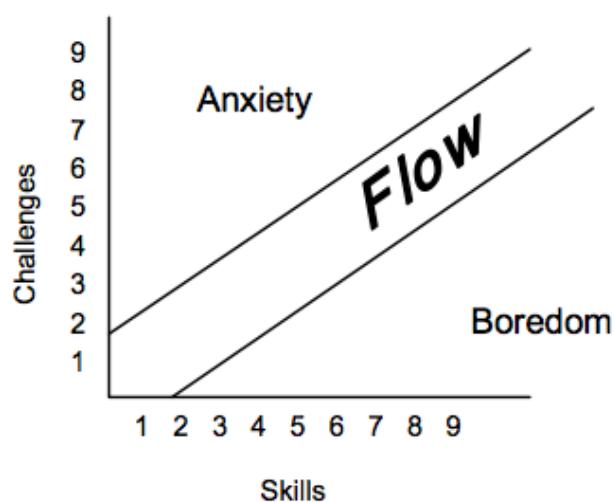
(Maslow 2011: 89; emphasis in original)

It is not that the given activity does not require effort, but importantly that the effort is not directed towards the 'striving' to do it, but into the relationship within the focus of 'intentionality' forged by the doing of it.

The balance between challenges and abilities

The idea of 'just doing' an activity which actually may require considerable effort and (certainly in the case of performance) skill and practice, is also noted by Csikszentmihalyi in his discourse upon the relationship between skills and abilities in the experience of 'flow'. 'Flow' is likely to happen when people are engaged in complex and challenging experiences. Wright notes that 'flow' often occurs when, 'people were engaged in occupations that required deep concentration and which had clearly structured demands, which usually resulted in a well ordered consciousness and the individual's perception of a harmonious experience' (Wright 2008: 26). Csikszentmihalyi creates a graph of 'flow' activity in which skills are presented against challenges (see Fig. 9). The 'flow' channel is that area in which the skill of a person is matched by their ability to engage at an appropriate level in the activity.

Fig. 5 - The flow channel



What the diagram in Figure 9 also points to is that as the skill of a person within a given activity rises, so must the challenge. If the activity becomes too easy then boredom occurs, but if it becomes too challenging then anxiety occurs. Within the 'flow' channel lies the pleasure inherent in the doing of the given task. This in itself points towards another condition of 'flow'; namely that, within it, the 'flow' activity contains immediate feedback on progress.

As John Britton (2010) notes, key to this feedback is the way in which the participant encounters the 'task', or 'action'. In commenting on work with his undergraduate performers in training Britton notes that rather than operating from a detached view of the 'task' itself and providing feedback after the event, Csikszentmihalyi's notion of 'flow' and the feedback it provides in the *doing* (through conversation and 'absorption' by and with the 'task' itself) is immediate and, 'can operate independently of pre-existing paradigms, for it is based on a trainee's actual experience of doing a task, rather than her *a priori* perception of either self or task' (Britton 2010: 40).

'Flow' as a creative act and state of being

The figure above also points to a characteristic of 'flow' being the notion of exploration, or of conquering or interacting with new challenges and previously un-encountered terrain. There is the, 'creative feeling of transporting the person into a new reality' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 74). The creative characteristic of 'flow', the language of 'flow', and the manner in which a person in 'flow' will play and discover new things within the given field or 'task' align the state of 'flow' closely with the idea of 'play' itself. 'Play' as a decidedly dynamic cultural phenomenon is explored in some depth later in this chapter as a lens through

which, alongside an understanding of 'flow', an understanding and articulation of 'absorption' can be developed within 'dance theatre'. However, it is useful to note here that Turner has written of play thusly, 'playfulness is a volatile, sometimes dangerously explosive essence [...] Most definitions of play involve notions of disengagement, of free wheeling, of being out of mesh with the serious "bread and butter"' (Turner 1986: 31). This subjective language of experience is typical of that associated with both 'play' and 'flow', indicating a separateness to the everyday caused by the 'absorption' of the participant within such activities. Turner also references the creative dimension contained within the act of playing, 'yet, although "spinning loose" as it were, the wheel of play reveals to us (as Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has argued) the possibility of changing our goals' (Turner 1986: 31). It is also interesting that, echoing the earlier points made in this chapter on the involvement and primacy of the body and the senses in 'flow', Turner also positions play as a decidedly embodied mode of being: 'There is no sanctity in play; [...] it is almost as though the limbic system were itself endowed with higher intelligence, in a kind of carnivalesque reversal of the indicative system' (Turner 1986: 29). Similarly Maslow (2011) also indicates that the peak experience is a creative experience with playfulness at its core.

Flow as an autotelic activity and 'absorption'

Before moving to discuss the notion of 'play' in this chapter, a final characteristic of the 'flow' experience to note here, and a point which Csikszentmihalyi saw as central to 'flow', is its autotelic nature. The etymology of 'autotelic' is seen in its two halves, originating from the ancient Greek word *auto*, meaning 'self', and the word *telic*, meaning 'tending towards a definite end'. An autotelic activity

therefore points towards activity which is self-contained. Also central to the autotelic 'flow' activity is the simple notion of enjoyment. It is done because it is fun to do it. 'Flow' activity therefore finds its autotelic capacity through its capacity to be intrinsically enjoyable for the doer. It has as its primary, sometimes singular reward the enjoyment of just doing. As a child would naively engage in a game, the reward of an autotelic activity is in and of itself, 'the key element of an optimal experience is that it is an end in itself. Even if initially undertaken for other reasons, the activity that consumes us becomes intrinsically rewarding' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 67). This points to a consciousness directed towards the doing, not the doing *because*.¹⁰³

As the psychic energy of the participant is being focused solely on the engagement in the 'task' itself, this gives both gives rise to and results from a further key characteristic of the 'flow' experience, namely that of 'absorption'. 'Absorption' would seem to occur in the absence of the normal gap between 'action' and 'awareness': the doer is 'absorbed', or consumed by the act of doing. 'Absorption' occurs when one is engaged in an activity to the depth wherein all of one's psychic energy, or one's consciousness, is directed to, and in conversation with, that activity. Maslow notes that, 'We may expect richness of detail and a many-sided awareness of this object from this kind of absorbed, fascinated, fully attending cognition' (Maslow 2011: 64). Echoing points above, the level of 'absorption' in the 'task' or activity at hand is often described as a deeply and intrinsically rewarding experience, '*flow* - the state in which people

¹⁰³ I have seen this autotelic component of 'flow' in both its absence and presence in watching football. In some matches I have watched I have felt that the players were not playing to 'play', but playing to achieve other aims. These aims lay outside the game they were playing. Their game was reserved and strategic; they were playing for the match bonus and for the league points. Playing at this point became work as they were not playing simply to 'play'. Whatever reward being worked towards was external to the game itself. But just occasionally, I have seen the footballers forget their bonus, their contracts and career aspirations and just 'play'. In these rare circumstances the game is utterly 'absorbing' for both spectator and player and the sheer delight and fun of the match is realised through the joy of the game alone.

are so involved in an activity that nothing else seems to matter; the experience itself is so enjoyable that people will do it, even at great cost, for the sheer sake of doing it' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 4; emphasis in original). In Ollis and Hefferon's paper examining 'flow' and dance activities in an educational context, the characteristics of 'absorption', intrinsic reward and enjoyment of the autotelic 'flow' activity were seen in the respondents' reflections of the experience of dancing:

Respondent A:

It's a big empty. Whatever happened during the day, whatever is happening before is GONE. It's totally the music, the steps, myself. It's like being in your own bubble. You see the people in front and all those people, but you are in your own bubble, you are doing whatever you want to do...what you have been taught to do, what you are supposed to do and you are having a blast with it. You are in your totally secure world of freedom...totally free...when it's right, your guts are spilling out...all the jitters and the worries...everything is there...but it's good...the bubble is your world...when you are in it, you are great, you don't think about it.

(Hefferon and Ollis 2006: 150)

The 'bubble' of experience to which respondent A refers indicates a final characteristic of 'flow' which results from the deep concentration of the participant and their 'absorption' in the activity at hand, namely that the everyday sense of time becomes distorted. The very liminality of the theatrical experience (both for performer and audience) causes one to become involved in the reception and perception of performance as a phenomenon aside from

the causality of the everyday. Regular time is interrupted here and our participation in it is momentarily paused.

'Play'

An exact, useful, meaningful and pertinent definition of 'play', like the very thing, preoccupation, or activity it seeks to describe, seems to evade satisfying definition.

Even in attempting to reach the point of reasonable definition, one becomes quickly entangled in descriptions that seem to work towards highlighting the qualities of 'play' *via negativa*. The core of what 'play' actually is seems to be elusive, or just out of reach. Johan Huizinga notes that, 'play is a function of the living, but is not susceptible of exact definition either logically, biologically, or aesthetically' (Huizinga 1950: 7). Similarly, Sutton-Smith indicates that, 'when it comes to making theoretical statements about what play is, we fall into silliness. There is little agreement among us, and much ambiguity' (Sutton-Smith 2001: 1). Victor Turner also explains that, '[p]lay can be everywhere and nowhere, imitate anything, yet be identified with nothing' (Turner 1986: 31). These thoughts define 'play' as a state or engagement, which is at once recognisable, yet simultaneously possessing an essential quality not easily captured by words, descriptions or theory. In highlighting the ambiguity of 'play', Sutton-Smith references contributions to the topic from the fields of anthropology, biology and theatre studies. In commenting on the playful 'nipping' or biting of animals, he notes that, '[a]nimals at play bite each other playfully, knowing that the playful nip connotes a bite, but not what a bite connotes' (Sutton-Smith 2001: 1).

It is the intangibility of the essence of 'play' which also can be seen to contribute to its fragility and its seemingly unstable nature. The state of 'play' itself is not a fixed and static state, a known thing with a predetermined outcome, but a state which contains flux, a degree of unpredictability, and the possibility of the unexpected. Caillois notes that, 'an outcome known in advance, with no possibility of error or surprise, clearly leading to an inescapable result is incompatible with the nature of play' (Caillois 2001: 7). D. W. Winnicott explains that, '[t]he thing about playing is always the precarious nature of the interplay of personal psychic reality and the experience of control of actual objects. This is the precariousness of magic itself' (Winnicott 1971: 47). Here, Winnicott alludes to the inherent tension in 'play' which aids in creating the 'magic'. This 'magic' would seem to sit in a fragile and transient liminality. Whilst it is possible to examine the concept of 'play' from a multitude of angles and stances, it is the liminal qualities of 'play' in the particular context of 'dance theatre' performance (and aspects of liminality associated with the playing of the 'dance theatre' performer) which constitute a useful place from which to begin to explore the relevance of 'play' as a lens for developing an understanding of 'absorption'.

The liminality of play in 'dance theatre'

In the translator's introduction to Caillois' *Man, play and games*, Barash writes that 'Caillois defines play as free, separate, uncertain and unproductive, yet regulated and make believe' (Caillois 2001: ix). Within this definition, Caillois identifies four categories of play: *agon* (competition), *ale*, (chance), mimicry (simulation) and *ilinx* (vertigo). Within each category there can be many games that can be played, each of which can be placed on a sliding scale between the opposites of *paida*. These indicate a state for the player of exuberant activity

and tumultuous spontaneity akin to the Dionysian, *ludus* indicating a calculation and an Apollonian consideration and observance of rules.

Of the four categories noted by Caillois, *ilinx* and mimicry are the two most useful to an understanding of 'play' in the game of 'dance theatre'. However, in his exploration of these terms Caillois specifically references theatre, rather than the 'dance theatre' of this study. Consequently, whilst his explication of *ilinx* and mimicry is still useful in examining and explaining the particular liminality of the state of 'play' at play in 'dance theatre', it is appropriate to temper and refine the use of these terms, in particular mimicry, for use in describing the particular state of 'play' in this context. This tempering and refinement of these terms is a choice I have taken consciously and deliberately with the aims of the study in mind as I work towards defining and expanding the lexicon of terminology to be used in later chapters.

Illox

Caillois uses the term *ilinx*¹⁰⁴ to describe the state of 'play' in which one temporarily loses sight of or connection to the stable, everyday mode of perception or being. *Illox* is when the psychological or actual walls shift, when the landscape experienced causes one to be displaced from the everyday and, for a short while, to exist in a different state of being. Caillois associates vertigo with the idea of mask. He describes it in language reminiscent of Dionysian ritual: intoxicating, liberating, frightening, hallucinatory, a state of possession. The altered consciousness of the player in this context can also be likened to Huizinga's player who experiences, 'abandonment of body and soul' (Huizinga

¹⁰⁴ Caillois explains that this is; 'the Greek term for whirlpool, from which is also derived the Greek word for vertigo (*illingos*)' (Caillois 2001: 25).

1950: 20) to the game. This altered state of being is pleasurable and 'playful'. It is the displacement of the fairground rollercoaster, the rush of skiing, or the dizziness a child experiences when they scream for the roundabout to be pushed faster. Caillois notes that the act of dancing is capable of providing this sense of vertigo, citing the example of the whirling dervishes: 'Dervishes seek ecstasy by whirling about with movements accelerating as the drumbeats become ever more precipitate. Panic and hypnosis are attained by the paroxysm of frenetic, contagious and shared rotation' (Caillois 2001: 23). Whilst some examples of 'dance theatre' within the genealogical canon as explored and defined in Chapter One do contain a presence of the ecstatic (notably some earlier examples of Wigman's work), it is the sense of 'playful' and pleasurable displacement of self within the idea of vertigo as applied to 'dance theatre' performance that is of most use in developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer working in this form.

To continue this thread of discussion, it is useful to recall the discourse of Chapter Two, which discussed the idea of the 'enactive' 'entity' being in a state of Heideggerian 'being-in-the-world', and also noted the altered perceptions of higher states, or extended states, of consciousness. In the context of dance performance, Sondra Horton Fraleigh notes these moments of unity between 'perception', 'intention' and 'action', explaining that, 'there is no separation, no thought for the dance, because the thought would turn it into an object. When I become my dance it becomes consonant with my consciousness. The difference between the dance and myself disappears' (Fraleigh 1987: 40). This state of absolute unity between 'intention' and 'action' described by Fraleigh, the point Fraleigh notes that Heidegger refers to as 'fallingness', is the

displacement of Caillois' vertigo realised as unification of dancer and dance; it is seen as 'absorption' in the moment of doing for the performer. In this vertiginous state, doing becomes being, 'I become centred in my action. I do not look back on it, or anticipate it. I am spontaneously present in it' (Fraleigh 1987: 40). So, the 'playful' presence of Caillois' understanding of vertigo within 'dance theatre' can contain the ecstatic, but is also transposed into the idea of displacement through 'absorption' in the moment of 'enactive' 'actual' expression, producing a liminal state of being for the performer in which the 'intentional', 'temporal', 'actual' and 'perceptual' qualities of the everyday are interrupted. Here we see again distinct similarities between the idea of vertigo and the state of 'absorption' commonly associated with the notion of 'flow' as discussed previously in this chapter. Similarly to points previously noted, related discussions picked up in the excerpts of practice used in later chapters.

Before moving on to discuss Caillois' use of mimetism and its pertinence to developing an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in 'dance theatre' it is useful to further explore the idea of 'absorption' inherent in 'play' activity, and its effects and implications for the player. This discussion makes explicit the link between Csikszentmihalyi's 'flow' and the idea of 'play'.

'Play' and 'absorption'

Johan Huizinga argues that the key element in 'play' is fun. Huizinga's *Homo ludens* (1950) focuses not on the purpose of 'play' (if it has one at all), but the nature of play as a thing aside from purpose. Similar to 'flow', 'play', according to Huizinga, possesses intrinsic value. As the value of the 'play' activity resides within the 'playful' activity, the value becomes an 'absorptive' feature of 'play' for

the player. Part of this value is the fun of playing for itself. When one becomes disengaged with the everyday as Turner suggests, one becomes 'absorbed' in the act of being, 'out of mesh with the serious' (Turner 1986: 31).

In anecdotal example to support this, I recollect a day several autumns ago. I had harvested a good selection of horse chestnuts, or 'conkers' with the hope that I could share a competitive game with my five-year old nephew. He received the gift of a bag of conkers gratefully, but the game we played was not the pre-ordained schoolyard competition I had planned. My nephew unthreaded the conkers from their strings and, sitting on his back door step, rolled them down his garden path. He would not accept my imposition of any external rules, but instead just rolled the conkers. When I asked what the purpose, or aim of his game was, he replied 'rolling the preciouses [conkers].' That was it. The game we played was rolling conkers for the sake and enjoyment of rolling conkers. He found this immensely absorbing. It was simply fun and done for the sake of doing alone. We played for a good portion of the afternoon. There was no purpose here outside rolling conkers, no external reason or rules, no external target to be hit. The ludic act had value for itself, through itself, expressed as fun. This is echoed by Sutton-Smith: 'What seems most obvious about play, whether that of animals, children, or adults is that it is a very exciting kind of activity that players carry on because they like doing so. It doesn't seem to have too much to do with anything else (Sutton-Smith 2001: 18).

Huizinga describes 'play' as part of the 'supra-logical' state of the human condition and situation, maintaining that, in itself, 'play' cannot be broken down and categorised, because as an activity in itself for itself it denies the imposition of a value system external to the act of playing. Was my game of conkers a

good game of conkers? Or was it a bad game of conkers? I have no idea. I am unable to understand it better in its meaningful context by examining it through any external point of reference. However, I do know it was fun and that both my nephew and I were fully 'absorbed' in the activity and had to be called into dinner by his mum. As noted by Huizinga, it is the thing at play, in 'play', which is the point of 'absorption' for the players.

This again sits well with the notion of 'action' and 'intention' merging during 'flow' activity or 'optimal' experience and the notion of a liminal space being created in which to 'play'. This space is temporally adjacent to the everyday domain, but temporally and spatially exists as aside from extrinsic purpose. In the context of 'dance theatre' and for the purposes of this study, this space is the 'playspace'. Within the context of 'dance theatre' we see similar sentiments to those expressed above articulated in Sondra Horton Fraleigh's descriptions of dancing, which she positions as, 'movement detached from instrumental usefulness; it has a primary aesthetic intent' (Fraleigh 1987: 27). The dance is not created as object, or thing being played with, but as intrinsically motivated experience which 'does not end in any action outside of itself but rather is realized as itself' (Fraleigh: 1987: 47).

However, whilst being fun, the 'absorption' experienced in 'play' is not, to employ a common phrase, just a laughing matter. 'Play' and fun can also be deadly serious. However irrational and senseless the playing itself may be, it is possible for the player to experience the fun of the game through relinquishing their self to the creative task at hand. Echoing the self-sacrifice of the performer noted in Chapter One in reference to *Ausdruckstanz*, Huizinga stresses that;

genuine and spontaneous play can also be profoundly serious. The player can abandon himself body and soul to the game and the consciousness of its being merely a game can be thrust into the background. The joy inextricably bound up with playing can turn not only into tension, but elation. Frivolity and ecstasy are the twin poles between which play moves.

(Huizinga 1950: 20-21)

The 'absorption' experienced by the players engaged in a game is akin to what Leo Frobenius (in Huizinga 1950: 15-17) describes as a state of enrapture in archaic man. There is a state where the game rules the players, a sublimation of self to rule imposed by play activity that carries echoes of Nietzschean self-overcoming. Frobenius notes that, 'the creative faculty in people, as in the child, or every creative person, springs from this state of being seized' (Frobenius, cited in Huizinga 1950: 16) Again, turning to Fraleigh, her reflections substantiate this sense of giving oneself over to the act of what can be deadly serious play, 'I do not think "move" then do move. No! I am the dance; its thinking is its doing and its doing is its thinking' (Fraleigh 1987: 32).

'Absorption', the sense of deadly serious fun, of 'being seized' and of the player being played by the game are all notions which bear striking resemblance to qualities inherent in 'flow' activity wherein the activity will, at times, seem to lead the participant. Loukes cites Zarrilli as noting the same qualities in 'optimal' performance, 'at optimal virtuosic levels of performance, one does the action/task while simultaneously being done by the action/task' (Zarrilli, cited in

Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 331). The qualities of serious fun, of precarious fragility, and of 'absorption' are elements of 'play' that add another useful dimension to understanding manifestations of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'.

Mimetism

At this point I return to Caillois' explication of mimetism within his classification of games to move the discussion forward. Caillois uses mimetism to indicate the 'fundamental, elementary and quasi-organic nature of the impulse' (Caillois 2001: 20). Echoing the state of the 'enactive' being in their domain and Heidegger's assertion of being-with, the 'organic' nature of this impulse is picked up by Viola Spolin in her description of the engagement of self in the act of experiencing the doing of theatre: 'Experiencing is penetration into the environment, total organic involvement with it. This means involvement on three levels, intellectual, physical and intuitive' (Spolin 1983: 3). It seems that here, as in the discourse of Chapter Two, the performer at 'play' is in a multi-layered and complex conversation with their 'enactive' domain. The performer becomes woven in dialogue with that which is beyond himself in interaction with the infinite fluctuations present in the environment and the moment of happening around him. Caillois also identifies the extended nature of this subject-object conversation during 'play'. In a manner highly redolent of the extended consciousness of 'flow', and the discourse of Chapter Two on extended consciousness, he uses the example of flying a kite to describe how the player, 'accomplishes a kind of auscultation upon the sky from afar. He projects his presence beyond the limits of his body' (Caillois 2001: 29-30). However, as noted above, Caillois' mimetism is based upon an idea of the theatrical event

rooted in an act of theatre wherein, 'the subject makes believe or makes others believe that he is someone other than himself' (Caillois 2001: 19). Whilst Caillois does acknowledge that there are, of course, manifestations of mimetism other and different to this, his predominant theme in his explanation of mimicry is that the 'entity' at 'play' imitates, mimics, copies or otherwise attempts to become something or someone other than that which they are.¹⁰⁵ The 'play' in Caillois' mimetism occurs in the space created by the willing suspension of disbelief on the part of the players and the spectators or audience, coupled with a willing and communal act of 'make-believe' also undertaken by all involved. As Caillois notes, [t]he actor does not try to make believe that he is "really" King Lear or Charles V. It is only the spy or the fugitive who disguise themselves to really deceive because they are not playing' (Caillois 2001: 21). The 'play' of Caillois' mimetism is the shared game of making-believe in other for a fixed period of time, during which players and audience suspend their normal attitude and literally 'play-along'. They accept that the actor is not the actor but is in fact King Lear or Charles V, all the while remaining safe in the knowledge that he is not.

It is at the idea of communally, temporarily and willingly making-believe in the *other* that the playful mimetism of 'dance theatre' would seem to differ from Caillois' notion of mimetism. Whilst it retains all other qualities noted above, the mimetism within 'dance theatre' as defined in Chapter One exists in a theatrical frame that does not create a fictive reality on stage with psychologically rounded characters. Instead there exists a liminal theatrical 'actuality' in 'dance theatre' in which the audience encounters the 'actuality' of the 'dance theatre'

¹⁰⁵ Caillois also notes the mimicry inherent in the insect world. He draws upon this reference point in order to align his term with an understanding of mimicry as 'fundamental, elementary and quasi-organic' (Caillois 2001: 20).

performer being themselves. The performer is not playing at being a psychologically rounded 'other' character, or playing make-believe, but instead playing with doing and being 'self-as-actualised-expression' of a given theme or moment. Whilst the 'actuality' here will, of course, be theatricalised to an extent, there is no fictive reality depicted on stage in 'dance theatre', no suspension in disbelief towards a 'then and there', which is away from the 'here and now'.

Whilst DV8 and Bausch and to an extent VDT 'play' on the edges of 'then and there', the 'action' always remains in the expressive 'actual' contained in 'here and now' of the 'playspace'. The primary reason for this subtle difference rests with the interplay of the conditions of 'dance theatre' as defined in Chapter One. In particular the ways in which the condition of the 'playspace' as a 'liminal meta-actuality', and the condition of the prominence of the 'lived body' as the primary means of expression and the locus for performance work together.

Whilst 'dance theatre' might play on the borders of 'make believe', these two conditions ground the work in the 'actual' by focusing the activity of performance not on the drama of make believe and a playing as-if, but on the 'action' of an 'actualised' 'playing-with' which centres on the 'lived experience' of the performer doing these 'actions', rather than representing an 'other' through mimesis. Neither the players nor the audience are transported to far off lands, or to other fictive settings by the make-believe of Caillois' theatrical mimesis.

What remains is the expressive phenomenological 'actuality' of the performers in the liminality of the 'playspace', with the 'actual' then becoming an active part of the moment of expression. The 'play-with' of 'dance theatre' 'enacted' by the 'dance theatre' performer is a mimesis which 'plays-with' in an embodied expressive extension of the behaviour or human relationship, or situation it

draws from. It is the mimetic 'playing-with', which, as noted in Chapter One, marks out the particular qualities of play within 'dance theatre'.

'Dance theatre' and the 'play' of self

Continuing with the idea of not playing as make-believe, but playing as 'playing-with', I now pick up in more detail another aspect of 'play' within 'dance theatre' as highlighted in Chapter One, namely the notion of playing the self. Claid (2006) argues that the dance, which has evolved through the last century and into this one, emphasises and plays upon a sometimes deliberate ambiguity of self, manifesting itself in several manners, situations and frames. Self (and elements and facets thereof) is both present and not present to the watcher in the fluctuating sense of presence that exists through the various movement forms and styles with which Claid engages. Claid postulates that it is this very fluctuation between knowing and recognising, and not knowing and not recognising that becomes the point of seduction for the audience. One of the many examples Claid uses is a recollection of an evening of multiple 'dance theatre' performances by Lloyd Newson. Claid notes that:

Lloyd fully inhabited the different personae of these pieces. Each one served as a disguise encouraging, in a single evening, multiple identities regarding the flesh and blood body of Lloyd [...] The many different personae he embodied became complex layers of ambiguous memories, diffusing any real identity of Lloyd. Yet he was there, committed and focused.

(Claid 2006: 160)

The seduction of which Claid speaks and the deliberate ‘play’ of the performer between the doing of the dance and the theatricalised personae of being is also accented within the ‘dance theatre’ of this study by the ‘actualised’ nature of the activity and the presence of the (albeit theatricalised) phenomenologically ‘real’. As will be explored in detail across the company-specific chapters of the study to follow, many examples of the emphasis on the ‘actual’ and the ‘real’ lie across the canon. We see the ‘actual’ manifested in the gruelling repetition of Bausch’s choreography. Kozel notes that, ‘Bausch’s performances are often very long, causing them to be experienced in “real time” where all parties battle exhaustion’ (Kozel 1997: 106). We see the ‘real’ inherent in DV8’s pieces and in Newson’s earlier pieces, such as *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (film) (1990) and *Enter Achilles* (1995). It is present in the very real threat of physical harm as his performers engage in high-risk movement. In his more recent work it can be seen in the use of verbatim texts as a through line for the pieces, in particular *To Be Straight With You* (2007) and *Can We Talk About This?* (2011). We encounter the ‘real’ across both DV8’s work and that of Vincent in their use of the performer’s personal biography in the work.¹⁰⁶ This again emphasises the ‘play’ of self inherent in ‘dance theatre’.

The seductive ‘play’ of self and the sense of playing with the ‘actual’ as noted above forms part of the wider sense of ‘playing-with’ inherent in ‘dance theatre’ and carries echoes of the deadly serious fun found in play activity by Huizinga. The ‘playing-with’ of ‘dance theatre’ is a ‘game’ in which the audience are complicit but, echoing the differences between Caillois’ mimetism and that of ‘dance theatre’, the ‘game’ is subtly different to that of make-believe as the

¹⁰⁶ Vincent and Newson continue to use the actual names, experiences and circumstance of the performers on stage, with no pretence or implied position that the performers themselves, their personal thoughts, opinions and motivations are anything other than central to the creation of the eventual piece.

audience see and 'play' with the performer as, in turn, the performer shares in their 'playing-with' the 'actual' and the 'real' in the liminality of the 'playspace'. Whilst the idea of 'game' as it relates to an understanding of 'play' and its relationship to 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' will be explored later in this chapter, it is useful to briefly pause in order to note the implications that 'playing-with' has in contributing to an understanding of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer as specifically related to the 'dance theatre' 'playspace'.

Towards an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' and 'playing-with' in the liminal 'playspace'

The idea of 'playing-with' as a means of understanding the specific characteristics of 'play' within the 'playspace' of 'dance theatre' points towards a liminal state of being for the performer in which they 'enact' and configure their immediate domain. Whilst this could be said to be true in other performative contexts, within the liminality of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace', the use of 'playing-with' as a configuration of 'play' is intended to emphasise the centrality of the 'lived body' of the performer within their immediate domain (the 'playspace') to any emerging context-specific notions of 'absorption'. The foregrounding of phenomenological considerations and the experience of doing draws the search for manifestations of 'optimal experience' into specific relationships for the 'dance theatre' performer into which they concentrate their 'playing-with'. This again points to a view of the 'playspace' as an 'enacted domain' for the performer in which they 'psychically' bring into being the domain as required for the performance at hand.

This 'enaction' can be seen as creating what Winnicott terms the 'third space' (Winnicott 1971). The third space is a liminal space which is neither 'subject' nor 'object'. In congruence with the 'enactive' view, Winnicott indicates that as 'play' is neither entirely inside the self (purely psychic) nor entirely outside (purely environmental) a third area should be recognised; this being the product of the experiences of the individual person in their dynamic relationship with the environment. It is within this third area that Winnicott locates the shifting variables inherent in the substance of 'play' activity:

One can think of the 'electricity' that seems to generate in meaningful or intimate contact that is a feature, for instance when two people are in love. These phenomena of the play area have infinite variability, contrasting with the relative stereotypy that relate either to personal body functioning, or to environmental actuality.

(Winnicott 1971: 98)

This positions the performer at 'play' in a liminal 'enacted' space. The third area exists in tension between the virtual and the 'actual'; a position recognised by Robert Gordon: 'The actors' creation of a virtual body transforms an actual place demarcated as a playing space into a virtual place. Real time is transformed into virtual time for the duration of the performance' (Gordon 2006: 2). However, mirroring the nuanced variation of Caillois' mimetism as when applied to the construct of 'dance theatre' within the context of the theatricalised 'actuality' of 'dance theatre' Gordon's 'virtual' becomes a virtual that is not rooted in a fictitious other. Instead, an understanding of 'virtual' arises which

again indicates the liminality of a phenomenal theatricalised 'actuality' set apart from the 'temporality' of the everyday. For the 'dance theatre' performer, therefore, this virtual place exists purely as an intra-psychic relationship of possibility between the personal 'perceptions' and 'intentions' of the performer and the 'actuality' of the phenomenal 'playspace'. This space is, for Winnicott, the position of 'play' itself, and so the act of 'playing-with' itself also is subject to this tension. It would appear that 'play' is itself a liminal state of what Victor Turner famously describes as being 'betwixt and between'¹⁰⁷ a state wherein something is created, or is invented, or is brought into being by the player.

In congruence with the discourse of Chapter Two, a particular characteristic of Winnicott's third area is that it also operates and is created from an I-centred, egocentric position. Moreover, again in keeping with content of Chapter Two, the position of 'I' as the locus for the experience of 'play' is an embodied position, embedded within the world; 'play' is experienced by the experiencer through and with their body. So, whilst possessing a 'psychic' element, this experience is rooted in 'action' and therefore is embodied. Winnicott notes that, '[t]o control what is outside, one has to do things, not simply to think or wish, and doing things takes time. Playing is doing' (Winnicott 1971: 41).

In continuing to consider the positioning of 'I' as locus for the experience of 'play' it is useful at this point to draw upon Brian Sutton-Smith's writing regarding the rhetorics of play. Sutton-Smith maintains that in order to bring some cohesion to the varied and complicated discourse on 'play', it is necessary to contextualise the different meanings and understandings ascribed

¹⁰⁷ Victor Turner focused on the subject of liminality and applications of its understanding across a number of fields, particularly anthropology.

to 'play' by formulating this understanding within 'ways of thought'. These rhetorics (Sutton-Smith 1997) are given as follows:

- The rhetoric of play as progress.
- The rhetoric of play as fate.
- The rhetoric of play as power.
- The rhetoric of play as identity.
- The rhetoric of play as the imaginary.
- The rhetoric of the self.
- The rhetoric of play as frivolous.

Of these seven, it is the rhetoric of 'play' as progress and, to a certain extent, the rhetoric of 'play' as the imaginary which is of most use when considering the relationship between 'play' and an understanding of 'absorption' in the context of 'dance theatre'.

'Optimal' experience and 'play' as progress

As noted above, inherent in Winnicott's doing is 'action'; 'play' therefore becomes embodied, and is thereby understood as experience from an egocentric perspective. Relatedly, Sutton-Smith notes that the rhetorics of 'play' as, 'progress, the imaginary and the self, are relatively Western, relatively modern, and relatively utopian discourses about individualised forms of play' (Sutton-Smith 2001: 175).

As the individual engages in the act of 'play', they play with something. This playing with may be with an idea, or an 'object', or a 'task', or a physical 'action',

or with other 'entities' within the 'enacted' domain of the individual. The point being made here is that they play with something recognisable as 'other' to themselves. With 'I' positioned as the locus of experience of 'play', the 'object' at hand in 'play' within the 'enactive domain'; that which is not me, is 'enacted' and played with. 'Play' in this context occupies a key role in the social, psychological and cognitive development of the individual. As a prominent voice in the field of child and infant psychology, Winnicott stakes a claim for a type of 'illusory' state of being (Winnicott 1971).¹⁰⁸ Leading on from this, and in continuing to understand and frame 'play' as progress, it is useful to note Jean Piaget's descriptions of the point in the development of an infant, or baby, wherein their mastery of their task or action becomes of no importance. At this stage the baby ceases to engage with the object, be it a rattle or a mobile, in order to explore, learn or investigate. Piaget explains that at this point in the developmental process it is the sublimation of reality by the baby that takes precedence; there is pleasure experienced by the individual through their experiencing their own powers to subdue, or shape reality. In short, there is enjoyment and fun to be found in the 'action' of 'intentional' 'enactment' itself. Piaget explains that:

In other words assimilation was no longer accompanied by accommodation and therefore was no longer an effort at comprehension: there was merely assimilation to the activity itself; i.e. use of the phenomena for the pleasure of the activity itself, and that is play.

¹⁰⁸ This state of illusion is an intermediate state between the baby unable to recognise the other, or object, and its growing ability to recognise phenomena as separate from itself. In essence the environment is recognised as an extension of self and as this is a state in continual flux; a pre-logical fusion of subject and object. Within this recognition the baby begins to attempt to assert control over its own corporeality and environment whilst fostering a growing cognitive realisation of the positions of subject and object.

(Piaget, quoted in Bruner *et al.* 1976: 170)

It is Piaget's emphasis on the 'transfer of interest to the action itself, regardless of its aim' (Piaget, quoted in Bruner *et al.* 1976: 171) that brings into focus the purpose and nature of 'play' itself and the idea of 'playing-with'. Whilst there is a progressive dimension to 'play', as espoused by Sutton-Smith, which can be understood as a concept that facilitates social, cognitive and perhaps biological progress, Piaget supposes that 'play' is more than just a purposeful, progressive interplay of subject and object.

By bringing together the notion of intrinsic worth and fun in the idea of playing with, together with the idea of playing as progress, it is now possible to begin to see the relationship between an understanding of 'absorption' and the ideas of 'play' and 'flow'. Due to the congruence of goal, 'intention' and 'action' within the state of 'flow', the 'flow' 'action', understood as playing with, becomes a progressive 'action' in which the teleonomy of self occurs¹⁰⁹. Moreover, the action is autotelic; in and for itself. As such, the intrinsic worth of the 'action' causes the player to become 'absorbed' in and by the act of progressive playing with. This is the essence of the fun experienced within playing with and is central to the reward and consequential element of progress inherent in 'flow' activity, 'because flow produces harmony within the self, attention can be invested totally in the activity at hand. This produces that "merging of activity

¹⁰⁹ Csikszentmihalyi (1988) maintains that flow is a teleonomic activity. As the self becomes established in consciousness, its primary goal is to ensure its own survival. Consequently, the attention, awareness and actions of an individual are, on a fundamental level, directed to replicate states and experiences congenial to the nurturing and furthering of self, and eliminate those which are less desirable. Csikszentmihalyi notes that, 'because the tendency of the self is most congruent with its goal directed structure during these episodes of optimal experience, to keep on experiencing flow becomes one of the central goals of the self. This is the teleonomy of the self, that is the goal seeking tendency that shapes the choices we make among alternatives' (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 24).

and awareness” so typical of enjoyable activities’ (Csikszentmihalyi and Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 32).

Drawing these thoughts into the context of the ‘dance theatre’ of the study, it is possible by examining reflections of performers engaging in this activity to note evidence of both the intrinsic reward and ‘absorptive’ qualities of these practices and also the sense that, in keeping with the idea of play as progression, the performer experiences a sense of growth, or expansion. In an expression of expansion of self, Sondra Horton Fraleigh explains that,

I move beyond the confines of persona (meaning mask or that which appears as evidently personal about me) to union with the larger aesthetic purpose of the dance and in communion with others. The magic here is that self is surpassed towards the dance and towards others.

(Fraleigh 1987: 29)

Similarly, in offering a personal perspective on the idea of presence, Eva Karczag¹¹⁰ comments that, ‘playing lightly, with complete absorption, utter conviction and intense pleasure, I enter and inhabit emergent worlds of the imagination and abandon myself to the physical delight of moving’ (Karczag, cited in Claid 2006: 209). In these two quotations it is possible to recognise qualities of both ‘play’ as playing with within the actualised ‘playing-with’ of the ‘dance theatre’ ‘playspace’, and the act of dancing as progressive play. Both accounts also contain clear qualities of ‘flow’. However, what remains unclear

¹¹⁰ Eva Karczag is a dance maker, dancer and educator working in, and advocating, explorative methods of art making. Many of her international collaborations have involved links across the arts.

from these accounts is a detailed understanding of the 'actual' activity: the ways and means through which an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' and within this, the idea of 'absorption' is manifest for and by the performers. This detail is contained within the focus of Part Two of the thesis and particularly in the analysis within Chapter Seven.

'Play', the 'playful', and the imagination

Pertinently, Karczag also notes the involvement of the imagination in her reflections upon her experience. It is useful to examine 'play' further here using the umbrella of Sutton-Smith's rhetoric of 'play' as imagination. Under this rhetoric, Sutton-Smith notes that:

Gathered here are all who believe that some kind of transformation is the most fundamental characteristic of play [...]The heterogeneity of this rhetoric is illustrated by listing many of the concepts relevant to its description: imagination, fancy phantasmagoria, creativity, art, romanticism, flexibility, metaphor, mythology, serendipity, pretence, deconstruction, heteroglossia, the act of making what is present absent, or what is absent, present and the play of signifiers.

(Sutton-Smith 1997: 127)

Karczag notes 'emergent worlds' and 'physical delight', a description of ludic activity which, in this imaginative and creative act, brings together the possible and the 'actual' into one sphere of being: a merging of the psychic and the objective domain. However, what is striking about both Karczag's words and

those of Fraleigh is the implied attitude of the performer during these actions. In both instances, there would seem to be an attitude adopted by the performer in their work which 'invites' in 'play'. When 'action' is imbued and therefore transformed by this attitude, it becomes *played*. The attitude necessary in the performer for 'play' is 'playfulness'. It would seem that the creativity and activated imagination of the individual engaged in 'play' is an essential part of that which makes the activity itself 'playful'. Therefore the 'playful' would appear to be a 'mode of doing' which must be entered into willingly by the player. It is a common complaint of artists across disciplines that creativity cannot be demanded, or produced 'on tap': it is a voluntary state of being into which one enters and therefore is a state of freedom. To be creative to order feels a lot like working. Working 'play' is different from the creative 'play' of a player playing, because working 'play' then becomes work. Theatre creates the paradoxical situation whereby the performer is asked to enter willingly into a 'game' at the same time every night. Whether the player enters 'playfully' into the game or not is, to return to my high school experience of performance noted in the introduction, part of the perceived difference between a performance that 'flows' and one that does not. The creativity of the performer will engage when they allow themselves to be taken and 'played' by the game, playing it for the very first time, in order to uncover, 'personal freedom when we are faced with a reality and see it, explore it and act accordingly. In this reality the bits and pieces of ourselves function as an organic whole. It is the time of discovery, of experiencing of creative vision' (Spolin 1983: 4). Similarly, Kirstie Simson,¹¹¹ in reflecting upon her attitude in performance, explains:

¹¹¹ Kirstie Simson is a dancer and dance teacher who has had a long career working extensively in contact improvisation in the UK and the USA. Simson has also worked with DV8 and Russell Maliphant amongst others.

It's about honesty. The work is in opening to what is genuine. I try to create an open space that lets people in. The big challenge is in letting myself be who I am. It is very scary to go out there, physically go out there, letting go of everything that fixes. So that is my work, to create an atmosphere of open-ness, so the audience and I can trust the moment of play that is happening.

(Simson, cited in Claid 2006: 208)

Winnicott (1971) describes a creative state of being as a 'colouring of the whole attitude' towards actuality as opposed to a state of compliance whereby the individual would acquiesce to the orders and rules set out by the external reality and existing outside of the playing itself. The attitude of the 'playful' and the act of creation is an imaginative sublimation of reality. One is able to see and experience as new, to recreate and enact the domain as fit for the playing. The activity of make-believe involves a psychic re-appropriation of one's surroundings in order to create a state of being for oneself that, to use Turner's phrase again, lies 'betwixt and between' actuality and virtuality. The player stands on the upturned bucket as a runaway marooned on an island and the actor and audience play together in making believe in the pain of Macbeth as he is told Lady Macbeth is dead. The fun of being 'playful' inherent in the imaginative exercise of make-believe is alluded to by Simone de Beauvoir, 'I would enjoy the most exquisite swoonings: the tears would pour down my cheeks and I would sink into the arms of angels. I would whip up these emotions to the point of paroxysm' (de Beauvoir, quoted in Bruner *et al.* 1976: 587).

To again turn these thoughts towards the context of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre' it is useful to consider the idea of the 'playful' imagination in the context of the discourse from Chapter Two. Firstly, it should be noted that in congruence with the idea of the body being central to conceptions of consciousness, 'perception', 'action' and 'awareness', imagination also adopts a similar position. When we imagine (or remember), it is ourselves we imagine or remember; we imagine from an egocentric position. In preparation for my viva on this thesis, I have imagined sitting in front of my assessors. The structure of this visualisation, or imagined future, even in that short description, is built by me, around me, for me. In this imaginative act I have moved forward in time from my actual temporal position and imaginatively enacted the potential event from an egocentric perception. Central to this egocentric perception is my body and the locus of I. Rhonda Blair notes:

Memories and imagination do not – indeed, cannot – exist without a foundational image of the body. Psychic images- whether they are of authentic past experiences or of an imagination of our self in fictive situations- are always of the body, since they are generated only within and by a body.

(Blair 2008: 77)

My playing with my imagined setting of my imagined viva sees me prospectively enacting possible futures; a 'playful' rehearsal that occurs with and through my body and the imagined perspective it brings.

In continuing to use the personal example of my viva, it is also possible to see another through line that the imagination shares with the discourse of previous chapters; namely that it contains an extended sense of consciousness. The imaginative consciousness is not Damasio's core consciousness but the extended consciousness of creativity. Whilst the act of anticipating the viva in itself may not be a particularly creative act, the manner in which I choose to 'rehearse' the viva allows me the potential of experiencing this rehearsal as a highly concentrated event during which other considerations external to the act of rehearsal fade to inconsequential in the background. I rehearse aloud in my study at home walking around and talking through potential lines of questioning, playing my responses over and over, toying with the emphasis on this word, or that word. I am drawn into the task of playing imaginatively with the potential event and the possible discussion which may take place during this event. This is a task which is focused, 'playful' in its anticipation of potential questions situated in the 'then and there' of the viva, highly 'absorbing' and highly pleasurable as a task in the 'here and now' of my study at home.

Csikszentmihalyi notes that '[t]he optimal state of inner experience is one in which there is order in consciousness. This happens when psychic energy – or attention – is invested in realistic goals and when skills match the opportunities for action' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 6). Whilst my experience of rehearsal for my viva is perhaps not on a level of the higher realms of the peak experiences as noted by thinkers such as Maslow, the experience does engage my imagination in playing with my projected self as I invest my attention in realistic goals.

To bring these considerations of imagination in 'play' and its relationship to an emerging idea of 'absorption' into the context of 'dance theatre' it is useful to

return to and re-interrogate the idea of transformation within Sutton-Smith's rhetoric of play as imagination within 'dance theatre'. In a similar fashion to the discussion above regarding 'play' within 'dance theatre' as it relates to Caillois' thoughts, Sutton-Smith's idea of 'transformation' within his notion of the rhetoric of play as imagination undergoes a slight shift in emphasis in the specific context of 'dance theatre'. A transformation would seem to occur, but, again, not through the portal of the make-believe. As has been previously discussed, there is no make-believe in 'dance theatre' when make-believe is understood to be a willing movement by performers and audience to the fictive setting of a narrative set in a world which is away from the 'here and now' of the 'playspace'. Instead, the transformation for the performer within 'dance theatre' occurs through an *extension* of their psychic self as they 'playfully' and imaginatively 'enact' the performance text within and through a 'playing-with' the theatricalised 'actuality' of the phenomenal 'playspace'. Sutton-Smith's transformation is contained within the extension to which I refer here. This is the extension and expansion of 'awareness' which reportedly occurs through 'optimal' experience. It is the reported sense of a heightened interconnectedness between the person in an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' and their perceptual domain.

We are also alerted to this difference in 'awareness' by the manner in which Rhonda Blair describes the work of the actor in respect of their embodied imagination: 'The actor is constantly engaged in the manipulation of various kinds of body-states through the manipulation of imagination and environment, in order to embody certain conditions connected to playing a character' (Blair 2008: 79). Whilst the work of the 'dance theatre' performer may also involve

their manipulation of imagination and environment, there is no 'embodying' of certain conditions in order to portray a character. Within 'dance theatre' the phenomenal necessity of 'enacting' the performance text or score itself, and also doing this within the phenomenal theatricalised 'actuality' of the 'playspace', takes away the imaginative task of embodying and replaces it with 'actual' 'enaction'. This can be seen in examples from across the canon explored within this study. One such example lies in Gary Carter's reflections upon instances of work from DV8:

When in *Strange Fish* Wendy Houstoun rolls on a bed of stones until you wish she would stop, when in *Deep End* Nigel Charnock throws himself to the floor, again and again, for what seems like an age – these are real metaphors: meaning and image are inseparable. As an audience member you can sense the dividing line between reality and pretence has been erased.

(Carter 1992: 7)

Here we see that the imaginative 'play' and transformation which occurs in the performer's task of embodying circumstances and character situated in a 'then and there' away from the 'actual' phenomenal reality of the 'playspace' and the related performance score does not exist. The imaginative 'play' in this context is contained within the imaginative 'playing-with' of the performer as they interact and 'enact' the 'playspace' through the performance score or text. The specific 'action' of the 'dance theatre' performer within the 'enacted' domain of the phenomenal 'playspace' and where the performer places their focus,

(psychic) 'attention' and 'intentionality' is the analysis and discourse of Part Two of the thesis.

Playing, 'game' and 'dance theatre'

Before moving to discuss the nature of the liminal space (the 'playspace') in which 'dance theatre' performance occurs, it is useful to end this section of this chapter by examining the place of 'game' within the 'play' of 'dance theatre'. Within his classification of games, as outlined near the start of this chapter, Caillois notes the idea of tension inherent in participation, which in turn gives rise to the 'playful':

The game consists of the need to find or continue at once a response which is free within the limits set by the rules. This latitude of the player, this margin accorded to his action is essential to the game and partly explains the pleasure which it excites.

(Caillois 2001: 8)

I am again reminded of Lutterbie's notion of 'metastasis' within a performance score or script, highlighting the potential of the unexpected to enter into a system, the rules of which are bound and agreed. 'Play' and the attitude of 'playfulness' would appear to exist not in situations or systems without boundaries or limits, but within instances whereby the player is able to act within boundaries in a manner which then creatively uses these boundaries in order to invite in the possibility of the unexpected, or else uses them in a manner that tests (or plays with) them without ever breaking them. The creative impulse in game play is given its essential exuberance by the imposition of rules.

Spontaneity and creativity are manifested through the discipline of self-restraint. If the given player were to exert too much control, the 'play', the fragile state of possibility, is crushed and we reach a state of affairs whereby the outcome and, importantly the journey towards it will be realised without deviation from the predetermined path or plan. Conversely, if the player were to break the rules of the game and continue their activity without recognising and obeying these boundaries, there would be nothing to test, no limits within which one would have the space to become creative. Crucially, as Vygotsky (in Bruner *et al.* 1976) notes, the rules set in place by the game and the players are not enforced by physical laws but by a self-restraint on the part of the player. The rules demand a shaping of impulse and a paradoxical state of being in which the player follows and uses the impulse, allowing themselves to be led and controlled by it, whilst never once actually completely losing control. This is the paradoxical tension of the 'playful' state within games: bounded yet free, creative yet regulated.

By framing the act of performance as a 'game', we are able to examine the specific characteristics of the 'game' of 'dance theatre' performance. As with other performance forms, the 'game' of 'dance theatre' possesses rules by which both the audience (or spectator) and the performers themselves agree to abide. The performers consent to be watched whilst they engage in 'enacting' the performance score or text. Depending on the piece to be 'enacted' this may directly or indirectly involve the audience. In turn, in entering the liminality of the 'playspace', the audience or spectator consents to play the part of an appropriate audience. When these rules are infringed, the game of the 'dance theatre' performance ceases. To cite an example of a piece discussed further in

the chapter on DV8 in Part Two to follow, I saw an example of infringement during a performance of DV8's *Can We Talk About This?* presented at the Lowry in Manchester on Friday 18th May 2012. The subject matter of the piece is religious extremism, with a particular focus on Islam and the Muslim faith. The piece uses a text constructed from verbatim material. It opens with one of the performers directly addressing the audience and asking them, by way of a show of hands, if they consider themselves to be morally superior to the Taliban. After this stark and confrontational opening, the piece continues with what could be perceived as a controversial and frank unmasking of selected political and religious viewpoints. Whilst this content is again evidence of the continuing politicised nature of 'dance theatre' performance itself, in the context of a discussion about the idea of performance as a 'game' entered into by performers and audience there was one point of particular interest within this performance at the Lowry. Approximately two thirds of the way through the performance a male member of the audience stood up and shouted at the stage. He exclaimed that he was a proud Muslim and that this piece was an attack on all Muslims and a one-sided argument. He then stormed out and did not return. In the moments immediately after he had disrupted the 'play' of the 'game' of performance through his actions (and then left the game), for a full five seconds or so, the rest of the players (both audience and performers) were unsure what to do. The 'game' had been interrupted and for a short time, no one was sure of the rules anymore – the interruption provided by the audience member was not within the agreed parameters of the performance 'game'. There was a tangible fracture in what had otherwise been a very slick performance exhibiting the tightly rehearsed timing and choreography typical of DV8's work.

The idea of 'game' as a part of 'play' also again sets it aside from the run of everyday life. Games have their own temporal 'bubbles'; portions of time set aside for the express purpose of the game itself. N. L. Boyd echoes this separation in reflection upon the imaginative work of an actor: 'The ability to create a situation imaginatively and to play a role: it is a tremendous experience, a sort of vacation from one's everyday self and the routine of everyday living' (Boyd, cited in Spolin 1983: 5). However, the 'game' of (and 'games' within) 'dance theatre' do not involve or invoke the typical imaginative 'as if' of the actor playing a role. Whilst the 'dance theatre' game may still echo Boyd's vacation, in this context, as previously explained, the 'game' is played as 'playing-with', both in 'actuality' and for 'real'. Caillois notes the games which, whilst remaining aside from the everyday, do not contain the make-believe of imitation:

The one who plays chess, prisoner's base, polo or baccara, by the very fact of complying with their respective rules, is separated from real life where there is no activity that literally corresponds to any of these games. That is why chess, prisoner's base, polo and baccara are played for real. As if is not necessary.

(Caillois 2001: 8)

It is useful to note that all of the games noted by Caillois here are similar to 'dance theatre' in that the action of the thing is the 'game' itself. One does not play chess as *if* playing chess, one simply plays chess.

In keeping with the idea of, in Caillois' terms, playing for 'real', as opposed to playing 'as if', within the structure of 'dance theatre', the performers play 'games' with the movement and the performance score. The structure and content of performance score itself is often derived in part from the 'games' of the devising and rehearsal process. These may be interpersonal 'games' (played with both the audience and the other performers) improvisational 'games', childish 'games', or 'games' of endurance. All these 'games' continue to adhere to the idea that they are played for 'real', instead of 'as if'. Examples can be seen across the genealogy of 'dance theatre' and within the work of the companies examined in this study. One such example from Bausch's work is seen in *Café Müller* (1978).¹¹² Jan Minarik, Malou Airaud and Dominique Mercy perform a punishingly repetitious sequence which becomes faster and faster, visibly tiring the performers. The 'game' sits both in the content and meaning of the repetition, and in the performers 'playing-with' the movement and its repetition as they return to the start of the cycle with increasing speed. Relatedly, Vygotsky notes that, 'in play a situation is created in which ... a dual affective plan occurs. For example the child weeps in play as a patient, but revels as a player (Vygotsky quoted in Bruner *et al.* 1976: 548-9).

The relationships between an understanding of 'game' within the context of 'dance theatre' and manifestations of 'absorption' in the same become clear when one considers the absorptive powers of 'game' and 'play', and the inherent, intrinsic sense of reward that playing a 'game' for itself carries with it. Moreover, the structure of 'games' that are played within both the devising and rehearsal process and within and through the performance texts themselves

¹¹² This scene is examined in the video files related to the content of Chapter Five.

would seem to contribute significantly to the structure of 'dance theatre' as a performance form not bound by a causal linear narrative. Through the company-specific chapters and the analysis of Chapter Seven, the relationship between the game-play inherent in the structure of 'dance theatre' and the game-play and 'mode of being/doing' of the performers within this structure will be explored as a means of developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer within this context.

The 'playspace'

Finally this chapter examines the nature of the 'playspace' of 'dance theatre' and its relationship to developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer in this context. In the section above, it was noted that the 'game' of 'dance theatre' has a set of rules by which all players must abide in order to continue playing. These rules of 'play' are an inherent part of Boyd's 'vacation' from the everyday self. They demarcate the act of 'play' as separate; a 'mode of being/doing' that, similarly to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', exists aside from the normal day-to-day run of experience. Boyd's 'vacation' suggests firstly a marked out, but impermanent period of time in which the players are existing aside from the psychic entropy of everyday life and are 'absorbed' by and focused upon playing. Temporally, the playing has a limited lifespan: it does not continue indefinitely. There is a point at which the 'game' begins and a point at which it ends. These moments are clearly marked and are the moments at which the rules of everyday are paused and willingly replaced with a different set of boundaries and borders that allow the players a freedom. The curtain is opened, the lights go up, and the whistle is blown. All players are free to start playing.

Through the idea of 'vacation' Boyd also suggests that there are specific places or spaces where the act of 'play' takes place. Vacations take place 'somewhere else'. Spatially, 'play' is given its own phenomenal setting, marking it apart from the places encountered as a natural part of everyday experience. Players must 'play' in these spaces and these spaces alone. Just as the marriage can only happen in a space designated for such a ritual, the theatrical act can only happen in a space designated to be a playing space.¹¹³

As a temporary world and a space apart, and like spaces designated for performance in other theatrical idioms and genres, the 'playspace' of 'dance theatre' is a liminal space in which the rules of the everyday are suspended. However, as has been a recurrent theme throughout this chapter, the liminality of the space is not focused upon a make-believe in which the space becomes simultaneously the 'then and there' of the fictive setting and also retains a hold on the 'here and now' of the 'actual' phenomenal domain. Instead the liminality is focused upon a suspension of the everyday that allows the 'dance theatre' performer room scope and licence to 'play-with' and, in Caillois' terms, play 'for real' using the 'actual' phenomenon of the 'enacted' domain as the fundamental starting point. So in *Enter Achilles* (1995) the performers do not play *as if* in a pub, or *as if* swirling in beer, they play in a pub, they 'actually' soak in beer. In Bausch's *Café Müller* (1978), Malou Airaudo does not repeat her movements as

¹¹³ Huizinga paints this temporal and spatial place as consecrated in its origins and created entirely for the purpose of the playing activity. He draws upon a social sense of ritual here and in doing so posits play as one of the foundations of civilisation, a ritualised, constructed instinct manifesting itself in a variety of socially ludic activity, again emphasising its position as a place set aside from everyday activity. 'Just as there is no formal difference between play and ritual, so the "consecrated spot" cannot be formally distinguished from the play-ground. The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart' (Huizinga 1950: 10).

if fatigued, she actually becomes fatigued through the process of living the demands of the 'action'.

Within the 'dance theatre' 'playspace', the focus on the 'actual' for the performer and the movement away from 'as if' is, to return to the discourse of Chapter One, seemingly counterbalanced by the Expressionistic and more abstract tendencies of the form. The 'dance theatre' 'playspace' becomes liminal, a temporary space set apart. In this space, itself manifest as 'actualised' expression, expression finds 'actualised' form through the 'lived body' 'enacting' for 'real' an 'actual' performance score. In Vincent Dance Theatre's *Broken Chords* (2005) the 'playspace' of the theatre is filled with old wooden school chairs. At the start of the piece these are set in uniform rows parallel to the seating of the audience. In the second half of the piece they have been stacked up against the back wall of the 'playspace' in a disordered, chaotic pile. These chairs are both 'actual' and expression. They are 'actually' used by the performers throughout the piece and are an integral part of the phenomenal domain. They are also used as part of Vincent's imaginative expression and play a large yet subtle part in communicating the messages, thoughts and feelings of the piece to the audience. However, whilst they contribute to the 'playspace' becoming a liminal space of 'actualised' expression, demarcated as apart from the everyday, at no point are they chairs which give rise to the state of 'as if' in either the performers or the audience. As an audience member watching this performance, I was transported nowhere but was simultaneously set apart from the everyday.

The collision of the imaginative and the 'actual' in the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' is useful to developing an understanding of 'absorption' in the 'action' of the 'dance theatre' performer as it points to places where one might begin to look for evidence of 'absorption' in practice, namely in the substance of the performers 'playful' engagement and 'actual' interaction with their phenomenal, 'enacted' domain and with other 'entities' within that domain (including the audience or spectators). This given direction will be pursued in the discourse and analytical work of the chapters to follow.

Chapter Three: Summary

In this chapter I have discussed the relationship between the idea of 'play' and the concept of 'flow' in relation to the 'action' of the 'dance theatre' performer. Through an initial concentration on the idea of liminality, I have examined the meeting points between 'play' and 'flow' and the ways in which 'play' is useful and pertinent to developing an understanding of the ways in which 'absorption' might be manifest and discussed within 'dance theatre'. I have also looked at the idea of 'games' within the context of 'play' and the implications this has for understanding and reflecting upon the structure and form of 'dance theatre' and the nature of the 'playspace' in which such performance occurs. Consequently I have also highlighted ways in which these 'games' might influence an 'absorptive' 'mode of doing' within the structure of the form itself, inviting in the possibility of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer. Similarly to Chapters One and Two, this discourse will now contribute to the lexicon of terminology to be employed and developed further in Part Two of this study.

Part One summary

Through the chapters of Part One of this study I have developed a lexicon of terminology with which to approach the company-specific chapters and the analysis of Part Two. Whilst some of the words and phrases within the lexicon of terminology developed so far may already be in common usage, they have been placed within quotation marks for the purposes of this study. I intend these marks to either signify a particular take, meaning or use of the phrase or word within the study, or to signpost the word or phrase as key to the development of an articulation of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer. A brief summary of the whole lexicon developed thus far is provided below.

Chapter One

'Absorption'; 'action'; 'actual/actualised'; 'attention'; 'flow'; 'game'; 'lived experience'; 'lived body'; 'mode of being/doing'; 'optimal'; 'play'; 'playspace'; 'real'; 'task';

The condition of the 'playspace' as a 'liminal meta-actuality';

The condition of the prominence of the 'lived body' as the primary means of expression and as the locus for performance;

The condition of 'play' and 'game'

Chapter Two

'Awareness'; 'enactive'; 'entity/entities'; 'intention'/intentionality'; 'metastasis'; 'object(s)'; 'perception'; 'situated'; 'temporality';

Chapter Three

'Game'; 'play'; 'playful'; 'playing-with'

Part Two

Introduction to Chapters Four, Five and Six

This introduction outlines the content and structure of Chapters Four, Five and Six. It also explains the structure of the accompanying audio-visual material for these chapters and the intended relationship between these two elements.

The purpose of these chapters is to present initial analysis and contextualisation of a detailed picture of the research material of the study in preparation for further analysis in Chapter Seven. Each chapter will focus upon the work of one company. In keeping with the emphasis across the wider study, the work of the performer remains the underpinning focus of this discourse.

Leading from the examination of *Ausdruckstanz* in Chapter One, within each of these chapters, key points of interest and commonality between the work of the company under examination and the genealogical lineage of 'dance theatre' are identified and discussed.

Focusing on the work of the performer and performance, each chapter will draw out key aspects and selected traits of the company in question, noting the particular accents or concentrations in the practice of each company. In drawing out these traits I will use and reference specific elements and moments from the video files, alongside additional examples from the canon of each company. In doing this I will use and develop further the lexicon of terminology created through Part One. Using and extending this lexicon to highlight detail aspects of performance which impact upon the work of the performer, or those aspects of

the work of the performer themselves, will allow me to continue to work towards an articulation and understanding of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'. The detailed discourse of *how* these points of practice contribute to the 'absorption' of the performer will be brought together in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

However, before introducing and discussing the video files that accompany these chapters and before each chapter discusses the work of one company in detail, in considering the work of the 'dance theatre' performer in creating a state of 'absorption' for themselves in performance, it is useful to briefly note the consistent relationship between the performer and the choreographer in 'dance theatre' practice. I have placed this discussion within this introduction to the company-specific chapters as the performer-choreographer relationship is similar in character across all three companies profiled. It is important to note this relationship as it helps to develop understanding, contextualisation and articulation of the relationship and ownership the performer has with the performance score that develops as a result of the collaborative devising and rehearsal process.

Across all three companies profiled here we see an investment and a prominence given to the contribution and the particular physical qualities, individual characteristics, or personal perspectives, traits and skills of the individual performer. In each company, the performance score that arises from Bausch, Newson or Vincent drawing upon these individual sensibilities in this manner becomes the result of a collaborative conversation between choreographer and performer. With respect to Bausch, Climenhaga notes that, 'early interviews are full of statements about the importance of people and the

difficulties of dealing with all of their personality quirks, vulnerabilities and needs. And yet this is exactly what the process is built on' (Climenthaga 2009: 42). Similarly, Buckland explains the effect of this facet of DV8's working methodology that it 'enables the individual members to approach the stimulus from their own perspective and physicality – a methodology deliberately intended to draw out individual qualities and characteristics' (Buckland 1995: 372). Finally, turning to my personal experience of VDT's working practices as seen through the fieldwork in which I shadowed the process of *If We Go On*, I saw a process in which Vincent both fed ideas to the ensemble and played with the resulting responses. I saw a process in which nothing was permanent or fixed, or choreographed, but one in which collective, collaborative input towards a shared increasingly certain notion of what the piece was trying to do and say was steered delicately by Vincent towards a unified whole.

This highly collaborative approach is reliant on the input of the personal by the performer across a number of levels. Similarly, the role of the choreographer within 'dance theatre' is antithetical to notions of the choreographer as the sole creative force, being one who, places pre-created movement onto the bodies of the performers. In the 'dance theatre' analysed in the chapters to follow, the relationship between choreographer and performer is one in which the choreographer is cast more as creative facilitator and guide for the ensemble. Whilst of course, the final artistic decision will necessarily be taken by the choreographer, the route by which the material is reached is through a mutually informative dialogue between the shared experience of the collective (including the choreographer) and the idea of the choreographer of direction and purpose, rather than end piece or singular vision.

Consequently, the relationship of the performer to the material of performance (the text, the music, the song, the movement) is one in which they have a certain freedom to choose the nature of the 'action' and where their 'attention' or 'intentionality' might be placed. During the devising and rehearsal process they are able to creatively generate the material under facilitative direction. In this situation the shape and nature of the material is, the majority of the time, inextricably linked to the body and the sensibilities of the individual performer themselves. Rather than them having to step into material that was not custom built for them, the performer is fused and intertwined with the material from the outset, creating a profound level of personal investment and involvement in the material and its 'intentionality'.

The relationship between the performer and the 'action' and score of performance within the 'playspace' engendered by the particular stance of the choreographer noted above impacts upon the notion of 'absorption' for the performer, seen as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in 'dance theatre. This will be picked upon during the forthcoming analysis of Part Two and will also feed into the Conclusion.

The video files

Chapters Four, Five and Six are accompanied by audio-visual research material on DVD-ROM presented as video files. The video files present selected clips of work taken from the performance practice of Pina Bausch, DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre. Through the selection of clips provided and the accompanying audio commentary running over these clips, the DVD-ROM concentrates on

framing and introducing examples of practice which, in keeping with the purpose and narrative of the wider study, aid in developing an understanding of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' within 'dance theatre' and the manifestations of this in the work of the performer.

It is my intention that the reader engages with Chapters Four, Five and Six with the facility to also watch the DVD-ROM. In the written elements of the chapters I will reference, and ask the reader to watch, specific sections from the video files on the DVD-ROM. This structured relationship between written discourse and audio-visual material is designed to give the reader a visual understanding and point of reference for the discussion, to signpost points for further discussion and to clarify, highlight and analyse particular points of practice. However, it is important to note that the relationship established between the audio-visual content of the DVD-ROM and the written element of Chapters Four, Five and Six is not simply a repetition of the same points between these mediums.

Instead I intend the reader/watcher to see both these sources as mutually informative. Whilst there are clear points of mutual reference across these two elements and the established lexicon of terminology sits across both areas, each element also includes content and discourse designed to complement and reinforce the other as I move towards deeper analysis of the subject as a whole in Chapter Seven. Before the reader/watcher engages with this material, it is therefore useful to reiterate the necessity of this audio-visual data and research footage in developing a multi-stranded and meaningful understanding of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'. The purpose of the DVD-ROM is to insightfully inform and contribute to detailed academic analysis of the work by

describing, commenting upon, and positioning the audio-visual data and research footage.

Structure of the material on the DVD-ROM

The DVD-ROM has three main sections. Each section focuses upon selected video footage clips from performance work of one company. In the case of Vincent Dance Theatre, material from the rehearsal process for *If We Go On* (2009) is also provided.¹¹⁴ Within each of these main sections the work of each company is further divided into themed selections. The material taken from the work of each company provides examples of instances wherein specific qualities, or characteristics of the performance work emerge, or are identifiable, which could then contribute to an understanding of 'absorption' in the work the performer. For instance, a selection of clips of work from Pina Bausch may be placed together to specifically examine the characteristic of repetition.

With the identification of these qualities and characteristics of performance work in mind, it is timely and a useful reminder to return to those methodological issues highlighted in the introduction to the thesis. These issues specifically focus upon my position as an observer and experiencer of 'dance theatre' practices and the nature of the particular phenomenon I am seeking to articulate and understand.

In responding to these issues, and by using the lexicon of terminology developed through Part One, the study focuses upon examination of the 'actual'

¹¹⁴ Rehearsal material from Vincent Dance Theatre is presented in the context of performance work here as it shows sections of the rehearsal process in which the company were presenting, (and so performing) material to a selected invited audience as a work in progress. Further footage of the rehearsal room configured as a performance 'playspace' is also included. Again, this environment was a working replica of the eventual touring set. I have used it here in order to highlight particular qualities of the phenomenal 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace' for *If We Go On*.

activity of the performer in respect of the idea of 'absorption' as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being doing' within 'dance theatre'. By employing the methodology explained in the introduction, what the study *is* able to do is *point towards* the constitution and formation of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' by highlighting and analysing instances of 'absorption' as perceived from the perspective of an observer and experiencer of the practice. As noted in the introduction, this perspective evolves through each company, allowing me to arrive at a position which synthesises these perspectives, standing within, outside and *alongside* the practice. Information and analysis undertaken from this position of synthesis then consequently becomes useful in furthering conversation about practice for practitioners, performers and academics as it contains relevance for each separate position. My position of synthesis is also correlated and cross-referenced with information and data from available literature and interviews where possible.

In summary, to minimise the inherent problem within my position, I have established, or undertaken, the following points through the methodology of the fieldwork, or through the work of Part One;

- The development of a lexicon of terminology in Part One.
- The development of criteria for the selection of material for inclusion on the DVD-ROM based upon my perception of the tangible presence of qualities of 'absorption' in the 'attention', 'action' 'intentionality' and 'awareness' of the performer(s).
- I have brought to bear perceptions that are informed by personal practice and experience as a performer and, where possible, cross-referenced

these perceptions with interviews from performers working with Vincent Dance Theatre.

Additionally, in the section of the introduction that gave detail of the methodology for the study I also noted that in keeping with the nature of the study, and mindful of best practice within phenomenologically orientated research and lifeworld research, I undertook a form of 'bracketing' of my own experience and perspective. This is the bracketing of perception in relation to *how* I observed and encountered the material. Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström note that, '[w]e do not only belong to the same world, we constitute the meaning of this world, of myself and the other, together. We do this by means of experiencing, acting in the world and by expressing it' (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström 2008: 63). At this point it is useful for me to unpick this further and make explicit my position to the visual research material and the field research material. This is done here in order to effectively and objectively acknowledge the particular character of my subjective position in the discourse and analysis to follow.

In the experience of encountering each company I also note that my perspective in relation to the material and therefore my understanding and constitution of meaning within what I encountered and my *perception* of what I was experiencing is subtly different in configuration. I acknowledge the difference in the nature of my experiences and perceptions across each company as my perspective shifts from observer of material to experiencer/observer and I acknowledge that the differing nature of my experience and the accompanying perceptions will have impact upon, and

shape, the eventual conclusions to the investigation. It is appropriate to bracket my perceptions by explicitly noting these differences.

Placing the 'bracketing' of my position at the opening stages of Part Two of this study is undertaken in order to aid in defining the parameters of validity to the research project as a whole and also to contribute to answering the facets of the Primary Research Question concerned with the ways in which the lenses, research methodologies and documentation of the study affect external perception of ideas of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre'.

Bracketing myself

As an overarching *modus operandi* to my interaction with, and use of, the material across all companies and all video files, I wish to acknowledge again the influence of Peter Hulton's framework for engagement. The specific aspects of his framework for engaging in documentation, initially explained in the introduction as a framework for engagement in the ethnographic fieldwork of the study, also steered the manner in which I worked with the mediated content. The framework and the manner in which it facilitated me positioning myself in respect of the work and aims of the study steered my process of watching, re watching, selecting, editing and narrating the work.

Initially, I watched the extracts of performance work from Pina Bausch on YouTube. I watched them in a window on my desktop computer, listening to the sound through earphones in order to exclude other sound from my actual location. In comparison to today's online video, the video quality is grainy.

Whilst general facial expressions are evident, it is hard to see the detail of these expressions on the faces of individual dancers in many of the clips.

It is clear that the cameras used to record the performance work have been placed in the position of the audience in each case, mimicking the position of an audience viewing the work. As I watch, I am aware that my viewpoint is therefore different to that of the audience member experiencing the work as live. I am limited in my frame of reference to the position taken by the camera operator. I cannot turn my virtual 'head'. I only experience the visual and the sonic elements of the performance: all other senses are not employed in my perception of the work. I also experience these as mediated by a screen; I am distanced and at one step removed from the liminal sensory 'bubble' of live performance, although this is mitigated slightly by the employing the sonic envelope of my earphones.

My mediated distance from the live-ness of the material also has the effect of focusing my attention. I can stop, replay and move forward through the live work a frame at a time. This allows me to scrutinise the contents of the camera frame, stripping away inference and focusing on the 'actual' 'action' of the performer(s) in detail. My perceptions are altered and distilled by repeated viewings. As increasingly I recall the clips from memory, I no longer see my computer, or my desk, or feel my earphones, but see an imagined version infused by my mediated experience in which I experience the performance work not from within an auditorium but, conversely, not from within my study. The performance is simply in front of me and I view it and hear it from the perspective of the camera, now operating as my 'I'. In not being able to contact

the performers, I am necessarily required to make certain assumptions based on my perceptions as a (mediated) viewer of this work. I am able to comment on those features of the work of the performer identifiable through examination of the 'playspace' and the 'action' of the performer as they appear to me on the screen which I perceive as useful or relevant to explicating an idea of 'absorption'.

I occupy a similar position in relation to the practice of DV8 as I do to that of Pina Bausch. The experience is mediated as before, and as before I listen to the sound through earphones in order to exclude other sound from my actual location. The video is of a good quality and I am able to see and hear subtle nuances in the work of the performers. Similarly to my viewing of Pina Bausch, I can stop, replay and forward through the work a frame at a time, giving opportunity as a desire to focus upon a given detail.

The difference I experience in viewing the examples of practice from DV8 lies in the fact that all of the examples of practice I have used in this study have been taken from performance work originally made for the stage, but then restaged specifically for camera. These are not recordings of live events staged for an audience, but a recording of an event built specifically for the recording and dissemination to a mediated audience. My viewpoint on the material is that which has been intended by the mediated staging. Consequently, my perceptions of the material that arise from this viewpoint, rather than being the result of a camera placed within an auditorium to capture a live event, are perceptions firstly shaped by the (re)creation of material specifically for camera and secondly by the deliberate and intentional framing of this material by the

specific camera angle, movement or shot. The camera and the frame it produces therefore, as part of the artistic creative process towards performance product become complicit in creating my perception of the work and 'action' of the performers.

This results in my perceptions of the work of the performers again being concentrated into the senses of sight and hearing alone, but this time from a vantage point which is not fixed, or 'end on' in an auditorium. As the 'I' of the camera shifts and moves across various vantage points in the given locations of the performance work, I have greater access to the performers and their 'playspace'. This perception is constructed in part by the camera. I understand the geography of the locations from the vantage points of the mediated 'I'. Although, as I watch, I feel physically closer to the performance work, I still retain a distance. I am aware of being *given* this or that sequence, this or that scene by the performers; it is for me, for the mediated 'I'. I am not a 'fly on the wall', but a passive active participant, in the same space but watching through the shifting position of the 'I'-camera.

My position in relation to the work of VDT and consequently my experience of the work of the company is significantly different from my experience of the work of Bausch and DV8. My position is a synthesis of perspectives, all of which combine to produce a fused perceptual whole on the work. In respect of the selected material on the accompanying video files taken from the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On*, I was in control of the camera. I chose the subject and composition of the frame provided by the viewfinder on the camera in response to the action of the moment and my awareness of what I was trying

to investigate and capture. Similarly, in recording instances of performance, I was able to work with multiple cameras, placing them as I saw fit within the auditorium and then subsequently using and moving between these viewpoints as I wish in the research material presented here.

Consequently, the 'I' presented by the eye of the camera lens in the case of my documentation of *If We Go On* presents a perspective much closer to my own experiential perceptions of the devising and rehearsal process and the subsequent performances. However, what is presented in the accompanying video files is inevitably only a selective snapshot of the entire experience of the devising and rehearsal process. As I watch and re-watch my video files, my watching is complemented and informed by memories of my wider 'actual' perceptual experience of being in the room with the company as they worked. It is at this point that I acknowledge and bracket the wider perceptual field of my experience as having an impact upon that which I selected to document, both in the moment of documentation and in the editing process of transferring over forty hours of footage into a series of short, manageable and focused video files. Whilst in all the video files accompanying this thesis, the selection of material was influenced by what I *felt*, or sensed was useful to the process of investigation. In selecting the material taken from the process for *If We Go On*, I drew upon a wider perceptual and sensory framework in determining what *felt* useful. This perceptual framework cross-referenced my experience of actually being in the room, with information taken from interviews and conversation and my re-examination of rehearsal and performance material from a mediated viewpoint. This is also a perceptual framework which is not accessible to any other reader or viewer of this research in its entirety. This is because it is my

experiential embodied perception of what happened. Consequently, in the spirit of eidetic reduction, in analysis and when referencing examples of work from *If We Go On*, whilst inevitably and legitimately presenting a subjective perception of phenomena, I aim to peel back the layers of the subjective to suspend judgement, or inference of the phenomena. In searching for an understanding of 'absorption', whilst my perception of the mediated information is, undoubtedly, coloured by my experience of the actual event as it happened, I will aim to draw only upon the information and personal experience of the process of *If We Go On* which can be known or seen in the video files, or that which can be substantiated by referring to conversation, interview or wider points of documentation.

Having now drawn out further my bracketing of my personal position in relation to the material, the tensions inherent in my position as an observer/experiencer have been acknowledged. Having done this, I am also now able to place value and import into my position as an observer. I am able to recognise my perceptions as robust data and meaningful exposition in relation to the work of the 'dance theatre' performer and the work of the study in articulating and understanding the idea of 'absorption' in practice. However, I also recognise that these steps have, and will always have, limitations and consequences for the study, discussion of which will be picked up in the Conclusion.

In pursuit of drawing out the specific qualities, relationships and characteristics useful to understanding 'absorption', the following structure is employed for each video clip on the DVD-ROM: Firstly, the given material is introduced and appropriate contextual detail is established. Secondly, the visual data is

accompanied by an audio commentary that aims to adhere to the following pattern.

Where appropriate, the commentary will highlight the specific condition(s) of 'dance theatre' perceived to be particularly active or prevalent in the selected material. The work of the performer is then scrutinised through examination of the specific aspects of the work seen as potentially contributing to developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer. For example, this scrutiny may entail a discussion of the relationship and mode of interaction between the performer and other performers, or the performer and the phenomenal 'playspace' of the theatrical event, or the performer and the performed content. The commentary accompanying the extracts of work in the DVD-ROM also draws upon the lexicon of terminology developed through Part One to offer analysis of the work. In doing so, the commentary also signposts information from Part One which will be used in the analysis and discourse of Chapter Seven and the Conclusion.

A final point of note regarding the content DVD-ROM: I am aware that making explicit the particular character of my subjective position in this introduction to Part Two has also had a notable effect upon the style of the narrative commentary I have recorded on each of the video files on the DVD-ROM and, at moments, on the language of the written description of practice contained within the discipline-specific chapters. This narrative commentary and language positions my description of the 'action' or content of the clips as being related to how I encountered or experienced them; how the 'action' appears to *me*. Consequently, across the clips, and at times in the written content of the

discipline-specific chapters, I employ a descriptive style of narration or language which uses and acknowledges my position in commenting that (for example) 'it would appear to be...' or 'it seems that...'. For the sake of clarity I wish to emphasise here that this narrative style and language is not intended to imply a vagueness, or imprecision, but is used to reinforce the position of the narration as being from *my* particular perspective in a manner that also invites the watcher to examine that perspective and to examine the associated images on screen.

As a means of preparation for engaging in the detailed use of the video files accompanying Chapters Four to Six, it is suggested that, before embarking upon each of these company-specific chapters, the reader/watcher watches in full those video files relevant to the company of the next chapter to be read.

Chapter Four - Pina Bausch: Playing in liberated spaces

Having given a brief contextual background the work of Bausch in Chapter One, this chapter examines in some detail aspects of Bausch's work sitting in congruence with the genealogical line. Hoghe and Tree describe Bausch's sets as 'liberated playing spaces' (Hoghe and Tree 1980: 68). This description, echoed in the title of this chapter, provides an indicator for the thrust and focus of the discussion as it examines the work. It should be noted here that the examples of work placed on the accompanying video files to this chapter are largely seminal extracts from several of Bausch's most famous works. As such they are sections of performance that have been viewed and examined many times before. However, when placed alongside the work of DV8 and VDT within the context of the subject of this study and its aims, it is possible to scrutinise the work and re-examine the familiar in a new light. The difference lies in the study's pursuit of an idea of 'absorption' for the performer, seen as a part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. In support of this, I would like to focus on several key aspects of Bausch's work. These are: a focus on the performer's involvement with the 'action' of the performance, a focus on the performer's engagement with the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace', and finally the idea of 'play' and 'game' within the work. I have structured the discussion to follow by using these aspects of Bausch's work as organisational subheadings. However, similarly to the earlier explication of *Ausdruckstanz*, it is possible to group and discuss the various aspects of Bausch's work selected here under one or more of these organisational headings as they exist in relation to, and through interdependence upon, each other. Consequently any divisions made here are made solely for the purpose of effectively managing this discourse. In tandem with drawing upon selected aspects of the video files on the accompanying

DVD-ROM, and other pertinent examples and descriptions of Bausch's choreography, the lexicon of terminology, including the conditions of 'dance theatre' as established in Chapter One, is used throughout the discussion.

The performer's involvement with the 'action' of the performance

'Action' as inscripted politics

The political upheaval of a nation experiencing seismic changes on the global stage seen in *Ausdruckstanz* transmutes in the *Tanztheater* of Bausch into a revitalised, socially smarter and sharper brand of Expressionistic dance which focused upon cultural and social politics and the power dynamics of gender and relationships of the 1970s and early 1980s. In pursuit of developing an understanding of the way in which the performer might become 'absorbed' in Bausch's work, it is useful to examine the manner in which the social commentary is manifest in her pieces.

The socially and culturally pointed content of Bausch's choreography is not simply told to the audience (or onlookers) by the performers who dance a dance with a personal-political message. Birringer observes that, '[t]he borderline in Bausch's *tanztheater* is the concrete human body, a body that has specific qualities and a personal history - but also a body that is written about, and written into social representations of gender, race and class' (Biringner 1986: 86). Instead, Bausch uses the bodies of her performers in the execution of 'action' that *inscribes* the message or happening upon the body, so that in the moment of telling, the teller and their body are temporarily altered through an expression which carries within it the imprint of recognisable behavioural patterns that are socio-political in their emphasis. An act of transformation

occurs in front of the audience. Andre Lepecki argues that dance 'proposes one body that is less an empty signifier, than a material, socially inscribed agent, an open potentiality, a force field constantly negotiating its position in the powerful struggle for its appropriation and control' (Lepecki 2004: 6).

Bausch consciously uses and exploits what is already present in this 'socially inscribed agent'. The body becomes a consciously, socially sensitised site of transgression for the message and messenger. The statement, or message, at hand is not told, but *exemplified* through Bausch's bodies. A state of live-ness is achieved and shared with the audience which is born and realised in the social implications of the 'actual' behavioural patterns embedded in the performed 'action'. Throughout the multi-sensory montage of Bausch's 'liminal meta-actuality' (this term being taken from the growing lexicon of terminology established in Part One) the single 'concrete' element is the body of each performer. The personal body becomes the transgressional site for a theatricalised 'real' rooted in 'actualised' Expressionistic experientiality.¹¹⁵ Cody explains that Bausch, 'dramatizes the *multilingual body as text*, the body's discursive potential, the ways in which it is regimented, controlled, suppressed betrayed, abandoned and reformed through history' (Cody 1998: 118; emphasis in original). Kay Kirchman says that Bausch's performers recognise

the body as a multi-expressive form that includes thought and speech just as much as movement. [...] Bausch has recognised that "what speaks there" isn't a separate, abstract great "spirit" but our body itself, an organic whole to whom the categorical division in soul-body-spirit is inimical.

¹¹⁵ The idea of the 'real' in Bausch's work is discussed later in this chapter.

(Kirchman, cited in Cody 1998: 124-5)

Similarly, Marcia B. Seigel, reviewing Bausch in *The Hudson Review* notes that, '[t]he performer must be totally present and totally willing to go as far as the task demands' (Supree *et al.* 1986: 82). This trait of using the body as an inscriptive site and as a transgressive site for the political content of the work is noted by Cody in 1980 when she sees that, 'a woman skips around the stage 50 times repeating the phrase, "I am tired" until her body is overcome with exhaustion' (Cody 1998: 123).

It is possible to see the ideas noted above by examining some of the content on *Video file 3 - Bausch 3*.¹¹⁶ Whilst the audio commentary asks the watcher to focus upon the work of Libonati in the second clip on this video file, in considering the body of the performer as a site for a socially inscribed message, it is also useful to consider the company of male performers in this clip. Positioned behind Libonati, and accompanied by a smaller number of attendant female performers, the males repeat a sequence of 'action' that sees them move forward in a rough line behind Libonati. In approximate unison they adjust their clothes and, as a chorus, occasionally bark a short staccato syllable. The sequence starts with the male chorus dressed in typically Bauschian costume: smart black trousers and crisp white shirts, overlaid with black braces; a typically male uniform. With each repetition, the group shed items of clothing: firstly shirts, then trousers. With each repetition the staccato movements they carry out, as they strut confidently forward with an increasing air of braggadocio, become a performed air of male dominance, made all the more pertinent by the

¹¹⁶ Please play the second clip on *Video file 3 - Bausch 3*.

fawning and fussing of their female attendants. Here we see the 'task' and 'action' assigned to this chorus inscribing a socio-political message onto the bodies of the performers in a manner which allows them to both exemplify the message, whilst simultaneously giving the piece itself room to comment upon this inscription.

Bausch and the 'lived experience'

Cody's description of action in *1980* also highlights another similarity Bausch shares with *Ausdruckstanz*, that of harnessing, or presenting, the 'lived experience' of the performer within the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'playspace'. More specifically, and drawing upon a condition of 'dance theatre' established in Chapter One, it is the 'the prominence of the lived body as the primary means of expression and as the locus for performance'. We can see this by examining the first clip on *Video file 3 - Bausch 3*.¹¹⁷ In this clip, taken from *Café Müller*, we see Bausch herself engaged in a section of lyrical, lilting, sensuous movement typical of her personal movement style. As will be explored further in the analysis of Chapter Seven, Bausch appears to be very much present in the moment, 'absorbed' in the act of doing the 'action'. Throughout the section shown, her eyes are closed. Her 'attention' and 'awareness' appear to lie with her attendance to the experience of doing, to the extent that 'action' and 'intentionality' seem to have merged; in effect she appears consumed by the 'action', so that rather than *performing*, or treating the 'action' as a sequence of movements to be executed, Bausch is simply *doing*, to the extent wherein, I argue, she enters into a transgressive 'mode of being/doing', or 'lived experience'.

¹¹⁷ Please play the first clip on *Video file 3 - Bausch 3*.

In contribution to the idea of the 'lived experience' in performance as an aspect of the performer's involvement with the 'action' of the work, Bausch's pieces often contain elements of an 'anti-technique' technique, with the pedestrianism of everyday life playing a significant role in the movement alongside technical virtuosity. Bartlett notes that, '[d]ancing of the most astonishing technical brilliance is intercut with passages of bathetic apparent trivia; images of ravishing scale give way to purely personal anecdotes' (Bartlett 1998: 4-6) Moreover, this real-life-as-art movement and its strain on the performers is never hidden, as in a ballet. Rather the reality of the movement and the roots of its structures and frames are exposed and celebrated. There is no illusion manufactured on stage by Bausch and her dancers. David W. Price notes that, '[u]nlike performers in classical ballet, Bausch's dancers are pushed physically to the limit, and they exhibit their exhaustion and pain quite openly onstage' (Price 1990: 326). In Bausch's work the 'action' on stage being configured as 'lived experience' frequently finds articulation through repetition, a favourite choreographic device used by Bausch. An oft cited example of this is seen again in *1980*, when Bausch comments on the notion of tenderness (a recurring theme often seen in her work): a female performer repeatedly kisses a male performer, eventually causing his face to be covered in the lipstick scars of what can be seen as over affection. A loving and tender gesture is subverted through repetition and becomes a latently brutal act of tenderness. Similarly Hoghe and Tree describe the following in *Kontakhof*: 'At the end of the play men touch a woman [Meryl Tankard]. They cover her body with touches. Hands stroke [...] - until the woman collapses underneath what is understood by men as "tenderness"' (Hoghe and Tree 1980: 65).

This use of repetition explicitly acknowledges the theatrical reality in which 'recognisable gestures of the everyday are subverted to become an 'actuality' presented in a light that focuses upon the Expressionistic articulation of the feeling associated with a particular relationship dynamic, rather than anything more literal. Paradoxically, the reality of the interpersonal implications within the situation can be seen to become more accessible through this treatment. The relational and interpersonal transactions lying beneath the surface are laid bare and exposed. Bartlett notes that, 'a single move will be held or repeated until its violence is almost unwatchable and its emotional repercussions spiral out of control' (Bartlett 1998: 6).

This redefining of the event is echoed in Susan Kozel's description of Bausch's mimetic strategy when she labels it as 'distortion' (Kozel 1997: 101). Kozel explains distortion in this context as a sense of reproduction of events that frame the event, yet step outside it; reshaping, reinventing and rebirthing it through the retelling. The mimetic act is not one of simple mimicry, but one that transcends the original object of imitation, '[d]istortion implies a challenge to existing senses of order and normality, through partially conforming to, and partially transgressing the usual' (Kozel 1997: 103). Kozel's description of Bausch's repetition as distortion is usefully seen in watching the first clip on *Video file 2 – Bausch 2*.¹¹⁸

In this first clip we can see the 'actualised' expression produce an 'actual' state of fatigue for the performer, particularly Airaudó. We see the 'task' of completing the 'action' in a sense consume, or absorb Airaudó through her doing. By the end of the selected section it is possible to hear the exertion of Airaudó as she

¹¹⁸ Please play *Video file 2 - Bausch 2* from the start of the file to the end of the first clip.

gasps for breath, or as she exclaims as her limbs make increasingly violent contact with her fellow performers or the floor of the 'playspace'. As noted before, the 'intentionality' of the performer is focused upon the 'action' of repeating the 'task' through to completion.

Similarly, in the second clip from the same video file we see Bausch's use of repetition again consume the 'attention' of not just the performer completing the repeated phrase, but also the 'attention' of other performers reacting to and with this repeated phrase.¹¹⁹ We see the 'task' and 'action' at hand consuming Mercy and Sasportes as they both engage in the 'doing' of the moment. It would appear that there is no room for consideration of anything else but the immediate 'task' or 'action' at hand. A similar sense that the performer is being consumed by the 'task' or 'action' can be seen in the clips on *Video file 3 – Bausch 3*.¹²⁰ In the second clip on *Video file 3 - Bausch 3*, the 'intentionality' and perceptive fields of the performer being drawn into focusing upon the sequenced 'action' would seem to be again achieved through a consuming use of repetition by Bausch. The idea of the performer being consumed in their relationship with the task at hand, in this instance through repetition, and the possibilities that this has for aiding in articulating an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer, as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing', will be analysed in Chapter Seven.

The repetition embedded in Bausch's work and the body as the transgressive site and locus of performance also point to a sense of self-sacrifice for the performer which is highly redolent of that found in the practices of

¹¹⁹ Please play *Video file 2 - Bausch 2* from 05:24 to the end of the file.

¹²⁰ Please play the final clip on *Video file 3 - Bausch 3*, to be considered alongside clips already viewed.

Ausdruckstanz noted in Chapter One: particularly those of Mary Wigman. Again, this is of use when considering an idea of 'absorption' for the performer. Bausch's theatre is often noted for its capacity to be a gruelling experience requiring a certain stamina and investment by both performers and audience. In the 1985 symposium at the Goethe House, New York, entitled 'German and American Dance: Yesterday and Today', Anna Kisselgoff commented that, '[i]n *Gebirge*, many people told me they left because they could not take the image of Josephine Ann Endicott lying down repeatedly and having her back slashed with red' (Daly 1986: 52). Bartlett also explains that, 'the work is built on the assumption that she wants the punters to work for the show in the same way as she allows her dancers to: as persons, as individuals' (Bartlett 1998: 6).

This investment by the individual dancer points towards Bausch's *Tanztheater* demanding a giving over of self to performance from the performer. This investment of self and the demand that the performers share of themselves is manifest in several ways. Sophie Constanti explains that Bausch, 'has always painted a larger picture of human interaction, delving into her own and her performers' past histories for simple, heartfelt truths' (Constanti 1992: 10).

There are many documented instances of Bausch's performers using their own life history and detail on the stage. Kozel says that, '[h]er dancers involve us in intimate emotional exchanges or inner monologues, thereby ignoring the implicit distinction between private and public space' (Kozel 1997: 103). This is also echoed by Manning who notes that Bausch's performers, 'employ Method principles, infusing their interaction with the intensity and pain of remembered experience' (Manning 1986: 61). Similarly Bartlett, in reflecting upon Bausch's work, comments that, 'watching her company is an open invitation to watch

people who are all utterly present on stage, bringing their individual minds and stories into the lights as well as their bodies' (Bartlett 1998: 6).

The investment by the performers of personal experience into the act of performance can be considered as significant in contributing to an understanding of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer. Similarly to the performer's involvement with the 'action' highlighted by the manner in which Bausch's politics are manifested, the investment of personal experience by the performer positions them as inseparable from the 'action' they undertake. This idea as it contributes to an understanding of 'absorption' will be picked up in more detail in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

The performer's engagement with the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace'

Within discussion of the 'playspace' here, it is useful to highlight and explore the notion of the 'real' in Bausch's work as holding pertinence for an understanding of the performer's 'absorption'. This discussion to follow highlights aspects of the 'playspace', and particular characteristics of the 'enactive' domain of Bausch's performers which will then be used to inform the analysis of Chapter Seven.

A 'liminal and meta-actuality'

Seemingly paradoxically, a particularly prominent aspect of the manner in which Bausch's work becomes 'real' is through its overt theatricality. Bausch celebrates the possibilities inherent in theatre (her work is often labelled theatre; Bausch herself has called them 'plays') with work that is inherently and unapologetically consciously theatrical on a grand scale. Bausch's pieces

employ a full gamut of theatrical devices. Of particular relevance to the experience of the performer is her epic use of scenography which theatricalises the 'playspace' to the extreme. Creating expressionistic environments on a monumental scale is an integral part of the *Tanztheater* of Bausch. This process of creating another reality for the performers through the setting is something that begins in the rehearsal and devising stages of production. Ralf Borzik, in creating the, 'liberated playing spaces for [these] grown up games' (Hoghe and Tree 1980: 68), developed sets with the company through rehearsal: 'We never say now this is the set and within it we make the play, it gets developed only within the actual work' (Bausch, cited in Hoghe and Tree 1980: 68). In *Bluebeard* (1977) the stage is strewn with dead leaves. In *Arien* (1979) the stage is flooded. Whilst in *Gebirge* (1984) a huge pine tree is dragged out on stage by the performers and used as an environment in which to play. Bausch returns to an environmental use of scenography, often employing elements of nature. The use of these very real elements inside the 'playspace' on a scale commonly found outdoors and in the open, greatly contributes to the deliberate creation of the 'playspace' as an absorptive liminal domain for the performers. There is the sense that the performers are interacting and existing in a highly tangible world that immerses the individual by virtue of its scale and size; a whole world is created for the performance, which, whilst related to our own, is demonstrably set aside from that of the everyday. This sense of world is further intensified by the way in which the 'action' interacts with the environment of the 'playspace' so that it both shapes and is shaped by the performers' 'actions' and their interactions. This tendency within the choreography is exemplified by the first clip on *Video file 1 - Bausch 1*.¹²¹ Within this extract, taken from *Bluebeard*, it is possible to see the 'task' of the performers necessitate

¹²¹ Please play *Video file 1 - Bausch 1* from the start of the file to the end of the first clip.

deliberate and 'actual' interaction with the set of the piece. This phenomenal grounding for the 'task' in the 'actuality' of the liminal 'playspace' creates the 'action' for the performers as 'actualised' theatrical expression: as 'real'. Consequently, what might otherwise be theatrical movement becomes a liminally situated 'actuality' for the performers by nature of the 'action' and interaction with the theatricalised 'playspace' not being 'as if', but by being 'real' (inter)action. When, at the end of the group sequence noted in the first clip on *Video file 1*, the performers cease their 'action', Libonati is the sole performer left in 'action', still exhaustedly bashing against the wall of the set. The exhaustion displayed is not played by the performers 'as if' they were exhausted, but rather, the exhaustion is 'real'; the results of the efforts they have expended in executing the 'action' are simply not hidden. The immersion of the performer and the necessary configuration of 'lived experience' as performance within such a 'playspace' is of significant interest with respect to the idea of 'absorption' for the performer. This will be interrogated further in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

The concentration on a theatricalised 'actual' is often supported by additional elements of Bausch's theatrical frame, which also serve to strengthen the sense of a liminal 'playspace' for the performers, spilling over into the 'actuality' of the audience. Harking back to the *Ausdruckstanz* of the early part of the twentieth century, Bausch often includes snatches of intimate cabaret performance in her pieces, or moments where the fourth wall, already decidedly weak, is discarded all together. With the fourth wall well and truly broken and the act of watching in a space divorced from theatrical 'action' shattered, the audience are consequently forced to play a part in the 'action'. In response to *The Seven*

Deadly Sins/Don't Be afraid (1976) Birringer notes, '[t]he slipping of the subject positions – who is the “we” and the “your” -is a crucial dramatic strategy in her [Bausch's] work that should not be overlooked by us, the audience. We are members of the economy of onlookers' (Birringer 1986: 87). Bausch's audience are placed in a similar position to that of an audience watching stand-up comedy. Jack Anderson, in commenting on the house lights being switched on in *Bluebeard* notes that, 'she implies that we who watch inhabit the same world as her characters' (Anderson, cited in Price 1990: 326). This deliberate positioning of the audience, coupled also with the removal of the fourth wall on occasions and the frequent use of direct address by the performers creates a theatrical frame that fragments itself and strengthens a liminal sense of 'real' and 'actual' which, whilst related to the concerns outside the theatre, is a place away from the everyday. This intentional slide into un-matrixed space strengthens the sense of the 'actuality' of an event that transcends the theatrical frame in which it arrives. In addition, through the overtly theatrical, coupled with the (well-documented) painfully 'real' use of the performer's individuality and selves, the audience are given the room to form comment on the 'action' *alongside* the performers. It is through this commentary on the 'action', fluctuating in the liminality of a joke and shared by teller and spectator, that the audience are able to receive the action like this or like that, but nonetheless become complicit in the telling.

Similarly, it is through the inherent tensions in the 'real' and the 'actuality' of the theatrical frame that Bausch presents that the 'playspace' becomes not only liminal, but also becomes a meta-actuality. At once the work is 'real': it is inscribed on 'real' bodies carrying out 'actual', meaningful and purposeful 'tasks'

and 'actions' in a 'playspace' which requires the performer to engage in a manner which is 'playing-with', rather than playing as-if. It is also an 'actual' which often acknowledges and shares the domain of the 'playspace' with the audience, drawing them into its world. At the same time, the overt theatricalisation, often seen in the manner in which Bausch's performers consciously and deliberately 'play' at social or gender stereotypes, or in the manner in which an operatic sense of *mise-en-scène* is realised, or in the capacity for the work to be interpreted in a multitude of ways, creates not just 'actuality' but 'meta-actuality'. It functions on several, often contradictory, levels simultaneously. This can be seen in the third clip taken from *Bluebeard* and presented on *Video file 1 – Bausch 1*.¹²² Here we see an 'actual' game being played by the performers. One can note by carefully watching the reaction times of the performers as they engage in this 'game' that they are *actually* playing; playing for 'real', not 'as if'. At the same time by placing the 'actual' within the liminal domain of the 'playspace' Bausch positions the 'game' to function as a theatricalised expression of the wider themes and narrative of the piece.

The particular manner in which the 'actual' and the expressive meet in Bausch's theatre which, 'functions both as psychological projection and as reflection of reality' (Manning 1986: 62), gives rise to a 'playspace', the characteristics of which have potential to impact significantly on an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer. This will be explored further in the analysis of Chapter Seven. However, at this juncture, to signpost the section of 'play and 'game' to follow in this chapter, it is also useful to highlight how the meeting of the 'actual' and the expressive in the structural content of Bausch's work also aid in creating a 'liminal meta-actual' 'playspace' for the performer. This is a space in which the

¹²² Please play *Video file 1 – Bausch 1* from 8:26 to the end.

'real' re-emerges as a licence to 'play', subverting, twisting and re-appropriating reality through the 'lived experience' of Expressionistic 'actuality'.

The reality depicted on stage in Bausch's work is one of dislocated imagery, an Expressionistic reality of the dream mind, twisted in its logic. Bausch's 'real' is a highly emotive pastiche or montage; a multitude of intertwining and concurrent angles upon a given theme, all of which can be seen from a variety of perspectives, and so hold a multitude of meanings. Bausch has famously said: 'You can see it like this or like that. It just depends on the way you watch' (Bausch, cited in Hoghe and Tree 1980: 72).¹²³ Bausch's narratives give the audience an episodic montage of experience which incorporates the incredible, the fantastical and the ordinary. However, Bausch maintains that this is indeed a reflection of reality. When talking about her 'plays' she says that:

if you just watch people crossing the street – if you would let them all file across the stage, very simply- the public would never believe it, that's how incredible it is. Compared with that the things we do are tiny.

(Bausch, cited in Hoghe and Tree 1980: 64)

These 'tiny' reflections of reality are scrutinised in Bausch's work. Human behaviour and relationships in all their idiosyncrasies are rendered in a stark hyper-reality that allows Bausch and her performers to accentuate and bring

¹²³ As an aside to the primary thrust of this chapter, it is useful to note David W. Price's alignment of the structure and nature of Bausch's work with the theories, ideas and practices of both Artaudian and Brechtian theatres. See Price, David W. (1990) 'The politics of the body: Pina Bausch's "Tanztheater"', *Theatre Journal*, vol. 42, no. 3, Women and/in Drama, pp. 322-331.

into sharp relief the subtle exchanges and social transactions that would normally lurk under the surface, or pass by in a moment. The audience sees them as hyper-real as they become new, de-contextualised and painted as extraordinary:

[W]hat Bausch puts on stage is politics; a raw, unaccommodated, unaccommodating account of who does what to whom these days – what the memories and gestures of our time actually look like, actually feel like. No theatre was ever as brutally or as elegantly in the present tense as Bausch's, no women are more powerful than hers, no men more tender, no steps, slaps, looks or touches were ever as real.

(Bartlett 1998: 7)

Whilst in many of Bausch's productions there are spoken and sung elements of performance these become signifiers in a much larger picture at the centre of which is a stage language built from physical ciphers and signs which place non-linear association, a non-linear and a non-logical fractured content at the structural heart of the 'enacted' performance text. The language used in Bauschian reality becomes as one constructed from association. The accumulative effect of this audio-visual and sensory montage is a subjective reality expressed through the 'lived body', through 'objects', relationships, snippets of film, movement, moments of cabaret-esque confessional and snatchings of song as disparate, sometimes contradictory or juxtapositional signifiers. The staged reality is a meeting place for multi-sensory hieroglyphs; a theatre of signs and multiple meanings. Bausch said, '[b]asically one wants to

say something that cannot be said, so we make a poem where one can feel what is meant. You see it and you know it without being able to formulate it' (Bausch, cited in Birringer 1986: 92).

This 'real' is employed by Bausch in a manner that twists it, rendering an altered state of 'real' that is recast constantly by juxtaposition and dislocation. The human behaviour seen onstage never reaches the point of being solid, a fixed known point. There are no fixed points in Bausch's reflection of everyday life, but rather a shifting sense of the performers being engaged in an act of reinvention (Kozel's 'distortion') that seeks to confront and critique rather than withdraw. This constant shifting and dislocation of normalcy is realised at the centre of the 'action'. Again we can see this critique through returning to the first clip on *Video file 2 – Bausch 2*, taken from *Café Müller*.¹²⁴ The act of repetition, and distortion through repetition, affords the performers the opportunity to critique and, simultaneously, emotionally explore the human transaction at the centre of the 'action'. Similarly In describing Bausch's *Carnations*, (1982) Norbert Servos states that:

In the midst of the summery freshness of this primal playground,
Bausch sets dark images- a man and a woman shovel earth
over each other's heads from small buckets as if in a childish
burial ritual...a woman with an accordion repeatedly appears,
bare-breasted and clad in only underpants.

(Servos 1992: 241)

¹²⁴ As seen in *Video file 2 – Bausch 2*, previously viewed from the start of the file to the end of the first clip.

Any core of identity in the images and instances described above is constantly subverted and shaken by the other elements of the moment, creating a fluidity that is displaced, yet recognisable, empathetically 'real' and human, yet alienated. This dislocation is taken further in *Die Klage Der Kaiserin* ['The Lament of the Empress'] (1989). Sanchez-Colberg (1993: 219-233) notes that the continual disruption of a fixed perspective is taken to an extreme as the film presents the audience with a stream of dislocated pedestrian images almost three hours long. Fragmentation and discontinuity becomes operative structures. Bausch takes everyday gesture and places a discordant element within the image, thus asking us to simultaneously acknowledge the image as existing outside the homogenising realm of normality due to the alienation prompted by a discord and also to see a recognisable reality in the lack of a conventionally 'danced' artifice in the movement. Sanchez-Colberg sees that, 'the images do not correspond to the natural, (i.e. accepted) images of the body: the muddied torso, the man dressed in garters and suspenders, two men on roller skates wearing gowns' (Sanchez-Colberg 1993: 228). The images enter a state of flux. Clearly there is life we recognise here, but certainly not the accepted norm. Reality becomes reinvented and constantly shifting in a plane that makes room for critique.

Across all these considerations focusing upon the nature of Bausch's 'playspaces' and the particular involvement of the performer with these structural and physical domains, is the overwhelming sense that a liminal domain that permits the fantastical is created for the performer; a 'playspace' full of tensions and opposites, in which the performer 'enacts' the work. Bausch's 'playspaces' are uncompromisingly actualised, yet grandly

theatricalised, 'real' reflections, yet subverted expression, they are a dislocated world set apart, yet acutely socially sensitised. The effect upon the 'enactive' performer working in such a domain, specifically the idea of their 'absorption' within such a space will be picked up in detail in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

'Play' and 'game' within Bausch's work

Within Bausch's work the particular manifestation of 'play' and 'game' holds resonance for the task of developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the for the 'dance theatre' performer. There are three points of interest here: firstly the predominance of 'task' and 'action', rather than drama, secondly, linked to this, the idea of Bausch's performers 'playing-with', in a 'liminal meta-actuality', rather than playing 'as-if' in a fictive theatricality, and finally, the idea of 'game' itself as a structural tool for performance making. With some variation, to be explored in the following chapters, these aspects are also to be found in the work of DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre.

The predominance of 'task' and 'action'

The structure of Bausch's work coupled with its Expressionistic tendencies moves the focus of the work away from a creation of the dramatic which is grounded in a theatrical fiction and towards a sense of drama which arises as a direct consequence of the thing itself: the act of the performers 'actually' undertaking the 'tasks' and interactions inherent in performance, which, in turn, is set and staged in the liminal 'playspace' of Bausch's particularly demanding *mise-en-scène*. It is the 'action' that creates the drama, rather than the reverse. There is no linear narrative to be found here. As Price notes, 'Bausch's productions are a riot of diversity; her form of creativity challenges the notions

of linearity and reasoned discursive practice and offers in their stead an expansive, fluid, multiple, and diffuse form of expression' (Price 1990: 328). The joyful absence of a narrative is seen again by Sophie Constanti in reflecting upon *Tanzabend II* (1991):

A woman strides onstage with a China piggy bank, holds it out to people in the front row and waits for them to make a contribution. Another woman climbs into a wet skirt, poses, grins and walks off. Another rushes in and attempts to relay the distressing details of a fatal accident. Another uses a colleague as target practice for cutlery thrown furiously but hopelessly off the mark. Two men pass a rock to and fro as if it were a baseball.

(Constanti 1992: 10)

In Constanti's description of 'action', it is possible to discern exactly and only that: 'action'. There is not a fabricated sense of drama created which lies on top of this 'action', but simply 'actions' that can then be received many ways by an audience:

"Each person in the audience is part of the piece," she said to me when I interviewed her in 1992. "You bring your own experience, your own fantasy, your own feelings in response to what you see [...]. So everybody, according to their experience, has a different feeling, a different impression."

(Meisner 1999: 32)

The concentration on 'task' and 'action' and the absence of a viewpoint *given* to the audience through an imposed and additional layer of drama leads to the performer adopting a particular relationship with the other performers in the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'playspace' and with the 'playspace' itself. This relationship can be by viewing the first clip on *Video file 1 – Bausch 1*.¹²⁵ In this clip the performers do not pretend to run from each side of the set to the other, nor, as they cease this 'task', do they embed a sense of artificially implied drama within the 'action'. They simply focus their 'intentionality' upon completing the 'task' and make no attempt to hide the effort needed to do this, allowing themselves to live the experience provided to them by the 'task'. Any dramatic tension is created through the doing itself, or is invested in by the audience in their perception of the 'action'. With respect to the search for an understanding of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the for the 'dance theatre' performer, analysis of the particular relationship which arises here between the performer, the phenomenal 'playspace' and the other performers will form part of Chapter Seven.

'Playing-with', not playing 'as if'

In describing Bausch's sets as 'liberated playing spaces', as noted at the start of this Chapter, Hoghe and Tree explain that, '[t]heatre for Bausch "has a lot to do with the things children do. The things we do sometimes you can actually do only when you are a child - splash around in the water, get greasy, paint yourself, play' (Hoghe and Tree 1980:68) "The activity of 'play' itself here is framed as semi-structured 'action'. The performer (or the child) engaging in splashing, or painting themselves seemingly engages in the action for the sheer

¹²⁵ As shown in *Video file 1 – Bausch 1*, previously viewed from the start of the file to the end of the first clip.

intrinsic fun of the action and plays freely within the action. Crucially, Bausch also describes the 'play' activity of performance here in terms of doing, or in terms of 'action'. Whilst a degree of separation from the everyday world may occur through the action of 'play', 'play' here is not grounded in make believe in another time and place, it is firmly situated in the re-appropriation of the 'here and now', but still gives an expansive sense of freedom redolent of the intrinsic joy of doing often experienced in childhood.

The need for Bausch's performers to engage in the work 'playfully' is underpinned by the very nature and specific demands of Bausch's pieces in order that, 'dancing be suspected as a possibility to experience oneself and the surrounding space' (Hoghe and Tree 1980: 68). In order for the work itself to function to full effect, a 'playful' response in the moment of the performer's 'lived experience' of the 'action' is necessitated. Again, this 'playful' response is situated in an understanding of 'play' residing in the 'playing-with', rather than the playing 'as-if'. This can be seen to good effect by returning to the third clip on *Video file 1 – Bausch 1*.¹²⁶ Here we see what is in effect a game of musical statues being played out on stage. The game continues for some time. It is clear from noting the reaction times of the performers in response to the music stopping or starting, and the manner in which they move about the 'playspace', that this game is played for 'real'. Each step or path of travel for each performer is not fixed. Instead the performers are engaging in the 'task' of playing the 'game' in 'actuality'. They are playing a 'game' grounded in an understanding of 'play' as 'playing-with'. They are not playing 'as-if' really playing musical statues. With respect to the search for an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer in this context, analysis of the particular relationship between the

¹²⁶ As shown in *Video file 1 – Bausch 1* previously viewed from 8:26.to the end of the file.

performer, their 'intentionality', the 'playspace' and the other performers which arises through this particular understanding and manifestation of 'play' will be picked up in Chapter Seven.

'Game'

The example given above exemplifies a final point of note regarding Bausch's work to consider in the search for an understanding of 'absorption' as part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the for the 'dance theatre' performer: that of the idea of 'game' within the work. The idea of 'game' is embedded in the process of practice and performance with Bausch from the outset of the work. Bausch works collaboratively with her performers in the process of creating a piece. Hoghe and Tree note that, '[h]er performances are not theoretically conceived. "For the last one there was a point of departure somewhere, but where the whole thing is moving is developed in rehearsal, it isn't planned - it just happens, through us all"' (Hoghe and Tree 1980: 66). This points to an explorational mode of creation by Bausch which, whilst containing some parameters, gives the performers the creative space to become inventive. She 'encourages individuals to have their own imagination, to be more like themselves, to dare uncommon ways of thinking' (Hoghe and Tree 1980: 63). Similarly, Cody explains that, 'Bausch asks her performers to play themselves in scenes based on exercises and improvisations, located around a specific emotion. Their work takes place in real time, and through painful exertion' (Cody 1998: 122-123).

In the descriptions above we see a structure of practice emerging akin to a 'game'. Certain parameters are established, and then, within these parameters,

each performer is given the freedom to respond, create, or develop material.¹²⁷

'Game' in this context becomes structured, exploratory improvisation.

The 'games' and associated structures employed in the creative process also then find direct voice in performance. Birringer recalls that,

I counted perhaps 40 or 50 different childhood games in 1980 and *Arien* (1979). When the Wuppertal dancers recall the youthful joy with which they used to drive away the fear built into all the children's games, the hide-and-seek exercises always look ambiguously sad and cheerful at the same time. Bausch's dramaturgical method becomes more accessible over time.

(Birringer 1986: 91)

Similarly Gitta Honegger recalls a moment in *Gebirge* (1984):

[T]he most shocking moment [...] happens [...] when the company members drag out about 40 huge pine trees and dump them all over the stage. They use them for a few moments to play little games of childlike seductions and hide-and-seek, and then they pull the trees off the stage again.

(Honegger, cited in Cody 1998: 127-128)

We can see these 'games' in a multitude of places in performance across the video files accompanying this chapter. They are evident in the 'game' of musical

¹²⁷ A key parameter here can be seen in Bausch's oft cited requirement for the performer to use themselves. Without this fundamental being in place, the creative process and the games inherent in this process would not occur.

statues in the third clip on *Video file 1 Bausch 1*, in the repeated sequence performed by the company of males as they strut, pose and manfully adjust their clothing behind Libonati in the second clip on *Video file 3 – Bausch 3*, and in the ‘Ich’ section of the second clip on *Video file 1 – Bausch 1*.¹²⁸ The effect that the idea of ‘game’ has upon the ‘mode of being/doing’ for the performer, requesting of them a ‘playful’ engagement in ‘action’, and the resulting implications for the development of a pertinent articulation and understanding of ‘absorption’ for the ‘dance theatre’ performer will be explored in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

¹²⁸ Please play *Video file 1 – Bausch 1* from 6:21 to the end of the following clip.

Chapter Five - Lloyd Newson and DV8: Up close, personal and 'real'

Having established an overview of the background to DV8's inception and its links to the wider genealogy of the 'dance theatre' in Chapter One, this chapter will follow a similar pattern to the previous Chapter on Bausch. Drawing upon the accompanying video files and using the lexicon of terminology, the chapter examines aspects of DV8's work, which might usefully contribute to an idea of 'absorption' for the performer, seen as a part of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. I would like to concentrate on the following aspects of DV8's work: firstly, the ways in which the idea of the personal investment of the performer contributes to, or is manifested in, performance. Within this area of interest, of particular note is the performer's relationship with other performers configured as 'inter-personal', the idea of 'lived experience' within performance, the idea of risk and, similarly to Bausch, the notion of the 'real'. Secondly, the idea of 'play' and 'game' is also of use in considering the idea of 'absorption' for the performer. I have structured the discussion to follow by using these points as organisational subheadings. However, similarly to the previous chapter on Bausch, it is possible to group and discuss the various selected aspects of DV8's work here under one or more of these headings as they are not manifested in relation to, and through interdependence upon, each other. Consequently the placement of these aspects of DV8's 'dance theatre' within the discussion below, and any divisions made are undertaken solely for the purpose of effectively managing this discourse.

DV8 and the investment of the performer

In DV8's work, the work for the performer takes on an acutely personal quality in the way in which Newson's asks the performers to investigate and unmask

themselves, making connections between this personal exploration and analysis and the wider societal attitudes. DV8's output focuses on the politics, nuances and complexities of relationships: '“Our work”, says Newson, “is about individuals, their lives, interactions and personalities”' (Newson, quoted in Harvie 2005: 135). The dynamics, motivations and stories behind the interaction between people, and people are the stuff of the work, with the performers unpicking the personal, leading to DV8 having, 'an honest, intelligent and risk taking commitment to social analysis, a willingness to be self-reflexive about its own thinking and practices and a wry humour' (Harvie 2005: 128). Newson explains this use of the personal and relational is to activate socially political enquiry:

Many of the things I deal with are often considered social taboos
[...] Rather than make generalised comments about society as a
whole I find it much truer to question myself. The self as part of society
seems to be what dance deals with best: a very personal investigation.

(Newson 1993: 13)

Similarly, Lansdale reflects upon Newson's work, noting that, 'these personal investigations often concern the individual's place in society and the exclusion of individuals from particular societies' (Lansdale 2004: 120).

The personal investment of the performers is present, and necessary, to DV8's work from the outset of each devising and rehearsal journey. Within the creative journey it is Newson's oft cited use of the performer's individuality and self in the

process of devising and rehearsal which begins to highlight the notion of personal risk and cost for the performers. Whilst an element of this risk may be seen in the eventual choreography (to be explored shortly), with the idea of 'absorption' in mind, it is useful to look further at the investment of the performers during the creative journey.

From the start of what is a highly collaborative process of making performance, Newson draws directly upon the thoughts, opinions and personal histories of the performers. Newson remarks that, 'I've found a lot of our work ends up being based around people who come along on their first day and say "Here's my life!" These people are prepared to reveal everything about themselves in the rehearsal process' (Tushingham 1995). This acute sense of the personal is at the heart of the process for the DV8 performer. Whilst Newson retains overall editorial control and often sets or steers the direction of the rehearsal room, intense investment and responsibility in a deeply personal process is a key factor for the performer, inevitably carrying with it significant risk. Leask notes that the performers are often asked to, 'show sides of themselves in performance that most humans would never reveal and sometimes will fail on stage as a result, but failure, which is the possible outcome of risk-taking, is part of DV8's working process' (Leask 1995: 49). This working process has been cited as a gruelling experience for both Newson and the performers. Newson reflects upon the initial stages of the process for *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*: 'We spoke for the first week, hardly danced at all; I listened to their stories. After two weeks we were manically depressed, but the support was there' (Constanti 1988: 6). Notably, after the film of this piece was made, the next piece (*Strange Fish*) was considerably lighter in tone and even contained

tones of slapstick in an effort to move away from the emotionally draining experience of *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*. Leask cites a reflection on this subject from one of the performers:

[I]t is like cutting yourself with a knife. How long do you keep cutting yourself? And while people are amazed that you cut yourself onstage publicly - how much do you keep doing it, repeating the same action? I won't continue to cut myself.

(Leask 1995: 51)

The deep personal investment and risk borne by the performers in the devising and rehearsal phase is carried through directly into the performance work, which again asks the performers to expose themselves emotionally and unmask vulnerabilities in front of the audience. Newson reflects:

To show vulnerability and failure onstage has become increasingly important to me. I often set tasks that ask performers to reveal something of their inner selves that they may not want to show in public. In doing this the performer can feel totally exposed and vulnerable.

(Newson 1993: 13)

However, this vulnerability is perhaps made more acute and the level of risk inherent in the work is made more fundamental to the performer in the way that Newson works with the individual bodies and physicalities of his performers.

Echoing the prizing of the individual voice seen in *Ausdruckstanz* and Bausch's *Tanztheater*, Newson focuses very much on the individual body as a tool for expression. Rather than moving towards a physical ideal, or concept of 'the dancer' Newson celebrates and foregrounds the idiosyncrasies and movements of each of his dancers. In conversation with Jo Butterworth, Newson explains that, '[g]enerally DV8's works are about seeing particular individuals on stage, therefore it is important to nurture the individual vocabulary' (Butterworth 2004). Behind this move to embrace and use the individuality is Newson's clear understanding that, 'each body has a politic' (Beedham 2002: 11). In reflecting on the preparations for the production, which eventually settled on the title of *The Cost of Living*, Newson describes one of his dancers and the particular qualities of the movement this dancer produces, 'Larry for instance is a fat dancer. His whole body moves in a way that a "normal" dancer's body would never move [...] The connotations that we read when we see a body of that size move brings a whole new perspective' (Beedham 2002: 11). This accent on the 'actual' body of the performer as being intrinsic to the performance itself, embeds the quality of risk and vulnerability within DV8's performance at a much more profound level for the performer. This vulnerability and weakness is then brought out directly in the performance text itself. A pertinent example of this is seen in the filmed version of *The Cost of Living* (2004) when David Toole, a dancer whose body begins from the waist up, is accosted by another character with a film camera and bombarded with a number of highly personal questions: 'What happened to your legs? Were you born like that, or did you have them chopped off? Do you have an ass-hole? How do you go to the toilet? Can you masturbate?' (Feck 2007: 80).

This sense of the personal investment undertaken by the performers is, in a manner similar to Bausch, focused upon the body as the primary means of expression and the locus for performance. Consequently, by placing the issues explored in the work through the personal story and relationships of the individual onto the body and, crucially, by explicitly drawing upon the individual bodies of the performer as a site and means to exemplify the message of performance, the bodies of Newson's performers become inscripted. Winter notes that, '[i]n DV8's work, the overriding aim is to find a social/psychological realism in the body, which is thereby seen as an interface between the self and other selves' (Winter 1989: 10). Echoing Bausch, we return 'our attention to the performance - the most elemental manufacturer of which is the body, which it makes both medium and subject' (Buckland 1995: 379). Through Newson's focus upon the relationships of the individual we have an exploration of,

the nature of human bonds - emotional, sexual and physical - and their interrelation to an individual's process of becoming an embodied subjectivity within a social environment [...] The self becomes a site in which many of society's' strategies get played.

(Sanchez-Colberg 1996: 49)

However, whilst in Bausch, we witness an inscription which is characterised by a somewhat Brechtian engagement of the performer with the character type and the social construct, in DV8's focus upon the specifics of interpersonal relationships and interpersonal interactions, there is a different emphasis in the inscription, particularly in the earlier work, including *Dead Dreams of*

Monochrome Men, *Strange Fish* and *Enter Achilles*. Whilst cognisant of the wider socio-political framework, themes and questions of the piece, it becomes 'lived experience' through an inscription that functions in the live interpersonal relationship between the performers, rather than positioning the performer as an embodied commentator upon a social relationship. There is the sense that the stories told by DV8's performers are tangible, 'real' and direct translations of immediate experience, rather than a Bauschian commentary on that experience. This aspect of the work can be seen across the video files of the accompanying DVD-ROM. Two particular instances are useful to note.

Firstly, in *Video file 5 - DV8 2*, we see an interaction between Liam Steele and Ross Hounslow.¹²⁹ The socio-political message in this section is driven by interpersonal interaction, and is contained within the dynamic of the interpersonal relationship between the two performers at this point. The performers both embody, and are inscribed with, the thrust of the commentary contained within the wider piece. It is clear to see that the interpersonal relationship between the two performers is 'lived' here. In slowing down the footage one is able to observe the reaction times of Liam Steele in particular.

The second instance of particular note can be seen in the final clip on *Video file 5 DV8 2*.¹³⁰ Here again we see an interpersonal relationship at work. The 'action' is focused upon two individuals (Charnock and Houstoun). Again we see this interpersonal relationship, and the wider thematics of the piece, inscribed upon the bodies of the performers through the 'action' of performance. The inscription comes to the fore in the relationship between the

¹²⁹ Please play *Video file 5 DV8 2* from the start of the file until the end of the first clip

¹³⁰ Please play *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 6:45 to the end of the file.

performers as the live-ness of the interaction; the awkward needy desperation of Charnock and the increasing discomfort and pain of Houston become ever more prominent. It is possible again to observe the 'real' effects and the inscription of the 'lived experience' being played out on the 'lived body', particularly in Houston's increasingly disturbed reactions.

In considering the 'lived body' further in DV8's work, the presence of risk has, in its various forms, become a particular character of the canon of the company. One aspect of risk focused directly upon the body itself is the physical risk of the earlier choreographic style employed by Newson, which can be linked to the emergence of 'Eurocrash' as a dance genre in the latter half of the 1980s. Eurocrash saw bodies, 'fly through the air, throw themselves hard onto the floor without recovery, slam their weight against other bodies, walls and floors' (Claid 2006: 169). The style became synonymous with the output from DV8 during the late 1980s and into the early 1990s. Claid notes that, 'Lloyd Newson, as director of DV8 Physical Theatre, persistently draws spectators' attention to the raw vulnerability of flesh-and-blood desires and the dance with death that such desire can provoke' (Claid 2006: 169). This sense of risk can be seen by examining a section of movement taken from *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*.¹³¹ In this section of the filmed performance we see exactly the style of movement noted by Claid: the four performers work at an unforgiving breakneck pace in which there is little, or no, room for error, jumping on and over each other, rolling across the floor and inviting danger by virtue of the movement. In this instance, by following the path of Newson himself through the 'action' we can see the 'attention' and 'awareness' of the performers rests in an interpersonal dynamic. The 'action' of each performer is the dominant focus of

¹³¹ Please play *Video file 4 - DV8 1* from 4:38 - 7:03.

the others as the each focus and direct their 'intentionality' towards the 'task' of catching, running towards, jumping over or moving around each other. It is possible to see reaction times within Newson as he moves around the space. From this it is possible to discern a level of 'absorptive' 'attention' in his work.

However, Newson himself is clear to point out that the physical risk of the 'action' on stage is not the endpoint:

For me risk means trying something that is new, and therefore involves the possibility of failure; it does not necessarily imply physical danger [...] For many dance companies it seems that risk just means physical risk; nothing is risked in terms of content or approach.

(Newson 1993: 11)

In *Deep End* (1987), when Michelle Richecoeur is blindfolded and, during a section of movement which lasts three to four minutes, experiences Nigel Charnock jumping on her repeatedly from a number of unpredictable angles and positions, the physical risk imposed by the theatrical prop of a blindfold is not physical risk alone. When combined with the content it creates a situation wherein the total stage language is borne out and communicated through the 'lived experience' and 'lived bodies' of the performers immersed in the moment of performance. It exemplifies the wider thematics of the piece and, through a focus on the 'body as the primary means of expression and the locus of performance', is functioning both as actual physical risk and lived expressionistic metaphor.

The element of risk, in its various combined manifestations within Newson's work, has potential to be considered as significant in its contribution to an understanding of 'absorption' for the performer. The emotional risks and the use of personal experience by the performers during the process, the manner in which the corporeal individuality of the performer is used by Newson, which, in turn, is transposed into a public vulnerability and personal honesty inscribed onto the body in performance, and finally, the physical risks inherent in the choreography all form useful points of consideration. They point to performance which demands an incredibly focused sense of investment in the act of doing, which, cumulatively could be said to be 'absorptive'. As Newson notes of his performers and the act of devising, rehearsal and performance, '[i]t becomes their existence, their life, everything about them becomes apparent' (Newson, quoted in Tushingham 1995). Moreover, as this deep, profound level of personal responsibility and engagement from the outset of each journey to its end is focused and realised in and through the individual body of each performer, it creates a connection to, and ownership of, the work which creates it as inseparable from the body onto which it is inscribed. Newson explains that, '[t]he movement vocabulary generally within a DV8 piece is so individual that people cannot do other people's movements [...] it is very difficult to replace people and have them learn movement made for a particular body or personality' (Newson, cited in Beedham 2002: 11). This sense of the personal is seen again by turning to an extract from *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*¹³² as we see the performers engage in a physically risky movement positioned as a metaphor for the wider thematics explored by the piece. At its very centre, this metaphor contains the essence of the relationship dynamic being explored and

¹³² Please Play *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 3:47-5:32.

'enacted' as inscribed upon the 'lived body'. The performer is, 'not just a dancer trying to present a piece of movement, but [appears] as an emotional being, as a "lived body" rather than a danced one' (Buckland 1995: 372). The individual 'lived body' being at the centre of DV8's work creates a focused, personal invested high-risk mode of being/doing' on a number of levels which is useful to considerations of 'absorption' for the performer. How exactly this manifests itself in the work and 'action' of the performer is the detailed analysis of Chapter Seven.

DV8 and the 'real'

Another key element of note in the video clip noted above is the presence of the 'real', with this notion again being brought to bear, and focused upon, the 'lived body'. The ladder is real, the falls, and the catches, and the inherent risks in the 'action', is 'real'. In pursuit of the authentic in performance, and as seen in the manner in which he engages his performers in the process for each piece, it is clear that Newson desires the 'real' in his performers and performance.

Echoing those pieces within Bausch's work focused specifically upon the politics of relationships, Newson's desire to connect to the 'real' is fundamentally evident in his choice of content. Neither the subject matter, nor the performance score that articulates these themes to the audience is divorced from a recognisable reality. At no point in the thirty-year canon of DV8 do we find abstract movement for movement's sake. At the centre of the work we find the individual 'lived body' of the performer expressing and exploring relationships, issues and questions pertinent and relevant to contemporary society. Commenting on the recorded output of the company, Rubridge notes

that, '[w]hilst DV8's work retains the fragmented structures of the experimental worlds of dance and television, it requires us to return again and again to the real world, the world where bodies experience pain and minds conflict' (Rubridge, cited in Jordan and Allen 1993: 204). Similarly, the direct drawing of content from real stories and situation can be seen in the genesis of *The Happiest Day of My Life* (1999). The piece was based upon the story of the ill-fated marriage between the sister of one of the dancers and a body-builder. The bride to be put effort and emphasis on the day of the nuptials itself and the model of a perfect lifestyle, to then walk out of the relationship only months later when the idealised concept of married life was revealed as unattainable in the everyday (Watson 1999). As Keith Watson notes, 'it's reassuring to find that Newson is still firmly committed to what the papers like to call true-life stories [...] *The Happiest Day Of My Life* has its roots bedded deep in day-to-day reality' (Watson 1999: 11).

Newson's concern with the 'real' is embedded into the journey of a piece from the outset. In conversation with Jo Butterworth, he reflects upon one research and development project which,

centred on taking the performers into, and working in, a 'greasy spoon' cafe. The performers were asked to observe normal cafe users to see what information was conveyed through their body language [...] My concern is for dance to connect and talk about the real world, so it seemed logical to send the performers out of the dance environment.

(Butterworth 2004)

In addition to the idea of the 'real' brought to the pieces by the thematic content of the work, Newson continues to periodically employ verbatim text as part of the stage language he uses to convey the message or content of DV8's work. Harvie comments that, 'DV8's performances have increasingly included speech and written text: in 1993, Newson commented that not to do so was to remain mute, to deny his productions one of the expressive languages at their disposal' (Harvie 2005: 129).¹³³ The first of DV8's pieces to employ verbatim text was *Men Seeking Men* (1993). The content of this piece focused upon the act of 'cottaging' and included text taken from interviews with over fifty men. More recent pieces, including *To Be Straight With You* (2007) and *Can We Talk About This?* (2011) have also included scripts derived entirely from verbatim texts. These scripts have been presented live by the performers. As Sanchez-Colberg explains, Newson uses this text across a number of levels:

Language is used both as a means to communicate intimate aspects of the performers (an internal element) and also as an external force acting on the performers. In *Men Seeking Men* (1994) this double source of material is magnified to create an interplay of level of "reality revealed"

(Sanchez-Colberg 1996: 51)

Newson's use of this text in performance also deliberately engages in the 'real' that is the here and now of the auditorium. With the verbatim text presented as

¹³³ In this sense, and in the manner in which he increasingly uses multimedia in his stage designs, Newson is emulating Bausch in a move away from a 'pure' concept of expressionist dance and towards a post-expressionist stance. As Lansdale notes; 'he flouts the highly valued integrity of expressionist dance - its central concern being for expression through movement alone' (Lansdale 2004: 120).

both internal communication of the performer, and as a presence external to the performers, the performers also use it as a force that acts upon the audience, inviting direct interaction. *Can We Talk About This?* opens with a performer standing mid-stage and confronting the audience through direct address. He asks the audience to raise their hands if they consider themselves to be morally superior to the Taliban. As an audience member experiencing this moment first hand in 2012, I recall being struck by the reality and currency of the question. The audience shared the reality of the text with the performers.

Again echoing Bausch, a further point of note about the inclusion of the 'real' in DV8's work is the presence of what I am calling the 'actual' in the movement. Whilst DV8's work does of course employ movement that is an expression and, to a degree, an abstraction of the 'real' in both its context and its context, like Bausch, Newson's ever-shifting vocabulary retains an essential relationship with the 'real' through retaining the 'actual'. The movement has an 'actual' function other than being primarily aesthetic in purpose, creating it as 'task' and 'action', rather than an artificially created 'drama'. The 'actualised' nature of the 'task' or 'action' itself is the location and instigation of any dramatic tension. Sophie Constanti reflects upon Newson's comments: "[N]othing must look affected", he insists, citing the simple action of running as an example. "A couple of times when Doug was running, he angled his torso inwards and you sensed this dancier quality. I had to say 'Doug, no Paul Taylor runs, you just run for your life!'" (Constanti 1988: 6). Sanchez-Colberg's comments on the 'actuality' of the movement employed in performance are similar: 'To witness the performance is to be aware of the very real danger faced by the performers as they blindly dive into space, hoping to be caught, climb over each other [...] having to dance

amidst falling glass or being crucified' (Sanchez-Colberg 1996: 51). At this point, we can revisit the video files for appropriate examples.¹³⁴ The sections of performance shown here on the video files create the movement as 'actualised' metaphor in which, 'grunts, faces distorted with effort or pain, shatter illusions of effortless in the act of dancing' (Prickett 2003: 28). Commenting on *Deep End* (1987) Carter identifies the relationship of the 'real' to the 'actual':

When in *Deep End* Nigel Charnock throws himself to the floor, again and again, for what seems like an age - these are real metaphors: meaning and image inseparable. As an audience member you can sense that the dividing line between reality and pretence has been erased.

(Carter 1992: 7)

This emphasis in DV8's work on the 'real' as described above has significant impact upon the 'lived body' as a locus for performance and upon the necessary 'mode of doing/being' for the performer when engaging in such work. Consequently, this facet of Newson's work in relation to the 'action' of the performer again has impact upon considerations of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer which will be unpicked further undertaken in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

DV8's 'playspace'

The positioning of the 'lived body' and its place in the 'dance theatre' performance of DV8 is also heavily affected in the manner in which the

¹³⁴ Please see *Video file 5 DV8 2* from 5:06 - 6:34 and note previously viewed section of *Video file 4 - DV8 1* from 4:38-7:12.

'playspace' as a 'liminal meta-actuality' is configured and created.

Considerations of the 'real' in this particular facet of DV8's performance are again useful to note as contributing to development of an understanding and articulation of 'absorption' for the performer as it relates to an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in performance.

In both the filmed and live work, and, latterly, in live work which positions an increasingly sophisticated and blended use of multimedia as an integral part of the scenography and *mise-en-scène*. DV8 continues to incorporate and use the 'real' in the creation of the 'playspace' as a 'liminal meta-actuality' in which the performance is presented. A key point which significantly shapes the way space, staging and location is used in DV8's pieces is its development in and through the devising and rehearsal process. Far from the performers working to create movement that is then transposed onto a set that has been developed separately, the set is central to the development and creation of the eventual performance score, often actually being developed prior to the movement. Newson himself explains that the performers '[w]ork with the set and ensure it becomes embedded into the performance. The environment needs to be lived in, and the set explored before the production week(s)' (Butterworth 2004). Similarly, Harvie explains that, '[s]cenography is not superficial, a pretty place in which to perform; it is an integral part of each show and its spatial meanings' (Harvie 2005: 129). We see this in the clips on the video files, perhaps most strikingly in the pub of *Enter Achilles* (1995).¹³⁵ In these sequences, the physical setting of the 'playspace' is used extensively by the performers as they move over and around the bar of the pub and perform acrobatic feats of male to male braggadocio on the instantly recognisable icon of the pub snooker table.

¹³⁵ Please play *Video file 4 - DV8 1* from 0:45 to 2:47.

As the audience we see familiarity in this setting. We identify with these 'actualised' points of reference taken from the everyday. Watson comments that, '[s]et designer Ian MacNeil has brilliantly evoked the spirit of the down-at-heel British local, right down to the colourless faded wallpaper - it's a sight that will strike a chord with all but the most abstemious' (Watson 1996: 13).

However, this 'real' is also blended with an Expressionist abstraction that allows the 'real' and the 'actual' in the scenography to be employed as metaphor, facilitating us as the audience to, 'witness the more complex underlying aspects of reality that exist. Only then is reality presented more thoroughly as it *is* rather than as it *appears*' (Wall 2007: 95; emphasis in original).¹³⁶ This is seen in the clip on *Video file 4 - DV8 1* taken from the evocative setting of *Strange Fish*.¹³⁷ Here we see the duet performed by Lauren Potter and Jordi Cortes Molina as seen through the eyes of Wendy Houston. The setting, in particular the lighting, in combination with the movement of the duet itself and its placement within a corridor that emphasises the emotional and actual physical distance between Houston and the amorous couple, creates an abstracted metaphor grounded in movement which is itself placed in an 'actual' setting. In addition the frame provided by the lens of the camera plays an active part in the creation of this 'actualised' metaphor, delineating the boundaries of the 'enactive' domain for the viewer. In commenting on the multiple settings experienced by the performers in *Strange Fish*, Harvie notes the similarities between Newson and Bausch:

Rough floorboards could be lifted to reveal a pool from which performers

¹³⁶ In *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, Leask describes an environment which 'textured both hard realism with a murky surrealism' (Leask 1995: 52).

¹³⁷ Please play *Video file 4 - DV8 1* from 2:47 to 4:38

emerged, and into which they jumped, fell, or were thrown. Like many of Bausch's settings, this scenography, designed by Peter J. Davison allowed the company to invoke both real social contexts and the relationships that are forged or dismantled in them, as well as more abstract, emotive environments.

(Harvie 2005: 131)

The inclusion of the 'real' within the 'playspace' and specifically its use as 'actualised' metaphor creates a highly politicised use of space that focuses on the body of the performer as the 'centralising' (Sanchez-Colberg 2007) point within this 'enactive' domain. Rather than performing 'on' a stage, or set, the performers are embedded within it. Similarly to Bausch's use of scenography noted in the previous chapter, Newson's performers are asked to adopt the 'playspace' of the performance as a 'liminal meta-actuality' in which to 'play' with the 'real' as metaphor. Made even more pertinent by the use of the camera as a tool with which to frame this world for the viewer, this 'play' uses the bodies of the performers to define the space and create the relationships between the performer and other. This is best seen in the video files by again returning to *Strange Fish*.¹³⁸ From the awkwardness of Charnock during the previous scene in the bar (not shown in this clip) we see the camera focus in on Houstoun and Charnock. The frame, and the 'playspace' loses all other reference points aside from the two performers; it becomes liminal, being solely about them and the social politics of their relationship as it becomes defined by their interaction and by the marginally tightening frame of the camera.

¹³⁸ Please play *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 7:16 to the end of the file.

The use of space by the performer, and the relationship fostered by the performer between themselves and the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace' (whether this domain is framed by a camera, or by an auditorium) has significant potential to impact upon development of a pertinent understanding of the performer's 'absorption' in understood as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' in 'dance theatre' performance. This thread of discussion will again contribute to the discussion and detailed analysis of Chapter Seven.

'Play and 'game' in process and performance.

The collaborative nature of DV8's devising and rehearsal process sees Newson and the company engage in games, tasks and improvisations during the creative process of making a piece. In reflecting upon the process of creation for the work which was to eventually become *The Cost of Living*, Robert Tannion comments that, '[e]veryone had time to experiment with motifs and props, play spatial games and delve into their assigned characters' (Tannion, cited in Beedham 2002: 9).

The 'games' and play' undertaken by DV8's performers during the improvisation inherent in the devising and rehearsal processes of the company are then translated, or evolved, into what I see as a particular mode of 'game' and 'play' in performance. In commenting on the physical risk of DV8's earlier choreography, Prickett notes that, '[t]he element of improvisation is limited to the creative process, as physical risks do not allow for improvisational approaches onstage' (Prickett 2003: 29). Similarly, having been an audience member for two of DV8's more recent pieces (*To Be Straight With You* and *Can We Talk About This?*) I have been struck by the highly polished presentation of

the pieces and the manner in which use of media was employed as an integral and embedded element of the action on stage, often manipulated directly by the performers. So, whilst the structural results of those ‘tasks’ and ‘games’ undertaken in the creative process could be clearly seen in the performance, in performance the performers did not improvise within a structured framework, but completed the performance score exactly as had been rehearsed.¹³⁹

However, whilst the more improvisatory elements of ‘play’ and ‘game’ are somewhat precluded from DV8’s performance, Newson still requires the performance and the material to remain necessarily fresh and ‘alive’:

Someone came to the audition the other day, and asked the dancers what it was like to be in the company. They said, you hardly ever have any time off [...] Liam said you cannot stop working at anything; you’ve got to always be prepared to keep everything fresh and there’s just no rest.

(Newson, quoted in Snape 1999: 12)

This requirement for the performer to maintain their performance as ‘fresh’ is useful to developing a pertinent understanding of ‘absorption’ for the performer. Whilst the detailed analysis of what exactly the performer does in pursuit of this will be the focus of Chapter Seven, it is useful to explore the focus upon ‘task’ in DV8’s work and the way it creates a ‘game’ for the performers.

¹³⁹ An example can be seen during *To Be Straight With You*, when one performer delivers a lengthy monologue whilst playing with a skipping rope. The performer skips on the spot and around the stage in a performed ‘game’ with the rope. The quality of this section, and, in particular the relationship between the spoken text and the movement was made playful by this translation of creative task into performance score.

In returning to the video files and the clips taken from *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, it is possible to detect visual evidence of the performers being 'absorbed' in the 'task' of the 'action'.¹⁴⁰ Both of these sections require the performers to focus their 'attention' and 'awareness' fully upon the 'action' of the 'playspace', specifically the other performer, or performers within it. The key to both these sections is the relationships between the performers. There is no room for the performers to focus upon anything else. In the first clip, the fast moving spatial relationships between the performers are central as they engage in risky choreography that carries significant physical danger and little room for error. In the second clip, we see an interpersonal relationship drive the performance score. The 'task' here necessarily involves a nonverbal conversation between the two performers, with the physical performance score testing, and ultimately breaking the relationship between the two performers.

In both these examples, the performance score sets the performers a 'task' which, by its very nature can be seen as a 'game' in which the performers test each other in some manner. In the first clip, trust, physical timing and risk, and the sheer difficulty of keeping up without mistake constitute the substance of the test. In the second clip, the 'task' tests the relationship between Nigel Charnock and Ross Hounslow. The act of testing within these constructs requires the performers to 'play' the 'actuality' of the set 'task' itself for 'real' with absolute focus and with the knowledge that it could fail or go wrong. The 'actual' risk inherent in both instances creates the performance score as a 'game' as, though never realised, it introduces the *potential* for the unexpected to occur into the present of the 'actual' doing. This necessitates an 'absorptive' 'mode of

¹⁴⁰ As previously viewed in *Video file 4 DV8 1* from 4:38 to 7:12, and also in *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 3:48 to 6:44.

doing/being' for the performers as they remain aware of the potential cost of the actions being carried out. The exact nature of this 'absorption' in relation to the 'action', 'awareness', 'perception' and 'intentionality' of the performer will be explored fully in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

'Play' of self

A final point of interest regarding the manifestation of 'game' and 'play' within DV8's 'dance-theatre', particularly notable in their earlier work, stems from Newson's use of the autobiography of the performer. As noted above Newson draws heavily on the particular experiences and physical attributes of individual performers. Carter explains that, 'the performers have always presented aspects of themselves in past works, a natural result of improvisation and the company's ethos. They have always used their own names, their own emotions' (Carter 1992: 53). Even when the device of character is used (for instance the performer Dale Tanner 'plays' a policeman in *Men Seeking Men*) or when verbatim text is employed by the performer (who then speaks with the voice of someone who is not him, or her), it is done in a manner that still reveals the actual performer, or facets of them on stage. There is never the sense that the performer psychologically takes on, and makes believable to the audience, the persona of *another*, be it character implied by verbatim text, or by the context of the performance score.

However, the performer presenting a persona constructed from facets of themselves, and/or presenting forms of characterisation that acknowledge the presence of the actual performer at the same time, suggests an engagement which is, in itself, is a 'game' played with the (live or mediated) audience. When

combined with the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'playspace', the 'actuality' of the performance score and the gruelling personal investment of the performers during the creative process, the impact of this 'game' is increased. At its heart is Newson's deadly serious and purposeful 'playing-with' the line between pretence and reality. In reflecting upon *Strange Fish* Sanchez-Colberg explains that:

The boundaries which separate the performers from the roles they 'play' on stage are ambiguous. The audience is invited to recognize the performers onstage as the individuals they are. In order to do this the cast members address each other using their names, stories are exchanged which are to be taken as semi-autobiographical, comments are made about someone's appearance, physique and personality, movement profiles are made manifest. The performance relishes the testing of the boundaries that separate the real from the illusory.

(Sanchez-Colberg 1996: 50)

This 'game' 'play' can also be seen by returning to the video files.¹⁴¹ This clip, taken from *Enter Achilles* focuses upon the interpersonal 'game' being 'played' by the performers. As the commentary notes, we see the 'game' being 'played' for 'real'. We see the 'actuality' and 'lived experience' of Liam Steel's reactions to the aggression of Ross Hounslow. The performers, or the persona constructed from the performer's personal investment in the creative process, are present in the clip. There is no sense of adopted or performed character-as-other. The 'playspace' is liminal but 'real': the 'action' is 'actual'. Consequently,

¹⁴¹ Please play clip 1 on *Video file 5 - DV8 2*

the performers 'play' the 'game' with the audience that lies between being there/not-there. Claid picks up on this element of Newson's work in reflections upon his performance work: 'The many different personae he embodied became complex layers of ambiguous memories, diffusing any real identity of Lloyd' (Claid 2006: 160).

This particular facet of 'game' 'play' within the construct of 'dance theatre', as exemplified by DV8's work raises questions regarding understanding and articulation of 'absorption' seen as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' for the performer in 'dance theatre'. In particular, exploration of the 'intention', 'awareness' and 'perception' of the performer as they engage in the 'action' of the performance score are critical to navigating this terrain. As before, discussion and analysis of these areas, and related topics will form the content of Chapter Seven.

Chapter 6 - Charlotte Vincent and Vincent Dance Theatre: Blending the disciplines

This chapter focuses upon the performance and practice of Vincent Dance Theatre. As with the previous chapters on Bausch and DV8, the purpose of the chapter is to examine the work of the company in order to highlight areas of practice useful to developing an understanding and articulation of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer in performance. With this in mind, the following points are of particular interest within the practice of VDT: firstly, it is useful to note the idea of the 'lived body' as the inscribed site for VDT's performance, secondly and relatedly is the idea of the 'real' within performance, and thirdly, I introduce here the idea of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' within the work of the performer in the 'playspace' (to be explored and explained through this chapter). Stemming from this, it is then useful to explore the relationship of the performer in VDT's work to the sonic environment, including within this the performer's use of, and relationship to, spoken and recorded text. Finally, I wish to explore the idea of 'play' and 'game' within the work as being useful to developing articulation and understanding of 'absorption' for the performer.

Similarly to the previous company-specific chapters, whilst these points of interest will be used to structure the discussion to follow, it is possible to group the various selected aspects of VDT's work here under one or more these areas as they are manifested in relation to, and through interdependence upon, each other. Consequently, any divisions made are undertaken solely for the purpose of effectively managing this discourse.

However, this chapter is a development and enhancement of the work in the previous two chapters in two primary respects: firstly, in the nature of the video files used in the chapter, and secondly, in the position of myself as researcher in relation to the work being discussed. Whereas in the previous chapters I have taken extracts from performance work already within the public domain and then re-framed, re-positioned and re-presented this material in line with the wider aims of the study, within this chapter I present and frame entirely new material which presents the practice of Vincent Dance Theatre. This material is a distillation of a period of field research spanning the devising and rehearsal process for VDT's 2009 piece *If We Go On*. As such it is a unique and original documentation of the process to performance for VDT. This field research consequently provides this chapter and the wider study with an ethnographic perspective. Unlike the previous two chapters, which draw upon a wealth of documentation and perspectives taken from a wide body of thinkers, critics and practitioners, this chapter foregrounds and emphasises my own experience and reflections upon the nature of the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On*. This perspective is placed alongside a body of literature defined by its relative exiguousness when compared to that which accompanies the work of Bausch or DV8.¹⁴²

Given the opportunity presented by this period of field research to develop and extend the study of material in the previous two chapters with original research and also to corroborate my observations and reflections with interviews, it is

¹⁴² As a pertinent aside, it is also perhaps useful to note that this study has been completed through part-time engagement from 2006-2014. In that extended period of research and investigation, the literature surrounding Vincent Dance Theatre still remains scarce. Alongside the ongoing relevance of the study to current directions in performance research, the written content and the accompanying video files focused upon Vincent Dance Theatre represent a significant contribution to the documentation and literature surrounding this company.

useful to briefly summarise the aims of the field research and remind the reader/viewer of the conditions of the fieldwork.

The aim of the field research was to observe and document the process and performance work of a contemporary company working in the canon and genealogical line of 'dance theatre'. The reason behind wanting to undertake this field research was to generate a body of first-hand evidence, including my own experience of being in the shared 'playspace' of the devising and rehearsal room of the performers, which might be used to extend, corroborate and provide an additional perspective to the focus of the study. In addition, as is noted above, the scarcity of documentation and research focused upon the work of Charlotte Vincent and Vincent Dance Theatre in comparison to that focused upon the work of Bausch or DV8 highlights a definite gap in the study of prominent contemporary practices. Consequently, the chance to document the process and early performances of *If We Go On* was highly serendipitous. It presented both an opportunity to develop the richness of the data and information of the study and, simultaneously, to create documentation of an under-addressed area through development of new material, new knowledge and a visual resource that will be of use to researchers in the future.

The fieldwork was undertaken over a ten-week period. On average, I visited the company once a week, spending the day filming with them. I was welcomed into the devising and rehearsal space and took up an unobtrusive spot near what became the 'front' of the space. I arrived with the performers and filmed almost constantly throughout each day. During my work with the company, I also documented my impressions of the devising and rehearsal space, and the

building it was situated within.¹⁴³ During breaks, which were often worked around the dynamic of the process (if the company were in the middle of something, the break for lunch may have been delayed), I was able to capture short interviews with some of the company, including brief conversations with Vincent herself. Whilst this slightly *ad hoc* opportunity to speak with the performers impeded me in some ways (I was not able to speak in a consistently structured manner with all performers) it is very reflective of the slightly unpredictable nature of the devising and rehearsal dynamic that Vincent employed. Whilst there was always structure, Vincent always held the ability to take the exploration of the room down a different avenue. I remain highly struck by exactly how responsive the process was, with each day following a structure, but with Vincent shaping and adjusting constantly, highly attuned to the task of steering the ‘thing’ in the process of becoming without destroying it, or blocking it. In addition, mindful of the *modus operandi* and the framework for engagement provided by Hulton (outlined in the section on methodology in the introduction to this study) I was also careful not to actively shape the ‘action’ in the devising and rehearsal space. In keeping with an ethnographic approach to this fieldwork, I sought to adopt a stance which worked with, and passively engaged in, the multi-layered live process of devising. In doing this, as highlighted in the introduction I positioned myself as *alongside* the material.

The body of unedited film footage was then selected and edited, alongside the footage focusing on Bausch and DV8, and condensed into the films forming the accompanying material of this study. Whilst the material does contain extracts from performance of *If We Go On*, the significant majority of the video footage

¹⁴³ To see these impressions, please play *Video file 6 – VDT 1*

for this chapter consist of material taken from the rehearsal and devising process, rather than the performance.

VDT and the 'lived body'

In conversation during the making of *If We Go On*, Vincent acknowledged that her work, whilst resolutely retaining its feminist principles, has also subtly shifted in some ways since the company started in 1994. In congruence with the wider theatrical scene emerging from Sheffield in the late 1980's and early 1990's, the earlier work of VDT pushed against the established scene of the time, presenting socially reflective work stemming from the personal narrative and politics of Vincent. This fusion of the personal and an emphatic connection to, and critique of, the wider societal picture remains. However, during the process of creating *If We Go On*, Vincent indicated a move from the fiercely and overtly feminist stance taken in the choreography of *Intercourse* (1994) and the interrogation of sexual and gender politics in work such as *Punch Drunk* (1994, restaged in 2004) to creating work that contains an increased sense of autobiography, such as *Broken Chords* (2006). This piece arose out of Vincent's personal experience of divorce. However, far from being over-indulgent stories of self, this is autobiography framed as socially pertinent, existential questions aimed at the audience, the performers and Vincent herself. There is a sense of temporal immediacy in the work. This can also be seen in *If We Go On*. Ostensibly a piece about questioning the process and purpose of making work as a more mature practitioner, the piece is characteristically multi-layered, containing shadows of many other themes and resonances. *If We Go On* pushes both performers and audience to consider things and moments that cannot be returned to: the points, opportunities and moments in life that have

been lost and cannot be regained. Any sense of autobiography contained within the process and piece was not so much in the past tense, but reflected happenings through, and in, the process of making, with Vincent continually tying these happenings to larger issues of loss, regret and public failure by dramaturgically connecting her personal questions and those of her collaborators and performers to wider themes. The work remains at once deeply personal and yet strikes universal chords.

The roots of VDT's politics can also be found in its core values: 'creativity, diversity, responsibility, inclusivity and action' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2013c). It is the way in which the company, and Vincent in particular, practices the art and craft of 'dance theatre' and performance making which helps demonstrate the manner in which the content of the work is inscribed onto the 'lived body' of the performer. So, whilst Vincent takes the societal issues that she encounters, and combines these with personal experiences laid bare in the work, mirroring the type of 'very personal investigation' (Newson 1993: 13) created by Lloyd Newson, one sees that the resulting performance work is an embodied proactive commentary and reflection upon the task of trying to do life (including making performance) in a way that best exemplifies the core values of the company; echoing the investment of the self of the performer in other iterations of 'dance theatre' there is no separation between personal and professional for Vincent at this point. A useful example of the way in which this is realised is shown by reflecting upon a facet of the process for *If We Go On*.

One of the ongoing points of research, interest and contention for Vincent is how the dance profession uses and supports female performers during and

after maternity, and also how the profession regards and engages older female performers. VDT has a number of ongoing research projects focused upon these concerns, collaborating with other groups and organisations.¹⁴⁴

In keeping with the questioning themes of *If We Go On*, Vincent had aimed for the piece to include performance by more experienced, older female performers. However, the eventual company only included three female performers: Patrycja Kujawska, Carly Best and Aurora Lubos¹⁴⁵, all of whom were under thirty-three at the time the piece was created. The older female performers declined to perform in the piece, or left the piece during the process. Reflecting upon developments during one of my visits earlier in the process, Vincent noted:

For me, it's a real metaphor for how I'm feeling, why Wendy [Houstoun] didn't want to be in it in the end, why Claire [McDonald] didn't want to be in it in the end, why Liz [Aggiss] didn't want to be in it in the end. I think all of us, who are sort of past thirty-five have real questions about how we want to spend our time and how much trolling around we want to do, and touring is essentially a young person's game [...] this piece originally was designed to present the voice of mature female practitioners and now we're down to three women, all of whom are under the age of 33.

(Vincent, pers. comm. 2009)

¹⁴⁴ Projects include: Parenthood and Pregnancy in Dance; The Table (an association of experienced female practitioners working across disciplines) and the Female Choreographers Collective. A full list with more detail can be found at <http://www.vincentdt.com/projects/female-practice/index.html>

¹⁴⁵ Lubos had recently given birth. Vincent was very supportive of the needs of Lubos and her newborn child during the process for *If We Go On*. The baby can be seen in the studio in *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 1:37 - 2:43.

Vincent felt like she was failing in her aim of presenting the female voice as she had set out to do. However, *If We Go On*, by having the mature female voice present in the text of the piece (Wendy Houstoun), the dramaturgy for the piece (Ruth Ben Tovim) and ultimately the direction for the piece (Vincent herself), the piece became, almost *via negativa*, an acutely 'actualised' and embodied metaphor for the current state of the industry. The issues with which Vincent grappled, and most significantly *how* she was grappling and encountering them were voiced through the position of the older female body within the work. The absence of mature female performers spoke volumes and became an embodied absence in the eventual performing company.

In other writing, Vincent herself has reflected upon the physical effects of the touring lifestyle and the lasting inscriptions upon her body this career has wrought:

I've had, physiotherapy, reflexology, massage therapy, hydrotherapy and hypnotherapy to soothe the pain, but all that crashing and burning leaves me, age 43, feeling amputated by injury [...] Claire [Macdonald] and I have retreated into words. In *Traces of Her* we shift and shunt and choreograph words instead of bodies. We make do. Things stand in for things. We are left with just the traces – an outline of our former physicality. We know our own strengths, inside and out.

(Vincent, in McCaw 2011: 264)

In the example of *If We Go On*, and in Vincent's reflections, we again see the inscribed 'lived body' as the embodiment of the message being carried by the performers, with, in the instance of *If We Go On*, the absent body as present becoming a voice; present in textual form as an 'actualised' metaphor pointing to a wider theme.

Again, whilst, out of all the companies profiled within this study, VDT perhaps lean heaviest upon the *live* inclusion of other disciplines within their shows (the inclusion of music, sound and spoken/sung text will be explored shortly), the positioning of the inscribed 'lived body' as dominant and as the locus for performance remains. This again has implications for the performer and for the manners and ways in which 'absorption' might be realised in performance, to be unpicked in the analysis in Chapter Seven.

VDT and the 'real'

The notion of the inscribed 'lived body' functioning as an 'actualised' metaphor within performance work from VDT also points to discussion of the 'real' within their work. Recognising the notion of VDT's 'real' as being congruent with that of Bausch and DV8, there are several aspects of its manifestation here pertinent to developing an understanding of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer.

Liz Tomlin, of Point Blank (with whom Vincent has also collaborated) notes that the notion of the 'real' is revisited in the work of the Sheffield scene of the 1990s.¹⁴⁶ In what can perhaps now be seen as the beginnings of work that has become recognised as part of the movement in the 1990s towards Lehmann's

¹⁴⁶ Vincent worked as movement director in Point Blank's *Nothing to Declare* (2001).

post-dramatic, the 'real' in VDT's work took on presentation of the physically 'real'. In a move that was also mirrored in the work of DV8, 'action' was not designed to display, or pretend, or to constitute stylised mimicry, but rather was designed to be an 'actualised' metaphor realised through the 'lived experience' of the performer with 'actual' or 'real' consequences. Tomlin notes that the presentation of the physically 'real' was most effective when 'exploited by shows which also celebrated a high level of technical control, such as the throwing of eggs in Vincent Dance Theatre's *Falling From The High Rise Of Love*, (1999)' (Tomlin 2004: 507). The successful use of the 'real' can also be seen again in VDT's *Drop Dead Gorgeous* (2001). Reflecting upon the fact that the September 11th attacks in America occurred during the making of this piece, Vincent remarks in the show: 'So, what to show? What to hide behind the wall? As our ability to play in the current climate became more loaded, so the act of performance becomes more hazardous - physically risky and emotionally confusing (Vincent Dance Theatre 2013b).

The 'real' in this piece is also emphasised by the staging of the work. In a design echoing a Bauschian use of space, the dancers move on a tonne and a half of grey slate covering the floor. A concrete, tangible sense of the theatricalised 'real' is once again clearly present for the dancers in their 'lived experience' of every move.

The 'real' positioned as 'actual' in Vincent's work also finds voice in the manner in which *If We Go On* was created, and in the manner that the process of creation led to the subsequent performance content being a continuance of this

process; the effort and attempt of the performers to *do* performance created as 'actualised' performative expression.

A key aspect of the devising and rehearsal process for this piece was Vincent's purposeful concentration and insistence on 'task' and 'action', not drama. In various conversations across my visits Vincent acknowledged that her natural tendency was towards creating dramatic expression. One of the central questions posed by *If We Go On* grappled with the problem of what might happen if the performers started from a point of not doing that which they usually did - essentially staying away from their tricks, learned habits and the comfort of competency and talent. Through a concentration on 'task', Vincent actively steered the process of the performers towards 'action' rather than a comfortable and competent dramatic expression. Throughout the process Vincent experimented with positioning the mechanics of making and its mistakes, frustrations and failures as performance content. However, her insistence on 'action', rather than drama, required the performers to 'actually' lose their way, to risk 'real' failure, to 'really' question self-competence and purpose.

This focus initially manifested itself not only in a seemingly endless succession of lists describing things for the performers to do – lists centred around 'tasks' of risk or repetition, or containing confessional and semi-autobiographical detail. These lists and 'tasks' were worked and reworked until the nature of their provocation to the performer and the response of the performer became explicit, realised as the core of actual 'lived experience' for the performer onstage. What Vincent remained interested in as 'action' was not necessarily

the 'task' itself (although this was important) but the evidence of the performer's genuine 'lived experience' of the *attempt* at the 'task'.¹⁴⁷

This emphasis again places the 'lived body' and the inscriptions upon it created by the 'tasks' of the performance as central to the mode of expression used by Vincent's 'dance theatre'. Both in rehearsal and performance, *If We Go On* was not about the performers representing a mimetic reflection of experience at each performance (essentially playing as-if) but instead focusing upon the attempt of the performers to *do* the piece and that, in this living and embodying, the 'actual' attempt at doing in each performance or run *became* the doing.¹⁴⁸

This focus on the 'real' through 'actual' 'task' and 'action' configured as effort and attempt to perform away from the comfort zone of the performers, coupled with the positioning of this attempt as the performance content itself, fostered an 'actual' and profound sense of uncertainty and not knowing. As the notes accompanying the production explain: 'The dark stretches before us. There are people waiting. We would like to show you something, but we are not sure how... The dark stretches before us, but here we are, faced with the question, how do we go on? *If We Go On* [...] embraces uncertainty, hesitancy and not knowing' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2009). This sense of not knowing, of uncertainty and of 'stumbling in the dark' was made 'actual' and embodied by the nature of the process to performance and the structural and devising methodologies of Vincent.

¹⁴⁷ Please play *Video file 7 - VDT 2* from the start of the file to 2:59

¹⁴⁸ Please play *Video file 8 - VDT 3* from 16:20 - 20:54

Up until the point where the shape of the work began to make itself apparent, the focus was entirely on devising, interrogating, questioning and generating material. This included working with material from the earlier research and development stages, taking sections of text from Wendy Houston, Vincent herself or the cast, or working through and with devised music, sound loops, and phrases of movement and text. This material would then be, in Vincent's words, 'bashed together to see what happens'. This would occur through lengthy improvisations which focused upon the efforts of the performers to make it through the improvisation and the list of 'tasks' they were required to attempt and complete. These 'tasks' would occur in a variety of combinations and patterns, often finding resonances and relationships seemingly by chance. Structurally, then, the shape of the process and the structural manner in which material of varying natures was interrogated and 'played' with, gave rise to a devising situation that positively welcomed and worked actively with the absent, the unknown, and the 'just for the moment'.

It was clear to see that, in turn, this facet of the work gave rise to an intense and genuine struggle in the performers as they tried to assimilate, 'play' with, or simply complete the 'tasks' set them by a shifting performance text and score. At several points this often became too much. In these moments, the performers would openly stop, regroup, work out where they collectively were and then resume. The score remained fluid from moment to moment and, to a certain extent, was propelled by 'accidents' as different phrases, sounds, and sections collided and met in the moment of experimentation. All of this was to be managed by the performers whilst 'playing' and responding to and with each other and in-the-moment direction from Vincent. As an observer, particularly in

the earlier visits, I witnessed the performers genuinely grapple with being lost, unseated and unsure of what was happening next or where they were going. There was a simple and overwhelming 'attention' and 'awareness' expended by the performers upon the 'task' of the moment and marriage of this to the activity of the wider 'playspace' from moment to moment. Inherent in the focus upon the idea of attempt was also the recognition of the value and interest associated with failure onstage.¹⁴⁹ The questions surrounding the potential risk associated with actual public failure again also became an integral part of the eventual performance score.¹⁵⁰ Vincent's interest and insistence of the prominence of 'actual' 'action' and 'actual' potential for failure and the 'actual' attempt of the performers to undertake a performance score which runs the risk of 'actual' vulnerability creates it as a highly useful example of the 'real' and the 'actual' in 'dance theatre' practice. The working practices of the process, the resulting structure of the devising process and the eventual shifting structure and thematic content of the performed piece itself all have resonance for an emerging idea of 'absorption' in this context. Discussion of these aspects of *If We Go On*, and other related examples of performance from VDT's wider repertoire, will feature in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

'Disciplinary synaesthesia'.

The manner in which the devising process and the resulting performance work of VDT foregrounds and values the contribution of the individual and their range of specialisms and talents gives rise to a company stage language, again sitting in congruence with those of the companies emerging from Sheffield in the

¹⁴⁹ Please play *Video file 7 - VDT 2* from 4:34 - 5:45

¹⁵⁰ For instance, as the performers near the close of the piece, a short lament is struck up through choral singing. This fades slowly into whispers and then silence as Patricja Kujawska quite openly and directly addresses the audience: 'This is shit, isn't it? I'm shit'. This section arose directly from the devising process and the tangible possibility of actual failure. A clear element of risk was present for the performers throughout the process and the piece.

1990s, that crosses and blends art forms as it draws on the experiences and backgrounds of the performers. This overwhelming notion of a focused, deliberate multiplicity in Vincent's work, and the sense that it resolutely and joyously defies consistent and meaningful classification positions it as being composed theatre, theatricalised purposeful dance-and-movement-with-meaning, and physical music. I am defining this movement between, and fusion of, music, theatre, dance, text, and song in Vincent's work as 'disciplinary synaesthesia'; a phrase to add to the lexicon of terminology that will be utilised in the discussion and analysis of later chapters.¹⁵¹ This 'disciplinary synaesthesia' carries a biting social and political commentary, yet is charged entertainment with a deeply personal core. It is theatrical and poetic, yet post-dramatic and stripped to the essentials. It is real, yet dream-like; a fused sense of 'total' theatre.

The idea of the performer able to work in a state of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' is significant in developing an understanding of the nature of 'absorption' in this context. 'Disciplinary synaesthesia' is realised and finds articulation through a number of points in the work of VDT, to be explored below.

'Disciplinary synaesthesia' in VDT's 'playspace'

A key aspect in the facilitation of the performers working in a state of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' is the way Vincent configures the physical 'playspace'. As with Bausch and DV8, Vincent creates 'playspaces' for performance that are theatricalised spaces positioned as separate from the

¹⁵¹ I am in part drawing and re-appropriating elements of this term from Josephine Machon's (2009) *(Syn)aesthetics*. Machon uses this term to fuse an aesthetic appreciation and critical discourse with an understanding of the neurological condition of synaesthesia in which; 'one sense is stimulated which automatically and simultaneously causes a stimulation in another of the senses' (Machon 2009: 13).

everyday, creating a 'liminal meta-actuality' on stage. Echoing Bausch's non-literal dramatized environments in which her performers could 'play', Vincent's 'reality' can be seen as an 'actualised' contemporary expressionism. It is multi-layered and often contains oppositional elements. However, whilst Vincent also positions her spaces as functional, they are also unusually responsive to the performers. The performers interact with and live in the 'playspace', actively shaping the scenography. In *Drop Dead Gorgeous*, (2001) the 'action' is dominated by the grey slate upon which it occurs. Echoing a Bauschian sense of cabaret, the 'action' that does occur is executed in glamorous costumes and high heels, providing a sharp sense of juxtaposition with the slate. In conversation with Thoms, Vincent says;

'In our work we are constantly trying to wrong-foot an audience by giving them something very funny and then undercutting it with something darker. Or giving something that has quite a personal meaning and then doing something completely and wildly abstract that has no meaning at all.'

(Thoms 2004: 44)

Similarly, in *Broken Chords* (2006) the backdrop for a largely bare stage was a pile of old wooden school chairs stacked floor to ceiling. Chairs are moved and 'played-with' by the performers throughout the piece.

The physical staging for *If We Go On* takes the performer's ability to shape and reshape the space a stage further. The 'playspace' is lit by a number of bare hanging light bulbs. At various points in the piece all the bulbs are moved and

manipulated by the performers. The switches to each of these lights, which provide the primary source of illumination for the piece, are also all 'actually' controlled for 'real' onstage by the performers. The back wall for this piece is a floor-to-ceiling blackboard upon which selected audio and visual elements of the composition of the piece are drawn in chalk as the piece progresses. This wall is also amplified so that movement in, on, or near the wall triggers sonic output during periods of the work. Far from being slick, this set creates an aesthetic that moves away from the polished and the big budget towards a grounded sense of poetic functionalism. This functionalism presents the performers and their actions as stripped down and stripped back in a space that is itself devoid of anything illusory. Carrying Bauschian echoes, the performer's interaction with and manipulation of audio-visual scenography and physical space in this context invites a tangible and shifting presence of the functionalised 'actual' into the space. The effect gained is one of the performers working openly and honestly, directing their 'intentionality' and 'awareness' towards their attempts to communicate something with the audience; it is possible to see the workings of what happens.

The extent to which the performers were able to 'play-with' and shape the 'playspace' in *If We Go On* creates a very malleable environment in which the inscribed performers are working through the 'lived experience' of multivalent 'action' in the space. Work in one medium easily transfers or shifts into expression in another. Again echoing the sometimes dissonant fusion of Bausch's works, the seemingly contradictory aesthetic of 'playspace' for *If We Go On* invites 'disciplinary synaesthesia' by blending spoken text, song, music, a live soundscape, movement and a responsive physical space backed by an

amplified ceiling to floor blackboard. *If We Go On* was a 'dance theatre' piece in which multiple mediums and disciplines were proactively and performatively intertwined in a highly poetic functional anti-theatricality.

In relation to the points above, specific examples from *If We Go On* which have a significant impact upon the idea of the performer's 'absorption' in the 'task' of doing the performance will be picked up shortly. However, in anticipation of these examples, an additional focus upon the sonic environment of the 'playspace' and its contribution to the idea of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' will be useful to explore. The particularly dominant role auditory elements played in the devising and rehearsal journey for *If We Go On* and the way in which these elements were created, and 'played-with' in in the final piece, is again useful to consider in respect of the wider focus of the thesis.

'Disciplinary synaesthesia' and the sonic environment

To begin this discussion, it is useful to contextualise the use of sound, music and also text as a rhythmical tool and artefact within performance of *If We Go On* by examining Vincent's relationship and that of her performers with the sonic element of performance in her other works. VDT's website describes the work of the company as 'dance theatre work' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2013c) although in conversation during the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On*, Vincent herself used the term 'experimental theatre' to describe the current work. Within this setting, an ongoing concentration and focus of Vincent's work is the use of live music as a recurrent convention and aesthetic. It is clear that consideration of music and sound are integral to the process of creation. In the

2008 'Dance Umbrella' event, 'A Feeling for Practice', Vincent noted that she no longer distinguished

the act of making choreography from the act of making music in the devising of new work. I think what I do these days is gather a group of practitioners together who cover all the bases – theatre, song, music, dance, writing and performance – and hope that I can steer a path through a devising process that may encompass all or some of these forms in one work.

(Vincent 2008)

Several of her collaborators, most notably Alexandru Catona and Patrycja Kujawska, are skilled multi-disciplinarians with significant training and performance expertise in music. In the same event Vincent explained that, 'VDT's core collaborators, including Patrycja and Janusz, exemplify the kind of independent actors, dancers and musicians who work with individual intelligence in dance. They can multi-task and are multi-skilled' (Vincent 2008). We see this expertise blended with the action across Vincent's repertoire. *Broken Chords* (2005) made full use of the virtuosic talents of Kujawska and Catona with a haunting musical score played live on stage, whilst *Motherland* (2012) again features the guitar of Scott Smith. In *If We Go On*, this drawing together and fusing of different elements of performance went one stage further, in that the concentration on presenting a dance piece was removed. In keeping with thematics and central questions of the work, Vincent worked hard not to repeat previous creative journeys:

“This is not really a dance show,” she says quite bluntly - and when you've seen it you understand exactly what she means, for although the piece does feature music and movement, it also has big moments of dialogue and a pure theatricality [...] The result is something that in effect dismantles many of the things that an audience might expect of contemporary dance theatre.

(Highfield 2009)

From the outset of my documentation of the process for *If We Go On*, Vincent was insistent and clear that the ‘playspace’ of the performance area, and all the technology, lighting, musical instruments and other functional elements contained within the space should be ‘actually’ created and operated by the performers. Consequently all sonic material was either created and worked with live or was the result of composition from the process (for example a sound, or a drum beat). This was then cued, operated and ‘played-with’ live by the performers. This insistence that the performers were the ones that held complete power over the generation of the sonic elements of the performance and its continuance had a profound effect upon the nature of the ‘playspace’ in this piece and the manner in which the performers interacted with, and worked within, this ‘enactive’ domain.

Firstly, this sonic responsibility infused the warm-up I witnessed on each of my visits. The warm-up for each day was conducted individually by the performers. I never witnessed a group class before devising or rehearsal. Instead, the warm-up was always infused with live music. It would usually be Scott Smith and Alex Catona playing on instruments during this period. As the performers

with perhaps more responsibility for the creation of sound for the piece, they would improvise and play music and sound during the warm-up.¹⁵² Sometimes this would be connected to the piece, or come directly from the piece. The music would sometimes comment on the activities of the process and the mood of the week¹⁵³. However, whilst actually constituting a technical set up for the day and providing a warm up for Catona and Smith, I noted that the music and sound created during the warm up also aided in setting the atmosphere for the ensuing work. What I note is that the sonic environment created through the warm up, which then sometimes spilled directly into the beginning of the ‘tasks’ for the day, was instrumental in creating and demarcating the ‘playspace’ as a liminal environment aside from the everyday and designated specifically for the collective endeavour of making.

The effect that the performance parameter placed by Vincent on making the performance technically and operationally ‘self-sufficient’ had upon the ‘actual’ configuration of the ‘playspace’ in the acting of devising, rehearsal and performance itself was that it aided in creating the ‘actual’ fundamental fabric of the space as something which was not fixed and was something with which the performers felt that they could ‘play’. Within this sense of the ‘playful’, there was a continual stream of sonic avenues to for the performers to explore. There was the potential for experimentation with amplified rhythmical sound and music (sung and played on traditional instruments such as the cello and violin), and there was the possibility of drawing upon non-traditional ‘instruments’ such as the loop station. There was also electronic sound created by the physical interaction of the performers with the physical environment. The most notable

¹⁵² Please play *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from the start of the file to 6:07

¹⁵³ For instance, Smith’s comments that they will play ‘songs in the key of strife’ in the footage on *Video file 8 – VDT 3*.

example of this is seen in a duet between Orlik and Best, taking place against the back wall of the playing space.¹⁵⁴ The wall itself is amplified. The resulting noise from their physical contact with the wall is captured through microphones and fed into a mixing desk where Alex Catona then 'plays-with' the tonality, pitch and aural shape of the sound, 'actually' creating this live in each performance. In tandem with this, the final performance score saw this duet accompanied by a long piece of live spoken text delivered by Smith.

With this level of sonic possibility inherent in the very construction of the space, the 'playspace' of the performance is again created as unusually responsive across the various 'perceptions' of the performer. Furthermore, as a consequence of its continual reshaping by the performers it remains highly changeable and shifting in its composition.

When these characteristics of the space are intertwined with the parameter of the performers being the operators and instigators of this environment, the concentration of the performers on the 'task' of doing becomes ever more apparent. It is an 'absorbing' separate world through its responsiveness, and yet 'absorbingly' 'actual' in its demand upon the performer to do and create the 'actual' sonic and auditory environment of the performance score.

So, for all performers in *If We Go On*, the consideration of sound, particularly its creation, organisation and transmission became a dominant factor. The level of technical organisation and equipment preparation before a given section was rehearsed or presented was considerable. The 'task' of then performatively dealing with the individual 'tasks' associated with sonic elements of the work

¹⁵⁴ Please play *Video file 6 – VDT 1* from 6:04 - 11:47.

became not something that simply facilitated a performance condition, but something that became a very central part of the performer's 'attention' and 'awareness' within the particular 'playspace' of *If We Go On*. As it was created by the performers through 'conversation' with each other, the sonic environment was at no point a backdrop to the 'action'; sound did not accompany the performance, rather its creation was at the very heart of the interplay between performers, and between performers and onlookers (later the audience).

This echoes a previously noted comment from Vincent regarding the relationship of music to the process of creation; it is entirely intertwined and embedded within the creative act. Fittingly, the performers did not dance or move to the sound, but with and through the sound, using the 'disciplinary synaesthesia' of this interplay in a creative loop with the movement and text. The sonic environment was central to the language of the 'action' and interaction. The very live-ness of the piece and the way in which performers reacted to and 'played-with' each other and remained connected and 'aware' had an emphatically sonic element to its constituency. Examples picking up the earlier points regarding the responsive nature of the 'playspace' and its contribution to a sense of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' in the work and, within this, the impact of the sonic elements of the environment of how this in performance can be seen on the video files in two sections.

Firstly, it can be seen in the manner in which Aurora Bolis works with what became known as the 'Pina Text'.¹⁵⁵ In this section, taken from rehearsal, Bolis is recounting the names of performers who have inspired her and with whom she wishes she could have worked. As she speaks the names into the

¹⁵⁵ Please play *Video file 8 – VDT 3* 8:12 - 10:24

microphone, her voice is recorded, fed through a loop station and then played back to her. The effect is of disembodied names surrounding her, like so many ghosts. It is possible to see Bolis, enveloped in a sonic 'bubble' for the duration of this section, physically 'place' these disembodied voices in the 'playspace' and then begin to interact, 'play-with' and react to her own voice as it is played back to her. As Bolis continues, her interactions are also then recorded, looped and played back with a cumulative effect; she continues to feed off, converse with and react with the sonic environment she is creating, giving it physical positioning within the liminal meta-actuality' of the 'playspace'. As this was created anew for each performance, Bolis was able to find resonances and new relationships between herself and her looped voice as she encountered 'lived experience' which presented difference at each staging.

Secondly the 'disciplinary synaesthesia' in the performer's relationship with sound can be seen in the section known as 'The Storm'.¹⁵⁶ In this section which builds a sense of sonic and physical disorder and chaos, there are many layers to the sound, all of which are created and 'played-with' live by the performers. The initial drone is taken from movements against the back wall. This is soon augmented by tense picked notes from the violin played by Kujawska and the panicked clicking of the bare light bulbs being 'actually' switched on and off by all performers. The sound of breath fed through a loop station is then added to this as snatches of sound and text from previous points in the piece are brought into play. This moves slowly to a crescendo, which becomes increasingly cacophonous and all-embracing in its assault.

¹⁵⁶ Please play *Video file Vincent Film 8 - VDT 3* from 10:25 - 16:20

In both these sections I noted that the sonic elements of the piece become very pervasive and immersive. As an observer, I felt at times hypnotised, engulfed, mesmerised and even overwhelmed by the sound. I also experienced this at other points in the piece, most notably, during a particular lament presented by Alex Catona on the cello.¹⁵⁷ Even in the quieter moments (in terms of decibels), or in moments that were sonically calmer, or stiller, the presence of the sound and the rhythm contained within it was tangible. The sound created by the performers held a sonic mass or a magnitude, placing it at the centre of the 'action' and work of the performers. The sonic thread of the performance and process facilitated a mode of communication in which the performers became servants to a narrative larger than the sum of its constituent parts. The sonic elements of the work created were not only intense, but they also continue to occupy a place in my perceptual memory of the work as a whole which is that of a tangible yet shifting 'glue' of the work.

As an onlooker experiencing the sound during rehearsal, at times I felt that the versatility of the performers also induced a further sense of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' in which the performers communicated using the various components or layers of the work. At points of heightened 'play' and engagement in the work, I observed that there seemed to be a 'coming together' of sound, movement and rhythm in conversation. At these points, the dominant mode of conversation, the 'intentionality' and 'awareness' held between the performers (and latterly between the performers and the audience) and the element that held the moment of 'action' at any one time, shifted balance continually. One moment may be driven by verbally spoken text, which was complemented by movement. Then, in a series of fluid shifts and changes,

¹⁵⁷ As previously seen in *Video file Vincent Film 8 - VDT 3* from 16:20 - 20:54

it became writing that echoed music, or drawings that echoed and instigated movement. It was at these points of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' as the performers worked with each other across a shifting, interweaving pattern of mediums that I experienced as an observer the environment becoming acutely 'actual' and intently liminal to the point of 'absorptive' immersion for the performers.

The sense of the 'synaesthetic' within the environment is also picked up by Scott Smith.¹⁵⁸ Smith talks about it being necessary to have a sense of dialogue and response with the space. He includes music in his understanding of space. Similarly, in reflecting upon a section of performance labelled as 'The Quiz Show', Carly Best comments in interview about the relationship and communication between her 'perception' and 'awareness' of the sound from the loop station (Kujawska's breath loop from the storm) and her own use of the rhythm in her breath in creating and 'playing-with' this moment.¹⁵⁹ Best describes this as 'finding the game'.

'Disciplinary synaesthesia' through text and rhythm

The rhythms and interplay in the performance of spoken or sung text within the performance score of *If We Go On* and the particular uses of textual rhythm in conjunction with music in performance also aided in drawing out a sense of 'disciplinary synaesthesia'. Vincent worked extensively with text. She used that which arose from the earlier research and development phase, that which arrived from Wendy Houstoun (the writer) in response to 'state of play' conversations from day to day, and that which was generated by the performers

¹⁵⁸ Please play *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 6:07 - 8:11

¹⁵⁹ Please play *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 20:55 to the end of the file.

through improvisation, creative sessions and discussion within the actual devising process.

I observed Vincent 'playing-with' text during the devising process in ways that configured it as an 'object'. It was a 'thing' to be torn up, reconstituted or tested in combination with other elements of performance to find its usefulness beyond the meaning contained within its words and sentences.¹⁶⁰ One way in which text was positioned as an 'object' during devising was the use of it as a rhythmical device. It became a trigger and a method used to construct and deconstruct meaning in the work. In one example of devising work we see Henry Montes, Scott Smith and Alex Catona 'playing-with' a piece of text-as-object.¹⁶¹ Under direction and through discussion with Vincent (Vincent explicitly says, '[w]e don't want conversation'), they focus on exploring its rhythms and cadences, with Smith later playing a guitar to bring a repetitive plucked chord sequence to the text.

In a further example, we see Alex Catona 'playing-with' a section of text, which, at the time was being considered as a possible prologue.¹⁶² Although the meaning and sense in this passage is more evident, Catona's delivery remains quite flat, does not foreground a dramatized reading and retains a dominant focus upon the rhythm and rhyme within this mock-Shakespearian verse. Using and playing with text in this manner positions it an 'object' to be handled and shaped; it becomes a sonic 'object' of the rehearsal space.

¹⁶⁰ Please play *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from the start until 4:01

¹⁶¹ Please play *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 4:01 until 6:58

¹⁶² Please play *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 6:59 - 8:54

Positioning text as an 'object' expanded the scope of its potential uses and relationships for the performer. This increased potential allow the performers to use text in performance of *If We Go On* to make connections across mediums, highlight and find relationships and meeting points across the various aspects of performance and draw out the liminal, 'world apart' quality of the performance and the 'playspace' by again 'playing-with' the rhythms and weight within the words. In one example, we hear Scott Smith playing with the presentation of text which itself focuses on the issues of 'playing-with' language.¹⁶³ I observed that it was predominantly the sonic qualities and rhythm of text, and its rhythmical relationship with other elements of the moment at hand, in combination with the literal meaning that seemed to unlock resonances and an extended sense of 'awareness' and connection for the performers. Essentially, the textual rhythms and the manner in which text was used and 'played-with' in the piece often acted as a catalyst for 'disciplinary synaesthesia' to emerge, and for the performer to become connected to an extended sense of 'awareness' that appeared larger than the thematic content of the language itself. This sense of intertwining the various disciplines through the rhythm and meaning of the text to create a unified and total presentation of sound, text, movement and staging, produces a crafted meeting, or cohesion, is seen in a further example of text delivered by Smith, called the 'She Did Go On' text.¹⁶⁴ Here we see Smith's text become performatively greater than the sum of its parts, fusing both liminal and 'actual' qualities; the text operates as instigator, leading the audience to focus upon the movement of Bolis as the supposed 'she' of the text, whilst also drawing in the dreamlike music of Catona, Kujawska and Orlik

¹⁶³ Please play *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 20:25 to the end of the file.

¹⁶⁴ Please play *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 8:55 - 16:30

on various instruments. (Smith himself switches between delivery of text and mournful chords on the harmonica.)

Aside from its use in periods of 'disciplinary synaesthesia', text was also used in numerous points of direct address, becoming a tool with which to break down the fourth wall and render the audience as existing temporally and physically in the same 'actuality' as the performers. This text was often placed as explanatory, or functional. In one example we see Kujawska delivering a reflection on crippling performance anxiety directly to the audience.¹⁶⁵ Moreover the questions embedded within some of this text positioned the audience as complicit in the unfolding state of being for the performers; indeed they were explicitly positioned as part of the 'action' (it would not exist without them there to see it).¹⁶⁶

Finally, text was also employed as a tool with which to instigate, question or command 'action'. In the example of the 'Go Go Go Game' (a section of improvised 'game' from the devising process that was translated directly into the eventual performance text), the 'action' is 'actual', the results of Kujawska's command to her fellow performers to 'go' is 'real'.¹⁶⁷

In considering the possible influences of 'disciplinary synaesthesia' and within this the place of the sonic environment and the use of text and rhythm upon an emerging understanding of 'absorption' for the performer, points of particular interest are those focusing upon the relationship of the performer as they

¹⁶⁵ As previously viewed in *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 16:30 - 20:25.

¹⁶⁶ The fourth wall was non-existent from the very start of *If We Go On* through to its closing seconds, with the piece as a whole being framed by the direct address of Patrycja Kujawska and Aurora Lubos.

¹⁶⁷ Please see the 'Go Go Go Game' at 5:25 in *Video file 10 – VDT 5*.

undertake 'action' with these elements as positioned as object of 'intentionality' and, relatedly, the resulting 'awareness' and 'attention' of the performer within the enacted 'playspace'. Drawing upon instances of work noted in the accompanying video files alongside other examples of practice, these points will be picked up in the analysis of Chapter Seven.

'Play' and 'game'

The manifestation of 'play' and the structure of 'game' within Vincent's 'dance theatre' are central to the performer adopting a 'mode of doing' and a 'playfulness' in 'action' which might contribute to a pertinent understanding of 'absorption' for the performer. 'Play' and 'game' are things to which Vincent returned constantly throughout the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On*, continuing a recognised way of working that stretches across the body of VDT's work.¹⁶⁸ As VDT's publicity states: 'Productions emerge over a 10-week making period through structured, task-based improvisation, through discussion, writing, composing and play' (Vincent Dance Theatre 2013c). In documenting reflections on rehearsal work between the company and Vincent on my first visit to the process, Vincent talked about the particular qualities of spontaneity and vitality that 'play' brought to the piece, noting also that it was very difficult to recreate these moments, but that it was the job of the performers to do this. Vincent also spoke on the notion of 'game', seeing it as an interesting structural tool in creation and performance, offering a set of 'rules' or circumstances for a section of work within which the performers can 'play', and also as a means of drawing in spontaneity.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁸ For instance it is possible to see a game of a 'tag' in the section between Orlik and Howard in *On The House* (2003) whilst *Broken Chords* (2008) sees Lubos play a darkly comic game as she mournfully experiments with the task of committing suicide. Each increasingly inventive attempt meets with failure which is both pitiful and funny.

¹⁶⁹ Please play *Video file 10 – VDT 5* from the start of the file through to 5:25.

It would seem that one of Vincent's reason for using 'game', 'play' and improvisation as methodological devising tools within *If We Go On* was the sense of change, possibility, and the manifestation of the unexpected that engaging in these 'actions' produces. Vincent employed these devices at a fundamental level; the structure and organisation of temporal and physical space within the process for *If We Go On* helped to foster a creative environment that remained exploratory in its attitude, rather than working to polish through fixing. It worked (and continued to work into the performances of the piece itself), to uncover and reveal, creating a process and piece which remained in flux, changeable, impermanent and 'playful'. However, these traits were all consistently pointed towards a 'metastasis' with a clear understanding of investigative and performative parameters directed towards the eventual purpose of 'action' and 'task' as performance. Given this, it is possible to see the manner and way in which Vincent structured the devising and rehearsal process as a whole as being akin to a 'game' and therefore conducive to fostering a space in which the unforeseen may occur. There was a consistently crafted and deliberate nature to the way that 'accident' was induced by Vincent and recognised and used by the performers. Consequently the creative structure Vincent employed, coupled with the manner in which the space became a 'playspace' and a space within which to 'play' smaller 'games' had a profound effect on the work of the performers and their 'mode of doing/being' in the process, to be analysed further in Chapter Seven.

The general pattern for a day of work would be one that saw the company assemble in the morning, then, collating thoughts from the previous day, work

on or with material or emerging thoughts during the morning. After lunch there would typically be a gathering together of elements and some kind of run of generated material. There would then be reflection on this and further work on resultant thoughts. This structure gave rise to a clear sense of immersion and 'absorption' in the creative process for Vincent. Particularly during the opening stages of a session, she would often give one or more of the performers text, or material to work on which had been developed overnight in response to the work of the previous day. Although the space was tidied to a certain extent at the end of each day, there was also a clear sense of accumulation of material. The process and the state it was left in at the end of the day carried forward into the start of the next day, as represented by the paper and the lists and the detritus of the *mise-en-scène*.¹⁷⁰ What I wish to highlight is that, within a relatively ordered temporal structure, the gathering of material and reworking of material did not appear to be entirely ordered, and that this was deliberate. There were numerous occasions where the latest version of a given piece of text was misplaced and then found floating in amongst stacks of other pieces of paper on the desk on stage, or tucked into other lists and thoughts elsewhere in the space. This order of space and the tension in the rehearsal space between order and disorder was indicative of the tension in the actual methodology of the company between the relatively ordered rhythm of the day, and the prominent value given to the unpredictability of intuitive processes. The value placed upon the intuitive as a force within the process was also evident in the ways in which 'games' or 'tasks' would feed off each other, or interact. One set of 'tasks' or a 'game' would morph, slide into another, or be layered across another in the eventual performance. Vincent continually 'played-with' these relationships, bringing seemingly unconnected sections of material into contact

¹⁷⁰ Please play *Video file 6 – VDT 1* from the start until 6:03

with one another to 'bash them together', or putting unrelated fragments side by side openly acknowledging, in selecting and placing these things together, that the reason for selecting *this* to put with *that* was an intuitive process of feeling the possibilities of what might happen. The sense of 'game' and purposeful 'play' in the rehearsal and devising process, and the particular way it was implemented and worked with, again aided in creating a 'playspace' that was continually 'subject to change'. Vincent saw it as her role to facilitate an environment wherein 'accidents' can happen for the performers. The fact that the sometimes important pieces of paper (for instance) were placed alongside other unrelated things was just one element of a considered methodology for crafting and welcoming possibility, utilising serendipity as a driving creative force.

The 'game' and 'play' inherent in the 'action' of rehearsal and performance itself arose out of, or led into, extended improvisations. Vincent would frequently ask, 'What's the game?' I am reminded of a memorable instance from the process of *If We Go On*. On coming back from lunch, there was music being played in the space. Alex Catona was playing and improvising with text and music not necessarily associated with the piece. Other performers joined in. When Vincent entered the room, instead of disrupting the transition from lunchtime to rehearsal time, she added to the 'game' being 'played', asking for Catona to do the entire piece by himself in a comedic fashion as a 'warm up'. This then led into a wider improvisation out of which grew an interrogation scene between Best and Catona which subsequently became the 'Interview' between Best and Orlik in the touring piece.

Vincent often capitalised upon and used the 'game' 'play' which initially lay outside what one might consider to be the 'official stuff' of rehearsal. Another instance was during my second visit. As a break in rehearsal came to a close and most of the performers present on that day were either coming back into the rehearsal space from outside, or in the rehearsal space already, Catona was again in the space already, fooling around by himself. Previous to the break the section known as 'The Storm' had been run and the space was very messy. Vincent wanted to run this work again, but acknowledged that the number of performers working that day would not represent the real sense of chaos that would be present when everyone was there. Vincent asked Catona to do a one-man storm and continue the fooling around. He did so, much to the amusement of the other performers and company in the room. However, once he began to 'play' in earnest, the engagement changed as the 'rules' or parameters and focus of the 'game' began to evolve. Vincent kept the game going, feeding it very delicately, transforming it and shaping it. The rules slid, the 'task' became different, the purpose of the 'task' shifted and what was at stake changed.

Particularly in light of the thematic starting point and content of the work, the sense of 'game' within *If We Go On* was also one that contained a certain element of risk, requiring a personal investment from the performers.

Sometimes a competitive edge was present in the 'games' which were 'played', but there was always something precious at stake. One aspect of this was seen in the idea of coercion, which arose during the process. This arose in discussion and improvisation centred on the idea that several of the performers did not want to return to their performative comfort zones in the work, despite the

attraction and ease of competency. Other members expressed tacitly or otherwise the need to be choreographed upon, or to respond physically to the director's 'vision', rather than autonomously create under loose guidance. It was noted in discussion that there was a tension point between being asked professionally to do that thing they do because they do it so well, and a desire to extend and experiment with new ways of working. This idea gave birth, in part, to a 'game' entitled the 'Go Go Go Game' by the company.¹⁷¹ This 'game' appeared in various forms from very early in the rehearsal process and entered into the touring work as a fully realised 'scene' that sees Patrycja Kujawska on a microphone downstage, with the rest of the performers enacting solo moments of mock-classical contemporary and balletic choreography. Facing the audience, Kujawska repeatedly shouts 'Go, go, go, go go go' into the microphone, which is on a stand. As she does the rest of the performers are forced into involuntary, semi-spasmodic bouts of dance as described above. All performers freeze when Kujawska shouts 'Stop!' resuming when she shouts 'Go!' again. Her lead is then challenged by Henry Montes later in the scene as he enacts the same rules upon her. The 'scene' can be taken as a wry comment on the relationship between dancers and choreographers in more traditional and mainstream practices. Through the form of the 'game', it draws comparison between these practices and the childish behaviour of the pre-school playground. There is no sense to the 'game', no resolution and the 'game' is both brutal and funny in its childish simplicity. It is also worth noting that in closely watching the switches between 'go' and 'stop' and in watching the latter intervention of Montes, and Kujawska's reaction to him, it is clear that the 'game' is not being acted out as a piece of performance text to be followed, but is an 'actualised' set of rules being 'played-with' for 'real' by the performers,

¹⁷¹ As previously seen in *Video file 10 – VDT 5* from 5:25 - 6:42

resulting in an 'actual' game which becomes 'lived experience' for the performers.

In performance, 'game' and a sense of 'play' was also achieved by drawing the audience directly into the 'game', again cementing the notion of a liminal space in which the 'actuality' is being 'played-with', rather than a fictive reality being played 'as-if'. Two examples, both taken from performance are useful to note here; the opening moments of the piece, delivered by Patrycja Kujawska and Aurora Lubos, and the 'Pause Text' delivered by Scott Smith.¹⁷² Both these examples see the performers focusing on 'playing-with' on a number of levels.

Firstly, the performers are 'playing-with' the audience. In both examples, a relationship between the performers and the audience is made explicit through direct address, with Smith in particular teasing and toying with the audience through the rhythms and delivery of the text. The air of the 'playful' in Smith's delivery had its roots in experimentation and 'play' within the rehearsal space. Although there were (obviously) fewer people in the rehearsal studio playing the role of an audience, when approaching this section of the performance Smith always reconfigured the length of silence as an agreed temporal 'space' with the audience. One sensed, even in rehearsals sparsely populated by 'audience', there was a clear attitude of listening and communion, but one that tested the onlookers present and their willingness to give over a period to silence, or pause. In watching an early run of this section of text I was asked directly by Smith: 'Is this any good? Is it?' The silences that resulted from this and later interactions often created an uncomfortable rhythm to the work. In performance, the audience did not feel entirely safe. In several of the

¹⁷² Please play *Video file 10 – VDT 5* from 6:42 to the end of the file.

performances, as is captured in the performance on the video file, the silence of Smith and the other passive performers during the 'Pause Text', was broken only by the audience shifting their weight in their seats, or laughing uncertainly, quietly losing complete certainty as the parameters of the 'game' in which they were complicit were tested. This text was repeated with variations several times in the eventual performed work, and was greeted by the audience with increasing familiarity on each return.

The second aspect of 'play' and 'game' for the performers in these examples is the act of 'playing-with' the artefact of the text and its staging itself. In the first example we see Lubos becoming increasingly animated alongside Kujawska, with both of them entering 'playfully' into delivery of the manifesto of performance.¹⁷³ The staging as well as the text is 'played-with' by the pair as they use the microphone, the small MP3 player and the sheets of paper. The sense of emphatic and at times gleeful abandonment is clear as they fling paper over the stage, and as Lubos gains control of the microphone towards the end of the piece. Despite having a significant amount of technical ability and rehearsal behind this delivery and 'playfulness', it is clear that there is an element of the unpredictable and the unforeseen 'playfully' invited into the delivery by the performers. They do not control the paper, they work to 'actually' interact and react for 'real' with each other and the audience, thereby creating the delivery as responsive and in conversation with the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace'.

As has been explored in this section of this chapter, the element of 'game' and 'play' is fundamental to Vincent's practice, being present and functioning on a

¹⁷³ This manifesto is an adapted version of Yvonne Rainer's famous 1965 *No Manifesto*.

number of levels and in a variety of ways within the work. The particular emphasis in *If We Go On* on the use of 'game' and 'play' as means of creating or inviting in the unforeseen, the unpredictable and the happy accident, is of particular interest in considering the impact of 'game' and 'play' on the 'absorption' of the performer as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing'. As with the previous points within this chapter, and those highlighted in the other company-specific chapters, discussion of 'game' and 'play', and the particular manifestations noted in the field research with Vincent Dance Theatre during *If We Go On* will feed into the analysis of Chapter Seven.

Summary of company-specific chapters Four to Six in Part Two

Each of the company-specific chapters in Part Two of this thesis has examined the practice of one company in some detail. The purpose of these chapters has been to highlight specific points and areas of interest impacting upon the work of the performer in preparation for the detailed analysis of Chapter Seven to follow.

Throughout Chapters Four to Six, I have also employed, and added to, the lexicon of terminology established in Part One. This lexicon provides a consistent linguistic basis with which to enter the detailed analysis of the next chapter in which the lexicon will be developed further.

Chapter 7 - Analysis: Developing an understanding of 'absorption'

Introduction

In preparation for the Conclusion to follow, this chapter analyses the practice of the companies profiled in Chapters Four, Five and Six in greater detail. The analysis draws upon and extends the lexicon of terminology established in Part One and developed further through the company-specific chapters of Part Two. The analysis aims to consolidate and extend the emerging understanding of 'absorption' by combining the lenses used in Chapters Two and Three with the discourse of the company-specific chapters to tease out a more exacting understanding and articulation of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer. In doing this, the analysis also interrogates the lenses of Part One to further hone the language used to articulate 'absorption' in this context.

However, with this aim in mind, it is timely to briefly touch upon the nature and scope of the languages currently used in performance practices to describe and comment upon performer engagement. It is useful to look at these in order to see where and how the articulation of 'absorption' emerging through this study contributes to, and develops these languages and how this chapter furthers the discussion of the thesis so far in its attempt to move towards Winnie the Pooh's 'Poetry and Hums'.

The existing vocabulary in this area focuses predominantly on either the idea of the performer being 'present' in the act of performance and/or the idea of the performer working in relation to an open 'awareness' of their immediate sensory, imagined and phenomenal environment. There are many and varied terms to draw upon here, from ideas articulated as, for instance, 'presence'

(Chaikin and others); the actor working '*moment-to-moment on impulse*' (Krasner, in Hodge 2010: 147; emphasis in original), the idea of 'hereness' (Bray *et al.* 2010: 237) or more recently as 'habitational action' (Camilleri 2013). It would seem that these languages are trying to articulate, or point towards, a mode of engagement for the contemporary performer wherein 'one of the tasks [...] is to find a way to be able to develop an awareness of both the bodymind and the action undertaken in order to be able to fully inhabit each moment of performance' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 329). As noted in the introduction to this study, the language specifically associated with the idea of an extended and focused 'awareness' in the act of doing also has numerous iterations and descriptive names originating outside the world of performance. In addition to being informed by these notions of 'optimal' experience, the language of extended 'awareness' in performance is also fundamentally informed by the phrases and terms within the interrelated genealogies of twentieth-century actor training, for instance, Stanislavsky's imagining of such extended 'awareness' as; 'the transmitting and receiving of rays of energy' (Carnicke in Hodge 2010: 12) and those within intercultural training paradigms and philosophies. More recently, these various approaches to training for the craft of performance have developed a focus upon the idea of the psychophysical performer, with the language of this focus also then increasingly informed by cross-fertilisation from the cognitive sciences in which the 'scientific paradigms of "enaction" and "situatedness" understand that the bodymind cannot be separated from the space around it, the environment it inhabits' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 307).

In adding this brief overview of the linguistic backdrop and the areas of research and practice upon which it draws to the linguistic landscape explored in the introduction, this study is able to contribute to, and develop, the language of the field in two key respects. Firstly, whilst there is an increasing interest in and focus on research that spans both broad definitions of dance and theatre (focused, for instance, upon notions of the 'embodied' performer (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013), the current and ongoing development of such languages and discussions, largely (though not exclusively) leans towards the performer configured as 'actor' rather than the performer configured as 'dancer', or simply just as 'performer'. For instance, in Dorinda Hulton's description of exercises undertaken by Chaikin and those working with the Open Theater, she describes an exercise, 'in which the presence of the *actor* becomes evident when he, or she, shifts moment to moment, within the transformation process, into alignment with imagery' (Hulton 2010: 220; emphasis added).

This disciplinary bias is painted in somewhat stark colours by Frank Camilleri when he cites John Matthews, who asks: 'Might then the presence of mind-body discourse in performance [...] be the less-than-fully-conscious forestalling, frustrating, or punishing by proxy of theatre's own apparent insistence on a certain un-equable form? (Matthews, cited in Camilleri 2013: 247). In relation to his notion of 'habitational action', Camilleri notes that,

The difficulty of finding satisfactory equivalents from theatre practice to 'habitational action' is related to the questions I quote from John Matthews [...] They concern the genre-related insecurity implied in the dominance of psychophysical rhetoric that surrounds actor training.

These discursive limits led me to look beyond the boundaries of theatre for other possible instances of overlap with 'habitational action'.

(Camilleri 2013: 255)

The particular standpoint of Camilleri's assertions notwithstanding, this study aims to develop the language of discourse in the dance-centric realm of 'dance theatre' as defined by this study. The language of the study is useful to performers, practitioners and academics as it contributes to the wider languages of performance through development of a lexicon that draws upon current interdisciplinary discussions and recognises the particular demands placed upon the performer working in a 'dance theatre' 'playspace', rather than the on the tasks undertaken by an actor working in a theatrical playing space. Whilst there are similarities to the demands placed upon the actor, or even the performer, the demands of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' are not identical. Consequently, a lexicon of terminology speaking towards this specific perspective is useful in dance-centric practice and research and also in furthering interdisciplinary connections through development of a shared language.

The second manner in which the lexicon of terminology contributes to the wider field is seen in the specificity of its focus on 'absorption' The languages used to describe an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' are often used to describe its quiddity, or its place as, 'the state we reach which can overwhelm our being' (Bray *et al.* 2010: 238). This 'mode' is then unpicked further, often through descriptions of exercises that might foster a heightening of the awareness in the

performer. For instance, Loukes (2013) notes in her study of the work of German body awareness pioneer Elsa Gindler that the work, 'focuses on bringing attention to daily activities such as walking, eating or speaking with an attitude of "concentration"' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 323). This study compliments such studies by developing the discourse in this area through recognising 'absorption' as a specific aspect of a wider understanding of the 'optimal' in performance. By concentrating specifically upon the idea of 'absorption', the lenses of the study are drawn upon to develop the language of the 'optimal'. Then, in extended development of the wider discourse, by tightening this concentration further onto the 'actual' activity of the performer as evidenced through Chapters Four to Six, the lexicon is positioned as practice-centric; it is of direct relevance to the performer. Developed and placed in this manner, the lexicon usefully furthers the discourse within 'dance theatre' in this area by creating the idea of 'absorption' as an 'actualised' and tangible concept, referenced in the concrete 'action' of the 'dance theatre' performer.

With the points and discussion above in mind, and echoing points made in the introduction to this study, this chapter firstly extends the understanding of 'absorption' developed so far in the study by focusing in on, and articulating, the particular qualities in 'action' of 'absorption' for the performer, analysing examples of 'dance theatre' practice in detail. Moving on from this, the analysis then continues to use the lexicon of terminology to define and develop a specific understanding of what I am calling here the 'dynamic locus' of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer within the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace' and the 'action' of performance. The idea of a 'dynamic locus' as an addition to the lexicon of terminology will be unpicked during this chapter

through analysis of the 'intentionality', 'awareness', 'perception' and 'attention' of the performer within 'action' which I perceive to hold qualities of 'absorption'. As the chapter continues to synthesise an articulation and understanding of 'absorption', the lexicon of terminology will be developed further.

Qualities of 'Absorption': 'Playing in excess'

One aspect of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' is seen through the condition of a 'liminal meta-actuality' as articulated in Chapter One and the particular qualities associated with the lenses of 'play' and 'game' from Chapter Three. We can see that the 'playspace' of 'dance theatre' is 'actualised' 'playing-with'. There is no pretence or denial of effort here; the effort is actual 'lived experience', with the manner in which it positions the body of the performer as lived and 'actual' also functioning as an integral part of the expression of the moment. Consequently, the liminal theatrical 'actuality' of 'dance theatre' sees the audience, situated in the same spatio-temporality, encounter the 'actuality' of the 'dance theatre' performer; the performer is 'playing-with' a 'mode of doing/being' realised as the 'self-as-actualised-expression' of a given theme or moment.

Coupled with the above, 'absorption' understood as 'playing in excess' is also drawn out through the idea of 'play' within the construct of 'game'. Aside from the notion of the act of performance in 'dance theatre' as an 'absorbing' 'game' in itself, across the canon there are numerous instances of 'actualised' 'games' embedded within the structure of the performance score and situated within the liminal 'playspace'. A primary example is seen in the game of 'musical statues' within Bausch's *Bluebeard*.¹⁷⁴ As noted in the narration of this section of work shown on video file, it is possible to see the reaction times of the performers as

¹⁷⁴ As seen in *Video file 1 – Bausch 1*

the music stops and they freeze, before continuing to run around the space again as the music starts. It is clear from these reaction times and the random pathways taken by the performers around the space that the 'game' is an 'actual' 'game', being played for 'real'. At 9:16-9:18 it is possible to see a female performer enter into a 'freeze' by instinctively slowing herself down by grabbing onto another passing performer, with the subsequent gap in time between the music restarting and this performer then moving again demonstrating the performer undertaking an 'actual' process of playing the 'game' by listening to the music. The 'playful' in this instance is manifested in the performer actively playing the 'game'. The performers are working within the rules of the game, exploring and finding new pathways, new freezes and new meetings each time the 'game' is played. The extended length of this game being played on stage also facilitates the possibility for the players to become 'absorbed' in the playing, thereby again reinforcing the sense of an 'actual' 'game' within the 'game' of 'dance theatre'; 'playing' within 'play' Alongside the condition of a 'liminal meta-actuality', the prominence of 'game', both within the creative strategies for the companies profiled and also as a structural tool for the performance score and content, also foregrounds the condition of 'play' and 'game' in performance. It is a significant part of what gives rise to the quality of 'absorption'. As with this example from the canon, 'game' and 'play' within 'dance theatre', are situated in the moment of 'playing in excess' within performance, positioned away from the everyday. It is this 'playing in excess'; being apart from and in addition to, the functionality of the everyday, which aids in facilitating 'absorption' for the performer. In examining the mimetic strategies of Pina Bausch, Susan Kozel notes that,

the mimesis found in the work of the [...] German choreographer Pina Bausch is based on a principle of repetition or analogy which is not one of identical reproduction or simple imitation. There is always a moment of excess or a remainder in the mimetic process, something that makes the mimicry different from that which inspires it and which transforms the associated social and aesthetic space.

(Kozel 1997: 101)¹⁷⁵

I understand this 'remainder' or 'excess' to be the space in which, through the performance score, the expressive 'actuality' of the performative moment allows the 'dance theatre' performer opportunity for 'absorption' through 'play' in mimesis. The 'playing in excess' is the mimesis contained within the 'playing-with' 'game' of 'dance theatre'. It is a mimesis 'enacted' through the inscribed 'lived body' which 'seems to be stepping inside a frame, but is in fact a constant transgression of the frame, which amounts to charting another territory all together' (Kozel 1997: 102). Whilst this 'playing in excess' finds different manifestations in the 'playing-with' of each of the companies profiled, it is the 'lived experience' within the mimetic of 'dance theatre's' 'actualised' 'playing-with' and performative 'game' within 'game' which marks out one particular quality of 'absorption' within this genre. In arriving at an understanding and articulation of this particular quality of 'absorption' as 'playing in excess', I am drawing upon the interdisciplinary suite of lenses from Part One, with an emphasis on the liminality of 'play and 'game' from Chapter Three and the idea of 'lived experience' from Chapter Two. This is combined with the understanding of 'actualised' theatricalised expression from Chapter One.

¹⁷⁵ Susan Kozel is also discussing the work of Belgian-born feminist Luce Irigaray

Absorption: An actively 'playful' attitude

The idea of the performer adopting an actively 'playful' attitude in engagement with the 'actual' 'games' of 'playing-with' within 'dance theatre' marks out another quality of 'absorption'. Drawing again upon the lenses of Chapters Two and Three, and reflecting upon and analysing the accompanying video files, it becomes clear that a deliberately 'playful' engagement in the act of doing steps beyond a level of engagement in which the performer simply carries out the 'task', 'action' or 'game'.

Embedded within the term 'playing-with' is an understanding, as explored in Chapter Three, of the precarious, unstable nature of 'play' and the need to recognise 'the precariousness of magic itself' (Winnicott 1971: 47). Whilst the rules of the 'playspace' abide, within this construct, 'a 'playful' 'playing-with' is not locked, unwavering and entirely fixed in its path. In a related vein to Lutterbie's notion of the variance of received stimuli within a wider 'metastasis' of a performance score, Emilyn Claid also notes explanations and accounts of this 'playful' state of being, taken from interviews with a wide range of dance practitioners, performers and choreographers: "Being in the moment, connecting with the moment whatever that might be [...] not locking the moment [...] Secondly it's about non-attachment, moving through it, not fixing" (Fin Walker 2003, cited in Claid: 2006: 206). Sondra Horton Fraleigh also acknowledges the specifically phenomenological considerations inherent in dance, along with the creative imperative of what I understand to be the 'playful' element of the work of the performer:

As dance exhibits phenomenal presence through the creative,

it invokes free agency, intention and initiative. As dance exists through the human body, it derives from the body's aesthetic form and psychic life. As dance exists within the condition of human movement, it involves lived (not simply measured) human time and human space.

(Fraleigh 1987: 50)

These accounts position the 'playful' engagement of the performer as *actively* playing with the 'actualised' 'playing-with' the 'game', 'task' or 'action' of the given performance score. The performer steps beyond a mode of engagement that sees them simply tread the familiar performance score, by employing a 'playful' attitude in engagement with the content or moment of the performance score. Within this 'enactive' domain the performer experiences the phenomenological, sensorial and imaginative environment of the 'playspace', including the other entities within it (audience and performers) as 'other' to the subject of their 'I'. At this point the performance score also becomes a thing in, of, and for itself, again reinforcing this sense of 'absorptive' separation noted earlier. However, I would like to suggest that a 'playful' 'mode of doing/being' within the 'actualised' 'playing-with' of 'dance theatre', and existing in the liminality of D.W. Winnicott's 'third' space positions the thing or things being consciously 'played-with' (i.e., those objects which are the focus of conscious 'intentionality' of the moment) as a continuously 'fluctuating other' for the actively playful performer. In introducing this term to help articulate the 'playful' attitude of the performer as a particular quality of 'absorption' within 'dance theatre', I am initially drawing upon, and synthesising Lutterbie's idea of 'variation' within the 'metastasis' of the performance score with Winnicott's idea

that, 'in playing, and perhaps only in playing, the child or adult is free to be creative' (Winnicott 1971: 71). Crucial here in Winnicott's assertion is the idea of a licence of freedom within 'play' that offers the possibility for the performer to actively invent, invite and seek out and work with variation. So, within a 'playful' attitude, the 'fluctuation' is extended and more profound than the 'variation' found naturally within the 'metastasis' of a performer simply repeatedly undertaking a preordained performance score without an actively 'playful' attitude. Within an actively 'playful' attitude, the performer directs their conscious 'attention' and 'intentionality' towards seeking out and inviting variation from repetition to repetition. This 'playful' attitude is grounded in an understanding of the exploratory, embodied 'lived experience' of playing, situated in the 'action' and task-centric 'liminal meta-actuality' of 'playing-with' within the 'dance theatre' 'playspace'. We see this actively 'playful' attitude embedded in the way in which Janusz Orlik described his desired stance in performance with VDT: 'I just need to be open enough and concentrated enough for the things happening around [...] I just need to be aware of what is happening and be ready for the offer coming from the outside' (Orlik 2009; pers. comm.). In Orlik's description of his attitude, he places himself and his possible 'action' in relation to the *potential* offered to him by the circumstance of each moment. Just as in 'play', nothing is quite fixed; everything is subject to the 'fluctuating other' and the variances within the wider 'metastasis' of the performance score.

Similarly to Orlik's idea of being 'ready for the offer', within the examples of performance work to follow shortly, the idea of 'fluctuation' found within an actively 'playful' attitude focuses the 'awareness' and 'attention' of the performer

directly upon the 'fluctuating other', thereby enhancing the presence of this fluctuation in the moment of performance. This focus facilitates the thing being 'played-with' to partially absorb the 'I' or being of the performer, and similarly, through an actively 'playful' attitude, the 'I' of the performer partially absorbs the thing being 'played-with'. I argue that 'playful' engagement in this context is 'lived experience' as embodied exploration. As noted again in Orlik's reflections above, it is the *active* attitude of the 'playful' 'readiness' which helps articulate a second quality of 'absorption' for the performer in which they become partially 'absorbed' by the 'fluctuating other' of the thing being 'played-with', yet maintain a separation and cognisance of the object as 'other'.

This quality of 'absorption' also sits in congruence with the 'enactive' view, indicating the thing being 'playfully' engaged with is neither entirely subject, or object, but positioned as an enacted phenomena within the intra-psychic relationship between the 'perceptions' and conscious 'intentionality' of the performer and the 'actuality' of the phenomenal 'playspace'.¹⁷⁶ The 'fluctuating other' is therefore again noted to be present as a direct result of the actively 'playful' attitude of the performer. As within the idea of the 'actual' 'playing in excess' and the 'playing-with' of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace', the 'playful' takes the form of 'actual' testing or of exploration within a pre-determined frame, the object of the 'fluctuating other' is therefore continually re-tested, re-explored, re-made and re-imagined as it is brought into being through 'playful' enactment by the performer. Whilst a sense of 'fluctuating other' may exist in other forms of theatrical engagement for the performer, it is this task of the 'playful' and this

¹⁷⁶ In this context, the 'thing' is any object towards which the performer directs their 'attention' or 'intentionality' and which is subsequently 'played-with'. This object may be a 'game', or a 'task', or an 'action', or an 'actual' 'object'. It may be an idea, a text a relationship, or a concept or a state (the seductive play of self noted by Claid (2006) is a state wherein the performer actively plays with personae or facets of self).

engagement with the 'fluctuating other' placed within the particular conditions of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' as a 'liminal meta-actuality' which helps articulate the 'absorption' of the 'dance theatre' performer. Because the 'playful' 'dance theatre' performer is in a relationship with other which sees them continually and actively 'playing-with' an 'actual' 'fluctuating other', exploring this fluctuation (the thing *at play in play*) in the 'metastasis' of the performance score, the act of doing becomes 'absorbing' for the player. Sondra Horton Fraleigh points towards this sense of being 'absorbed' by doing, or giving oneself over to the act of 'play'; 'I do not think "move" then do move. No! I am the dance; its thinking is its doing and its doing is its thinking' (Fraleigh 1987: 32).

Echoing Csikszentmihalyi's reflections on the state of 'flow' in Chapter Three, the concentration required to maintain such an actively 'playful' attitude is part of what precludes the entry of other alternative foci into the perceptive field of the performer. In support of this, in reflection upon conversations with the performers working as part of VDT and witnessing their practice during the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On*, it is important to note that the performer working with an actively 'playful' attitude when approaching the performance text does not happen as a matter of course. An attitude of 'playfulness' is a relationship between the subject and the 'enactive domain' which is difficult to maintain and reinstate with each repetition. For instance, Carly Best, in commenting upon a section of performance text presented during the devising and rehearsal process for *If We Go On* reflected that, 'It's about, I guess, a communication, or a "Ah, I see where the response is, I see the game." But it doesn't necessarily happen every time' (Best 2009, pers. comm.).

Within this 'game', Best identified the breath as the important point of 'intentional' focus for her and something with which she was able to engage 'playfully': 'There have been instances where I kind of discovered; "Oh it's something to do with the breath, and whoever is producing the breath"' (Best 2009, pers. comm.).).

When the 'playfulness' of the performer in their engagement is missing, or absent, there is a tangible difference in the 'action'. This was picked up by Vincent in discussion after one particular run of material for *If We Go On*¹⁷⁷, when she noted that, 'I don't know... it's not as enjoyable to watch as yesterday, if I'm honest - it didn't have the play that yesterday had [...] people were much more "ploddy" because they were taking the structure or whatever much more seriously' (Vincent, pers. comm. 2009).

The discussion above is now drawn back into further analysis of work from each of the companies. By examining and revisiting specific examples, it is possible, from my perspective as a viewer and, in the case of VDT's work, as an experiencer/observer, to perceive and understand the 'absorptive' quality of an actively 'playful' attitude noted above as being present in the work of the performer, or performers. However, before entering this discussion, a point related to both my perceptions and to those of Vincent in her observations above arises from consideration of whether the performers know they are absorbed or not whilst doing, and relatedly, whether the absence or presence of this 'awareness' matters. Consequently, it is useful to briefly explore the self-awareness of the performer's 'absorption' (or lack of) here.

¹⁷⁷ Please play *Video file 10 – VDT 5* from 1:18 - 3:44

Informed by my own experience of performance, by the discussion of Part One and by the conversations and by interviews within the fieldwork with VDT, I argue that performers are not necessarily always aware of 'absorption' itself as a primary point of 'attention', during the doing. In drawing on the lenses of 'play' and the idea of the autotelic and the negentropic within Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow' as discussed in Chapter Three, 'absorption' means exactly that for the performer; an 'absorption' in the doing. Drawing in language from Chapter Two, the conscious 'attention' 'intentionality' and 'perceptual' field of the performer resides with and is 'absorbed by' the process of interaction with the 'fluctuating other' seen in the 'object' or 'action' of the moment. As Csikszentmihalyi notes:

A person who pays attention to an interaction instead of worrying about the self obtains a paradoxical result. She no longer feels like a separate individual [...] Because of this union of the person and the system, the self emerges at a higher level of complexity.

(Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 212)

Echoing this, Scott Smith, reflecting in interview about a meaningful engagement with performance describes; 'a faith in my own actions, responses and behaviours... my *response*-ability to uhh, contribute to the circumstance somehow, I think, and also to please myself' (Smith 2009).¹⁷⁸ Here, as with the engagement with the domain described by Csikszentmihalyi above, the 'attention' of the performer does not rest with the pre-occupation of being 'absorbed', but rather with the 'action' of doing, as it is 'enacted' in congruence

¹⁷⁸ Please see *Video file 12 – VDT 7* from 10:06 – 10:48

with the 'intentionality' of the moment. In the instance of work from Bausch, below, the 'attention' and 'awareness' of the performer is directed towards the feeling of what happens; the sensory knowledge of phenomenal domain, not to an awareness of the idea of 'absorption' as an 'object' in itself. 'Absorption' here can be understood as similar, (though not identical) to the manner in which Shusterman describes perception of the body: 'I do not grasp it as an explicit object of consciousness, even if it is sometimes obscurely felt as a background condition' (Shusterman 2008: 3).

However, to draw in my personal experience of performance, whilst 'absorption' may not be present in the moment of negentropic 'action' for the performer as an explicit, consciously directed 'awareness', after the event one is able to say in reflection from a personal perspective whether one felt absorbed. I return again to *West Side Story* mentioned in the introduction. On the first night I felt absorbed, playing 'playfully', an integral part of the 'action'. On the second night this was not the case.

Returning then to the question of the performer's awareness of personal 'absorption' in the moment of doing, I argue that 'absorption' is not a conscious focus of 'attention' but, like Shusterman's concept of the body, is 'sometimes obscurely felt as a background condition.' However, its centrality to all understandings of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' as discussed in Part One would position the articulation and understanding of 'absorption' as it occurs in performance as important and useful to the reflections of the performer, and to other practitioners and academics engaged in such discussion and study.

On a separate and final note before the clips are examined, it is pertinent to be reminded of an aspect of the idea of 'play' and the 'playful' from Chapter Three. It is useful to remember Huizinga's reflection that, just as 'the sportsman too plays with all the fervour of a man enraptured' (Huizinga 1950: 18), so the 'playful' attitude as an aspect of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' performance can also be resolutely serious.

'Absorption' example 1 - Pina Bausch ¹⁷⁹

In this clip, we see the performer (Bausch) focused upon the doing of the performance score. More than this, it would appear that she is focused upon the sensation of the 'lived experience' of doing. Bausch performs this section largely with her eyes closed. In adopting a 'playful' relationship with the physical content of the performance score, her movements within the 'playspace' can be configured as an 'actual' 'fluctuating other'; movement with which she is conversing through encountering the 'lived experience' of the 'lived body'. Bausch would appear to be 'absorbed' by the experience of doing; her 'attention' and 'intentionality' seems to be directed towards experiencing the movement as lived whilst simply sharing this lived-ness with the audience.

'Absorption' example 2 - DV8 ¹⁸⁰

In this clip, taken from *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, the viewer is afforded multiple perspectives on the interaction between Nigel Charnock and Russell Maliphant. After an initial interpersonal interaction which frames the sequence to follow, the sequence using the ladder (itself a highly risky 'game') sees both performers focus upon the 'actions' of the 'task' at hand. During this

¹⁷⁹ Please play *Video file 3 - Bausch 3* from the start of the file to 1:30

¹⁸⁰ Please play *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 3:16 - 6:44

sequence there are no pauses, or points when the 'intentionality' or 'perceptual' 'awareness' of either performer is drawn away into another sphere of 'action'. Both performers remain intent on the doing. The doing in this case is catching, climbing, falling, or watching the other performer do so. The highly physical sense of 'actualised' 'action' configured as expressive metaphor within this sequence, and the potential for 'actual' physical injury within this demands a level of focused awareness and 'attention' which becomes 'absorptive' from the performers. Within this 'absorption', is it possible at times to see the presence of a 'fluctuating other' within the highly purposeful 'playfulness' of the pair. This is most prevalent for the viewer in the moments when the camera captures Charnock's eye contact with Maliphant as he tests him, experimenting with the parameters of the 'game' of trust being played, or in the 'action' of both performers as they navigate and 'play-with' the action of free fall as Charnock lets go of, and falls from, the ladder. In both these instances, the concentration and 'awareness' of the performers directed towards the object of conscious 'intentionality' as a 'fluctuating other' is consuming and absorbing for the performer. There is simply no perceptual 'room' for anything else. Within these fleeting moments, it is again possible to see the 'lived experience' of doing 'absorbing' the performers; the 'action' becomes inseparable from their cognition of it.

'Absorption' example 3 - Vincent Dance Theatre¹⁸¹

This clip was taken from a run of performance material late in the devising process for *If We Go On*. As noted in the commentary to the clip, whilst being focused on the content of a given 'task' in performance, Vincent was also focused on the performers explicating 'playing-with' and making explicit the

¹⁸¹ As previously seen in *Video file 8 - VDT 3* from 16:20 - 20:53

sense of attempting the given 'task'. As noted in the chapter profiling VDT, the sonic elements are a prominent feature of the company's work and figure heavily in the shape and nature of the overall domain of the 'playspace', with *If We Go On* being no exception. In this clip, I observe Alex Catona to be 'absorbed' in the task of 'playing'. More than this his 'intentionality' is focused upon attempting to draw something out, to 'get' to something or communicate something *through* this attempt, although what this is, I am unsure. The sense of attempt here, directorially foregrounded by Vincent, is the position through which we can again identify a state of 'absorption' for the player; there is a 'mode of doing/being' at 'play' which is 'playful'. Catona's 'perceptual' 'attention' is predominantly directed towards the sound as an 'object' to be 'played-with' as a 'fluctuating other' with difference actively being searched for, invited and encouraged by Catona through the sense of attempt and through the sense of trying to do something, or locate something with the material. Having seen this section of performance material numerous times both during the process and the subsequent performance run, I note that it was never the same twice. In this instance, I see it as Catona's focus upon the attempt of doing, the concentration of his 'perceptual' 'attention' upon the sound as an 'object' which is a 'fluctuating other' and the sensation of 'lived experience' he encounters through the doing, which again becomes 'absorbing' for him.

In all of the examples noted above, I observe that the 'attention' of the performer resides not with themselves, but with the testing and exploration of the 'fluctuating other'; the thing at 'play' in 'play'. In this activity they are also 'playing-with' possibility; the performers 'playfully' engage with the boundaries of what is and what might be, bringing, or 'enacting' their domain into being in

accordance with the needs of the moment. Moreover, it is the performer's doing of the 'playing-with' the 'fluctuating other' that becomes so 'absorbing' for them as the concentration on what might be leads to 'absorption' in experiencing the unexpected and the new at each repetition. As the performer becomes 'absorbed' by the act of doing in this manner, the division between the 'fluctuating other' and the subject, fluctuates itself, with the subject of the performer extending towards and, to a greater extent than in the everyday, merging with the 'action' being undertaken. Drawing upon the lens of 'play' in Chapter Three, Caillois also identifies the extended nature of the subject within the 'absorptive' subject-object conversation during 'playful' engagement. In a manner highly redolent of the extended consciousness of Csikszentmihalyi's concept of 'flow', and the discourse of Chapter Two on extended consciousness, he uses the example of flying a kite to describe how the player, 'accomplishes a kind of auscultation upon the sky from afar. He projects his presence beyond the limits of his body' (Caillois 2001: 29-30).

Given the discourse above, I would argue that a quality of 'absorption' for the performer is can be articulated in a 'mode of doing/being' positioned as an actively 'playful' attitude with the 'object' being 'played-with' positioned as 'fluctuating other' within 'dance theatre' practices. Drawing upon discussion of 'flow' from the lenses within Chapter Two, engagement of the subject with the object of 'intention' in this manner produces a merging of 'action' and 'awareness'. In Csikszentmihalyi's terms, we see the person in 'flow' actually experiencing their being, being in 'flow'. The subject becomes integrated with, or 'absorbed' by the object: 'The autotelic individual grows beyond the limits of

individuality by investing psychic energy in a system in which she is included' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 212).

Using the aspects of lenses from Part One and the lexicon of terminology, the analysis so far has articulated qualities of 'absorption' in 'dance theatre' practice. However, it has only provided a broad view of the 'actual' activity of the performer and has only addressed, in part, the *how* of performer engagement. Whilst this articulation is useful in describing the qualities of performer engagement as we work towards a meaningful articulation of 'absorption' the need to extend and deepen the understanding further remains. This next level of understanding to add to the articulation arises from analysis of the detail of *what* the performers actually *do* in either working towards an absorptive 'mode of being/doing', or whilst actually working within 'absorption'. This discussion, which is the focus of the next section of this analysis, is again important in light of the aims and purpose of the overall study as, through gaining a deeper understanding of the 'actual' activity of the 'dance theatre' performer, it again develops and extends the languages that can be used by performers, academics and practitioners to articulate such activity.

As noted at the start of this chapter, I am positioning 'absorption' for the performer here as being situated within the 'dynamic locus' of the 'relationships' established between the performer and other 'objects' and entities within the 'enactive' domain. By identifying the particular character and constitution of the 'relationships', it is possible for this study to articulate in detail the 'action' undertaken by the performer in respect of their 'absorption'. Before introducing the articulation of the 'action' and 'relationships', and in order to frame this

articulation, it is useful to summarise the understanding of the 'action' undertaken by the performer in the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' arrived at through the discussion of Part One.

Drawing upon the discourse of Part One, I position the 'action' of the performer as shared, 'lived experience' which is embodied, embedded and 'intentionally' relational. That is, it stems from a position of 'being-in-the-world' (within the particular 'enactive domain' of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace') which is fundamentally bound to the cognition of the sensorimotor system, its 'awareness' of its self and its processing of proprioceptive and environmental stimuli and information. As Gallagher and Zahavi note, '[w]hereas I can approach, or move away from any object in the world, the body itself is always here as my very perspective on the world' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2006: 143).

With the body and its sensorimotor system being central to cognition, the 'action' undertaken becomes relational. As previously explored in Chapter Two, the world, or 'enacted' domain is experienced from the locus of 'I' by each of us. Our cognitive understanding of our world is organised by our neural network in relation to our body, which functions as the centre of this world. However, as with any other environment, the environment of the 'playspace', and the 'objects' and entities within it, are not fixed or static. Instead the 'enacted domain' of the 'playspace' represents a dynamic environment in flux in which, drawing upon Lutterbie's use of Dynamic Systems Theory, the performer enacts and perceives their domain in accordance with the 'intentionality' and purpose of the moment. As has been previously established through Chapter One and the conditions of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace', where 'dance theatre' differs in

its constitution from most theatrical performance spaces is in the positioning of the 'lived experience' of the performer being situated as 'actualised' action, which is recognised in the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'here and now' and 'playing-with', rather than existing in support of a fictive space other than that of the 'actual' phenomenal domain of the 'playspace'. Within the particular context of this 'playspace' the performer enters into a 'perceptual' and 'intentional' relationship with the environment which is embedded *within* that environment, and 'thoroughly integrated with the world' (Lutterbie 2011: 100) rather than sitting separately in relation to it. As Lutterbie explains through use of DST, far from being linear and causal with a beginning, middle and end this relationship exists in a perpetual and cyclical state of disequilibrium within the wider 'metastasis' of the performance score; internal and external stimuli are received, in turn producing and directing new 'perceptions' and 'intentionality' in the performer which give rise to conscious 'intentional' 'action', which shapes and 'enacts' the environment according to its purpose, thus producing more internal and external stimuli.

However, as pointed out in Chapter Two, the sheer cacophony of stimuli encountered and generated by the sensorimotor system in tandem with the imagination of the entity would be overwhelming. Even within the more focused liminal environment of the 'playspace' (as opposed to the far more unpredictable environment of the everyday), it would be impossible for the performer to encounter and process all possible stimuli on one level, or at the same 'volume'. Consequently, the relationality of the performer with(in) their enacted domain is subject to the power of choice by the performer; within the parameters of the piece and under the direction of the choreographer as noted

in the introduction to Chapters Four, Five and Six, the performer is able to choose where and when to direct their consciousness and perceptive field of 'attention', thereby foregrounding some 'perceptions', and lessening others. This dynamic act of conscious 'intentionality', of selected consciousness towards entities or 'objects' is also in itself a process of 'enactment', causing the performers' 'being-in-the-world' to be a consciously perceptual act in which they choose to encounter and bring into being the 'enactive' domain of the 'playspace' as it needs to appear to them, thereby creating perceptual, 'intentional' and 'enactual' relationships with other 'objects' and entities.

Given this, and in analysing the practice of the companies profiled with the previous discussion of this chapter in mind, it would seem that the particular conditions and qualities of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' and the practice of 'dance theatre' itself, offers the possibility for 'absorption' to occur for the performer when he or she is able to hone in, focus, or foreground their conscious 'intentionality', their 'attention' or their 'awareness' within the 'dynamic locus' of several key 'relationships' within the 'enactive' domain which lie between themselves, its 'entities' and its 'objects'. By using examples of practice from across the companies profiled, this analysis now isolates those 'relationships' which would seem particularly conducive to fostering 'absorption' for the performer.

The 'relationship' between the performer and the 'object'.

This section of analysis will use three clips of work, one from each of the companies profiled.¹⁸² The 'relationship' analysed in this section constitutes the nature of the dynamic between the performer and 'objects' within their domain. The term 'object' or 'objects' is intended to denote one or more of the following: the corporeality of other entities; the substance of the performance text configured as 'object' (this might be spoken text or a physical score); or an 'actual' physical object within the 'enacted' domain of the 'playspace'.

In keeping with the condition of the prominence of the 'lived body as a locus for performance and the dominant means of expression', the performer engages with the 'object' at hand in a manner that focuses upon them experiencing the 'object' as 'fluctuating other' as they bring it into being. Within this, the 'lived experience' is centred upon a 'playing-with' the object, which, drawing upon Damasio, foregrounds a sensation of 'the feeling of what happens' through doing and 'action'; it is the sensation for the performer of lived 'being-with' and corporeal engagement. The 'playing-with' the 'object' in all these examples appears to be exploratory.

In the first clip, taken from *Café Müller*, we see Bausch moving with her eyes closed, heightening the sense gained by the viewer that her 'perception' and the direction of her consciousness's 'intentionality' are focused upon the experience of doing the movement. As noted in the commentary, she communicates a sense of feeling her way with and through the movement, allowing it to act upon her as stimuli in itself.

¹⁸² Whilst the sections to follow may partially overlap with previously viewed material, please play *Video file 3 - Bausch 3* from 0:30 - 1:30, *Video file 4 - DV8 1* from 3:15 - 5:06 and *Video file 9 - VDT 4* from 16:31 - 20:23

In the second clip, taken from *Strange Fish*, we see the duet between Lauren Potter and Jordi Cortes Molina as framed by the gaze of Wendy Houstoun; we see it through her eyes. The duet is one wherein the two performers are concentrated solely upon experiencing the intimacy of moving with the other. There is a focus upon the phenomenological experience of 'being-with' the corporeality of the other performer through the 'action'. This is aided by the camera; there is no 'awareness' shown from the performers of the 'I' of the camera. Instead their 'perceptual' frame is drawn into the movement as 'object' to be 'played-with', or to be experienced. This is alongside the other performer, who is also conceived as 'object'. The *person* of the other performer is secondary in the focus of each performer in the duet to the corporeal sensation of doing; the phenomenological experience described by Merleau-Ponty as 'flesh meeting flesh'. This again is aided by the camera and the lighting of the section, as it does not foreground the personalities or persona of Molina and Potter in the duet, but instead concentrates on the dynamic and the shape of the interlocking bodies.

In the third clip, taken from the rehearsal and devising journey for *If We Go On*, we see and hear Patrycja Kujawska delivering a section of text to the audience which describes the experience of freezing up on stage and losing confidence in one's own ability to continue. As noted in the accompanying commentary, Kujawska's delivery and use of this text is not overtly dramatic. She is simply re-telling the experience in the actual here and now of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace'. Moreover, Kujawska's experience of interacting with the text as 'object' and having it act upon her creates a sense of reciprocal conversation

between herself and the text in which both are transformed through the 'lived experience' of 'playing-with'.

In each of the clips highlighted immediately above, the perceptual 'intentionality' of the performer rests predominantly with the immediate field of the 'object' being 'played-with'. The 'lived experience' of the performer is thereby predominantly concentrated into a subject-object relationship manifested by 'playing-with' this 'object', to the exclusion of what would, in a less negentropic environment, be a much wider spectrum of stimuli. In the first two clips from Bausch and DV8 respectively, this 'object' is the physical performance score of the sections; in these clips the performer is focused upon receiving and processing stimuli generated through the activity of their externally-orientated sensorimotor system and their proprioceptive faculties. In the clip from *If We Go On*, the text is 'played-with' in the 'actuality' of the here and now, but still constitutes part of the bodily 'lived experience' of doing 'dance theatre'. In all cases, the tightened focus of the perceptive field is also thematised by the performer; that which they are bringing into being by 'playing-with' is appearing for them in accordance with the purpose and 'intentionality' of the moment. Within this tightened perceptive field, I see the 'intentionality' of the performer; their 'directed awareness' (Dahlberg, Dahlberg and Nyström 2008: 47) within the 'enacted' domain of the 'playspace' being focused upon two intertwined points.

Firstly, the conscious 'intentionality' of the performer is directed into the 'lived experience' of 'being-with' the given 'object'; in the instances above, this is the movement of a short solo, or a duet, or a piece of spoken text. In 'being-with'

the 'object', the performer experiences and lives sensations, both physical and mental. We see this clearly in Kujawska's work as she becomes affected by 'playing-with' the text.

However, I argue that here, this gives rise to a second focus of 'intentionality' within the doing, important for an understanding and articulation of 'absorption' for the performer, which is a performative 'intentionality' directed towards 'playing-with' the 'lived experience' of 'being-with'. As the being-with produces stimuli to be processed by the performer, the resultant responses are also consciously 'played-with' by the performer; drawing upon Ribeiro and Fonseca's idea of 'modulated action', in the 'lived experience' of doing the performer 'modulates' and 'plays-with' 'being-with'. This 'playing-with' is inscribed, or 'modulated' with the particular aesthetic of the given moment and the wider cultural practices of the company.

The 'relationship' between the performer and the sonic environment

This section of analysis will use clips of work from each of the companies profiled, with several clips being taken from the devising and rehearsal journey for VDT's *If We Go On*. The 'relationship' analysed in this section constitutes the nature of the dynamic between the performer and the sonic environment of the 'playspace'. The term 'sonic environment' here is intended to denote the auditory elements of the 'playspace'. Within these elements, particular attention is paid to the rhythms inherent in the sonic environment. I am focusing solely on the sonic element of the 'playspace' here for the following reason: whilst I develop the understanding of sonic elements as 'objects' within the 'playspace', which can be understood as similar to 'objects' of other natures (i.e., visual

objects), as I will explain below, the sonic environment as a whole moves beyond the definition of an 'object' as something to be 'played-with'.

Whilst all companies utilise a sonic environment within their work, it is within the work of Vincent Dance Theatre that this 'relationship' is particularly prominent. As evidenced by the extracts of practice on the video files taken from across the companies profiled, there are two particular manifestations of the 'relationship' between the performer and sonic environment.

Firstly, the sonic environment is treated as an 'object' by the performer and is 'played-with'. Music, rhythm and sound are not positioned as a backdrop for the performance and something to be danced along *to*, but an element of the performance that sits alongside the performers and is moved with.

We can see this firstly in the game of 'musical statues' taken from Bausch's *Bluebeard*.¹⁸³ In this instance the music is an equal partner in creating the 'playful' engagement of the performers.

In a second example, taken from *If We Go On*, we can see the sonic environment as an 'object' actively being 'played-with' by Vincent, as she plays with the way the sound is configured in the staging, and an 'object' being 'played-with' by the performers as they create the sound through their movements on the back wall of the 'playspace'.¹⁸⁴ The performers' interaction and 'relationship' with the sonic environment in this instance is one which is

¹⁸³ As previously viewed in *Video file 1 - Bausch 1* from 8:25 to the end of the file.

¹⁸⁴ As previously viewed in *Video file 6 - VDT 1* from 6.04 - 11:39

highly reciprocal; the 'actual' movement of the performers creates the sound which in turn infuses and informs the dynamic of the duet.

The second manifestation of the 'relationship' between the performer and the sonic environment is that the sonic environment is simultaneously 'played-with' and 'played-within.' Whilst this occurs across the companies, this manifestation was particularly prevalent within the practice of VDT, largely owing to the fact that rather than the sound being created for the performance by a separate group of artists, it was all created by the performers and then actively operated and recreated at each run of the performance. During documentation of the process and performance of *If We Go On*, I observed the sonic elements of the 'playspace' environment to be pervasive, intertwined and inseparable from other elements. This positioned them as larger than an 'object' *within* the 'playspace'; they were part of the very fundamental fabric of the phenomenal environment experienced by the performers. This pervasive nature created the sonic environment as 'absorptive' for the performers. They created it and in creating it were enveloped within it.

An example of how the sound infused the process of activity for the performers even from the outset of the given day's activity can be seen in the first section on *Video File 8 - VDT 3*.¹⁸⁵ I note how the music and the act of making music is central to the process. In the second clip, a blackly melancholic atmosphere was induced by the improvised music of Smith and Catona as they played 'songs in the key of strife'.

¹⁸⁵ As previously viewed in *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from the start of the video file to 6:08

The clearest example of the sonic environment in performance, in this case the rhythmic element of the environment, being the key 'relationship' held between the performers and each other, and the performers and their 'playspace' is seen in the section wherein Smith speaks the 'She Did Go On' text to the audience, whilst Bolis, configured as the 'she' of the text, moves slowly at centre stage in a repeated pattern of Expressionistic gestural phrases, reminiscent of the movement style of Bausch.¹⁸⁶ All other performers are on stage.

At the centre of this whole section is the rhythm held by the performers. This rhythm is a lulling presence, the essence of which appears to work across all the 'action' of the performers, creating the individual constituent elements as a 'scene' unified by rhythm and one in which each element feeds the others. It is possible to see this unification in the manner in which the company works together during the scene. With Bolis as a living meter of tempo-rhythm, all other performers maintain frequent eye contact with each other broken by cognisance of the audience on occasions (Smith) and a gaze which takes in Bolis. In turn, in her movements and gestures, Bolis feeds off the sound created by the ensemble. The company work in a manner akin to a jazz ensemble, responding to the fluctuations in each other's playing to arrive at a cohesive, unified whole that travels the ebbs and flows within the dynamics of the piece.

The manifestations of the 'relationship' between the performer and the sonic environment noted above also give rise to two particular ways in which 'perception' and 'intentionality' of the performer function within this 'relationship'. In the first manifestation of the 'relationship' noted above, with the sonic elements of the 'playspace' also being perceptually encountered as 'objects'

¹⁸⁶ As previously viewed in *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 8:55 - 16:31

within the 'playspace', the 'perception' of the performer is embodied, being a dynamic act employing the sensorimotor system and proprioceptive capabilities of the body. The perceiver 'enacts' (that is, perceives objects within their domain in accordance with the 'intentionality' inscribed by their needs of the moment) those objects of 'perception' from a position of 'being-in the-world'. With this in mind, the body of each performer exists for them as the root of organisation and meaning of the spatial configuration for the space; as noted by Elizabeth Grosz, this embodied 'I'-centred organisation of perception creates space that 'is understood by us as a relation between these points and a central or organising perspective which regulates perception so that they occupy the same perceptual field. This perspective has no other location than that given by the body' (Grosz 1994: 90). Consequently, the 'relationship' between the performer and the sonic elements of the 'playspace', specifically their 'perception' of them and the 'intentionality' ascribed to them, take on a spatio-temporal dimension. The sound is an 'object' in the 'playspace', to be encountered and 'played-with'. Similarly to the 'perception' and 'intentionality' of the performer, it is also dynamic, rather than static. The performer 'perceives' and 'enacts' this 'object' in relation to their corporeality. So, in the duet between Best and Orlik in *If We Go On*, the sound is spatially configured to come from the back wall. In this instance the back wall and the sound become one, 'intentionalised' as one sound-object. As the performers contact the wall to frame the duet, their 'awareness' is directed towards the sound and its relationship with the wall, with the wall becoming intended as a means to create and bring sound into being.

To draw another example from *If We Go On*, we can see Bolis in conversation with her own voice as she notes the names of practitioners with whom she would have liked to have worked.¹⁸⁷ She actually organises the names around herself in the darkness. Bolis positions herself as the locus for perceptual meaning in the section, spatially creating, receiving and positioning the names that constitute the sonic 'objects' of the moment around the 'playspace', thereby directing conscious 'intentionality' towards the names, creating them in an image suggesting that the names are physical presence with her in the space.

The second aspect of the 'perceptual' and 'intentional' relationship of the performer to the sonic environment relates more closely to the rhythmic elements, often involving music, of the sonic environment than to the specific sounds, or individual sonic events. As such it is more related to the second manifestation of the 'relationship' between the performer and the sonic environment, being intertwined with the performer's 'playing-within' the enacted domain of the 'playspace'. I also note that, in performance, this aspect of the performer's 'relationship' with the sonic environment is mirrored in the perceptual experience of the audience. Consequently, as an observer of the material to follow in this section of the analysis, I must also explicitly acknowledge my own 'perception' of the work being infused by the sonic elements.

This strand of the 'perception' of the performer within the 'relationship' of the performer to the sonic environment sees the sonic elements of the space act as a 'colouring agent' within the 'perceptual' and 'intentional' focus of the performer. Whilst 'enacting' activity (for instance a 'task' or a 'game') which is

¹⁸⁷ As previously viewed in *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 8:55 - 10:24

technically separate from the dynamic sonic elements of the 'playspace', the 'relationship' of the performer to these other activities, and, within this 'relationship', the 'perception', 'intentionality' and 'enactment' of these activities undertaken by the performer, becomes infused and affected by this sonic element. Consequently, just as the architecture of a set creates meaning, the 'relationship' of the performer to the dynamic sonic environment also creates meaning in the 'playspace' for both the performers, and also for the audience or viewers watching this action. In this manner, and particularly in reference to the work of VDT and the characteristics of their practice, the understanding of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' develops to incorporate this use and articulation of the sonic environment as an aspect of its materiality. In turn, consideration of this then affects the manner in which the articulation and understanding of 'absorption' for the performer might be developed: 'absorption' for the performer working in the specific context of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' takes on a fundamentally 'actualised' sonic element, realised through the auditory elements of the 'playspace'.

Returning again to the section of *If We Go On* which includes the 'She Did Go On' text, it is possible to see the sonically infused 'action', resulting from the 'perception' of the performers, being focused into a 'relationship' with the given 'activity' of their 'intentionality' which includes and draws upon the sonic elements of the moment.¹⁸⁸ Central to this infusion is the inherently shared rhythm of the sonic element which is taken on by all performers in their 'activities'. I would argue that the individual sonic elements here are not perceived directly as an 'object', and 'played with', but are collectively 'played-within' as a pervasive presence in the 'playspace', the 'perception' of which

¹⁸⁸ As previously viewed in *Video file 9 – VDT 4* from 8:55 - 16:31

affects the nature and shape of the 'activity' of the performers. All performers are 'intentionally' focused upon 'objects' in service of a rhythmic and sonic unity. At this point, they are not focused on either their body-subject, or the subject-object with which they 'play', but the sonic environment and unity *within* which they all 'play'. As in VDT's practice, and in particular in the level of interactivity captured within the staging for *If We Go On*, the sonic element was 'actualised' and brought into 'being-with' by the performers themselves as part of their 'lived experience' of doing. Consequently, the 'activity' of the performers, 'enacted' in accordance with the thematised 'intentionality' of the moment (itself infused with the sonic element) then feeds and affects the 'actualisation' of the sonic element in a cyclical conversation between performer (subject), 'object' and 'enacted domain'. With the idea of a 'fluctuating other' being sought out as an element of the actively 'playful' attitude, this cyclic conversation builds on the dynamic process of continual destabilisation within a wider 'metastasis', as noted by Lutterbie in his use of Dynamic Systems Theory when he describes a continual influx of stimuli that destabilises the given system, 'leading to a response expressed as actions, images or concepts relevant to the situation; but it [the system] does not return to a static, pre-existing state of homeostasis. Other excitations keep the system from returning to equilibrium' (Lutterbie 2011: 84).

Both strands of the performer's 'relationship' with the sonic environment were also touched upon in interview with the performers during the process for *If We Go On*.¹⁸⁹ Scott Smith noted a sense of 'dialogue' with the space, including the sound within this comment. He commented that he *needed* this dialogue. Smith

¹⁸⁹ Please play *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 6:08 - 8:11, and then again from 20:53 - 27:02. In addition, please play *Video file 7 – VDT 2* from 30:34 to the end of the video file.

also pointed towards his desire for an active dialogue with others, rather than a dialogue with just the space and himself, explaining that this gave him a reason to 'suggest' something in his responses, explaining that, 'I certainly don't dance alone anymore' (Smith 2009, pers. comm.).

In describing her relationship with rhythm, Carly Best likened it to the rhythm of a joke, something that was already in existence and there to be discovered and 'played-with' by the individual. The rhythm is a temporal 'object' *into* which the performer can enter. Best explained that it 'feels like it's already there to be stepped into' (Best 2009). Best also commented upon a particular section of *If We Go On*, colloquially labelled 'The Quiz Show', as being a section in which she often felt the qualities of 'absorption' associated with 'optimal' experience.¹⁹⁰ Best noted that the rhythms of the breath within the section were something that she 'discovered' and that from this discovery the process of response of, in her words, an 'information feeding process' (Best 2009, pers. comm.) could occur in which she could be in a state of 'knowing the game and engaging in the game' (Best 2009, pers. comm.). Within these comments and reflections both performers point to both strands of the 'relationship' with the sonic environment noted above. It is clear that both stands are not separate or mutually exclusive, but interwoven with each other, and with the other 'perceptual' and 'intentional' relationships of the performer.

The 'relationship' between the performer and 'task'

This section of analysis will use clips of work from each of the companies profiled. The 'relationship' analysed in this section of the analysis constitutes the nature of the dynamic between the performer and the idea of 'task'. The

¹⁹⁰ As previously viewed in *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 20:53 - 24:06

term 'task' here is intended to denote the 'actual' 'action' of the performer developed through the collaborative devising process. As such the 'task' may have been given to the performer by the choreographer, or arisen from the improvisation of the performer themselves and developed autonomously to be then used and placed in the structure of the overall piece. Regardless, the 'task' is owned and undertaken by the performer in the 'actualised' context of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace'. The 'task' undertaken by the performer is often constituted as a 'game' in which the performer is again afforded the opportunity to 'actually' 'play' and operate creatively within a wider set of rules or 'metastasis'. The 'task' may also be functional 'action', which supports the given thematised 'intentionality' of the moment of performance.

The 'action' of the performer is a reciprocal interaction of the performer with the 'actual' 'enacted' domain of the 'playspace'. As previously discussed, the conscious experience of the performer is embodied and embedded within their 'enacted domain', becoming an embodied dialectic between subject and 'object': 'The body and the visible are both intimately connected and separated by a gulf. They are intertwined with one another' (Moran 2000: 409). Within this understanding of 'action', a 'task' can be seen as 'intentional' 'action'. In a movement-orientated 'task', or one that is corporeally driven, 'intentional' movement becomes the embodied agent of the performer's enactment of their domain in accordance with the goal, or 'intentionality' of the moment.

Consequently, the 'task' may be intrinsically or extrinsically motivated. In the case of the 'task' manifested as 'game', it becomes intrinsically motivated as the doing of the 'task', situated in the 'actuality' of 'playing-with' becomes the 'intentional' focus of the performer. In instances of the 'task' being a functional

'action' which supports the given thematised 'intentionality' of the moment of performance, the motivation is extrinsic to the 'task', as the 'intentionality' of the performer does not reside with the 'task' itself, but with the 'object' of 'perception' or imagination towards which the 'task' is purposed. Similarly, the 'objects' of the domain interacted with through the 'task', are not perceived as 'objects' themselves but as invisible and being in service of the wider 'intentionality', or goal (see above, 'The Relationship between the Performer and Object'). However, the source of the motivation for the given task *does* always exist within the spatio-temporality of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' as a whole.

Examples of the 'relationship' of the performer to 'task' exemplifying the dynamic noted above can be seen across the work of the companies profiled. In the first example, taken from Bausch's *Café Müller*, rather than focusing upon the traveling sequence of Dominique Mercy, if we turn our attention to the work of Jean-Laurent Sasportes, we can see the 'relationship' between the performer and the functional 'task'.¹⁹¹ Sasportes' 'attention' and 'awareness' is focused upon Mercy and the path he takes back and forward across the 'playspace'. It is his 'task' to keep this pathway clear and move the chairs in the space out of the way. Consequently, whilst the chairs may be perceived as 'objects' within Sasportes' spatio-temporal perceptual experience of the 'playspace' they are not direct objects of 'attention' but rather they are experienced as being in service to, or 'enacted' in accordance with, the 'intentionality' of the moment. Sasportes' 'intentional' field lies with Mercy and the fundamental goal of clearing his path. It is possible to see him react to Mercy's movements as he does this, again indicating that this 'actual' 'intentional' 'action' or 'task' (he does

¹⁹¹ As previously viewed in *Video file 2 - Bausch 2* from 5:23 - 9:08

not pretend to clear the chairs, but actually does it as necessary to Mercy) is a point of 'lived experience' for him.

In the second example, taken from DV8's *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, I would like to focus on Nigel Charnock and the short periods within the example where he is climbing the ladder.¹⁹² In each of the short periods between the point of him recovering from the fall before, and reaching the top of his climb to turn to face Russell Maliphant, we can see that the ladder is integral to his 'perceptual' domain; it is at the centre of his embodied cognitive experience of the 'playspace' and he engages in interaction with this ladder. However, whilst within Charnock's 'perceptual' experience of the 'playspace', the ladder is only an 'object' of his 'intention' in so far as he intends it in accordance with the focus of his conscious 'intentionality' in the space, namely the testing of Maliphant and Maliphant's willingness and ability to metaphorically and 'actually' catch him. The 'task' of climbing the ladder here is therefore again placed in service of that conscious 'intentionality'. Similarly to the manner in which Gallagher and Zahavi explain that the body tends to 'stay out of our way so that we can get on with our task' (Gallagher and Zahavi 2006: 145), it is not focused upon by the performer as an 'intentional' 'object' in and of itself, but as purposeful 'action', 'enacted' in service of thematised 'conscious intentionality'.

In the third example, taken from Vincent Dance Theatre's *If We Go On*, we see the 'task' undertaken by the performers is the content of the 'Go Go Go Game' led by Patrycja Kujawska.¹⁹³ Within this 'game', the various contortions undertaken by the performers are, like Bausch's musical statues in *Bluebeard*,

¹⁹² As previously viewed in *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 3:47 to 6:06

¹⁹³ Please play *Video file 10 - VDT 5* from 5:25 - 6:42

stopped and started by the command of the controller within the 'playspace', in this case Kujawska. The 'task' within this 'game' for the players is adherence to the rules of the 'game' through the actively 'playful' attitude in movements (the contortions) and the 'actions' (switching on or off the light bulbs). This is a 'task' requiring 'actual' phenomenal interaction with the 'objects' of the 'playspace' for the performer. This interaction is situated within the 'playing-with' of an 'actual' 'game', played for 'real'. Consequently, at this point, the 'perception' of the performer positions the domain of the 'playspace' and the 'objects' and 'entities' within it as being 'enacted' for the purposes of the 'game'. 'Objects' and 'entities', whilst being elements of the perceptual field of each performer, are not focused upon in and for themselves, but again in service of the wider 'intentionality' of the moment. In this instance, the 'intentionality' of the performers lies with the 'actualised' 'task' of 'playing-with' the 'game'. 'Playing-with' therefore becomes an imaginative 'object' of conscious 'intentionality'.

The intersubjective 'relationship' of the performer to other 'entities'.

This section of analysis will use clips of work from DV8 and Vincent Dance Theatre. The 'relationship' between the performer and 'object' examined in this section of the analysis is that between the performer and other 'entities'. These 'entities' are either the audience, or viewers, or other performers. I am positioning this relationship as different to the subject-object corporealism found in the performer-to-performer 'relationship' noted above in the section addressing the 'relationship' of the performer to 'object'. This section of analysis focuses upon the cognitive 'perception' of the performer concentrated into the experience of empathetic connection with other 'entities', or the 'intersubjective experience' explained by Lutterbie, below.

The collaborative and performative nature of theatre makes it an intersubjective experience. Unlike the reclusive artist, or the poet in the garret, actors need each other, whether those others are fellow performers or the audience. A considerable amount of attention therefore must be placed on the actions of the others in the room.

(Lutterbie 2011: 100)

Whilst I recognise that cognition is a process, I position this as a relationship different to a subject-object relationship for the performer, as engendering empathetic connection is, in itself, a very tangible 'intentional' consciousness and an 'awareness' of a process of doing for the performer, rather than the less prominent 'intentional' consciousness of an 'object'.

There are several aspects of this 'relationship' useful to note before highlighting examples of practice. Firstly, as with all other 'relationships' noted above, the cognition of intersubjectivity by the performer is relational; it is embodied and understood through the perceptive and proprioceptive faculties of the performer. It is embedded within the 'playspace' so that the intersubjective interplay between the performer and other 'entities' is a multi-layered cycle of stimuli and response in which the performer experiences a continual process of destabilising information and sensory and imaginative data constituting their 'being-in-the-world'.

Secondly, within 'dance theatre' the intersubjective relationship between the performer and the other 'entities' in the 'playspace' is not coloured by the notion of psychologically formed character-as-'other'. Whilst some forms of theatre intend to create a fictive location, as has been established in Chapter One, 'dance theatre' practice is inherently 'actualised' in the here and now of the 'playspace'. In combination with the nature and demands of the 'dance theatre' process drawing heavily upon the individual, emphasis is placed upon the presentation of the self of the performer and the 'seductive ambiguity' (Claid 2006) that this offers. This means that the performer, as themselves (or as selected facets of themselves), is interfacing very directly with the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace', rather than through an entirely fictive character, placed within an imagined setting.

At the perceptual root of this particular intersubjective 'relationship' lies the influence of the 'mirror' neurons noted in the discussion of cognitive neuroscience of Chapter Two. Whilst the actual functioning of these neurons may reside in premotor and parietal perceptual activity that essentially configures or instigates empathetic response at an unmediated level of neural action, the actual response and interaction between 'entities' will be intertwined with, and shaped by, other perceived 'relationships' between the performer, 'object' and 'entities' encountered within the 'playspace' that constitute the bodily 'lived experience' of the 'dance theatre' performer. Consequently, as noted by Ribeiro and Fonseca (2011), the response and 'actions' will be 'modulated', or inscribed with the traces of these other 'relationships', which themselves bear all the cultural inscriptions carried by the 'dance theatre' performer.

With the premotor activity and its 'modulation' acknowledged, within this 'relationship', the conscious 'intentionality' of the performer resides in the deliberate fostering and maintenance of an empathetic connection and conversation with the other performers and/or the audience. This empathetic connection focuses upon the communication and use of self by the performer and the directing of this into contact with that of the other 'entities' in the 'playspace' in a process of deliberate and conscious projecting and recognition. Ribeiro and Fonseca draw upon Gallese in noting that: 'Empathy is deeply rooted in the body experience – in the live body – and this experience is what enables us to recognise the others as people like us' (Ribeiro and Fonseca 2011: 79). Practice exemplifying the dynamic noted above can be seen in the following two examples.

In the first example, taken from *Strange Fish*,¹⁹⁴ the 'action' of both Wendy Houstoun and Nigel Charnock is a bodily expression of feeling. Whilst being a bodily expression, the 'intentionality' of Charnock in this extract is clearly directed deliberately towards the persona of Houstoun, with Houstoun acknowledging this and increasingly attempting to deliberately ignore or disengage from Charnock's persona. In turn, as the mediated viewer, we see, recognise and empathise with Charnock's increasing desperation and Houstoun's increasing discomfort and pain. The empathetic connection between the performers personae is enacted through, and focused into, inscribed, 'modulated' corporeal 'action', with the dynamic being realised through the movement content. It is possible to see Charnock and Houstoun physically experience the bodily 'lived experience' and feeling of doing as the

¹⁹⁴ As previously viewed in *Video file 5 - DV8 2* from 6:44 to 8:38

nature of the corporeal subject-object 'relationship' reflects the empathetic or intersubjective connection between the two.

In the second example, taken from Vincent Dance Theatre's *If We Go On*, I would like to focus upon the section of the clip in the following footnote from 22:15 onwards.¹⁹⁵ After having sunk to the floor, both Orlik and Best are breathing heavily from exertion. Orlik is looking at Best and says into the microphone he is holding that he is, 'Still waiting.' Not speaking, Best slowly rises to her feet. Unable to answer Orlik's questions, she just looks at him as she goes to stage left, pulls down a hanging light-bulb, picks up a switch and extinguishes the light.

During this 'action', the 'intentionality' of the performers rests with each other, specifically resting with the persona of the entity, rather than with the corporeality of the entity as 'object'. The 'intentionality' of each performer would seem not to be directed towards any particular 'object' except in service of the 'enactment' of an empathetic connection between themselves and the other performer. Each performer appears to be deliberately focusing their conscious 'intentionality' upon receiving and accepting the emotional state of the other performer, whilst also simply acknowledging their own as being present.

Summary of analysis

Using the lexicon of terminology from Part One, in the first half of this chapter I furthered the initial analysis of the discipline-specific chapters in Part Two into attempting to articulate qualities of 'absorption' in the work of the 'dance theatre'

¹⁹⁵ As previously seen in *Video file 8 – VDT 3* from 20:53 - 24:06

performer. Drawing upon specific examples of practice from the accompanying video files I positioned the qualities of 'absorption' as:

- 'Playing in excess'
- An actively 'playful' attitude

Articulating and highlighting these qualities provides useful material for the performer. When placed together, these qualities describe a particular 'mode of being/doing' for the dance theatre performer; the first quality articulates the particular nature of 'play' within 'dance theatre' explaining how the structures and strategies of mimesis within 'dance theatre' cause 'play' to be realised. The second quality focuses on the performer, providing a descriptive indicator of the desired performative attitude for working and becoming 'absorbed' within this setting. The discussion also recognised that this attitude is an unstable and difficult aspect of practice for the performer to maintain.

In articulating these qualities, the attitudinal basis for the performer being 'absorbed' is established. However, in order to be of more concrete use to the performer, and to be able to effectively facilitate and contribute to conversations about practice between performers, academics and practitioners, this attitudinal articulation needed to be grounded in specific tangible 'action'. With this in mind, the analysis then worked to identify and explore the 'dynamic locus' of the performer's 'absorption' in 'action'. The analysis positions 'absorption' for the performer as residing in the cognitive and 'situated' process of 'lived experience' within the 'enactive domain of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' across four key subject-object relationships of the performer. The four key

relationships between the performer and 'other' were all recognised as processes in flux; unfixed, and destabilising:

- The 'relationship' between the performer and the 'object';
- The 'relationship' between the performer and the sonic environment;
- The 'relationship' between the performer and 'task';
- The intersubjective 'relationship' of the performer to other 'entities';

Through the analysis, the lexicon of terminology was developed further.

Additions to the lexicon arising through this analysis will be fully summarised and examined in the Conclusion to come.

I think that within the two areas of analysis of this chapter, the 'how' and the main points of the 'what' of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer have been identified and articulated. In drawing upon the lenses of Part One and combining this with the examples of practice from the companies profiled in Part Two, the discussion has been able to continue to advance the articulation of 'absorption' in this context. However, whilst the discussion above has identified 'absorption' for the performer in terms of qualities and relationships, this articulation is, to some degree a division that recognises the constituent elements as inseparable in practice. Just as the form and the inherently active 'playful' attitude of Vincent's devising and rehearsal process affected the structural composition of the performance score at a fundamental level, so too do the qualities of 'absorption' interrelate and intertwine with the 'intentional' 'relationships' of the performer in the performance in an holistically realised 'mode of doing' for the performer. It is at this point we arrive again at

'absorption' for the performer. As a final part to the summary of the analysis, and in relation to the point above, it is pertinent to pick up the idea of 'optimal' experience from the introduction to the thesis and explore how the articulation of 'absorption' achieved through this chapter relates and contributes to the wider discourse on notions of 'optimal' experience.

The extended self

To pick up this thread, it is useful to be reminded of the idea of the extended self so often reported to be a part of optimal 'experience'. In commenting upon the notion of 'optimal' experience configured as 'flow', Csikszentmihalyi (1990) notes an absence of self-consciousness; during participation in activities in which the participant is in 'flow', the participant 'loses' conscious awareness of self. Whilst this echoes the comments of Gallagher and Zahavi (2006), which note that the body tends to 'stay out of our way' during 'flow' activity, the absence of 'awareness' and conscious 'intentionality' directed specifically towards one's own body is extended to encompass a more pervasive sense of loss of self-consciousness. Mirroring this, during the process for VDT's *If We Go On*, Janusz Orlik commented in interview on a point at which he had felt he had experienced an 'optimal' state of experience, explaining that, '[i]n the moment, yes, it's really difficult, in the moment you actually do it, you don't really process how it feels' (Orlik 2009 pers. comm.). As Csikszentmihalyi notes, this lack of psychic energy being directed towards 'awareness' of self offers the opportunity for the self to be expanded through increased 'awareness' being directed outwards into the 'relationships' with 'other': 'When not preoccupied with ourselves, we actually have a chance to expand the concept of who we are. Loss of self-consciousness can lead to self-transcendence, to a feeling that the

boundaries of our being have been pushed forward' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 64). As the boundaries of self are pushed forward, they are pushed forward through the conscious 'intentionality' of the participant towards 'other', or the psychic energy of the individual is invested in a focused directionality towards 'other', creating, in Csikszentmihalyi's terms, an 'interaction that produces a rare sense of unity with these usually foreign entities' (Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 64).

As noted in exploration of 'flow' in Chapter Three, this 'rare sense of unity' dissolves the normal relationships and the divide found between the subject and 'object' in the psychic entropy of the everyday 'enactive domain'. Within the relatively focused domain of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' there exists a greater opportunity for negentropic engagement, and the fostering of the highly focused, 'absorptive' 'perceptual' and 'intentional' relationships with 'other' noted above. The articulation of these 'relationships' as clarified in this chapter, gives clear definition to the 'action' of the performer in which the possibility of a unity, and a merging of the performer with a system greater than the self, can occur. The extension of self through the qualities and relationships of 'absorption' as articulated above represent an understanding of the coalescence of 'intentionality' with the goal of 'intention' itself. The 'absorption' of the performer here is a part of an extended consciousness and 'awareness' also recognised in dance practice by Sondra Horton Fraleigh. In approaching this coalescence from a phenomenological viewpoint, Fraleigh writes that:

Phenomenology contends that consciousness always has an object.

But I have described a pure consciousness, which is nothing unless I can

equate it with a state of being, possibly pure subjectivity; not as a metaphysic that escapes the body but as lived by the body because it has become the *body's* consciousness. As the dance is fully realized, it ceases to be an object of consciousness; it dissolves in perfected action.

(Fraleigh 1987: 40; emphasis in original)

Here Fraleigh describes the subject of intention and 'intentionality' itself dissolving together. It would seem that the higher the level of extended consciousness, the wider the 'reach' of the subject. 'Action' and 'awareness' are extended and merge in extreme negentropic activity to the point where the self, in terms of 'perception' and 'intentionality', moves beyond itself and its normal boundaries; it becomes 'absorbed'. As Ralph Yarrow notes,

the other is that the mode of knowing which occurs at the fulcrum point of this interface is not an either or, but a both/and *and* a neither/nor. At this point "I" am not what I was, nor am I yet what I may become, but I am both the unravelling of the former and the potential of the latter.

(Yarrow 2006: 21-22; emphasis in original)

Yarrow describes a state of being here akin to both the idea of 'optimal' experience and Fraleigh's description of 'perfected action' (Fraleigh 1987: 40) in which the *potential* of the 'latter' yet to be realised is present. The blending of 'action' and goal, or 'intentionality' and subject, would appear to give rise to an

'awareness' in which the 'dance theatre' performer creates themselves as extended; as possibility. As Sondra Horton Fraleigh notes, '[a]t the same time, I am extended beyond my personal identity. A larger identity appears as I meet the dance. The self that appears before me is the self of my possibilities' (Fraleigh 1987: 38). Relatedly, in the wider context of 'optimal' experience, as 'flow', Csikszentmihalyi notes that:

During the long watches of the night, the solitary sailor begins to feel that the boat is an extension of himself, moving towards the same rhythms towards a common goal. The violinist, wrapped in the stream of sound she helps to create, feel as if she is part of the "harmony of the spheres".

(Csikszentmihalyi 1990: 64)

In looking at the analysis of this chapter and in considering where the work of this study, and in particular the articulation of 'absorption' as a culmination of the investigation contributes to the field of discourse, I return again to the introduction to this chapter. As noted, the contribution and extension of the discussion offered here is made by virtue of the specificity of the study and consequently the potential in application and use for the 'dance theatre' performer. The work of the chapter, and the way it draws from the chapters before it, acknowledges the current thinking and developments in this interdisciplinary field detailed above and develops and extends this through articulation of a specific lexicon. More than this, the articulation and understanding of 'absorption' that has been developed is practice-centric. The enquiring performer, the academic and the practitioner will be able to use the

contents of this study as a resource in furthering practice and discourse. However, whilst this articulation will be of use in this respect, it will inevitably have characteristics and facets limiting its use and providing caveats to consider in its application. Discussion of these issues and related points of concern will now be addressed in the Conclusion, alongside a summary of the progress made here and discussion of possible routes forward.

Conclusion

This Conclusion begins by looking at the study as a whole, drawing together the various strands in order to evaluate the position reached by the investigation. In firstly summarising and then evaluating the work of the study I look at how this new knowledge contributes to, develops and builds on existing work and, in respect of the desire to work through ‘absorption’ towards an understanding of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’, how much closer it brings us to Winnie the Pooh’s ‘Poetry and Hums’, or Csikszentmihalyi’s violinist positioned as part of the ‘harmony of the spheres’. In doing this, the investigation revisits the primary research question itself:

Recognised as a necessary aspect of an ‘optimal’ ‘mode of being/doing’, what is ‘absorption’ for the performer working within ‘dance theatre’, and how can it be articulated?

The Conclusion then looks at how the new knowledge of the study might then itself be used, developed and extended, highlighting possible application and further routes of enquiry.

Summary of the study

Having introduced and explored the interdisciplinary notion of ‘optimal’ experience in the introduction and, within this, the idea of ‘absorption’ as the focus of the study, Part One of the study created and developed a lexicon of terminology with which to approach examination of ‘dance theatre’ practice. The foundations of this lexicon were established through constructing a genealogy of ‘dance theatre’ in Chapter One, and positioned as performance conditions of ‘dance theatre’. Through Chapters Two and Three, the emerging lexicon was

developed by adding words and phrases taken from, or adapted from the lenses of the study.

In Part Two of the thesis, the lexicon of terminology was then applied to the examination of practice in the discipline-specific Chapters Four to Six. This examination drew upon and reframed extant work from Pina Bausch and DV8 and also presented new original footage and material focused upon Vincent Dance Theatre, which was taken from fieldwork capturing the process and early performances of the company's 2009 piece, *If We Go On*. The material from each company is presented as accompanying material and comprises a number of short thematic video files detailing and exploring the work of each company as well as an audio-visual record of each interview conducted during the fieldwork with VDT. The fieldwork with VDT provided the bulk of the videos used in the analysis of Chapter Seven. The voiced narrative accompanying each film draws upon the lexicon of terminology. The lexicon was also then used in the analysis of Chapter Seven, with Chapters Four to Seven also continuing to develop the language of the lexicon. Part Two of the study culminated in analysis and articulation of 'absorption'. This analysis firstly identified qualities of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer, and secondly articulated key 'relationships' between the performer and other within the 'enactive' domain of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace'. These relationships were positioned as constituting the 'dynamic locus' of 'absorption' for the 'dance theatre' performer. As previously acknowledged and explained, in practice, the qualities and 'relationships' articulated are synthesised, holistic and intertwined with each other and do not exist separately.

A lexicon of terminology for ‘absorption’;

This section of the Conclusion draws together and presents the complete lexicon of terminology developed through the study. The content of this is then considered and evaluated.

The conditions of ‘dance theatre’

The condition of the ‘playspace’ as a ‘liminal meta-actuality’;

The condition of the ‘lived body’ as the dominant means of expression and the locus for performance;

The condition of ‘play’ and ‘game’;

The qualities of ‘absorption’ for the performer

The quality of ‘playing in excess’

The quality of an actively ‘playful’ attitude

The ‘dynamic locus’ of ‘absorption’ for the performer

The ‘relationship’ between the performer and the ‘object’;

The ‘relationship’ between the performer and the sonic environment;

The ‘relationship’ between the performer and ‘task’;

The intersubjective ‘relationship’ of the performer to other entities;

The language and terms of the lexicon of terminology

‘Absorption’; ‘action’; ‘actual/actualised’; ‘attention’; ‘awareness’; ‘being-with’; ;

‘disciplinary synaesthesia’; ‘dynamic locus’; ‘enactive’; ‘entity/entities’; ‘flow’;

‘fluctuating other’; ‘game’; ‘intentionality’; ‘lived body’; ‘lived experience’;

‘metastasis’ ‘mode of being/doing’; ‘object(s)’; ‘optimal’; ‘perception’; ‘play’;

'playful'; 'playing in excess'; 'playspace'; 'playing-with'; 'playing-within';
'relationship'; 'real'; 'situated'; 'task'; 'temporality';

The lexicon above draws together terms created through this study, such as 'disciplinary synaesthesia', 'fluctuating other' or 'dynamic locus' and combines these with terms from the fields of study used as lenses, for example: 'play', 'intentionality' or 'perception'. Within the lexicon, key terms are also used to provide points of structural focus for the terminology, as seen in the conditions of 'dance theatre', and the qualities and 'dynamic' locus' of 'absorption' for the performer as articulated through the various 'relationships' identified. Again, these are a combination of existing terminology from the fields used as lenses and new terms I have developed and created through the study. What arises is a body of language that combines the new with the existing to present an interdisciplinary linguistic framework focused on the articulation of 'absorption' for the performer. Given its content and structure, this framework furthers and develops current language in several respects.

Firstly, new and existing terms used here are brought to bear on the specific work of the 'dance theatre' performer. Echoing the sentiments of Camilleri (2013), whilst there is a body of discourse focusing on the 'dancer' as performer or simply the 'performer', the emphasis of the current lexicon is on the 'actor'. As noted at the start of the Conclusion, examining the variety of studies and practices focused upon this particular aspect of the work of the performer reveals a spectrum of approaches which sit across historical and contemporary thinking towards training for performance and performance practice itself. However, in taking in the spectrum of these practices and approaches (from, for

instance, the early ideas of Stanislavski with respect to 'communion', to Joseph Chaikin's notions of performative presence, to the intercultural approach to performer training taken by Phillip Zarrilli and his use of the 'enactive' view), it should be noted that the vast majority of these refer to the performer as the actor or actress. Similarly, the majority of the theatrical practice undertaken or discussed as part of the discourse in this area is situated as theatre, dramatic text or play.

As this study has shown, the demands upon the performer understood as the *actor* working in *theatre* are different from those acting upon the *performer* working in the 'playspace' of 'dance theatre'. Fundamentally, the 'liminal meta-actuality' of the 'dance theatre' 'playspace' positions 'action' as 'actualised' theatricality, occurring as 'lived experience' for the performer and inscribed upon the body of the performer in the here and now of that liminal 'actuality'. It constitutes space in which the performer does not encounter the playing 'as-if' or 'make-believe' of the 'then and there' fictive setting which sits as an imagined location away from the 'playspace', but undertakes a 'playing-with' akin to the sports game. This is 'action', not drama, located in the 'actualised' setting of performance.

In this study, the lexicon has been developed through, and applied to, a form of performance that recognises the performer as possessing understanding of performance as inherently dance-centric in conception, structure and realisation. The terminology of the lexicon acknowledges and uses this understanding whilst also extending and furthering the language of performance for the 'dance theatre' practitioner. A particular instance of this is seen in the

predominance of the language derived from an understanding of 'play' in the lexicon of terminology. Whilst the idea of the 'playful' is alive and well in the language of the 'dance theatre' devising and rehearsal process, and the notion of 'game' is a fundamental structural tool used across the 'dance theatre' genealogy drawn out in this study, there is very little discourse on the idea of the 'playful' 'dance theatre' performer. Conversely, the 'playful' actor is widely understood and discussed. The 'play' language within the lexicon gives articulation to this aspect of practice, facilitating a focus for further exploration and practice as research in this area of 'dance theatre' performance.

Secondly, the language of study brings together new and existing terms in a linguistic framework that moves beyond what is currently extant through its specific focus upon the idea of 'absorption' for the performer.

In drawing from language associated with the 'situated' and 'enactive' viewpoints within cognitive science, the language extends the discussion focused on the dancer and their relationship with movement or the dance. By synthesising this in combination with an understanding of 'play' and by bringing this synthesis to bear upon articulation of 'absorption' the study extends and specifies the pioneering phenomenological discussions of, for instance, Fraleigh and Sheets-Johnstone. The language furthers and specifies these discussions beyond the relationship of the dancer with the dance and into considerations of the 'dynamic locus' of particular relationships between the performer and 'objects' and other in the 'dance theatre' 'playspace', within which the qualities of 'absorption' are also considered.

Finally, the lexicon of terminology represents an objective analytical framework configured as a practice-centric lexicon for the 'dance theatre' performer within

the 'actuality' of the 'playspace'; the lexicon of terminology is grounded in an idiom aligned with the experience of the 'dance theatre' performer and is aligned to an embodied understanding of performance with the performer at the centre of considerations and discussion. Rather than residing as a purely theoretical construct, the language finds specific location in the 'tasks' of the 'dance theatre' performer and the tangible activities they undertake through their practice. For instance, the idea of entering into specific 'relationships' within the 'playspace' of the 'dance theatre' domain is a notion grounded in 'action' for the performer; it is something they do and with which they can identify. This emphasis in the lexicon is again important when considering the rationale of the study and the aim for it to be of tangible use as a resource in practice.

However, the strength of the study in its language, and the objective, analytical stance this creates in relation to the phenomenon of 'absorption' for the performer as an aspect of an 'optimal' 'mode of being/doing' is also a notable limit of the study; it is unable to adequately describe how it *feels* for the performer to be 'absorbed'. The study has highlighted how this element of discussion remains necessary for effective practice. The lexicon of terminology developed and used by the study provides the framework in which this feeling and practices associated with this feeling might be explored and investigated, but inevitably cannot not grab onto the phenomenological essence of the thing itself.

This points to the language of the study being useful in so far as it provides a rigorous, analytical and discursive framework within which the personal, felt 'lived experience' of the performer can be grounded. The fact that the

performers interviewed during this study continually struggle to articulate the performative quiddity of the 'lived experience' within performance underlines the usefulness of this framework as a grounding tool and a resource for such reflection and a means of further developing a shared language for debate and discussion between academics, practitioners and performers.

The discussion and words that *are* capable of meaningfully grasping the essence of the lived experience of 'optimal experience' have to, *need to*, have recourse to the poetic realm where one might find Winnie the Pooh's 'Poetry and Hums', or the descriptions noted by Bond and Stinson:

I feel like I'm going to take off.

I'm just about to fly. I AM flying!

I am flying and flapping and doing something very good.

I fly and swoop over and over again.

I am free!

(Bond and Stinson 2000: 60)

The language highlighted by Bond and Stinson, and that of the performers whom I encountered during the devising and rehearsal journey for *If We Go On*, points to the performer developing and articulating understanding of their work from the standpoint of felt, 'lived experience'. The position communicated is one that is necessarily and appropriately guided by the personal feeling of what happens rather than a thought or objective analysis of what happens. The linguistic framework of the study does not, should not, and cannot adequately capture the feeling of what happens for the performer. In describing the character of personal knowledge, Michael Polanyi acknowledges this inherent limitation when he notes that: 'For, just as, owing to the ultimately tacit nature of

all our knowledge, we remain ever unable to say all that we know, so also, in view of the tacit character of meaning, we can never quite know what is implied in what we say' (Polyani 1962: 95). What this study does do is provide a linguistic *enabling* framework through which discussion can be facilitated and in which the metaphors used to articulate personal experience and the felt process of doing can be situated and extended.

Documentation of VDT: A resource for research

The films in the accompanying material focused on *If We Go On* provide a new, useful and unique resource for research and practice in two key ways. Firstly, the films provide a valuable documentary resource focused on a prominent 'dance theatre' company. These films begin to address a gap in research focused upon the practice of this company and its place in discourse focused upon related areas of performance practice.

Secondly, and relatedly, the documentation of VDT's *If We Go On* sits as an exemplar of practice that marks a point in contemporary interdisciplinary performance. Whilst positioned as 'dance theatre' in this study and aligned to that genealogy, it also acts as an example of work that moves beyond the widely used term of 'physical theatre'.

Placed in the context of the wider genealogy of 'dance theatre' as structured by this study, we see an increasing hybridisation of the form as we encounter VDT. It is in the work of this company that we see a 'disciplinary synaesthesia' beginning to emerge. Central to this 'disciplinary synaesthesia' as realised by VDT, is the responsibility given in VDT's *If We Go On* to the performers for live

manipulation and creation of the majority of performance elements on stage. In *If We Go On*, the performers were responsible for the operation of the lighting, creation and/or playing of sound track and music, the performance of the spoken and sung word, the movement content and the movement of the set of the piece. As previously noted all the performers are highly skilled multi-disciplinarians, able to work fluidly with music, movement, song and text to produce work in which each of these elements is inseparably intertwined with the next. This is performance that draws upon, synthesises and moves between a gamut of artistic means to convey the given message at its heart.

Similarly, the inclusion of the pedestrian in previous iterations of 'dance theatre' has, in the work of VDT, been taken to extremes. In the case of *If We Go On*, this is now 'dance theatre' containing very little in the way of formalised dance. During the devising process, Vincent herself commented that it was more like experimental theatre than dance. VDT's next piece, *Motherland*, also continues in a similar stylistic vein with live music and the performer-created sonic environment again playing a significant role in the performance construct.

However, this step away by VDT from an emphasis on formalised danced movement does not mean a performance form that lessens its focus upon the 'lived body'. The prominence of the 'lived body' as the locus of performance resolutely remains; the message or thematic content of the piece is borne out through the inscribed 'lived body' and communicated as the 'lived experience' of the 'dance theatre' performer. In considering this continuing primacy of the 'lived body' in conjunction with the 'disciplinary synaesthesia' noted in VDT's practice, we arrive again at the notion of an 'embodied theatre', as espoused by

Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes. Loukes' use of 'embodied theatre' as an alternative to the label of 'physical theatre' moves the understanding of such practices beyond the limitations implied by such a tag, and she explains that, 'the use of the term retains the centrality of the bodymind in the process of making movement but perhaps gets away from the cultural, temporal specificity of the term "physical theatre"' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 269). We can see a similar sense of the contemporary 'dance theatre' practices as exemplified by VDT's *If We Go On* perhaps beginning to move beyond the idea of 'dance theatre' Placed in the context of emerging theatrical practices noted by Loukes, we see a 'disciplinary synaesthesia' in the practice of VDT in which there is a meeting, meshing and use of diverse and complementary artistic practices within the theatrical construct. This produces a manifestation of 'total' theatre presenting a contemporary echo of the Wagnerian *Gestamkunstwerk*.¹⁹⁶ Moreover, there is an actualised embodied echo in which the 'lived body' is still inscribed and celebrated as the locus and means of performance.

This study in context: Potential applications in practice.

The discourse and practice within performance studies and training pedagogies which focus upon the presence of the performer, or the engagement and interaction of the performer with the domain of the live event, and the other performers within it, are key areas of study, discourse and practice towards which the content of this thesis might usefully contribute. The study has potential to be used by performers, academics and practitioners working in this

¹⁹⁶ Loukes notes that the term 'total' theatre finds articulation in 'the work of Appia, Craig, the Futurists and Artaud and it reflected the pre-occupation of Modernist theatre artists to find ways to connect, integrate and synthesize existing forms' (Loukes, in Zarrilli, Daboo and Loukes 2013: 275). The term also recognises a multiplicity of contemporary practices that lean towards the 'innovative work within physical, visual and devised theatre, dance-theatre, mime/clown, contemporary circus, cabaret and new variety, puppetry and animation, street arts and outdoor performance, site- specific theatre, live art, hybrid arts/cross-artform performance' (Loukes 2013: n. p.).

area. As detailed below, the study offers the possibility for considerations appropriate to interdisciplinary performance, 'dance theatre' and dance more widely to become further embedded in the study of this particular area of performance practice. Potential applications of the study firstly focus upon the potential of the lexicon of terminology as a facilitative resource and a tool for direct application in both pedagogical and practice contexts and secondly on the development of practical exercises and methodologies for 'absorption' in performance.

Firstly, by placing consideration of VDT's work as indicative of contemporary 'embodied' practices, the study also offers further avenues for research and practice focused upon practical application and development of the understanding and articulation of 'absorption' in interdisciplinary contexts within performer training and performance practice. This work offers the possibility for the lexicon developed here to act as a first draft of a framework for 'absorption' through which various disciplines, fields and professions might meet in the study and practice of performance. In turn, initial use of this lexicon in interdisciplinary contexts would then be well placed to further develop the shared language across disciplines, providing further routes for enquiry and investigation within and across these disciplines and fields.

In considering the lexicon as a potential tool for practice and pedagogy, we can turn to examine its potential place in current training traditions. When examining training for dancers, we find an overwhelming focus upon the training dancer gaining mastery over the various strands of corporeal or physical technique. Whilst the related (though not identical) field of somatic practice does occupy a

place within and across the multitude of dance training regimes, this is relatively minor when considered in comparison to the emphasis placed on communion, performative presence and spatio-temporal interaction and engagement within the playing space of actors during their training. The emphasis, focus and lexicon of terminology of this study provide a framework through which these considerations might be brought to bear in working with practicing dancers and those in training. In particular, through the intersection within the study between the lenses of phenomenology, 'play', consciousness studies and the cognitive sciences, the 'relationships' the study highlights for the 'dance theatre' performer might contribute effectively in evolving approaches to training performers and to performance practices focused upon this area of the performer's work. A potential avenue of ongoing practice as research, therefore, is direct application of the central ideas and language of this study with training dancers to examine the effect that conscious application of these ideas and language has upon the performer's experience and communication of 'absorption' in practice. In particular, the development of:

- Exercises specifically focused upon the qualities of the relationships for the performer;
- Training methodologies that use these specific relationships as points of focus for the practical engagement of the performer;
- Use of the specific relationships as basis for the structure and organisation of training and practice.

In place of a text for rehearsal and/or performance, this approach foregrounds

the 'situatedness' of the performer. It uses the experiential 'relationships' as encountered by the performer as the fundamental unit within practice, or the structural basis of training and practice.

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