

**DANCING AGAINST THE GRAIN:
NEW VISIONS OF MASCULINITY IN DANCE.**

**A thesis submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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Abstract.

The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed an important development in contemporary theatre dance practice and its study. Since the early 1970s an increased level of concern with 'masculinity' has directed dance makers and scholars alike, resulting in a number of new and challenging dance works alongside a significant growth in publications devoted to gender and identity politics. This activity has led to a change in a cultural practice that had previously been dominated by women practitioners and of critical interest mainly to feminist scholars.

The impact of this shift towards a concern with 'masculinity' directs this study's exploration into the ways in which selected contemporary dance works represent forms of male identity that resist being categorised according to established models. Set within a framework of current thought on gender drawn from debates in the visual arts, dance literature and other non-dance sources, this research project investigates the extent to which these alternative models contribute to the development of a greater understanding of what it means to be a man in today's society. Furthermore, by paying close attention to the ways in which meaning is articulated in individual works, and setting subsequent findings against a historical perspective, this study questions some of the essentialist rhetoric used in dance scholarship and other critical disciplines which describe representations of masculinity.

Through an interdisciplinary approach that is sensitive to how aspects of masculinity are articulated in dance, this study uncovers a diversity of representations hitherto unacknowledged by other analytical models. Moreover, this project raises awareness of how dance not only reflects cultural norms of gender and sexuality but resists them and presents new ones. This is the visionary capability of dance wherein works can be read as working 'against the grain' of old-fashioned and essentialist attitudes about men in dance and in society.

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CONTENTS.

	Page.
Abstract.	
PREFACE.	vii
INTRODUCTION.	1
<u>PART ONE - MASCULINITY AND REPRESENTATION: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH.</u>	13
CHAPTER ONE: MODELS OF MASCULINITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS.	14
1.0. Introduction.	15
1.1. The Vitruvian model.	20
1.2. The Victorian model.	28
1.3. Modernity and photography.	35
1.4. Contemporary 'visions' of the male body.	41
1.5. Conclusion.	47
CHAPTER TWO: APPROACHES TO MASCULINITY IN DANCE LITERATURE.	50
2.0. Introduction.	51
2.1. Ballet historiography.	53
2.2. Contemporary scholarship and gender: the explosion of dance studies.	60
2.3. Conclusion.	73
CHAPTER THREE: FRAMEWORKS FOR READING MASCULINITY IN DANCE PERFORMANCE.	77
3.0. Introduction.	78
3.1. Analytical and conceptual approaches.	80
3.1.1. Masculinity: changing constructs and perspectives.	96
3.1.2. Postmodernism: blurring the sex/gender divide.	107
3.1.3. The 'queer' challenge: multiple, liminal and transgressive identities.	118
3.2. Conclusion.	122
<u>PART TWO - VISIONS OF MASCULINITY IN DANCE.</u>	128
CHAPTER FOUR: MASCULINITY IN DANCE: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.	129
4.0. Introduction.	130
4.1. Divinity: the Renaissance male dancer.	131
4.2. Heroism: the male dancer in Romantic ballet.	137
4.3. Sexuality: early twentieth century man in ballet.	144
4.4. Conclusion.	153
CHAPTER FIVE: MASCULINITY AND DANCE TODAY.	158
5.0. Introduction.	159
5.1. American modern dance.	160
5.2. Postmodern dance in Britain.	163
5.2.1. Images of orthodox masculinity.	163
5.2.2. Subversive practices: inversion/abjection/camp and queer identities.	166
5.3. Conclusion.	176

**PART THREE - AGAINST THE GRAIN: ALTERNATIVE
MODELS OF MASCULINITY IN CONTEMPORARY DANCE.**

178

**CHAPTER SIX: INVERSION AND SUBVERSION IN MARK MORRIS'S
THE HARD NUT (1993) AND MATTHEW BOURNE'S *SWAN LAKE* (1995).** 179

6.0.	Introduction.	180
6.1.	Mark Morris.	182
6.2.	<i>The Hard Nut</i> .	183
6.2.1.	The Nutcracker and Drosselmeyer.	186
6.2.2.	The Housekeeper and Mrs. Stahlbaum.	189
6.2.3.	Snowflakes and Flowers: the <i>corps</i> .	195
6.2.4.	The <i>finale</i> .	200
6.3.	Matthew Bourne and Adventures in Motion Pictures.	203
6.4.	<i>Swan Lake</i> .	204
6.4.1.	The Prince and the Swan.	207
6.4.2.	The <i>corps</i> .	214
6.4.3.	The <i>finale</i> .	218
6.5.	Conclusion.	221

**CHAPTER SEVEN: ALIENATION AND ABJECTION IN PINA BAUSCH'S
NELKEN (1982) AND LLOYD NEWSON'S *ENTER ACHILLES* (1995).** 225

7.0.	Introduction.	226
7.1.	Pina Bausch.	228
7.2.	<i>Nelken</i> .	229
7.2.1.	The Signer and the Accordionist.	231
7.2.2.	Three dances.	237
7.2.3.	The final <i>tableau</i> .	245
7.3.	Lloyd Newson and DV8.	249
7.4.	<i>Enter Achilles</i> .	250
7.4.1.	<i>Précis</i> : mythical sources.	253
7.4.2.	The peer group.	254
7.4.3.	Four beer-glass dances.	258
7.4.4.	Superman and the sex doll.	267
7.5.	Conclusion.	271

**CHAPTER EIGHT: EROTICISM AND 'QUEERNESS' IN JAVIER DE FRUTOS'S
TRANSATLANTIC (1996).** 275

8.0.	Javier de Frutos	276
8.1.	Introduction	277
8.1.1.	The opening scene.	282
8.1.2.	The soundtrack.	288
8.1.3.	The buttocks.	289
8.1.4.	Two window dances.	294
8.2.	Conclusion.	299

CHAPTER NINE: CONCLUSION. 303

Appendix.	<i>The Hard Nut</i> synopsis.	320
	<i>Swan Lake</i> synopsis.	321
	List of illustrations, videography and bibliography.	323

PREFACE.

At the beginning of *The Male Dancer* (1995), Ramsay Burt describes his first participation in a dance workshop as a life-changing event. Already an adult, he reflects that, given this opportunity earlier, maybe he would have become a professional dancer instead of writing about dance. His story mirrors my own. After attending a school where only girls could dance, it was only while at University that I discovered a love for it; not just as a spectator, but as a participant. Like Burt, I sense that an opportunity was missed and have sometimes imagined how my career path may have developed had I started formal training in my youth. For Burt, this missed opportunity stems from ignorance, where, as he explains, 'ballet was not an area of experience considered appropriate for young men like myself, or even one in which I might be interested' (p.1).

Based upon the evident lack of other men in the technique classes I attend, this attitude surrounding male dance and dancers still exists. Dance is an activity that remains shrouded in mystery, an atmosphere sustained by social structures that govern what is, and what is not, appropriate for boys and men to do. Within the binary codes of Western culture, any man who pursues a career in dance automatically reflects an investment in a feminine economy.¹ In contrast, men involved in other performance arts such as theatre and opera, as well as those who take to the concert platform, are not subject to the same stigma. Theatre dance performance remains unique in this sense, for its female legacy and association with physical spectacle are seen as a betrayal of what it means to be a man.² The equation is simple; to be a male dancer means being less than masculine where, within the dualist construction of Western cultural discourse, this further translates as being effeminate and presumably homosexual. Is this the true meaning and unspoken fear behind the 'appropriateness' that Burt earlier describes?

The belief that heterosexual men act, sing and perform music but don't dance is sustained by a cultural prejudice that seeks to maintain clearly defined differences both between and within the sexes. Any outward display of non-conformist behaviour leads to social marginalization and stigma; the male dancer is weighed down with the same stereotypical baggage that fashions preconceptions of the feared and effeminate homosexual. Even in a culture that claims to be working towards greater tolerance and the eradication of sexual discrimination, the male dancer remains a minority figure in a predominantly female arena.³

This marginal status, however, brings with it an opportunity to exert pressure. Visible articulations of difference can and do challenge the exclusive parameters of orthodox cultural practices and identities.⁴ When men use dance performance as a vehicle for the expression of unconventional forms of identity the pressure increases.⁵ Spurred on by my own experiences of marginalization, both as a gay man and as a male dancer, it is the impact of this combination of sexual preference and gender upon what is and is not considered appropriate that provides this research project with its founding impetus.

¹ For an account of the 'feminine economy' concept see Daly in Desmond (1997).

² Dance notation, particularly for classical ballet, has also been instrumental in upholding and promoting gender differences. See Blasis (1828).

³ I am referring to on-stage activity and not management and administrative positions. Although the female dancer/male manager equation is changing, as more women become involved in the running of companies and in decision making roles, it still remains a predominantly male area. See introduction to Burt (1995).

⁴ See introduction to Silverman (1992).

⁵ This is not meant to imply that female dance practitioners have not used dance for similar purposes, but this research study is concerned with issues related to male dance and representation.

INTRODUCTION.

The last quarter of the twentieth century witnessed a dramatic increase in the popular appeal of men in contemporary dance, with the number of all-male companies and male soloists performing new and exciting works increasing at an unprecedented rate.¹ Although works that address issues related to masculinity, devised by male and female choreographers alike, predate this period, what is especially pertinent to this exposition is the proliferation, provocative nature and variety of approaches now being adopted. At the same time there has also been a considerable increase in the amount of research devoted to masculinity. As with dance practice, this concern with men's issues in academia also has a longer history, but what is remarkable about this recent engagement is the generation of a diverse range of challenging and often conflicting views.

The main stimuli behind recent developments in both practical activity and theoretical debate are an underlying sense of dissatisfaction with old-fashioned and restrictive gender models and a timely need to reconsider what it means to be a man in today's society. Taking its cue from this need for redress, this research project will present an examination of five contemporary dance works. Viewed against a backdrop of current thinking about gender and sexuality, these works will be read to see if, and how, they articulate models of identity that challenge the existing codes of more traditional representational practices. Furthermore, what will also be considered is the extent to which recent stage activity contributes to the development of a more sensitive understanding of the ways in which dance articulates masculine identity.

In academia, dance has never enjoyed the same level of critical attention bestowed upon the other arts, but scholars remain divided over the reasons for this inequality. Feminists argue that, because dance is a body centred activity, it has suffered 'the scorn and neglect of mainstream scholarship' (Foster 1995: 11). It is a fate that, as Susan Foster points out, it shares with 'women, racial minorities and colonised peoples, gays and lesbians, and other marginalised groups.' Elsewhere, Janet Adshead-Lansdale (1993/4: 24) expresses similar concerns when she draws attention to the belief that 'creativity stands in opposition to the intellectual tradition and is incompatible with it.' It is a view that, she adds, 'ought to be long dead' because it maintains the stereotype of the 'mindless' (female) dancer and 'sterile' (male) academic.

Questioning the exclusivity of this politically grounded reasoning for the marginal status of dance, Francis Sparshott (1995: 420) claims that the 'lack of any reliable and generally accessible way of recording dance has given it a fugitive nature.' He suggests that dance's ephemerality and its reliance upon imperfect human memory as a means of preservation has made the study of dance very difficult. At the same time, he acknowledges that these are qualities unique to dance and should not be surrendered. It is this 'tension between transience and permanence' (p.421) that, according to Sparshott, while endowing dance with value as an art form, has also further contributed to its continued marginal status in scholarship.²

Whether due to political forces or to the technical limitations of recording the event, evidence suggests that circumstances are now changing for reasons that are both

theoretical and practical in origin. The impact of these forces is overturning previous attitudes towards dance to such an extent that, as Adshead-Lansdale (1999: xii) contends, the traits of 'transience and impermanence,' historically regarded as negative aspects of dance and an explanation for the lack of critical attention, should be seen and used as strengths. She argues that regarding dance's ephemerality as a weakness is to 'take the view that "making sense" of a dance is a search for an agreed "truth"; for a single and objectively demonstrable clarity of meaning based on the existence of a stable, physical object' (p.xii). She then points out that this scientific rationality has been exposed as a 'limitation' due, primarily, to the advent of poststructuralism with its emphasis upon multiple meanings rather than a single 'truth'. This development, Adshead-Lansdale suggests, has acted as a much needed corrective, opening up dance to the 'same depth of appreciation as theatre and music'.

The end of the twentieth century has witnessed two further important developments that have been of enormous benefit to the study of dance. First, is the impact of feminist, gay/lesbian and queer theorists whose critique has centred upon supporting an interdisciplinary interest in the body as an alternative source of meaning. This new emphasis, wherein 'bodily participation in endeavours is allowed to inform the inquiry' (Foster 1995: 12) has, in turn, led to a reconsideration of what Foster describes as the dichotomous distinctions that underpin canonical scholarship.³ As Foster continues, recent 'critiques of traditional scholarship aid in understanding strategies of the body's neglect, but inquiries into bodiliness can, in turn, extend these critiques by elucidating new dimensions of patriarchal and logocentric value systems.' The second

key development, that addresses Sparshott's concern, has been technological advances. The advent of sophisticated and affordable recording equipment, alongside greater access to notation systems, has made dance more amenable to scholarship.

A further influential and, arguably, prime factor behind this change of circumstances that is particularly pertinent to this study, is what is happening in the professional dance world itself. A significant contribution to the development of scholarship can also be attributed to the growing number of dance practitioners who are tackling complex social issues. Much of the excitement that surrounds recent performances has found its way into, and fuelled the progression of, dance research. In all, three distinct forces are at work: an 'exuberant creativity of the field' (Morris 1996: 11), technological advancement and an interdisciplinary 'inquiry into bodiliness' are all helping to raise awareness of dance as a 'visionary' practice.⁴

Because it is still a comparatively new research area, however, scholars who choose to write about dance cannot rely upon a history of supportive evidence such as that which is readily available to those who engage with other art forms.⁵ Sally Banes (1998: 1) laments, 'there are few models.' As a result, much of the terminology that will be used to articulate concepts that are pertinent to this study has to be drawn from outside the discipline. Previously, this strategy has given rise to complaints that dance scholarship has only developed its remit through acts of piracy and, by plundering the other disciplines for their riches, has in fact been left poorer and less secure. For example, Adshead-Lansdale (1999: xiv) expresses her concern with a history of dance study in which theories from linguistics and literary analysis have

been 'pounced upon, often uncritically and used simply to replace another set, in this case of traditional constructs from music and theatre.' A problem with this practice is that the very qualities unique to dance (physicality, dynamism and ephemerality) may not be given due consideration.

The alternative to this raiding of the disciplines would be to disregard the progression of ideas articulated in more established research and formulate an independent approach to reading dance that has its own conceptual vocabulary. This raises the problem of disassociation and even accusations of elitism and obscurity.⁶ A way out of this *impasse* that scholars such as Foster and Banes advocate, is to employ useful conceptual models discursively; to create a dialogic framework in which dance analysis could not only utilise, but also engage with and encourage the progression of extra-disciplinary critical thinking. Their suggestion that there should exist a balance between dance and theory is an important one, in that both performance-based and conceptual findings should be read through the same analytical lens.

Elsewhere, Gayle Austin (Goodman 1998: 139) provides a compelling argument in favour of the use of theory in dance analysis that exemplifies this sense of balance. She states, 'for me, theory is a way of thinking. It means stepping back from the myriad details of theatre production to take a broader view . . . It means that practitioners can be theorists and theorists can be practitioners . . . Theory is a text, to be read in a variety of ways like any other'. Adshead-Lansdale (1999: xv), however, adds her own timely qualification to the practice of drawing upon theories from non-dance sources, stipulating that it 'has to be matched by a critical awareness of *their*

capacity to respond to dance and to illuminate it (original italics). For Adshead-Lansdale, performance comes first, a strategy that distinguishes dance scholarship from other disciplines that, she argues, tend to use dance merely as metaphor or backdrop to 'pre-existent theory'.⁷

In the light of these debates, a discursive strategy that draws on the Banes and Foster dialogic model and traces a path according to Adshead-Lansdale's 'capacity to illuminate' will be adopted in this study. In the search for useful conceptual models, Part One will begin with an examination of literature that discusses representations of masculinity in painting and photography because, as with dance practice, both are visual forms and both use the male body as subject matter.⁸ This consideration of the body is a key factor behind this study's focus upon research devoted to the visual arts rather than other disciplines for, as Bryan Smith (1992: 22-23) points out, 'within art practices the Body is no longer a fleshless abstraction but the material of the body itself becomes the subject.'

How these texts address issues surrounding masculinity and the male body will be looked at in Chapter One. Speculation will centre on whether there is such thing as a universal model of masculine identity and, if so, what the parameters within which it operates might be. Also, acknowledging that any model also functions to exclude, what is being overlooked will also be discussed. Key to this strategy is the extent to which the 'material of the body itself' exerts a resistance upon the equation between male imagery and conceptual models of masculinity.

This question provides a useful link between fine arts analysis and the examination of findings drawn from dance study that will be conducted in Chapter Two. In this chapter the ways in which models of male identity are conceptualised in dance historiography will be discussed first. Of concern will be whether these models offer a useful, additional perspective to those taken from sources on painting and photography. As with the previous chapter, what will also be examined is the extent to which the inclusion of images of the male body exerts a form of resistance. In the subsequent section of this chapter, which is devoted to texts and articles that have sprung from the recent explosion of dance studies, an investigation into what extent this consideration of the 'resisting' body has contributed towards the development of a more sensitive approach to reading dance will also be conducted.

Based on Chapter Two's findings, the concern in Chapter Three will be to formulate a critical approach to reading dance performance that, while preserving agency to the body, is still able to incorporate concepts associated with masculinity and male identity. Three main elements will be discussed in this chapter: first, a method by which the dance works can be read; second, a methodology in which such readings can be set; third, an investigation into how key issues taken from a range of disciplines can inform the theoretical underpinning of the enquiry. The aim here will be twofold, beginning with how different theorists across a range of disciplines have explored useful issues related to gender and sexuality. Then, by tracing ideas that concern masculinity as they develop and traverse the disciplines, what will be considered is the contribution that research in dance can make to ongoing debates. This contribution will identify the four major historical stages, or turning points, in the

conceptual notions of: sexual difference within Classical reason and knowledge; the modern crisis in masculinity; postmodernism and its blurring of the division between sex and gender; and the recent development of queer theories.

Scholars from across the disciplinary spectrum remain divided over the dates of the modern and postmodern periodisations, while others remain sceptical as to their definition or criteria. Debate also centres on the extent to which postmodernism signals a complete break with modernism or merely its logical progression.⁹ Yet another opinion is that postmodernism is not opposite to modernism, but 'works from within the system it critiques' (Morris 1996: 11). Furthermore, there also exists widespread speculation as to whether postmodernism, as both a socio/historical periodisation and an aesthetic movement, is in decline and, if it is, what will replace it.¹⁰ Recognising, therefore, that these categories are 'slippery' and are subject to geographical, ideological, generic, national and thematic inconsistencies, this study will not refer to them as discrete historical periods but as points of division; axes around which major changes in thought took place. As such, a multi-disciplinary course through pertinent areas of Western thought that addresses some of the schisms, or divisions, that have led to new or revised ways of conceptualising masculinity will be pursued in this chapter.

Having examined issues taken from the various strands of the gender debate across different disciplines and how these can be brought to bear on an interpretation of dance performance, an exploration of significant moments in the male role in Western dance from the seventeenth century up to the present day will be conducted in Part

Two. To this day, the male dancer remains a problematic figure, subject to various degrees of controversy and prejudice. The strategy in Part Two will be to identify some of the possible causes for this current situation through an historical examination of how changing social pressures and choreographic demands have affected the way in which he is perceived. In addition, what will be considered is the extent to which the image of the male dancer has not only been partly fashioned by these forces but has also played an active part in the way dance manifests meaning.

Chapter Four will focus on ballet and present an examination of the role of the male protagonist from three different dance works. Recognising these ballets as groundbreaking in terms of the development of the genre, the investigation will focus on the ways in which they also brought about significant changes in the status and function of the male dancer. The question that will be asked is whether, by tapping into prevailing social anxieties, uncertainties and doubts, as well as aspirations, subconscious dreams and desires, these roles spoke to and of Western men and women and, albeit briefly, captured the spirit of their age.

While the main focus of this study is on new visions of masculinity in contemporary dance works, much can be gained by setting them in an historical context.

Furthermore, this strategy stems from a need to counter the possibility of adopting an essentialist attitude about men in ballet that risks denying them agency. By addressing specific ballet works and how each one represents models of gender identity, the aim in this chapter will be to demonstrate that the history of the male ballet dancer is one that has, as for his counterparts in contemporary dance, been

subject to and the source of the twin forces of innovation and controversy.

Chapter Five will bring this historical account up to date with an exploration of links between previous ballet developments and innovations in the contemporary arena. While looking at some of the diverse representations of masculinity in male dance today, what will also be addressed is the elitist stance adopted in some strands of dance scholarship. Rather than adopting a hierarchical bias that unfairly categorises ballet as an old-fashioned and institutionalised genre on the one hand and contemporary dance as a remedial or corrective platform on the other, what will be contended is that greater insights into the way dance manifests meaning could be gained by concentrating on the particulars of the performance. Instead of reading dance works purely in terms of how they exemplify generic and historical codes, this study will present an examination of how these codes modulate and develop according to the themes raised in each performance. To this end, this chapter, unlike the previous one, will not adhere to a chronological agenda but will be structured thematically. The concern will be with what Burt (1995: 159) describes as the 'experimental, new, progressive' period in late twentieth century theatre dance, a time that witnessed not only a significant flowering of creativity but also a great deal of invention and divergence.¹¹

The strong European bias in the historical framework of Part Two corresponds to two related concerns. First, these three periods of cultural history (Renaissance, Romantic and Modern) not only gave rise to a discrete model of the male dancer but also witnessed important changes in the performance and reception of Western

theatre dance.¹² Second, this model and the contemporaneous developments in European culture were closely associated. Bringing this investigation up to date will also provide a historical and thematic context for the dance works that will be examined in Part Three.

Part Three will be divided into three chapters and consist of a close reading of five contemporary theatre dance works. Although the introduction to each chapter will include some biographical information about the practitioners, referring to general aspects of their choreographic style and listing some of their previous major works, the concern is less with the socio-historical background to these works or the respective careers of the choreographers, but rather the ways in which the dance works articulate aspects of gender and sexual identity.

The themes of 'inversion and subversion' will provide the framework for the examination of *The Hard Nut* (1993) by Mark Morris and *Swan Lake* (1995) by Matthew Bourne in Chapter Six. In Chapter Seven, there will be an exploration into representations of 'alienation and abjection' in *Nelken* (1982) by Pina Bausch and *Enter Achilles* (1995) by Lloyd Newson.¹³ Finally, Chapter Eight will present a reading of *Transatlantic* (1996) by Javier de Frutos as an exploration of 'eroticism and "queerness".' By situating these performance-based findings in the context of the debates explored in Parts One and Two, what will be considered is the extent to which these works exemplify, question and expand upon current thought concerning masculinity; that is, how they articulate new visions of male identity that go 'against the grain' of traditional Western constructs of gender and sexuality.

¹ The definition of contemporary dance that I am using refers to the wide range of dance forms that developed in Britain and Europe from the mid 1960s. See Jordan (1992).

² Sparshott (1995: 421) argues that, for dance, 'nothing could be better than the 'imperfect' preservations whereby tradition, recollection and *aide-mémoire* endow dance creations with a variable longevity and mortality.' While recognising Sparshott's concerns, however, this study will not share his opinion because, without recent improvements in the recording of dance, this study would not be possible.

³ Such dichotomies exemplified by Foster (1995: 12) are 'theory vs. practice or thought vs. action'.

⁴ This notion of dance as a 'visionary practice' is pertinent to this study. More than mere observation, the term 'vision' refers to both the imaginative perception of an image and the image itself: both the subject and a way of observing it. Furthermore, as David Levin (1988: 14) suggests, 'if we think of vision as a capacity to be developed and a task to be achieved, then we are also thinking of vision as a "practical activity".' Vision, on the one hand, becomes a skill and a 'making sense' while, on the other, it refers to that which is stimulating or provocative.

⁵ Dance has always been a focus of research, but prior to the advent of dance scholarship and the adoption of dance study in universities and colleges, only by private individuals. See introduction to Carter (1998).

⁶ For a more detailed discussion of this point see the introduction to Desmond (1997). Also Carter (1998) comments upon the inaccessibility of some current writing on dance.

⁷ In her introduction Desmond describes how, at the 1992 interdisciplinary conference 'Choreographing History' a rift developed between dance and non-dance critics. At the centre of the debate was the fear that the 'materiality of the dancing body' would be lost by extra-disciplinary theorists who may 'approach dance merely as an exotic trope or metaphor' (Desmond 1997: 20). This study believes these concerns to be justifiable and, as such, will pursue an agenda that favours performance-based findings as primary.

⁸ Representations of masculinity in film are also well documented. See Mulvey (1975), and Neale (1983). A detailed discussion of the differences between film and dance representation can be found in Burt (1995).

⁹ See Bradbury and McFarlane (1976) and Kaplan (1988).

¹⁰ See introduction to Fekete (1987).

¹¹ Burt (1995: 159) resists using postmodern to describe this period in dance development as the term, he argues, is open to such a 'plethora of competing and sometimes conflicting definitions' and so readily applied to an ever widening range of dance styles as to make it almost valueless. While recognising that this term is problematic and is sometimes used uncritically, it still has value in this study when used to relate to specific works.

¹² Although mentioned here, this study is less concerned with developments in Western Theatre dance *per se*, but the relationship between changes in performance practice and corresponding models of the male dancer.

¹³ To be consistent, I am using the name of the choreographer rather than the company throughout this study. It is worth noting, however, that the company members of both Tanztheater Wuppertal and DV8 often work in collaboration with Pina Bausch and Lloyd Newson, their respective choreographer/directors.

PART ONE
MASCULINITY AND REPRESENTATION:
AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APPROACH.

**CHAPTER ONE:
MODELS OF MASCULINITY IN THE VISUAL ARTS.**

1.0. Introduction.

In this study's search for a 'responsive' and 'illuminating' theoretical framework, this chapter will begin with an examination of how masculinity is conceptualised in literature devoted to painting and photography. That both of these media are visual forms and use the male body as subject matter suggests a level of compatibility, while a more established tradition of cross-disciplinary critical engagement than is presently available to dance promises the availability of an extant and useful conceptual vocabulary. Furthermore, Brian Smith's (1992: 22-23) statement that art practices explore the material of the body, whereas theoretical models of the body are 'fleshless' abstractions, suggests that concepts of masculinity articulated in dance performance may have closer affinity with those filtered through an engagement with the visual arts than with those drawn directly from abstract theoretical sources.

These 'fleshless' abstractions' to which Smith refers, because they are 'purpose-built' linguistic constructs, also incorporate a concept of gender that is predominantly determined according to the needs of the associated theoretical discipline. Even philosophical models of 'the Body' that do not incorporate a concept of difference (for example; gender, sexual object-choice, ethnicity or age) raise questions about the appropriateness of adopting a universal stance in the light of recent feminist insights into the patriarchal underpinnings of language and culture.

In this chapter, it will be speculated as to whether philosophy's legacy of a universal idea of 'the Body' also directs models of masculinity conceptualised in art analysis

texts. In other words, on what level is the body in art read as metaphor in order to validate pre-existent theoretical stances and what consideration is given to the process of engagement with the subject-matter itself to inform the inquiry? This question has particular bearing to this study where the aim is to explore the extent to which aspects of masculinity articulated in dance performance can be read 'against the grain' of more orthodox models.

Both the literature and the art-works examined in this chapter are products of different socio-historical periods and this will be considered in their evaluation. Moreover, all the writers under discussion, although read as part of a trajectory of theoretical consciousness, have their own analytical models which deploy only the theoretical concerns available to them at the time of writing. In other words, there is no 'level playing field.' Therefore, and to avoid the risk of adopting too generalised an approach to masculinity, while charting developments in both thought and practice, the art-works will be investigated in chronological order. Drawing upon first-hand evidence from specific images themselves, the extent to which disciplinary and/or historical frames of reference are contingent elements that limit the 'material of the body's' ability to articulate meanings will be questioned. Of concern will be whether problematisation of these parameters has critical value by revealing fresh aspects of masculinity.

This discussion of representations of the male body in the visual arts will begin with its oldest and most popular form: the nude. The art historian Kenneth Clark (1957), who has written extensively on the relationship between visual art and culture, makes

an important distinction between the naked and the nude. He states that the nude is more than just a straightforward image of a naked body. Rather, he claims, only through poetic re-articulation does the 'ugly' human form transform into a nude. This manipulation of the subject matter corresponds to the Aristotelian notion of art in which 'the creative desire is not to imitate but to perfect' (p.4). With all imperfections eliminated, the actual human form is transcended to become its poetic ideal. For Clark, to be naked is to be unclothed, whereas a nude is invested with socio-historical significance and symbolic value.

To understand how this symbolic investiture informs the way in which critics such as Clark conceptualise masculinity, a specific male image will be examined, that of Vitruvian man. This nude figure is chosen because, although a product of thirteenth and fourteenth century Italian Renaissance culture, it is heavily influenced by antiquarian notions of perfect architectural proportion. As such, it epitomises many of the qualities used in the promotion of a classical model of ideal masculine identity.¹ It is also an image of the male body that has found its way into popular culture through its repeated use in advertising and the media to become a familiar masculine icon.² Furthermore, the masculine attributes that the Vitruvian model exemplifies have been exploited and questioned whenever visual representations of the male body have been discussed. In this chapter the concern will be with identifying these qualities and how they can contribute to an understanding of how masculinity is articulated in dance.

Motivated by a concern with identifying how different cultural theorists conceptualise masculinity, what will be addressed in this chapter are some of the more recent investigations into representations of the body in the arts canon. This will not be an exhaustive catalogue of the extant literature. Rather, it will be a selective look at texts that exemplify different responses to pressures exerted by feminist, gay/lesbian and ethnic groups which seek to recast canonical art history from minority perspectives. Key to the approach adopted in this literature is a remedial emphasis upon the material body as an alternative source of meaning. This, critics claim, facilitates the release of both works and practitioners from a history that has functioned to exclude minority voices from scholarship.³ As Home and Lewis explain, the purpose of such inquiry is to 'read against the grain' of 'ostensibly heterosexual imagery . . . , remove the presumption of the heterosexual viewer [and] construct alternative traditions' (1996: 1). It will be asked to what extent this problematising strategy would also befit a search for new visions of masculinity in dance.

One such 'remedial' text is Michael Hatt's *The Male Body in Another Frame* (Benjamin 1993) in which the author undertakes an investigation of *The Swimming Hole* by Thomas Eakins (1883). This painting, Hatt claims, 'can be understood as participating in a redefinition of masculinity' (1993: 15). In response to this notion of a conceptual shift in meaning concerning masculinity some of Hatt's findings will be examined. In particular, an assessment will be made as to how this Victorian 'redefinition' contrasts with the ideal values epitomised by the earlier Vitruvian model.

Hatt's notion of 'redefinition' seems to contradict Clark's contention that the function of the nude has not changed from its original purpose; 'so that man might feel like a God' (1957: 357). Modern photographic images of the male body are a useful source to interrogate this disparity, offering scope for the examination of the extent to which such ideal and universal values are still in evidence and where there have been changes in both thought and practice. Specific examples of modern photography will be explored, therefore, with attention given to the ways in which developments in theories of gender have been incorporated into art analysis in order to expose the visual conventions that support these values. Of concern will be how findings drawn from these theoretical models may be applied to an analysis of gender representation in dance. There are, however, key differences between painting and photography. Therefore, what will be investigated is the impact that the modern photographic medium, which might be considered less 'idealising', has had upon the way models of masculine identity compare with their Classical and Victorian predecessors.

The last few decades have witnessed the increased popularity of the male body as a lucrative photographic commodity in Western culture. Images of both nude and semi-nude men are now commonplace. They adorn billboards, pose for calendars and posters and populate the walls of art galleries. Drawing upon this as evidence of a significant shift in cultural attitudes towards the male body, what will be considered is how different theorists have responded to this recent development and what impact they believe it has upon 'ideal' masculine values. As it is a level of exposure that was formerly only granted to female bodies, many of the concerns previously raised by feminists are now being adopted in order to inform the debate.

Feminists claim that cultural attitudes towards women are constantly purveyed in representational media. This has led them to question the ways in which women are depicted and how such imagery corresponds to changes in Western culture.⁴

Unsurprisingly, theorists engaged with male imagery are now asking the same questions. There is, however, an important difference that Margaret Walters (1978: 13) identifies when she suggests that while the female nude has undergone continual modification, the 'ideal of male beauty' has remained virtually unaltered. Some of the literature that discusses more recent and *avant-garde* photographic representations of the male body will be examined in order to test this claim. What will be asked is, to what extent have new and unorthodox images of the body deconstructed this eternal 'ideal of male beauty' and what sort of impact has this had upon the way critics conceptualise masculinity?

1.1. The Vitruvian model.

There are two different painted versions of Vitruvian man; the da Vinci version (1487) and the Como Vitruvius (1521) by Cesarino (see figs. 1 and 2). Both depict a naked and muscular man with arms and legs splayed wide, where the hands and feet fit within two geometric shapes: a circle and a square. The original purpose of this diagrammatic representation of the male body was to demonstrate that man was a model of ideal architectural proportion. It was a concept that, in a period in history that witnessed the rise in popularity of Greek antiquity, played a significant role in the development of Renaissance high culture.

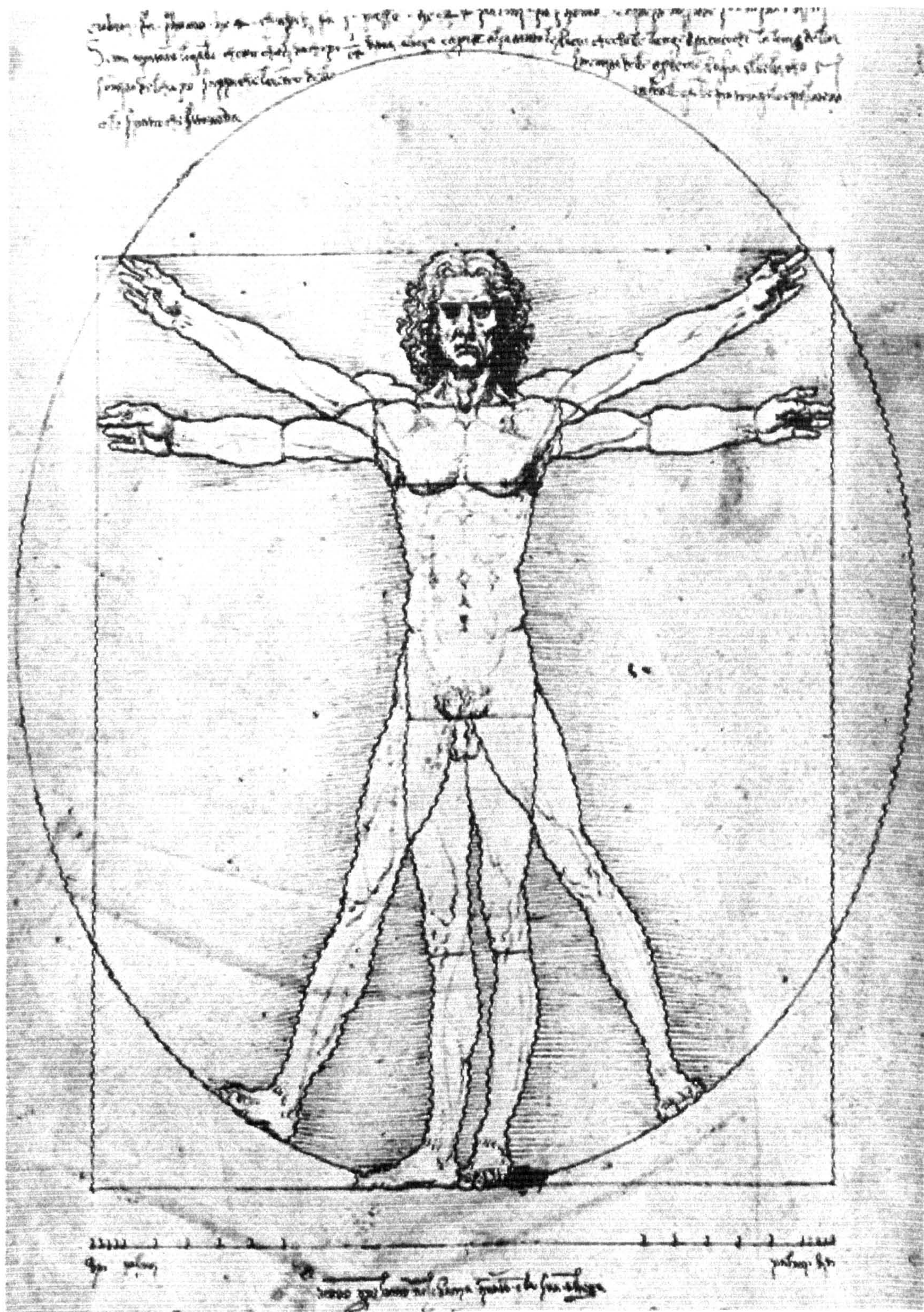


Fig. 1.

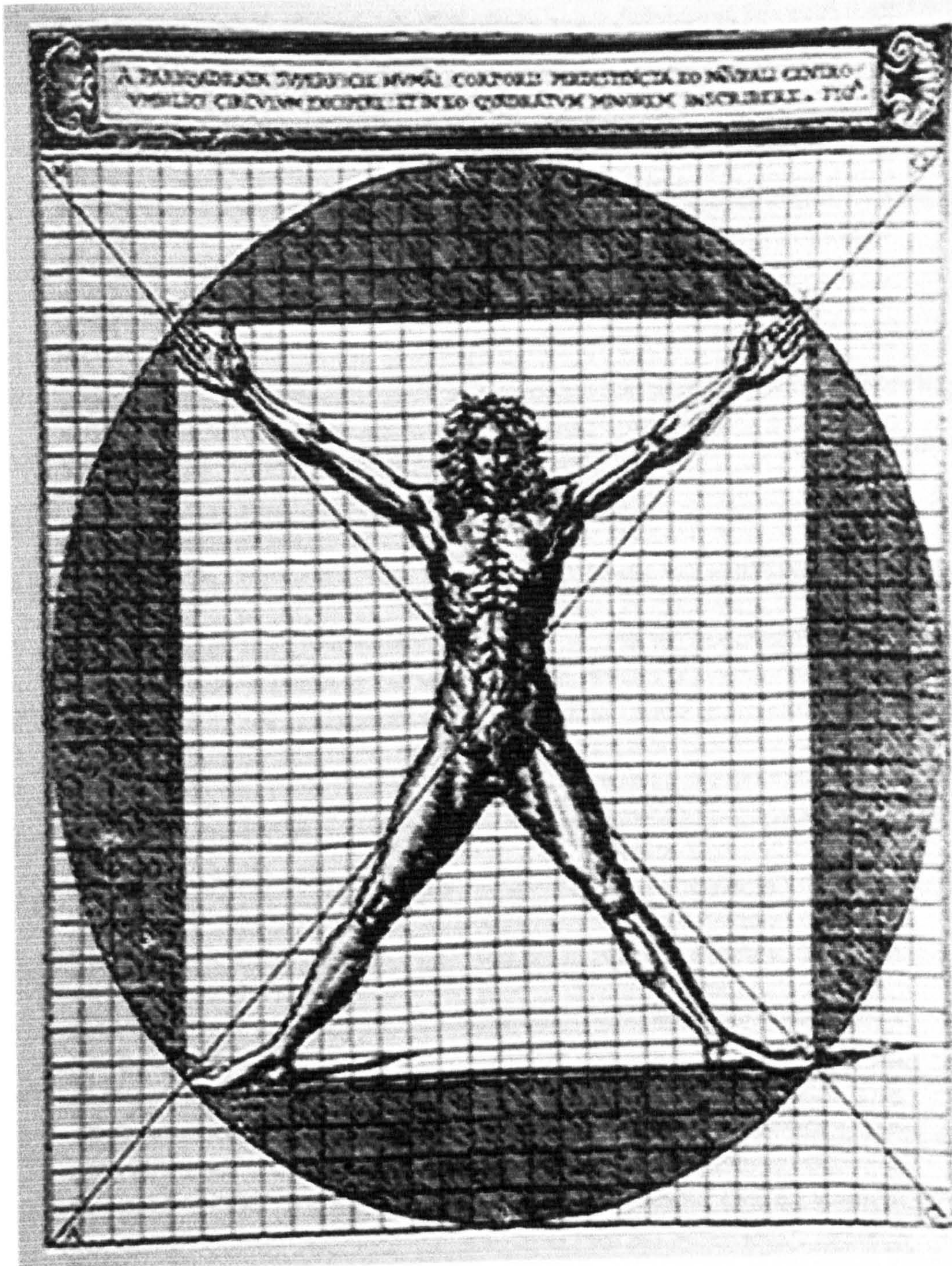


Fig. 2.

In his examination of the history of Western visual art, Emmanuel Cooper (1986: 1) draws a direct parallel between aesthetics and the promotion of ideal masculine values. He comments that 'the great resurgence of interest in Greek art and thought that was a fundamental part of the Italian Renaissance took the perfect male nude as the ideal physical form, able to convey the finest qualities of strength, courage, vitality, nobility, energy and intelligence'.

Elsewhere, Margaret Walters (1978), in her discussion of the Vitruvian model, suggests that such qualities, rather than being unique to the Renaissance, are eternal. Furthermore, Walters regards this desire for perfection as a means towards divine status. She states that Vitruvian man stands as 'a symbol of the harmony between man and God, microcosm and macrocosm. In the ideal male body, the proportions of the whole universe are reflected' (p.101).

Kenneth Clark (1957), however, points out that these ideal proportions are only achieved through a process of manipulation. He describes how, in the Como version, Cesarino distorts the body to fit within the circle and the square. As a result, the hands and feet appear disproportionately large and ugly. In the da Vinci version, two copies of the same figure are superimposed on top of each other so that, while one stands in the square, the other splays his legs to fit in the circle. Finally, the artist adjusts the positions of the geometric shapes so that the male form retains both ideal aesthetic and architectural proportions. This level of manipulation leads Walters to claim that 'Vitruvian man is not wholly convincing as an image of harmony. It hints, rather, at the difficulties artists experienced when they tried to turn flesh into formula,

a recalcitrant reality into ideal nudity' (1978: 101).

Walters suggests that the 'recalcitrant' male body itself exerts a resistance upon externally imposed ideal values. As such, the equation made between the male body and the claim to divine perfection is artificial. Likewise, the concept of masculinity being expressed by the Vitruvian model is the result of cultural influence rather than of natural (or divine) design. Walter's notion of a friction between 'flesh' and 'formula', which also corresponds to Brian Smith's differentiation between the 'fleshless' theoretical model and the 'material of the body' in art models, will be key to Chapter Four. In particular, what will be examined is how qualities associated with an 'ideal' model of masculinity were heavily exploited within the French royal court of Louis XIV to produce a spectacular demonstration of autocratic power through dance.

According to Walters, the concept of masculinity being articulated by the Vitruvian model is built upon the combination of divine and athletic power, of the universal gift bestowed by nature and individual conquest over the physical world through the deployment of both wisdom and visible muscularity. It is double-edged: the purest embodied reflection of a higher spiritual order and the all-conquering and immortal warrior hero; the rational thinker and passionate doer.

The symbolic source of power behind this model is, in Walters' view, the phallus. Stating that the classical nude is an aesthetic articulation of phallic virility, she recognises the phallus as the symbol of both the 'creative and renewing powers of nature' and also, through an association with tools and weaponry, of civilisation

(Walters 1978: 8).⁵ Furthermore, this model of a virile and omnipotent masculine identity is one that, as Clark points out, although subject to historical variance, remains basically the same:

The Greeks perfected the nude in order that man might feel like a God, and in a sense this is still its function, for although we no longer suppose that God is like a beautiful man, we still feel close to divinity in those flashes of self-identification when, through our own bodies, we seem to be aware of a universal order.

(Clark 1957: 357).

Clark suggests that the symbolic value of the Vitruvian model has remained the same, but that 'we' have changed in our attitudes towards the male body. He then qualifies this claim by describing a process of 'self-identification' with the nude. For Clark, 'we' means men: both the viewer and the artist are male and the text is a completely homosocial treatise. As Walters points out, for Clark 'the nude is always male' (1978: 13). She adds that this paternalistic attitude has a long history in art criticism, where "it is the male and not the female body that becomes a symbol of order and harmony between human and divine, the male that embodies man's supreme cultural values'. Elsewhere, Nicholas Mirzoeff (1995: 3), offers a possible explanation for this aesthetic and critical bias when he comments that, throughout history, 'Western art has sought to find one perfect method of representing the male body in order to overcome the weaknesses of the physical body'.

For Clark, Walters and Mirzoeff, the symbolism of the male nude body seems straightforward: visible muscularity corresponds to power, not just physical power but

also cultural (power to control nature and build civilisations), sexual (man as progenitor) and divine (man as emblem of God). Muscles also denote imperviousness to the possible threat of disease, enemy attacks or any suggestion of the male body as passive.⁵ That these disruptive forces can never be completely sublimated may explain the constant need to depict the male nude according to the same 'ideal' proportions.

Through this striving towards the promise of perfection encapsulated in the model, however, what is revealed is that masculine identity is based upon a lack. The history of the male nude in art, as exemplified by the Vitruvian model, no longer stands as a testament to what it means to be a man, but rather, to what he strives to be. In this continual postponement of the ideal there is, however, a disruptive force at work.

Clark claims that the 'beautiful' nude should 'arouse some vestige of erotic feeling' (Clark 1957: 6). As has already been argued, Clark's text is a homosocial treatise where the artist and spectator are both male and the gender of the nude is, according to Walters 'always male' (1978: 13). So, is this 'erotic feeling' that Clark imagines actually a homoerotic one? How, then, does his 'flash of self-identity' relate to 'arousal'? Clark remains silent on this conflict, a taciturnity that seems less surprising when the sociohistorical context of his writing is considered. For example, it could be argued that his silence reflects a general 'silence' in literature of these implications or, as Clark was writing in the late 1950's, theoretical models were not available to him. Equally, it could be speculated that Clark's own social class background might have made him reticent on matters of sexuality. Whatever the reason, Clark is unable to

resolve the tension between desire and identification that the male nude provokes. This tension renders the male nude, and the idealistic concept of masculinity that it articulates, unstable: the seemingly natural link between masculinity and the male body is rendered problematic due to the undifferentiated gaze of desire.

Although not addressed directly by Clark, what is being suggested is that, in the unfulfilled striving towards the ideal there is an unregulated pleasure principle. This exerts a pressure upon accepted codes of representation, re-inscribing the male body as a site for alternative, sexually coded, meanings. The possibility that the nude male body may be read as a source of counter-normative values, and what impact these may have on more idealistic aspirations, remains beyond the remit and (considering the time they were writing) the consciousness of both Clark and Walter's analytical model. Nevertheless, what can be inferred is that the way in which the image conceptualises masculinity depends not only upon the values encrypted into the model but how these values are decoded by the spectator: a spectator who, like the writers discussed in this chapter, interprets according to their own cultural, gendered, sexual, ethnic, historical and age-related perspective.

The suggestion that there is a disparity between desire and identification, and the 'ideal' and the actual, has particular value to this study. For example, several of the dance works examined in Part Three include duets between men, where tensions between their 'ideal' function in the narrative and the 'actual' symbolic import of the choreography blur the boundary between a legitimate identification and an illegitimate desire. Furthermore, the two works in the final chapter add another dimension to this

debate by exploring the complexities that surround the difference between a 'licit', regulated eroticism and an 'illicit', unregulated homoeroticism.

What constitutes the difference between the legitimate and the illegitimate, or the licit and the illicit, and how this may be advantageous to a search for new visions of masculinity in dance, will be addressed in the following section of this chapter. Furthermore, although Clark's and Walter's insights have proved useful to this investigation by conceptualising the 'ideal' masculine values being articulated by the male nude, there are still problems associated with taking too generalised an approach to the relationship between image and spectator. Therefore, of concern will be: first, how the symbolic import of an image and the relative perceptual position of the viewer impact upon a Victorian redefinition of masculine identity and second, how a different disciplinary approach may reveal greater insights into the mechanisms that regulate this 'redefinition'.

1.2. The Victorian model.

Beginning with the claim that Thomas Eakins' *The Swimming Hole* (1883) has a 'troubled history' (Benjamin 1993: 9) Michael Hatt undertakes an examination of some of the reasons why this painting should have caused such anxiety during the Victorian age. He begins by questioning previous over-simplistic explanations of this painting's hostile reception which, he explains, overlook important aspects of its construction and socio-historical background. Taking a combined deconstructionist/historical approach to the work he suggests that the relationship between elements in the

painting and contemporaneous concerns with representations of male nudity give it special significance. Part of the problem with the painting (and a possible reason for its neglect within art criticism), he suggests, is not so much to do with the subject matter itself but its suggestion of illicit pleasure. *The Swimming Hole*, Hatt claims, because it is homoerotic, raises 'the spectre of deviance' (p.10). As such, what will be examined is the analytical method through which Hatt reaches this conclusion, what impact homoeroticism has on the relationship between the male body and masculinity, and how key aspects of his approach could be used in an analysis of representations of masculinity in dance.

The painting depicts several naked men enjoying a swim in a lake (see fig.3). It is, according to Hatt, a representation of a 'homosocial world . . . a place where the male body is a spectacle, and object of scrutiny for a male gaze' (p.11). It is in this all-male framework of the gaze where the spectre of homoeroticism is invoked.

Hatt argues that this 'spectre' works to destabilise the relationship between the male body and an embodied expression of ideal masculinity because it brings the homosocial 'dangerously close' to the homosexual, while, at the same time constructing a 'steel frame that keeps one out and the other in' (p.13). For Hatt, the spectre of homoeroticism is the disruptive force that contributes towards the redefinition of masculinity that this painting articulates.



Fig. 3.



Fig.4.

By recreating a homosocial space based upon Eakins' own photographs of his 'naked romps' with other men, an ideal concept of masculinity where 'gender was understood to be literally embodied' (p.16) was inscribed on to his male subjects. It was a Victorian interpretation of a Vitruvian model, one that tended 'to accord with those disciplines such as sport, war and scouting which regulated the body and the moral values it incorporated; disciplines that work against the threat of the unmasculine, the feminine, the sissy, and so on' (p.16).⁷ These naturist jamborees were disapproved of during the Victorian period, however, because they occurred outside a 'regulated space where the male body was a legitimate spectacle and where the look was controlled'. As Hatt states, the unspoken fear that lay behind criticisms of Eakin's outdoor activities was 'the possibility of unregulated pleasure' (p.15).

According to Hatt's evidence, the Victorian concept of ideal masculinity relies upon the existence of institutional ('steel') frames and codes of conduct for its stability (Hatt examples the gymnasium, the YMCA and the Sports Club as 'proper, moral, disciplined frameworks' (p.16)). As the legitimate justification for gazing on the male body provided by these frames is absent from the painting, the only reason that remains is illegitimate pleasure. Equipped with Mulvey's famous conception of the gaze and the notion of desire (concepts unavailable to Clark and Walters) Hatt states; 'the gaze it [*The Swimming Hole*] invites – the male gaze on the male body – is offered no context for enjoyment other than delight in the body itself. The male nude is insufficient as a frame if there is no legitimate reason for nudity' (p.19). This, however, is not the only disruptive element that the painting articulates: there is an additional factor that serves to destabilise the relationship between the male body and

'ideal' masculinity. As with the Vitruvian model, the concept of masculinity that it articulates is based on a degree of manipulation.

Hatt sees *The Swimming Hole* as part of an 'aesthetic tradition surrounding the nude' (p.16), a tradition in which, as it has already been claimed in this chapter, manipulation and instability are important factors. In order to identify the level of manipulation within the painting, Hatt compares it with the original photographs that were used by Eakins as its basis. Hatt points out that 'the photographic nudes are further formalised and idealised in the painting. Bodies are turned to remove the penis from sight, poses are stabilised, and models from the academy are invoked' (p.16) (see fig.4).⁶ The process of idealisation in *The Swimming Hole* transforms the boyish physiques of the photographed models into their more muscular and mature equivalents.

Does this mean that age is a contributory factor towards idealism or is the artist demonstrating a sensitivity towards depicting naked boys and, if so, what this could imply? To hide the penis from view and make reference to antiquarian models lends weight to the notion that a level of censorship directs this representation of the male body.

This censorship, or moral framework, however, does little to dispel the homoerotic charge that this painting produces. While the Vitruvian image can justify the gaze through direct reference to architecturally ideal proportion, no such disciplinary structure is present in *The Swimming Hole*; therefore 'the spectator is interpolated as

both masculine and desiring. The image presents the undisciplined body as the object of a desiring subject' (p.20). Hatt's argument, however, is based on a similar presumption made by Clark concerning both the gender and sexual identity of the spectator: both male and heterosexual. For Hatt, *The Swimming Hole* is a deviant image, but only inasmuch as it effectively compels the spectator to view the image from a perspective that is 'other' to the masculine.

This problematic aspect of Hatt's approach, however, does not diminish the value of his findings to this study. That the framework or context of the nude, its socio-historical background, the level of manipulation and the reasons for this manipulation all contribute to whether specific male images are supportive or disruptive of ideal values is useful to an exploration of representations of masculinity in dance that go 'against the grain'.

So far, it has been revealed in this chapter that the history of representations of the male body is one in which there exists a fine line between a 'licit' aesthetic appeal and an 'illicit' desire. Just as the Vitruvian model can be claimed as a justifiable excuse for depicting male nudity, so *The Swimming Hole* cannot. Even the superimposition of antiquarian imagery and a level of censorship are not enough to dispel the 'spectre of deviance' from this image. In this respect, the Eakins painting is more revealing. While the Vitruvian model articulates a quintessentially ideal concept of masculinity, *The Swimming Hole* shows what happens to this concept when its supportive mechanisms are removed. The male body becomes a possible source of pleasure, which renders its 'natural' bond to masculinity unstable. During the twentieth century

this link between a physical and conceptual ideal has become further strained as the result of a popular demand for 'beautiful' images of the male body.

1.3. Modernity and photography.

The notion of instability surrounding models of masculinity is fundamental to Richard Dyer's (1982) investigation of popular male photographic imagery. Drawing upon psychoanalytical theories of the construction of gender, and focusing on the different non-verbal ways that gender roles are maintained, 'what is at stake,' he argues, 'is not just male and female sexuality, but male and female power' (p.63).⁹ Although there are important differences between photography and dance, his description of the strategies through which this power is inscribed onto the male photographic model has the potential to provide this study with an insight into the ways male dancers maintain and/or go 'against the grain' of their own gender roles in performance.

The first strategy involves what Dyer calls 'the active/passive nexus of looking' (p.66), in which the gaze of the male subject tends to be either a disinterested look up or off, or a direct 'stare at the viewer' (p.63). Both types of gaze, he claims, imbue the male subject with phallic power. To look up suggests spirituality, a straining and striving for higher things where 'straining and striving are the terms most often used to describe male sexuality'. When the gaze becomes a direct stare, the sexual stakes are raised even higher where, in the language of psychoanalysis, this look is described as 'penetrating or castrating' (p.66). According to Dyer, the power of the gaze to

penetrate or castrate becomes the means through which men can reaffirm a masculine identity that, within a nexus where the male subject is objectified in the frame of the viewer's desiring gaze, is in danger of being associated with passivity. Moreover, as Dyer adds, this threat is one that pertains only to male sexuality:

It is clear that castration can only be a threat to men, and more probable that it is the taboo of male anal eroticism that causes masculine-defined men to construct penetration as frightening and the concept of male (hetero)sexuality as 'taking' a woman that constructs penetration as an act of violence.

(p.66)

This notion of the 'penetrating stare' as an act of violence is particularly useful to the two analyses in Chapter Seven. Both dance works deal with changing power relations between men where hierarchies of dominance and passivity are both determined and manipulated through the use of the direct stare.

Another strategy discussed by Dyer is the link between activity and masculinity. He describes how, while female models are generally 'just there to be looked at,' the male model is either seen doing something or posed in such a way as to suggest activity. Key to this promotion of the male as active is visible muscularity where, as Dyer remarks, hard muscles are 'the sign of power - natural, achieved, phallic' (p.68, original italics). The illusion that muscles are biologically given serves to defend a concept of masculinity proclaimed as innate to the male and hence incapable of being lost or surrendered. It remains illusory because, according to Dyer 'developed muscularity - muscles that *show* - is not in truth natural at all, but is rather achieved'

(p.71, original italics). Adding to the mystique, which implies that activity and muscularity are not enough, male models are often artificially posed by the photographer in symbolic settings that serve to reinforce hardness. This is not a new practice, but one that finds its roots in the sculptural representations of sword-wielding and overtly muscular warrior heroes and gods from Greek antiquity. Furthermore, that the combination of muscles *and* a 'reinforcing' setting determines the difference between active and passive also explains why the Vitruvian image passes as an 'ideal' representation of masculinity and *The Swimming Hole* does not.¹⁰

The notion of artificiality is brought into sharp relief by the two last photographs that Dyer includes in his article. The first one depicts a naked and muscular young man happily sporting an erection while the other is of a fully dressed and serious Humphrey Bogart (figs.5 and 6). The setting of the first picture is an outdoor location with the young man casually leaning against a tree while the model in the second shot is not only indoors but surrounded by (in fact, almost completely buried beneath) trophies, sports equipment and other evidence that 'hysterically' (p.72) emphasise conquest. In the first photograph the equation is between masculinity and nature, and forms a link with the Victorian model epitomised within Eakins' painting. The second one associates masculinity with culture, which corresponds to the earlier Vitruvian model of man as the focus and embodiment of cosmic harmony.

In both photographs the men look away from the camera but while the gaze in the first shot imbues the model with a secure confidence borne of an innate muscularity, the gaze in the second suggests a sense of surety through achievement.



Fig.5.

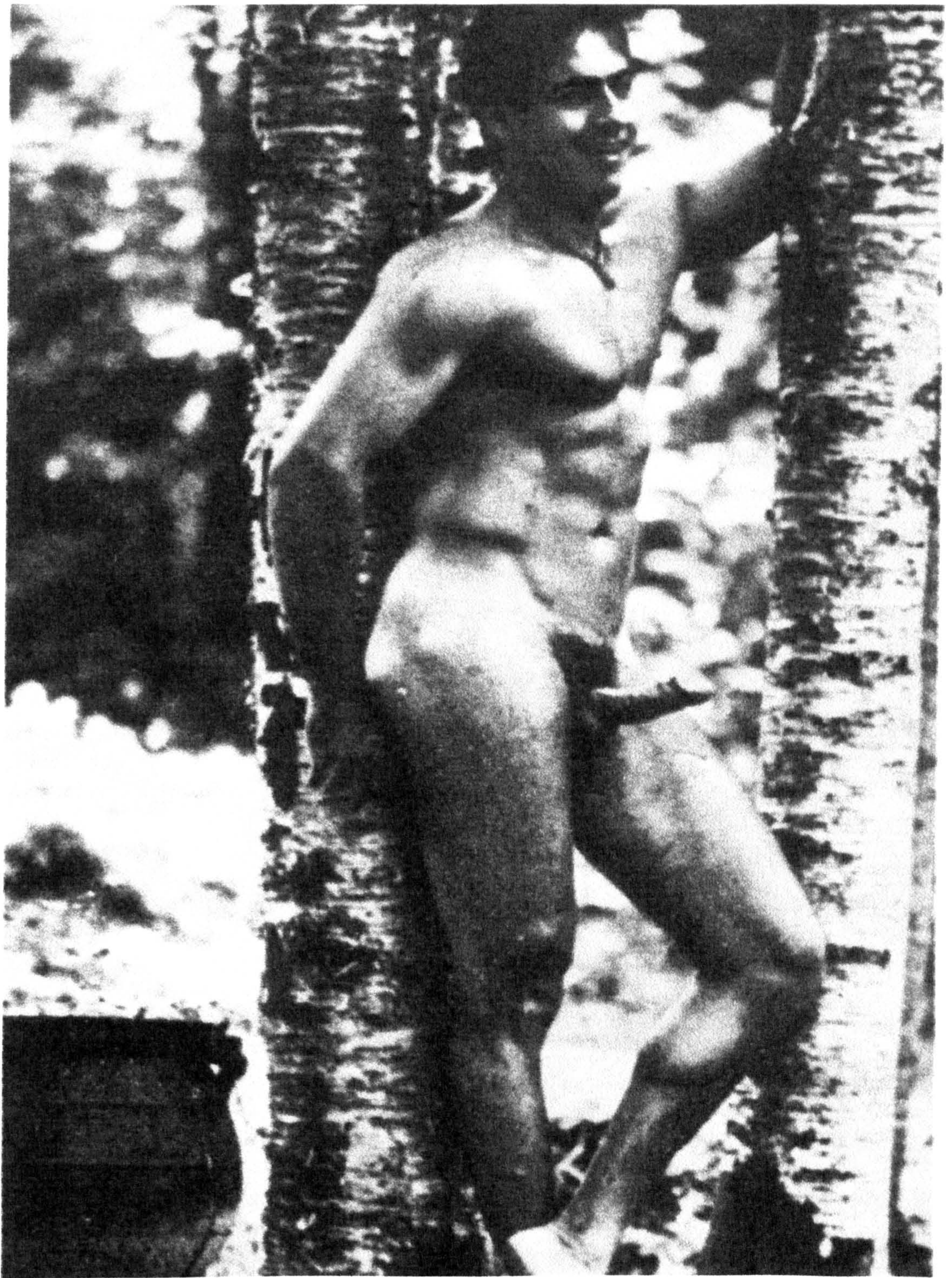


Fig.6.

While the methods of enforcement are clearly different, whether relaxed or straining, the concept of masculinity that they articulate is identical and, by now, familiar.

Dyer's examination of male pin-up photography is useful to this study in its assertion that the criteria that define 'ideal' masculinity are still in evidence and that this is only achieved through a process of manipulation of the subject-matter. What is also of value is the way in which writing in the latter part of the twentieth century is able to utilise: Lacanian psychology which, although indifferent to historical processes, rejects any notion of fixed sexual identity; sociology, which deals with the structures of labour and power; and sexual politics, which charts the various crises and complexities of sexual identities and gender relations. This drawing upon various disciplines (and the way they conceptualise models of gender) according to their capacity to illuminate an argument is now an acceptable analytical device. It is a strategy that will also be pursued in this study.

Since Dyer's article was published in 1982, however, cultural attitudes towards the male body have changed: a shift made evident by a late twentieth century demand for erotic images of men. Social theorists argue that this increased level of exposure does not necessarily mean that men are becoming more feminised but that social definitions of masculinity are variable and subject to cultural and economic forces: a temporality that psychoanalytic theory does not consider but has become a key factor in more recent investigations into representations of the male body.

1.4. Contemporary 'visions' of the male body.

In *Fully Exposed: the Male Nude in Photography* (1990), Emmanuel Cooper tackles many of the issues that surround more recent male imagery. Referring in particular to the widespread appeal of late twentieth century photographic work produced by artists such as Mapplethorpe, Michals, Weber and Tess, he suggests that this increased exposure has polarised the debate surrounding the symbolism of the male nude. For men, he claims, it has come to stand as an 'alarming reminder of their own vulnerability' whereas feminists recognise it as 'another assertion of masculine strength' (Cooper 1990: 183). While his condensation of this division into one based on gender difference could be seen as an oversimplification, it highlights an underlying and seemingly irrefutable axiom. For both Cooper and Dyer, the crux of this debate remains the link between the penis and the phallus which, Cooper adds, 'is generally thought to be crucial to the male psyche'.

This notion of necessity in terms of hiding the penis from view is the 'crucial' factor in Cooper's argument. What is visible (the penis) and what is alluded to through symbolism (the phallus) is considered pivotal in the way masculinity is both conceptualised and then problematised.¹¹ As has already noted in this chapter, however, to conceptualise the phallus as the transcendental signifier of masculine power is to disregard the impact of historically specific and changing power relations (both between men and women and amongst men) in the wider social structures and practices that produce them. Dance performance, however, replicates and informs social structures.

This phallus/penis relationship, therefore, will be reconsidered in Chapter Eight in an examination of the extent to which symbolic suggestion and actual exposure impact on how masculinity is articulated in dance. What will also be questioned in this chapter is whether the primacy of the phallus as the defining symbol of masculine power/identity/sexuality is destabilised and/or inverted through such performance techniques as depictions of the male body as a fragile receptacle for sexual desire and a choreographic focus on parts of the male body not traditionally associated with expressive agency.

While Cooper's somewhat simplistic understanding of gender politics within his argument remains open to question, his belief that there is a link between the increased popularity of images of the nude male body and a widespread change in attitudes concerning masculine sexuality remains credible. For him, the entry of what was previously considered the taboo subject of eroticism into the economy of mainstream cultural practices has impacted upon the moral divide that functions to preserve and protect an orthodox masculine code from the spectre of deviance. Moreover, more recent photographic images, particularly those that come from the highly commercial and fashion-based industries, have exploited this deviancy factor as a lucrative commodity that appeals to both women and men. As Allan Ellenzweig (1992: 14) remarks, 'any photographic model of man-as-phallic champion is capable of providing exceptional fuel for homoerotic admiration, a feeling mixed with variable amounts of envy, desire and identification.'

Cooper (1990: 185), however, goes on to point out that many feminists regard the increased level of interest in the male nude not in terms of a breakdown in barriers around masculinity but as an 'expansion of the terrain of masculine sexuality'.

Claiming that the social context in which art is produced plays an important part in the way it is received, the feminist view is that most of the erotic photographic images of the male body are taken by men and are therefore merely an 'extension of the male view'. The male body may be perceived as sexual but, according to feminist thought, only in accordance with tightly controlled and artificially imposed preconditions. These can be likened to Hatt's 'steel frames'.

This notion of a preconditioned eroticism leads Cooper, like Dyer before him, to question whether the increased visibility of the male nude has 'shed any of the power invested in the body ideological by revealing the body physical' (Cooper 1990: 186). In an attempt to resolve this dilemma Cooper turns his attention to what he calls the homosexual viewpoint. He suggests that many male photographers have developed a 'gay sensibility' that bridges the imaginary divide that separates a feminist from a masculinist perspective:

Taking up the feminist ideas, some photographers challenged the construction of masculinity in a patriarchal society, questioning stereotypical 'macho' characteristics to deconstruct traditional representations and reconstruct non-aggressive, pro-feminist images of maleness (p.188).

Cooper's introduction of sexual difference is also one that seems to shift the locus of meaning away from the spectator and towards the creator. Unfortunately, as has already been demonstrated in this chapter, the combination of a 'recalcitrant' male body and an undifferentiated gaze render any premeditated coding highly unstable. Whatever the original motivation may be (either political or aesthetic), however, some photographic work can be read as 'challenging', 'questioning' or a 'deconstruction' of more traditional models of masculinity. Examples of this practice include the use of androgynous imagery (Mapplethorpe) and the widespread practice of creating objectified images of the nude body by omitting the model's head (Weber and Tess). To become androgynous, not only must obvious gender-specific parts of the body be disguised or remain hidden but phallic properties of the body, like overt musculature, must also be downplayed.¹² Indeed, many of Mapplethorpe's male models, although tending towards a lean and athletic look, are not particularly physically developed while, to blur the gender divide further, his female subjects are often body-builders.¹³

The omission of the subjects' head results in the loss of identity and reconstructs the male body as an object. It also denies the returning gaze of the model which, according to Dyer, functions to preserve a level of potency. This notion of fragmentation and objectification as a means to disempowerment and what impact it has on the way dance represents masculinity will be considered in Chapter Eight.

So far it has been suggested that, while cultural attitudes towards the male body have shifted over time, and these attitudes are embodied in the articulated or otherwise stances of the writers which this chapter exemplifies, the underlying model concept of

masculinity articulated within both paintings and photography has remained historically unchanged. That is, male bodies are represented according to a limited repertoire of variations based upon a single theme. The promotion of God-like attributes, with man as virile athlete or indestructible warrior, has served to defend the idealistic concept of masculinity from the spectre of deviance. In Chapter Seven, however, it will be contended that the notion that these forces come from the outside is based upon denial. Rather, what will be suggested is that beneath the surface of this idealistic model there is an inherent flaw, in which the threat of exposure of this instability is something that 'haunts' masculine identity.

The argument presented in this chapter is that, while perceptions have shifted, models of masculinity in the visual arts have not. If anything, a more relaxed attitude to nude male imagery, widespread cultural change and the rise of consumer spending power have contributed towards sustaining the popularity of idealistic male imagery.¹⁴ As Alasdair Foster (1988) points out, all photographic texts refer to classical antiquity as a source of masculine values such as morality and sovereignty, and little has changed. He states, 'slimmed down from proportions which might make him appear ludicrous, freed from the baggage of classical reference, the core of powerful masculinity remains' (p.31).

In *The Male Body and Contemporary Art* (Goldstein 1994), however, Andrew Campbell and Nathan Griffith suggest that, in more contemporary and less populist imagery, it is possible to detect a shift away from this narrow model towards a much broader remit. Taking to an extreme the Aristotelian notion of the nude as the naked

body transcended, they contend that, in some areas of the visual arts, the male body no longer exists. It is, rather, 'nothing more than a physical support for a "masculine" identity that is constructed by the ways in which it is clothed, is arranged, or arranges itself, and the social/sexual context in which it interacts with similarly or dissimilarly sexed bodies' (p.153).

To exemplify this claim, and drawing upon a revisionist agenda that finds its origins in recent feminist and gay/lesbian thinking, Campbell and Griffith investigate a number of late twentieth century paintings and photographs. These images, they believe, have the potential to 'problematise the very notion of a male identity defined and characterised by an archaic, euro-american, heterosexual, phallogocentric system of signification' (1994: 155). They go on to describe how each image articulates a particular challenge to orthodox masculine values; a subversive agenda in which the male body undergoes extreme levels of distortion and, in some cases, vanishes completely. Certain themes predominate including parody, images of sadomasochistic practices, cross-gender representations and bodily fragmentation.

Campbell and Griffith's deconstruction of the male body to that of a 'metaphor' is not too dissimilar from Brian Smith's notion of 'the Body' as a 'fleshless abstraction': a theoretical construct that, because it does not consider the material of the body as the subject, has little value to the aims of this study. Furthermore, Campbell and Griffith contend that, in contemporary photography, the link between the male body and masculinity has been denaturalised and, as such, 'traditional notions of masculinity no longer hold in our culture' (Goldstein 1994: 176).¹⁵ While their claim for photography's

agency to affect culture to such an extent seems somewhat ambitious, their belief that some male imagery can be read as 'visionary' is convincing. They maintain that 'the term masculinity has no meaning in and of itself. It only has meanings brought to it through social construction and history. The male body is only one aspect of what masculinity might be'. What masculinity 'might be,' as a vision of the future, is fundamental to the aims of this study.

1.5. Conclusion.

Evidence extracted from the texts in this chapter upholds the claim that, even though it is possible to detect a late twentieth century shift in attitudes towards the nude, the majority of representations of the male body in the visual arts still continue to support a universal concept of masculinity. This is an 'ideal' model of male beauty that, historically, has been legitimated through the language of aesthetics and Aristotelian notions of physical perfection. Motivated by developments in psychoanalytic and feminist theories of gender, however, more recent investigations have sought to question such rhetoric in order to ascertain what underlies the continuing need to maintain this ideological model and the standardised masculine values it represents.

Consequently, scholars well versed in the latest theory now read this model as a tightly regulated defence mechanism against any externalised threat that could rob the male of his most precious and illusory power source: the phallus. Moreover, and as evidence in this chapter reveals, the real threat to this model does not come from external forces but through the unstable nature of the exposed male body itself.

Some recent and challenging work produced by photographers has been read as an attempt to destabilise this ideal model. Findings suggest that looking at images of the male body that are in some way transgressive not only reveals that traditional codes of representation impose a limit upon what masculinity means, but that subsequent problematisation can render the body open to alternative readings of identity: visions of masculinity that go 'against the grain.'

¹ As Clark points out, in western art as in classical Greek art, the nude is an 'idea,' in that, it is in its physical idealism that classical Greek sculpture is readable as an aspiration towards, or an poetic invocation of perfection.

² Images of Vitruvian man abound in Western popular culture. For example, it is used as the logo for the television documentary *Everyman*; numerous advertisements for men's watches or perfume, opening titles to films; there is even one in the screen-saver for my PC.

³ See Betterton (1987), Benjamin (1993), Meyer (1994), Davis (1994) and Home and Lewis (1996).

⁴ For example, see Betterton (1987) and Nead (1992).

⁵ A discussion of how Greek idealism has been perpetuated in twentieth century Western culture's obsession with the muscular male body can be found in Dutton (1995).

⁶ I will return to this notion of the male body as 'passive' and what impact this may have on an investigation into representations of masculinity in dance at a later point in this chapter.

⁷ The Vitruvian model is itself a re-interpretation of Greek idealism.

⁸ This is also recognised by Walters (1978: 239) when she states that, in comparison to the original photographs, 'the nudes . . . have a faintly artificial air'.

⁹ Dyer draws upon on Mulvey's concept of scopophilia (the look of objectification; most often used in film theory to describe the way a male viewer's gaze transforms the female into a fetish or penis-substitute) and Lacan's concept of the pre-Symbolic and the Symbolic (the two stages of the child's development from a pre-Oedipal stage of polymorphous perversity which is outside language, to the recognition of the significance of the penis and entry into the symbolic order of patriarchal law and language) as a starting point. Both of these theories, although useful in that they provide a basis for a gendered approach to the act of looking and identification, are trans-historical and have also recently faced criticism from theorists who question the idea that the formation of identity comes with the acquisition of language.

¹⁰ Even though, ironically perhaps, the penis is clearly visible in the Vitruvian image and hidden in *The Swimming Hole*.

¹¹ For a more detailed discussion of the relationship between the phallus and the penis see Bordo in Goldstein (1994).

¹² Most notably the penis for male bodies, and the lack of the penis for female bodies.

¹³ Two photographs that have inspired this notion are *Robert Sherman* (1979) and *Lisa Lyon* (1980) by Mapplethorpe (Conrad 1988). Both subjects are nude but their genitalia remain hidden by shadow and, while the first model is lean and undeveloped, the second adopts a pose favoured by bodybuilders to emphasise muscularity. Gender ambiguity is the result of occlusion and conflicting sexual signals.

¹⁴ The impact of cultural change on concepts of masculinity will be discussed in Chapter Three.

¹⁵ Other examples of how photographers have distorted the human body can be found in Ewing (1994). For a discussion of how contemporary queer art practitioners have used the human body as part of a subversive political agenda see Cooper (1986 and 1990) and Home and Lewis (1996).

CHAPTER TWO
APPROACHES TO MASCULINITY IN DANCE LITERATURE.

2.0. Introduction.

While the examination conducted in the previous chapter of how texts on visual arts conceptualise masculinity is of value, all of the models under discussion were based upon static and two-dimensional images of the male body.¹ This study, however, is concerned with reading the male body in dance, a body that that moves and interacts with other bodies within a three-dimensional frame. Acknowledging, therefore, that the impact of temporal and spatial factors unique to dance have so far not been considered, this chapter will address how masculinity is conceptualised in dance scholarship.

Chapter One also noted that some visual arts images of the male body can be read as ‘visionary,’ in that they have inspired new ways of thinking about masculinity. As such, this chapter will ask whether contribution performance based findings are having a similar developmental impact within dance scholarship. One of the main concerns of the previous chapter was how different texts dealt with the often complex relationship between theoretical models of ‘the Body’ (Smith’s ‘fleshless abstractions’) and the recalcitrant nature of the subject-matter itself. A similar line of investigation will be pursued in this chapter in relation to dance scholarship. In other words, it will be considered to what extent a balance between theoretical models and the agency of the dancing body to articulate meaning has been achieved in recent readings of dance works. An examination of this issue will be beneficial to the formulation of a model of analysis that is sensitive to the requirements of this study.

Although the concern in this study is with contemporary dance works, much can be gained from setting them within a historical framework that encompasses developments in both thought and practice. As such, this chapter will begin with an examination of some of the earliest discussions of theatre dance. With one notable exception, these texts are historiographical and concerned primarily with classical ballet.² The findings in this chapter are presented in order to test whether there is a model of masculinity particular to traditional theatre dance. If there is, how is it being conceptualised? Moreover, how may an examination of this model contribute to an understanding of what constitutes new visions of masculinity in dance?

After examining ballet historiography, the second section of this chapter will look at some of the many texts resulting from the late twentieth century explosion of dance studies. The previous chapter has already highlighted the impact that both unorthodox images of the male body and developments in theory have had upon visual arts literature. This chapter will examine the extent to which the same forces are at work in dance scholarship. It will ask whether the recent growth in the number of practitioners who are addressing men's issues has led to an increase in the documentation devoted to men's involvement and representation. In other words, to what extent is some of the most recent thought on gender and sexuality finding a place in readings of contemporary dance works that deal with masculinity and the male body?

2.1. Ballet historiography.

1969 saw the publication of an issue of *Dance Perspectives* devoted to 'The Male Image'. In his introduction, anthropologist and kinesics³ founder Ray Birdwhistell describes it as a collection of 'unique and thoughtful documentations of the reflections of sensitive and talented men who are attempting to examine the concept of "masculinity" in a field, ballet, in which men have been charged to be (and have at times claimed themselves to be) "feminine" ' (1969: 11). Referring to the common stereotype of the male ballet dancer as effeminate and 'probably homosexual,' he goes on to argue that, contrary to this notion, ballet requires 'strength, agility and endurance.' Seeking to separate male ballet from stigma, Birdwhistell claims that the effeminacy tag was 'engendered and nourished . . . by offstage behaviour' (p.11).

Though Birdwhistell believes ballet to be a manly pursuit akin to sporting activities, he acknowledges that any attempt to debunk prejudice remains a futile occupation. This 'coercive and durable' stereotype, he remarks, will never be erased because the sports arena itself is no longer perceived as a stable homosocial milieu. Birdwhistell argues that 'a public, increasingly doubtful of the masculinity of weightlifters and football players, is probably not going to be swayed by statements about the athletic demands of the ballet' (p.11). Birdwhistell, in this respect, seems to be caught in a paradox of his own making. Indeed, as Kenneth MacKinnon (1997: 45) notes, 'The Male Image' seems 'nearly obsessional in its concern to establish the masculine credentials of male ballet dancers,' while, at the same time, 'finds it impossible to unburden (them) of an imputation of effeminacy.'

Birdwhistell's own solution to this 'no-win' situation is the creation of a division between the actor who 'makes a "masculine" statement' and the 'general public, which would define the dancer as feminine and his performance as inherently un-masculine' (1969: 11). It is, he argues, the public that 'must be educated' and so 'the communication model must prevail'. Birdwhistell's sweeping generalisation about the 'general public' and his bias towards the 'actor' is, however, merely a smokescreen. It masks a fundamental problem with men who dance, wherein, according to MacKinnon, the 'display element of ballet and other dance forms raises doubts about the appropriateness of the male in the overtly to-be-looked-at position, reckoned to be proper to women' (p.46). As the previous chapter has noted, this sense of appropriateness concerning men as the subject of the gaze is not unique to dance. Being on display, whether it is in the visual or the theatrical arts, raises the spectre of deviance by equating issues of gender with those of sexuality. For a man, to be in a position conceived of as 'feminine' implies homosexuality. This is not so much because there is any evident similarity between these two forms of 'otherness' but, rather, because there is only one understanding of the concept of difference in which heterosexual masculinity is upheld as the norm.⁴

The conflation of sexual identity with gender is demonstrated by the four male ballet dancers interviewed in the Birdwhistell text. All of them deploy a series of tactics to defend themselves from the poisoning stigma of the effeminate homosexual label. Any threat is either removed from the performance arena ('off-stage behaviour'), couched in negative terms (by equating homosexuality with a sense of loss) or countered through the continual equation of ballet with other manly activities. This

evidence suggests that these dancers equate professional legitimacy with heterosexuality. As such, the identity they describe is Vitruvian in essence; invulnerable, muscular, superior and phallic. Moreover, this is the model that, according to Birdwhistell, must prevail even if it not recognised by an uneducated 'general public'. As Birdwhistell implies, however, this is not enough to completely dispel the spectre of deviance. Seemingly aware of this, a further weapon these dancers deploy to defend their cherished masculine status takes the form of the female dancing partner.

The relationship between the *danseur* and the *danseuse*, as implied by these men, is one based upon different levels of support. While the ballerina requires the man to hold her in lifts and pirouettes he, in turn, exploits her presence to demonstrate his 'natural' superiority. In addition, these male dancers also use differences in ballet vocabulary and physiology as evidence to uphold their claims. For example, a common attitude is that only women should do *adagio* movements because their bodies are better designed for it while men should do the large jumps because only they have the necessary power and 'weight'. A further, gender based, difference is identified by one of the men when he describes his approach to partnering work:

Though very conscientious in her work, sometimes even she could not resist her feminine instincts. To keep the situation well in hand during our dance together, whenever it was physically possible I would gently push her off balance or stop her pirouettes - at the proper time of course. Thus I made sure that overbalancing or overturning was not possible.

(Igor Youskevitch in Birdwhistell 1969: 15)

Not only does this exemplify the man's desire to remain in control (see also Edward Vilella's comments, p.47), it also highlights another common attitude in this text. The male dancer works logically and through 'reasoning' (Youskevitch, p.23). His aim is to be creative without abandoning self-control whereas the female dancer 'loses' herself in the dance. She works through 'feelings' and 'instinct' (Youskevitch, p.15); stereotypically feminine traits which, as the text implies, need to be harnessed by the man.⁵ The male dancer is, however, not always accompanied by a ballerina and it is at these points that the male body slips from its 'ideal' moorings and the spectre of deviance re-emerges. This time, however, it is not the 'general public' who are implicated but the *Dance Perspectives* text itself.

'The Male Image' is replete with photographs of both male dancers and images of nude Michelangelo statues. The reasoning behind this practice, although never qualified in the text, can be imagined. By equating male ballet dancers with gods and warrior heroes from antiquity, a strong connection is forged between these men and the classical ideal of male physical prowess. While inscribing these *danseurs* with a borrowed concept of manliness, however, it also serves to transform them into fetish objects. As has already been argued in the previous chapter, the male nude is highly unstable. Open to the indiscriminate and desiring gaze, its inclusion in 'The Male Image' functions to destabilise the 'steel frames' that separate an ideal masculine identity from the spectre of deviant homoeroticism.

The ideal of a virile heterosexual masculinity that *The Male Image* seeks to promote is undermined by the unregulated male body itself. Furthermore, dance performance

remains a feminine milieu that, like the unregulated setting of Eakin's *The Swimming Hole*, does not provide the stable framework in which the spectacle of the male body can be legitimated. Without support from the protective mechanisms that serve to protect the male body from objectification under the desiring gaze, no amount of on stage athleticism or off stage heterosexist rhetoric can serve to dissociate the male dancing body from possible speculation surrounding sexual identity.

Birdwhistell's concern that any attempt to debunk prejudice remains a futile occupation seems to be justified. The source for this stigma can, however, now be identified not as the 'general public' but the male body. Furthermore, and as the analysis of the following texts will contend, to dissociate male dance from any suggestion of deviance, ballet historiography sometimes resorts to discriminatory tactics.

The need to separate male dance from the spectre of deviance appears in both Walter Terry's *Great Male Dancers of the Ballet* (1978) and Alexander Bland and John Percival's *Men Dancing: Performers and Performances* (1984). Both texts are very similar in style, structure and content and provide a straightforward account of the development of male ballet since its inception in the French courts of the Renaissance. Concentrating upon European and American ballet history, they chart the successful careers of a wide range of male ballet dancers where the level of fame corresponds directly to the amount of text space they receive. Unsurprisingly, Vaslav Nijinsky, Rudolph Nureyev and Mikhail Baryshnikov gain the most attention in this respect. The purpose here, however, is not to question the relative celebrity status that these dancers enjoy in these texts but the way in which it is articulated.

In order to justify the legitimacy of male ballet and male dancers, both texts employ the same rhetoric as 'The Male Image'. Concentrating on the particular technical abilities, athleticism and noble grace of each dancer, what remains paramount is to what extent each dancer exemplifies acceptable and universal manly qualities. What is not disclosed is that the means of expressing this ideal comes as a result of many years of training. Like the Vitruvian model, the masculine identity being articulated is not innate but achieved, culturally produced.

In both texts there is limited reference to anything that might problematise the claim to acceptability. This is exemplified when both texts refer to Nijinsky. In Terry (1978) there is only a very brief reference made to the relationship between Nijinsky and Diaghilev (who was Nijinsky's lover) in which the term 'homosexual' is neatly avoided. Bland (1984) handles this aspect of Nijinsky's persona far more clumsily. Seeking to solve the 'mystery surrounding his personality', the text states:

To many people, he seemed to have literally dropped from the skies as a pure and unsullied spirit of the dance, only to be corrupted by Diaghilev who has been accused of contributing to his insanity through his sophisticated embraces (p.102).

This level of avoidance is both tortuous and misleading. To suggest that the 'pure and unsullied' Nijinsky was not homosexual before meeting Diaghilev points to a level of denial that is even more telling than the previous reference to 'off-stage' homosexual practices. While 'The Male Image' attempts to legitimise male dance by down-playing homosexual involvement, the Terry and Bland texts go one step further

and describe a history of men in dance in which homosexuality does not even exist.

The texts discussed in this section remain biased towards the promotion of male ballet dancers as archetypal models of virile heterosexuality. This defence-based strategy acts as a steel frame that seeks to limit unregulated codes of representation. For example, there is no direct reference to the male body in dance as erotic. This would be seen as tantamount to a betrayal of these men as embodied expressions of ideal masculine identity. It brings the already unstable male body perilously close to what Hatt previously describes as the 'spectre of homoeroticism' which all three texts seem anxious to dispel. In ballet historiography, this level of denial suggests that the male body in dance is not only unstable but that any unregulated meaning attributed to men in dance is a damaging force.

In the section of Chapter One devoted to photography, in which experimental imagery of the male body has been recognised as being instrumental in initiating re-evaluations of both gender and sexuality, it was suggested that the disruption of ideological values does not necessarily mean a negative outcome. It is an approach to reading the male body that has yet to find its way into ballet historiography in which old fashioned and heterosexist attitudes still dominate. This situation is in no way surprising as ballet historiography texts, on the whole, are written by men and are designed to appeal to a broad and not necessarily scholastic readership. As such, although they provide this study with an insight into the way normative notions of masculinity have infiltrated (and have tried to justify) men in dance, while attempting to impose a steel framework around the otherwise unstable male body, their value to

the aims of this study is otherwise negligible. The next section of this chapter, however, will look at some of the more recent research into dance. It will seek to identify the extent to which ongoing thought concerning gender and sexual identity has led to a reconsideration of the way dance articulates meaning and how this may be of benefit to this study.

2.2. Contemporary scholarship and gender: the explosion of dance studies.

According to Jane Desmond (1997: 3) the 'explosion' of dance studies began in the mid 1980s as a response to 'the wave of influential transformations that had been reconfiguring the humanities during the preceding ten to fifteen years'.⁶ What initiated this wave, according to Desmond, was the advent of structuralism and poststructuralism, under whose rubric 'could be found various strains of feminist theories, of deconstruction, of Marxism as influenced by Gramsci, Althusser, and others, as well as the powerful discourse studies of Michel Foucault, and varieties of psychoanalytic-based analyses' (p.3). As a discipline, dance studies has recently sought to combine these politically motivated academic concerns with the expressive agency of the dancing body. This section will examine the extent to which this relationship between theory and practice has led to developments in the way issues related to masculinity and the male body are addressed. Beginning with Judith Lynne Hanna's (1988) contribution to scholarship, this section will continue with a discussion of texts by Ramsay Burt (1995), Ann Daly (Desmond 1997) and Sally Banes (1998).

Although not an exhaustive account, these texts exemplify two key issues. First, the ways in which ongoing debates are finding a place within models of dance analysis and second, how performance-based findings are contributing to advances in theory. This choice of texts also reveals a significant trend particular to dance study. With the exception of Burt's contribution, all of them are written by women. This detail indicates the way a broad feminist concern with representations of women in performance continues to provide the predominant dynamic behind advances made in scholarship.

It is important to stress, however, that comparing Burt's findings with those drawn from other texts does not correspond to a bias that favours male opinions above female ones; for the approach adopted in the Burt text remains heavily indebted to feminist insights into gender and sexuality. What does set this text apart is not the gender of the writer but the way in which an interdisciplinary model favoured by feminists has been refashioned in an investigation that prioritises issues directly associated with masculinity and the male body. As such, this chapter will look at what aspects of feminist thinking Burt considers relevant, what problems he encounters, and the extent to which his findings may contribute to this study's investigative aims.

In *Dance, Sex and Gender* Judith Lynne Hanna (1988: xiii) explores a diverse range of different dance forms including social, ritual and theatre dance in a search for an understanding of how 'feelings and ideas about sexuality and sex roles . . . take shape in dance.' The broad scope of her anthropological search serves to bring

otherwise seemingly unrelated dance forms together around one central theme. As a result, it raises a whole series of issues that have since been adopted and expanded by dance scholars.

Hanna asks why women and gay men predominate in Western theatre dance practice. Recognising that the reasons for this situation are diverse she then aspires to 'simplify what is complex' (p.122). Focusing upon the status of women in dance, she then suggests that they enter the performance arena to escape from social and economic constraints, to enhance their self-esteem, to gain approval or to prove their independent status. These motivations, she states, also apply to the 'disproportionate' (p.136) number of male homosexuals in the profession. As demonstrated by this reasoning, Hanna is keen to emphasise similarities between marginal groups regardless of differences between issues related to gender and sexuality. The result is a tendency towards essentialism in which important differences between, as well as within, marginal groups are overlooked. It is a strategy that Hanna continues to adopt throughout her investigation of male homosexual participation.

While charting the reasons why dance acts as a 'magnet for gays' (p.136) she creates a formal divide between two homogenised forms of identity while, at the same time, she conflates gender with sexual preference. On one side are 'mainstream American men' whom Hanna associates with 'athletics, business and war' and, on the other, are gay men who 'identify with the effeminate yearnings, feelings and romantic idealisation of the ballet' (p.137).

For Hanna, gay men share more similarities with women than heterosexual men; an equation in which homosexual men become emasculated while, through default, heterosexual men acquire increased potency. Furthermore, her desire to understand why gay men dance pays little attention to why heterosexual men do not. More recent studies have sought to redress this imbalance and look more closely at two areas. First, how culture dictates what is and what is not appropriate for heterosexual men to do and second, forms of discontinuity and incoherence in male dance practice that address some of the taken-for-granted attitudes surrounding models of gender identity and sexual object-choice.

Hanna's rationalist stance is one that adheres very closely to a rhetoric of gender differentiation. Although couched in the antidotal politics of early feminism, it is reminiscent of stereotypical and old-fashioned attitudes predominant in some of the dance historiography previously discussed and that this study finds problematic.⁷ Masculinity, for Hanna, is not only conflated with heterosexuality but can also only be obtained by gay male dancers through role-play and fantasy identification in performance (p.138). In her investigation into the mechanics of the duet, for example, this essentialist stance also leads her to define the relationship between male and female roles as combative in nature with the man as predator and the woman as passive victim. This relationship, she believes, exists both on stage in terms of role assignments and off stage in respect to what she sees as a take-over by men. While searching for 'stimuli for innovation in male dancing' (p.218), she claims that the impetus behind this take-over came from men's 'resentment' of 'woman-centred ballet' as well as 'feminist modern dance.' In response to their exclusion from both the

classical and modern arenas, men have, Hanna contends, pursued five different courses of action including gender reversal, usurpation of 'female roles and movement,' unisex choreography, 'exaggerated machismo' and 'derogation' of women. Citing narrative examples from both the ballet and modern dance canon that support each of these five agendas, she claims that 'dance imagery reflects more preoccupation with sexual conflict than with harmony' (p.240). This practice, she concludes, was initiated and pursued by men.

Ultimately, her understanding of the relationship between dance and gender remains not only too simplistic and unquestioning but also biased. The concept of masculinity that she articulates remains essentialist and bound within the logic of ideological gender formations. The only difference is that those masculine values celebrated in ballet historiography are here criticised as oppressive to women. Although she claims to be concerned with how 'feelings and ideas about sexuality and sex roles . . . take shape in dance' her approach to reading dance is one in which the dancing body as agent of meaning has no currency. Not only does her 'liberal feminist' (p.251) agenda prevent her from imagining male involvement in dance as being anything other than intrusive and reactionary but, according to the remit dictated by her anthropological stance, she values dance practice only in terms of how it reflects cultural developments.

Although Hanna fails to identify useful (and positive) models of masculine identity in dance that could destabilise the rigid hierarchy between male and female, and heterosexual and homosexual, archetypes, she does conclude that 'more attention

should be given to how images of dance and its production affirm and challenge basic social arrangements and doctrines about them' (p.250). This concern is now being addressed by other scholars who look at performance as an informing practice and the dancing body as the 'site of meaning in motion' (Desmond 1997: 20).

With the publication of Ramsay Burt's *The Male Dancer* (1995), issues surrounding the relationship between representations of masculinity and the male dancer were for the first time placed squarely in ongoing debates concerning gender and sexuality. Burt states that his book does not 'present a survey of male dance in the twentieth century' but rather 'examines a selection of significant developments in the representation of masculinity in Western theatre dance' (p.5). As such, not only is it narrower in scope than the Hanna text but is also only concerned with practitioners and works that, Burt believes, raise questions about and/or destabilise the way dance articulates gender. That this remit is similar to the one pursued in this study suggests that an examination of his methodology and how he conceptualises masculinity should prove invaluable.

Beginning with the feminist claim that knowledge is embodied, Burt goes on to state that previously ignored representations of the male in dance are now coming under the critical deconstructive gaze of gender theorists.⁸ Masculinity, for Burt (p.9), is 'a socially constructed entity' and, as such, no longer valued as a stable concept but contradictory and full of inconsistencies. This post-structuralist stance is used to address representations of masculinity in dance that, he believes, have tried to 'disrupt and destabilise masculine identity.' To this end he limits the time-span of his

study to the last one hundred and fifty years, arguing that it is 'only within work that is progressive, experimental or *avant-garde* that staid, old-fashioned images and ideas about gender can be challenged and alternatives imagined' (p.5).

This leads to the construction of a hierarchy between different dance forms in which classical ballet is classified as a highly regulated and paternalist institution that allows only a limited repertoire of 'acceptable' male images. In this hierarchy, the male classical dancer becomes normalised, identified as the embodied source of a vocabulary of expression that is both orthodox and repressive. It is against this 'staid' backdrop that Burt contrasts work produced by dance artists who 'are not white, male, heterosexual or privileged'; practitioners who, he adds, 'have to make representations differently in order to express their point of view, their sense of identity or their cultural values in theatre dance' (p.5).

Like Hanna, Burt identifies a political basis to the divide that separates the 'traditional' from the *avant-garde*. While 'extreme, almost stereotypical representations of violent, macho masculinity' (1995: 9) appear in all forms of theatre dance, in ballet and modern dance they support 'conservative norms of masculinity' but serve to 'criticise and threaten' them in postmodern dance. Accordingly, for Burt (p.199), postmodern dance practice then becomes valued as the forward-looking environment in which to find 'more acceptable ways of being masculine'. In this separatist procedure, acceptability means an investment in feminine qualities.

In a direct comparison between dance representation and cultural practice, Burt sees a remedial purpose behind investments in the female code. Referring to the 'abject and grotesque' representations of men in works by Pina Bausch and Lloyd Newson, he suggests that 'the effects of denaturalising and demystifying masculinity in recent works seem to have been to show up some of the more unsatisfactory aspects of what it is to be a man in Western society today' (p.198). The purpose behind much recent dance work, Burt argues, is towards cultural enlightenment and to overturn 'homophobic, heterosexual conditioning, restrictive logocentric ways of thinking and communicating or tightly bound aspects of male identity' (p.199). This, he concludes, is something that men are only just beginning to do.

It is this remedial approach to postmodern dance that both Helen Thomas (1998) and David Popalisky (1998) consider problematic. In her review of *The Male Dancer*, Thomas highlights a friction between what she sees as Burt's 'modernist view' of dance history as being evolutionary and his post-structuralist approach to reading dance. Her concern is that, to promote the view that twentieth century developments stem from a need to break away from more mainstream forms, ballet is 'treated as the conservative fall-guy of dance, the base-line from which reformers and visionaries can be assessed and celebrated' (Thomas 1998: 39). She points out that, as part of his revisionary strategy, Burt fashions a three-tiered hierarchy where 'ballet is situated at the bottom rung of the ladder, with modern dance in the middle and postmodern dance at the top'.

Thomas attributes this hierarchical view of dance to Burt's attempt to cover too much ground (a criticism already raised against Hanna's contribution). This, Thomas claims, results in 'sweeping generalisations about modernism and excessive claims for the emancipatory potential of the works which operate on the basis of 'deconstructive practices' ' (p.43). Burt's study, she concludes, 'demonstrates the difficulties of overcoming the dominant representations of masculinity in dance.' What is not addressed by Thomas, however, is that this difficulty stems both from the relative infancy of dance scholarship and its liberal feminist preoccupation with women's contribution and representation,⁹ and a legacy of heterosexist rhetoric attributable to dance historiography.¹⁰ One of the main problems common to both a pro-feminist and pro-masculinist emphasis, as exemplified by all the texts so far discussed in this chapter, is an unquestioned conception of masculinity that tends to accord with the same 'dominant representations' that need to be tackled.

Elsewhere, Burt's policy of concentrating on the antidotal strategies pursued by reformers and innovators raises further criticism. Identifying a bias, Popalisky (1998: 79) states that 'innovative representations of masculinity in dance are tied to sexual preferences, specifically homosexual, and while Burt does the critical investigation expertly, he fails to find any marginally positive examples of heterosexual masculinity and sexuality.' While Popalisky's criticism is well founded, it does not consider the possible reasons behind Burt's choices. As the previous section of this chapter points out, the history of dance literature is one in which homosexuality has tended to be either relegated ('off-stage') or completely avoided. Even the Hanna text, although it recognises the contribution that homosexual men, as a distinct social category, have

made to dance practice, is couched in an old-fashioned and somewhat homophobic rhetoric. In light of this legacy of neglect Burt's 'gay reformist' emphasis seems not only justifiable, but also needed.

Popalisky also expresses his concern at the terminology that Burt uses to describe the marginal images of male dancers. Drawing attention to the oft-repeated use of such general terms as 'subversive', 'disrupting' and 'destabilising' throughout the text, he echoes what Thomas sees as one of the major problems that confront dance scholars seeking to describe new representations of masculinity; a lack of descriptive terminology. It is a lack, that, although partly due to Burt's adoption of too wide a remit and a hierarchical approach to dance history, also stems from his unquestioning and over-essentialist perception of the traditional male role in dance.

The belief that classical ballet is an idealising practice that reflects and promotes ideologically based gender types is, however, an assumption common to much dance scholarship.¹¹ By looking at factors such as narrative devices, choreographic symbolism and the imbalance between male choreographers and female dancers, it is read as a direct representation of the ways in which mainstream culture continually conspires to subjugate women and empower men. This is the critical stance adopted by Ann Daly (Desmond 1997) when she discusses how ballet manifests ideological gender differences. She argues that, although there have been many changes in women's lives, this is not represented in ballet which has 'never really changed, because its ideology has never really changed' (p.113).

Like Burt, Daly sees a clear division between ballet and contemporary dance that includes important differences in gender, ideology, cultural history and aesthetic practice. For Daly, classical ballet is an old-fashioned institution built upon the promotion of idealised and highly restrictive gender norms and an unresponsive paternalist superstructure. Likewise, the concept of masculinity that it promotes is normalistic, repressive and resilient to change. The value of viewing ballet in this way, however, is being questioned by critics who, by conducting close analyses of individual works, are discovering 'a much more complex range of representations than has previously been suggested' elsewhere (Banes 1998: 3). Although so far only recognised as being of remedial value to women's status in performance, this approach may promise to be of benefit to the study of men's contributions to dance.

In *Dancing Women: Female Bodies on Stage* (1998: 1) Sally Banes attempts to 'recast canonical dance history since the nineteenth century in terms of a feminist perspective'. Unlike other writers discussed so far, Banes does not begin from the presumption that, while ballet is oppressive to women, modern dance is liberatory (p.2). She also expresses her dissatisfaction with the limits imposed by 'sterile' political agendas that tend to stress either the victimisation or celebration of women and stigmatise men.

To counter what she sees as an ongoing preoccupation with essentialist strategies, the approach she adopts to analysing choreographic representations of women in dance works is 'historical and materialist' (p.4).¹² She explains that, 'while I describe and analyse images and tropes that seem to emerge repeatedly throughout dance

history, I do not see them as universal or essential, but rather as produced by historical conditions and a dialogic tradition of artistic practices.'

Although Banes provides very little space in her readings for masculine concerns, the ramification of this 'anti-essentialist' approach to the way dance represents gender is one that indicates the direction in which studies of men in dance might progress.¹³ Another problem that Banes highlights relates to a disregard for the agency of the dancing body to articulate meaning. She argues that previous excursions into dance analysis, particularly those devoted to nineteenth and early twentieth century ballet as well as early modern dance, have tended to privilege plot over performance. Although this is understandable due to the elusiveness of choreographic texts, a crucial aspect of dance has been overlooked:

It is, after all a *live*, interpretative art. It is not fixed on the page, nor can all its meanings be accurately conveyed through verbal means. And bodies can impart different meanings – sometimes diametrically opposed meanings – than words suggest (p.8, original italics).

She points out that, although the narrative may be misogynist or patriarchal and describe the female character as weak or passive, 'the physical prowess of the dancer performing the role may saturate it with agency' (p.9). This notion of a conflict between plot and performance also impacts upon the way men are perceived in dance. While the male role may be depicted as powerful and dominant in the libretto, lending support to essentialist models of masculinity, telling instances in the choreography can 'undermine or render ironic the narrative flow' (p.10).

Elsewhere, Susan Manning (1998) demonstrates the value of looking at telling instances in the choreography when she traces the overlap between American modern dance and gay culture. While examining works by Ted Shawn, she identifies a tension between his use of dance to promote 'he-man' masculinity and a hitherto disregarded homoerotic subtext in the choreography. She suggests that there is a need for this recasting of dance history from a minority perspective, arguing that 'for too long most scholars refused to explore or even discuss the overlap between the dance world and gay culture in the twentieth century' (p.37). She wishes to build bridges and challenges other scholars to do likewise. Judging by the scarcity of articles such as this, however, this opportunity remains to be fully realised.¹⁴

This emphasis upon performance agency, however, is of enormous value to this study. As has been suggested in this chapter, any investigation of men in dance has to begin by addressing some of the rhetoric that, for too long, has been used to support an old fashioned model of the male dancer. Furthermore, and as was revealed in the previous chapter in respect to the visual arts, this deconstructive approach needs to begin from the perspective of the male body itself and how it articulates meaning. As a corrective, an investigation of three ballets will be undertaken in Chapter Four in which the question asked will be to what extent key performance elements can be read as disruptive of the values associated with this model. Moreover, the search for what Banes describes as 'telling instances within the choreography' will underpin a timely re-consideration of the hierarchical divide that separates traditional from postmodern dance forms. In turn, this strategy will

contribute towards setting the readings in Part Three in the context of dance history as a developing and informing cultural practice.

2.3. Conclusion.

Although the recent growth in the number of texts devoted to the study of dance is cause for celebration it has not been without problems. In order to cover the ever-widening terrain of theatre dance, more detailed academic investigations into how different dance works are raising key issues on gender and sexual identity are needed. This will help to deconstruct an essentialist rhetoric that, as has been argued in this study, has tended to see traditional theatre dance (and the way it represents gender) as institutionalised and repressive. Particularly in early feminist contributions, this view has served as part of a much needed critical reappraisal of the status of women in dance history and how mainstream performance practices have reflected cultural gender codes. Although a valuable contribution to scholastic development, however, the result of this strategy has been to sustain a political divide between the 'unsound' ballet and the 'remedial' *avant-garde*. Implicit in this hierarchy is the presumption that, prior to the advent of challenging postmodern theatre dance practices, male dancer's roles conformed to and promoted heteronormative values.

The validity of this agenda has recently been addressed by scholars who are concerned that, due to this 'postmodern distaste for the ballet's politics' (Lynn Garafola 1997: 7), the expressive agency of ballet is being disregarded. This, in turn, can lead to either a distorted or over-simplistic reading of the subject matter, particularly when

evidence from the works themselves is either given secondary status or not even considered.

Dance scholarship is still in its infancy and there still remains a paucity of texts that address gender representation. As Banes (1998: 2) remarks, 'much work needs to be done'. She adds that dance studies has yet to catch up with even the most basic research and interpretation that has occurred elsewhere in the feminist canon. The distance between studies in masculinity and corresponding research into men in dance is, as this study suggests, even greater.

Outside of dance scholarship, however, the situation is quite different where recent intense academic interest in gender and the body has resulted in a rich and useful source of information on masculinity and representation. In the next chapter, which outlines the method of analysis, some of the key concepts being discussed in these debates and how they can contribute towards the development of a systematic approach to reading the dance works in Part Three will be examined.

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- ¹ Although it could be argued that paintings and photographs suggest movement and depth, they only capture a 'moment in time' and the three-dimensional perspective they create is artificial.
- ² The notable exception is the Birdwhistell text (1969) which takes the form of four 'discussions' with prominent male ballet soloists.
- ³ Kinesics is the science of body behavioural communication, a branch of anthropology developed during the 1950s and 60s as an antidote to religious and Darwinian attitudes to race and gender. Perhaps one of its most important findings is how body 'language' is not a natural 'biological' given but a cultural creation.
- ⁴ Chapter Three will return to this notion of a single concept of difference and how it has recently been challenged by feminists whose concern is with what they see as a separatist approach to gender that favours men.
- ⁵ As Daly (Desmond 1997: 112) points out, 'Youskevitch's rhetoric is emblematic of ballet discourse as a whole: it is inextricably rooted in the notion of "inborn" or "natural" gender differences'.
- ⁶ The reasons for the delayed entrance of dance scholarship into academic circles has been well documented. See, in particular: Copeland and Cohen (1983), Thomas (1993) and Desmond (1997).
- ⁷ Since the publication of Hanna's text in 1988, and according to Desmond (1997: 7), the uni-dimensional analytic frame of early feminism has given way to a view of gender in relation to 'many other salient social categories' such as nationality, race, sexuality and class.
- ⁸ According to Duncan (1996), feminists are now exploring the notion that knowledge itself is embodied, and hence both gendered and sexed. She argues that, in the public arena, the notion of 'universal reason and transcendence' supplied by the 'disembodied, disinterested Cartesian observer' is now understood to be a fiction. She states that this 'model observer can be shown to be (implicitly) a white, bourgeois able-bodied male, and in fact . . . a heterosexual male' (Duncan 1996: 2). See also Butler (1990), Silverman (1992) and Grosz (1995).
- ⁹ Desmond (1997: 7) comments on the 'immense impact feminist work has had on new dance scholarship, having spawned the first books devoted solely to the subject of dance and gender'. Indeed, the majority of articles in *Meaning in Motion* are feminist discussions of women's contribution to dance.
- ¹⁰ See 2.1.
- ¹¹ See Adair (1992), Novack (in Thomas, 1993), Thomas (1995) and Foster (1996).
- ¹² She divides her readings into six different historical periods, concentrating upon only a small number of works. This practice marks a key progression in dance scholarship from the general to the specific.
- ¹³ Her views on the male role in *La Sylphide*, however, are particularly insightful: see 4.2.
- ¹⁴ This article by Manning is taken from *Dance Theatre Journal*. Like many other dance journals, *DTJ* pertains predominantly to theatre dance in Britain and consists of interviews with contemporary practitioners alongside details of festivals and previews of works in production. For example, there are articles on the all-male company The Featherstonehaughs, choreographers Bill T. Jones and Bob Fosse, as well as an interview with Javier de Frutos (all in 14:2, 1998). The following issue (14:3, 1998) contains an interview with Michael Clark alongside a review of the production career of William Forsythe. And in 15:2 (1999) there is a discussion of Mats Ek and his radical reworkings of classics from the ballet canon as well as an interview with Lloyd Newson concerning his latest work *The Happiest Day Of My Life* (1999). While devoting coverage to male and female artists, discussion of their works seldom makes any direct reference to issues related to masculinity. Demonstrating that the

journal has a political sensitivity, however, there are also articles that discuss the changing status of the relationship between dance practice and its cultural background, of which the Manning piece is an example.

CHAPTER THREE
FRAMEWORKS FOR READING MASCULINITY IN DANCE PERFORMANCE.

3.0. Introduction.

The investigation in Chapters One and Two concerned how models of masculinity are conceptualised in literature devoted to visual arts and dance. Apart from providing a valuable insight into the various factors that make up these models and how different representational or performance criteria can lend themselves to new, and sometimes unorthodox, readings of identity, what was also revealed was that how masculinity is conceptualised is heavily dependant on the method of analysis. In other words, not only is the subject matter itself important, but so too is the way it is read. Taking this as a cue, a method of analysis that will be most congenial to a search for representations of masculinity in dance that go 'against the grain' of more established models will be explored in the first half of this chapter. This strategy will be in two parts. First, an examination of how other dance scholars have formulated their own models and what factors they consider important and second, an explication from these findings of what will be most useful to this study.

Two other issues were raised in Chapters One and Two that, due to both their complexity and pertinence, will be discussed in more detail in this chapter. The first relates to the cultural framework in which a particular analytic model can be set while the second concerns a key aspect of how masculinity could be conceptualised within this frame. For example, evidence in Chapter One suggested that visual arts images are not only reflective but, because they have inspired critical speculation, are also informative of cultural values.¹ Furthermore, many of the writers discussed in Chapter Two see dance as an interactive cultural practice, while demonstrating very different

understandings of the relationship between dance and culture.² In this study dance is conceptualised as a 'visionary' platform, in that it may be read as expressive of aspects of masculinity that have yet to (or may never) be articulated elsewhere in the wider cultural arena. As such, this issue concerning how the relationship between dance and other cultural practices should be framed is an important one. To this end, an examination of how this dance/culture issue is already being addressed in dance scholarship will be conducted in order to provide an insight into how a framework most conducive to this study might be formulated.

The second issue raised in the previous two chapters concerned the practice of conflating sexual orientation and gender. This, it was suggested, stemmed from an over-essentialist and prejudicial understanding of the concept of difference in which heterosexual masculinity is upheld as the unquestioned norm.³ As was made evident in Chapter Two this problem has yet to be fully resolved in dance literature.

Therefore, and to find a more deconstructive approach to difference that will be sensitive to a study concerned with new visions of masculinity, a search outside the more immediate area of dance scholarship will be conducted.

Although there are many ways of reading dance, key to this study are the ways in which the gendered body is represented in performance. To this end, Part Three will consist of a reading of five dance works through the lens of ongoing interdisciplinary thought on gender. Although some of this thinking has been incorporated into visual arts and dance literature, there is still a gap between theoretical discourse and its application. For example, and as suggested at the end of Chapter Two, some of the

very latest studies in gender have yet to find their way into dance analysis, and so 'much work needs to be done' (Banes 1998: 2). In order to remedy this short-fall, the aim in the second half of this chapter will be to trace the development of thinking about gender and highlight useful concepts that can contribute to understanding how the dance works in Part Three articulate masculinity. As this strategy takes this study into areas where dance has yet to have an impact, there is a danger of losing sight of the agency of the dancing body altogether. In order to avoid this outcome, the last part of this chapter will present a discussion of how the body in dance, as a 'site for the invention of meaning' (Foster 1995: 15), can form a 'visionary' link between ongoing theory and practice.

3.1. Analytical and conceptual approaches.

One of the most valuable contributions to dance scholarship was the model of dance analysis developed by Janet Adshead-Lansdale. Although first published in 1988, prior to many of the advances in the discipline, it still stands as one of the most detailed, and widely quoted, models. As such, an examination of this model, and to what extent subsequent writers have either drawn from it or criticised it in order to develop their own approaches to reading dance, will be conducted in this chapter.

According to Adshead-Lansdale (1988: 21) there are four main 'separately identifiable' components that should be considered in the first stage of her analytical model: choreography, dancers, *mis-en-scène* or visual setting and aural elements. While not in themselves a method of analysis, these components do provide a useful

starting point as they all, to greater or lesser degree, contribute to how dance articulates meaning.

'Choreography' addresses movement; a broad category that covers action, gesture, spatial dimensions, dynamic elements and the characteristic selection from these that constitute style. An analysis of the dancers includes how they are configured in groupings such as solo, partnering and ensemble work as well as other criteria such as age, sex and size of the performers. '*Mis-en-scène*' involves the costumes, sets, props and use of lighting, while 'aural elements' looks at the use of music, spoken dialogue and other forms of accompaniment.

The process of discerning, describing and naming these components, according to Adshead-Lansdale (1988: 41), corresponds to the first stage of her model. The second stage analyses how these four components inter-relate in the performance to create the structure. More specifically, 'it is the relationships *between* components that bring about the structure, hence the movement and other elements of a visual and aural nature are manipulated and put together in particular ways to create the form' (original italics) of the performance.

Stephanie Jordan and Helen Thomas (1994: 6) recognise the value of Adshead-Lansdale's model but, as part of their own structuralist approach to reading dance, stress that these four components have 'no existence outside the structure in which they are brought into being and through which they are ordered.' For Jordan and Thomas, each dance should be treated, not as an 'aggregate of individual parts' but

'as a structure that functions as an emerging coherent whole, constantly in the process of structuration through its own determinate internal rules'.

While Jordan and Thomas's use of structuralism in their argument remains open to question,⁴ their emphasis upon the uniqueness of each dance work remains key to this study. For example, what has already been highlighted in Chapter Two is a tendency towards making sweeping generalisations about gender representation within dance scholarship, wherein classical ballet is often read as an undifferentiated source of traditional masculine values while postmodern dance is valued as emancipatory. As a corrective, and pursuing a similar line of argument to Adshead-Lansdale, Jordan and Thomas state that, in their model,

the concern becomes to look at the art work in terms of its specificity, dynamics, form, content and so forth in order to draw out the complex set of interrelationships at work in it, which, combined together, help to create the aesthetic effect and give rise to the emerging integrated whole (p.6).

This attention to the 'specificity' of the work is also shared by Banes (1998) in her model as it counters what she sees as a tendency to look at dance only as a metaphor for premeditated political agendas.⁵ Moreover, this emphasis upon a close examination of individual works is incorporated into the third and fourth levels of Adshead-Lansdale's (1988) model: interpretation and evaluation. To interpret the dance, she claims, requires 'recognising and identifying its character, ascribing qualities to the dance and understanding its meaning' (p.120) while an evaluation is based upon 'appraising and judging its worth and merit' (p.121). Although an

interpretation would seem to require an initial formal description of components and structure as its basis, Adshead-Lansdale (1999) later suggests that this need not be the only way of analysing dance. As a corrective to what she regards as a previous misconception of her model as hierarchical, Adshead-Lansdale suggests that the four levels should form a 'three dimensional' matrix. This means that the description of formal qualities and the ascription of meaning can be linked in such a way as to create a framework supple enough to respond to the aims of both work and analyst. This notion of flexibility is a welcome amendment as it allows for a level of interpretative freedom and a space for creative expression into what otherwise appears to be a rather restrictive, almost regimental, model.

Underlying this concept of a more open and responsive attitude is intertextuality, in which 'the reader's activity becomes one of unravelling threads, rather than deciphering fixed meanings, choosing which colour in the tapestry to follow, where and when to start, change direction and conclude' (Adshead-Lansdale 1999: 8).

Drawing upon French literary theory and post-structuralist thought, Adshead-Lansdale suggests that an analysis of a dance work as *text* is appropriate because it 'opens up the discourse of "art" to cultural practices more widely' (p.13). It also contributes towards bringing a previously marginalised dance scholarship in line with developments that are occurring elsewhere in the critical canon.

According to this intertextual model, interpretation then becomes an interdisciplinary procedure that draws upon a range of different disciplines as a 'basis for the *construction of meaning*' (p.20, original italics). Moreover, in this context, any

meaning that is ascribed to the work is not fixed but open and contestable.

Recognising that, in this strategy, there is a risk of devaluation, wherein dance's status is lost within a sea of theoretical approaches, Adshead-Lansdale makes an important stipulation. While movement analysis, aesthetics and art theory, and disciplines such as history, sociology, anthropology and psychology can make a valued contribution to the interpretative strategy, it is the close analysis of the dance work itself 'as part of social experience' (p.xiv) that must remain foremost. '*Theory*', she contends, '*is validated by the practice*' (p.xv, original italics).

Giving precedence to the dance, Adshead-Lansdale explains, is crucial to her open-minded approach to interpreting meaning. She states:

an open-minded view of the potential relevance of theories from a number of different sources (including non-dance sources) has to be matched by a critical awareness of *their capacity to respond to dance, and to illuminate it.*

(Adshead-Lansdale 1999: xv, original italics)

Adshead-Lansdale's emphasis upon an interdisciplinary/intertextual approach to the analysis of dance, in which the works take priority as 'practices that establish their own lexicon of meaning,' is also central to this study. Moreover, it is an approach shared by Susan Leigh Foster (1995: 15) in her model. Central to her 'ambulant' strategy is an emphasis upon the body as an agent of meaning; where 'dance, more than any other body-centred endeavour, cultivates a body that initiates as well as responds'.⁶ Similar in structure to Adshead-Lansdale's model, Foster identifies two

levels of activity in dance analysis. She states that 'the act of translating such physical endeavours into verbal descriptions of them entails, first, a recognition of their distinctiveness, and then a series of tactical decisions that draw the moved and the written into an interdisciplinary parlance' (p.16).

For both Adshead-Lansdale and Foster, the method of analysis traces a clear path from formal description through to intertextual ascription. This approach is not, in itself, revolutionary or even unique to dance scholarship. Several elements, however, mark out these models as particularly useful to this study. First, the way in which both theorists posit the belief that meaning is activated through a dialogical process between the work and the reader. Second, an open attitude towards ambiguous and diverse meanings. Third, an emphasis upon an intertextual approach to interpretation, where a textual reading of the dance and texts from other, 'extraneous', sources are brought together in the act of ascription to produce an intertextual web of signification.

Elsewhere, however, both Adshead-Lansdale's and Susan Foster's model of dance analysis have given rise to a number of concerns. For example, Naomi Jackson (1994), in her discussion of the merits of these models, draws attention to what she sees as an overemphasis upon 'readability' in which dances are almost willed into a 'reading' (p.9). According to Jackson, 'texts are inherently slippery, and that such things as whether an action is read as symbolic or not is determined *only* in the process of interpretation, it does *not* pre-exist it' (original italics). This belief is shared by Marcia Siegel (1992: 30) who contends that 'if a dance doesn't suggest meaning by its performance, no amount of intellectualising can put meaning into it.' This,

however, is not a view shared in this study. While it can be argued that a dance's meaning can only be determined through the process of interpretation, it must also be the case that to see an action as not being symbolic is still to make an interpretation. This undermines the premise of Siegel's argument because she fails to consider the act of seeing as a form of interpretation *in itself* and that the two are inseparable.

Siegel (1992: 30) also claims that the interpretation of dance is a post-performance activity, a point at which the 'intuitive, visceral, preverbal' viewing experience is 'rationalised' in language.⁷ In this she seems to be conflating 'interpretation' with 'translation.' It has already been argued in this study that interpretation cannot be separated from the act of viewing. Siegel, on the other hand, suggests that interpretation cannot begin until after the performance is over. This is clearly not the case as it implies that, for the duration of the performance, the spectator's deductive abilities are somehow disengaged.⁸ Rather, the post-performance part of interpretation is, as Adshead-Lansdale suggests, more the process of ascribing meaning through an interdisciplinary process to produce an intertextual web of signification.

Another concern raised by Jackson is with the place of the reader within the process of interpretation. She believes that it is not given enough consideration in the work of Adshead-Lansdale and Foster. Jackson points out that 'dance is a *performative act involving real spectators*' (1994: 10, original italics). Taking a more performative approach to reading dance, she contends, would 'extend our understanding of how dance is produced to how it is received, thereby realising the extent to which structure

and meaning are emergent only in the *interactive* process of performance' (original italics).⁹ Adshead-Lansdale's own response to Jackson's criticism is to claim that, on the contrary, the role of the spectator has not been excluded and that Jackson has not read closely enough into *Dance Analysis* (1988). To ascribe meaning to a dance, Adshead-Lansdale continues, 'carries a sense of assigning, attributing, imputing, which makes clear the role of the person who does it' (1994: 17). Ascription, she claims, 'emphasises the personal and performative character of the act of reading,' where 'the meanings perceived will depend on the position and concern of the observer, her/his ideological stance, the type of engagement with the event etc. etc.' Similarly, Foster's ambulant model requires the authorial presence to take on a 'positionality and a character' in the process of analysis (1995: 16).

Although countered by Adshead-Lansdale and Foster, Jackson's criticism of their models does raise the question of to what extent generic background and position of the spectator/critic should be involved in interpreting the meaning of dance imagery. This takes on a special significance when looking at gender representation (and especially masculine representation) in dance. For example, Ramsay Burt (1995), in his analysis of male dance imagery, addresses a pertinent dilemma. Taking his cue from both feminist and French structuralist and post-structuralist investigations into power, Burt asks, 'from what point can I as a man consider the possibility of questioning the male order as represented in dance?' (p.47).

Because the idea of 'men' is an ideological construct, a way into questioning the male order, Burt suggests, could be found by following a deconstructive strategy. To avoid

the danger of continual deferral (in which, as Burt explains, unitary masculinity is dissolved until there are as many masculinities as there are men), the theoretical approach he decides to employ only uses deconstruction to 'make visible the otherwise hidden nature of the operations of ideologies' (Burt 1995: 48).¹⁰ Moreover, his conditional application of deconstruction conforms to Adshead-Lansdale's earlier statement concerning the adoption of theory according to its 'capacity to illuminate.' Deconstruction, however, is also useful to this study and the search for visions of masculinity that go 'against the grain' of traditional codes of representation because, as Burt states, it can 'make a space from which it is possible to imagine alternatives.'

Like Burt's investigation, this study is founded on the premise that dance not only passively reflects but also actively envisions cultural conceptions of corporeality. This approach, as Gay Morris (1996: 9) contends, requires 'embedding dance in culture'; a strategy that, she adds, is not favoured in all dance studies. According to Morris, while 'the impetus to place dance within the larger framework of culture has been going on since the 1970s' (p.8), it has done so in the face of strong opposition from some scholars who, as Koritz (Morris 1996: 88) adds, seek to preserve dance study as an autonomous discipline. Morris identifies their concerns clearly when she asks, 'as dance scholars roam far afield in their research methods and subject matter, do they, themselves, risk losing the "dance" in dance studies?' (p.11). The alternative, however, risks ghettoising and disempowering dance study and dragging it back to the 'narrow purview' of formalist analysis. Finding the right balance between these two forces, as both Morris and Koritz suggest, is perhaps the greatest challenge to contemporary dance scholarship.¹¹

Yet another difficulty that has faced dance research is not whether dance should be 'embedded' within culture, but how the relationship between dance and other cultural practices should be framed. This is another point of dissension amongst scholars. For example, in Hanna's (1988) study there is no serious consideration of dance as an *interactive* cultural practice (see 2.2). Although Hanna claims that 'at times society and dance hold mirrors up to each other' (p.246) her approach is one in which models of identity and behavioural codes taken from the wider cultural sphere are brought to bear on interpretations of dance, not the other way round.

More recent studies, however, demonstrate a commitment towards exploring the reciprocal nature of the relationship between dance and other cultural practices.¹² In this equation, dance performance is understood as an active communicating text that can both engage with, and influence the progression of, gender concerns and theories about sexuality that occupy ongoing critical debates. Thomas (1995: 170) exemplifies this strategy when she remarks that more recent anthropological studies on dance 'have demonstrated that dance does not simply reflect social relationships but can also contribute to shaping social relationships and thus can contribute to change.' Elsewhere, Jane Desmond (1997: 33) begins by arguing that dance can 'represent a highly codified and highly mediated representation of social distinctions.' She then qualifies this statement by pointing out that this 'relation to the economic "base" is not one of mere reflection but rather one of dialogic constitution'.

This 'dialogic' stance is adopted by Ted Polhemus (Thomas 1993). He claims that through the medium of dance, both cultural attitudes towards men and men's

attitudes about themselves are literally given body on stage. As this is one of the cornerstones of this study, a more detailed examination of Polhemus's reasoning and, in particular, how he frames gender, will be conducted in this chapter.

Polhemus stresses that the relationship between dance, as the metaphysics of culture, and other cultural forms is not simple. Employing an anthropological rather than 'high art' definition, he sees culture not as unified and fixed, but rather as 'a multifaceted system which incorporates a complexity of symbolic codes which while "practical" are rarely reducible' to each other (Thomas 1993: 8).¹³ Furthermore, Polhemus adds that although culture is 'the definitive shared, intersubjective experience its reality is always subjective' (p.10) and everyone experiences and interprets culture differently. He then argues that only age and gender are the 'two significant categories of experience which inevitably and profoundly distort any individual's subjective perception of cultural reality.'

Focusing on gender (which, he claims, is the more problematic of the two), Polhemus posits a clear dividing line between male and female culture when he maintains that '*for any given individual, the experience of gender identity is an absolute boundary which is existentially insurmountable*' (p.11, original italics). Dance, he proposes, embodies and materialises this division, where male dance becomes a crystallisation of what it means to be a man while female dance has the same function for women. Suggesting that there can be no possible transgression of this divide, he goes so far as to imagine that the two sexes come from 'different worlds' (p.12). Polhemus's argument that any individual experience of culture is unique proves useful to the

methodological framework of this study because it displaces the notion of a universal, objective reality in favour of one that is subjective and contingent: a strategy redolent of the post-structuralist models of analysis previously discussed.

What remains contentious is Polhemus's claim that there is an 'insurmountable' dividing line between male and female culture. Fundamental to his anthropological stance is a concept of difference based on social experience. Elsewhere, Michèle Barrett (1987: 32) takes issue with this hypothetical model by arguing that it tends to assume a level of cultural essentialism in which 'the identities that people construct from their experience are never seen as problematic.' She contends that the authority of a separatist approach, wherein 'men have one reality, women have another' (p.31) and traditional masculine values remain dominant can, however, be challenged. To this end Barrett pursues a more deconstructive approach to the concept of difference in which differences within, as well as between, the genders are considered. An examination of her findings may help to avoid what has already been identified in this study as a tendency to describe disruptive representations of masculinity only in so far as they differ from an unproblematised heteronormative code.¹⁴

Barrett suggests that, in recent feminist writing and debate, there are three concepts of difference being deployed: 'experiential diversity, positional meaning and sexual difference,' all of which, she adds, are artificial and 'overlap' (p.39). Furthermore, because 'there are not merely *differences* between these various ways in which the concept has been deployed; there are disagreements and outright contradictions' (original italics), these concepts are best identified separately.

The concept of difference as experiential diversity (which, Barrett claims, forms the pragmatic end of the spectrum) recognises nation, region, ethnicity, age, sexual orientation, disability and religion as well as gender, as 'important and politically salient forms of experiential diversity' (p.30). These contingent factors are important because, she adds, they serve to destabilise 'an assumed or argued difference between women and men that is held to have very wide repercussions in society generally' (p.31), and, more specifically, in Polhemus's discourse.

On the concept of difference as positional meaning, Barrett cites Saussurean semiotics wherein meaning is constructed through linguistic opposition rather than by absolute reference (p.33). It is a form of difference that, she claims, remains common to the otherwise diverse strands of post-structuralist thinking. Barrett adds that it has also been of enormous benefit to feminism in its aim to 'criticise and deconstruct the "unified subject", whose appearance of universality disguised a constitution structured specifically around the subjectivity characteristic of the white, bourgeois man' (p.35).¹⁵

The third concept that Barrett identifies stems from 'modern psychoanalytic accounts of sexual difference' (p.29), as a matter of the channelling of unconscious desires. Many of the key concepts used in psychoanalysis such as the 'heterosexual' or 'homosexual' gaze, the 'other', the abject, exhibitionism and narcissism have also been adopted in debates on gender to account for differences both between and within forms of sexual object-choice. For example, in queer theory, difference, not as difference *from*, but as *pure* difference, marks an escape from concepts of sexuality that are modelled on the binary masculinity and femininity.

On the concept of difference, Eve K. Sedgwick (1990: 22) comments that, although there are a tiny number of 'indispensable' axes such as gender, race, class, nationality and sexual orientation, these tend to 'override all or some other forms of difference and similarity.' Focusing on what she sees as a postwar 'condensation of sexual categories' (p.3) into only two discrete specifications (namely heterosexuality and homosexuality), she goes on to speculate whether it is still possible to identify differences within sexuality that could retain 'the unaccounted-for-potential to disrupt many forms of the available thinking about sexuality' (p.25). This search for disruptive forms of difference is important to Sedgwick's antihomophobic enquiry for, as she states:

In spite of every promise to the contrary, every single theoretically or politically interesting project of postwar thought has finally had the effect of delegitimizing our space for asking or thinking in detail about the multiple, unstable ways in which people may be like or different from each other (p.23).

Ultimately, Sedgwick's level of resistance to the ways in which various postwar critical projects have charted sexual difference is too extreme for the purpose of this study. What remains valuable, however, is her (and Barrett's) suspicion that, for too long, any thinking about sexuality has adopted a somewhat taken-for-granted attitude towards categories of difference based upon a heteronormic logic that fails to acknowledge other dimensions of sexuality that 'subsist in this culture as nondiacritical differences, differences that seem to make little difference beyond

themselves' (p.35).¹⁶ Hence, rather than just accepting the legitimacy of accounts of sexual difference as they are given in mainstream cultural and theoretical systems, Sedgwick proposes that greater attention should be given to how these categories work, change and interrelate. Furthermore, she contends that, because sexual orientation (more so than gender) is marked by axes of difference that are open to 'rearrangement, ambiguity and representational doubleness' and may also be historically and geographically specific, any interpretation of sexual object-choice must incorporate temporal and spatial factors.

This discussion on the concept of difference has taken this investigation beyond the immediate realm of dance analysis. There is, however, an underlying purpose to this strategy, the key to which is the previously raised notion of the recalcitrant body as an agent of meaning. More specifically: if, as Polhemus suggests, dance can be read as an informative representation of cultural codes and practices; if, as Barrett claims difference can be understood in terms of 'experiential diversity, positional meaning and sexual difference'; and if, as Sedgwick proposes, more attention should be given to how categories of difference work, change and interrelate (notwithstanding spatiality and temporality), where better to look for the impact of these factors upon heteronormative values than in dance performance?

As such, the analytical model used in this study will draw upon these theoretical discussions according to their capacity to contribute to the dance works' meaning in the broader terrain of the changing social and political contexts of men's status, sexual life, work and education. In other words, the choreographic representations

examined in Part Three will not be interpreted as socially or politically free-floating entities, but as they exist in, and engage with, a complex and developing cultural framework.

Chapter Two has already presented a discussion of how issues related to gender predominate in recent scholarly dance literature. The ways in which these issues have been tackled, and the various merits and drawbacks of each approach, was also explored. The interpretative strategy in this study will draw upon these findings. Although these theories of gender will provide a useful interpretative framework, however, the readings of these works will remain 'open.' As Adshead-Lansdale makes clear, it is the dance work itself, as a 'lexicon of meaning', that must take priority. Moreover, this is a study of gender representation in dance. Therefore, and as Banes (1998: 3) states, 'to do close analyses of images is absolutely necessary . . . otherwise, one is left with essentialising generalisations about genre conventions.' This study is also concerned with dance as a visionary practice. As such, it will also be argued that these dance works offer a critique of existing theories of gender and their models.

An exhaustive account of all these models is beyond the scope of this exposition. Rather, the aim in the next section of this chapter will be to discuss only those writers whose own findings can, to a greater or lesser extent, contribute to the theoretical framework conducive to an analysis of representations of gender in dance. Moreover, this is an examination of visions of masculinity that, it will be argued, 'go against the grain' of more traditional models. This suggests that how various disciplines have

charted the extent to which changes in both thought and cultural practice have impacted upon normative codes of gender representation would be the most appropriate line of investigation. To this end, debates drawn from areas of research such as: cultural studies of twentieth century changes in conceptions of masculinity; postmodern writings on identity and culture; recent anthropological work on patterns of gendered behaviour; philosophical investigations into the relationship between gender and power; feminist discourses on sex, gender and representation; and some of the latest gay/lesbian/queer thought on cultural formations of identity and social visibility will be examined according to their 'capacity to illuminate' (Adshead-Lansdale 1999: xv).

All of these critical projects and the constructions of masculinity they describe are relative to historical and disciplinary moments. As such, and as this is an investigation into dance as a *visionary* platform, the extent to which dance-based findings may complicate, expand and/or problematise these theoretical models, will be considered. In order to set these models within a historical perspective, a brief account of the mind-body dualism of classical thought will be presented.

3.1.1. Masculinity: changing constructs and perspectives.

Platonic philosophy sculpted the actual male form into its poetic ideal according to the belief that only through transcendence could man obtain divine status.¹⁷ To 'touch God' in this way required the relegation of irrational emotions and desires to the lower realm of the impure physical body, leaving the mind free to pursue its higher quest for

pure reason and spiritual enlightenment. Since Plato, Western philosophy has upheld this hierarchical division between the rational mind and the sensual body wherein reason, now bodiless, could be understood as universal and neutral.

From the nineteenth century onwards, however, a series of mediating concerns started to pull apart this ideology. Hegel argued that reason and knowledge were marked by history, while Marx later claimed that a further qualifying condition was class and power. Nietzsche proposed that the body was a fundamental source of thought and Freud disputed the autonomy of the rational ego over irrational desires. Subsequent twentieth century feminists argued that not only was the mind not separable from the body but that the categories of reason and knowledge are marked by sexual difference. Linda Martín Alcoff (Duncan 1996: 17) exemplifies this point clearly when she remarks:

Marx inserted the labouring body into philosophy, Nietzsche reminded us of the body that feels and needs, and Freud insisted that the desiring body is a ubiquitous element in all human thought and practice. Feminism simply pointed out that these bodies are both sexually specific and socio-cultural, that they are inscribed by power, and that the Kantian “man” who conditions all knowledge is, indeed, a man and not a woman.

Claiming that concepts of reason and knowledge (as well as those of ‘man,’ ‘history’ and ‘power’) are gendered practices passing as universal ones, feminists such as Alcoff called for a fundamental rethink of the opposition between ‘higher’ masculine reason and ‘lower’ feminine feelings and desires.

Drawing attention to a history of patriarchal practices, in which men have shifted the burden of corporeality onto women, feminists proposed that prevailing gender roles and sexual relations need to be not just problematised but overturned. Taking issue with the nature-nurture debate, they recognised the impact of cultural forces over biological determinism, arguing that the existing gender ideology (a set of practices that organise, regulate and define relations between men and women) also *produces* gender.¹⁸ Furthermore, because masculinity and femininity are not products of nature but social constructs, they are not immutable and eternal, but conditional and unstable. This major shift in thinking, instigated predominantly by feminists, had wide-reaching implications and opened the door to a flood of new voices and concerns from across the disciplinary spectrum.

One of these 'new voices' is contemporary cultural theory, an intellectual practice that, because it is used by writers and critics to cover an increasingly diverse range of subjects, eludes a precise definition. Generally, however, cultural theory draws upon a wide range of critical and socio-political projects (including feminism, gay and lesbian studies and, most recently, queer theory) in an ongoing concern with documenting changes in and between different social power relations and structures. One of the most dramatic changes, judging by the amount of critical speculation it has fostered, has occurred in the area of gender and sexual identity. In particular, many writers working on this subject contend that, due to the breakdown of classical thought, masculinity is now in crisis.¹⁹ They describe how a universal and fixed model of masculine identity, used as a metaphor to support a set of idealistic values in philosophy and other critical projects, has, since the beginning of the twentieth

century, slowly been unravelled.²⁰ E. Ann Kaplan (1988: 17) states,

not only is the bourgeois individual subject a thing of the past, it is also a myth; it *never* really existed in the first place; there have never been autonomous subjects of that type. Rather, this construct is merely a philosophical and cultural mystification (original italics).

Elsewhere, Mark Simpson (1994: 7), shares Kaplan's view when he describes the crisis as a fragmentation of that 'which has always wished to be seen as a monolith'. He points to the recent wave of literature as evidence of this fragmentation, claiming that 'urgent ideological work usually signals the failure of a system, not its dominance' (p.xi). Although Simpson believes that Kaplan's mythical construct of bourgeois individuality still survives in essence, he argues that it is riddled with inconsistencies, adding that 'the current cascades of representations seem hectic, even panicky'.

Locating the beginnings of what he calls the 'fashionable chatter' about the crisis of masculinity in the 1980s, Simpson identifies several factors that have led to this concern: advances in the feminist and gay movement; the shift from heavy (masculine) industry and its puritan work ethic to post-war service (feminine) industry and a computer-literate dispersed globalised proletariat; and the devaluation of the traditional Victorian family unit as a desired and stable cultural form. Elsewhere, other critics also point to a particular development in postwar commodity capitalism that, in the pursuit for new markets, appeals to and nourishes masculine narcissism.²¹

That this crisis cannot be accredited to any single cause is demonstrated by Lynne Segal (1990: xii). As an introduction to her own investigations into this crisis, she begins by considering how various disciplines have sought to explain many of the prevailing 'problems around masculinity' (p.x) according to different sets of criteria. Cultural theorists, she maintains, have looked at men's inability to adapt to social change, while psychologists have pointed to a conflict between 'prescribed gender role expectations which are seen as restrictive, contradictory and confusing' (p.xiii) and men's need to retain a sense of coherent identity. Elsewhere, she adds, psychoanalytic theory has proposed that it is men's emotional illiteracy that is to blame, while post-structuralists argue that men's place at the centre of the dominant discourse has been displaced by the increased visibility of women and those deemed 'other'. Post-structuralists, Segal (1990: xxx) continues, see masculinity as 'an anxiously claimed identity, tied to linguistic and materialist practices that are never fixed or secure,' while psychoanalysis contends that 'masculinity is never the undivided, seamless construction it becomes in its symbolic manifestation' (p.102).

The specific pre-set disciplinary and historical parameters that shape these theoretical perspectives leads them to point to very different explanations as to the cause of this crisis in masculinity. There is, however a fundamental belief that they all share. For them, this crisis has developed from a friction between a concept of masculinity as a highly restrictive, nostalgic and ultimately unobtainable code of identity that, while retaining a 'symbolic weight' (Segal 1990: x), no longer corresponds to, or encompasses, actual men's experiences in a rapidly changing cultural climate. Furthermore, the sparks from this friction have ignited not only

widespread theoretical debate but, as will be evidenced in Part Three of this study, also some of the most challenging and visionary dance imagery that has yet to find any equivalent in more abstract theoretical models of masculinity.

That performance-based imagery has yet to make any impact upon recent gender debate is exemplified in Segal's writing. Like many other cultural theorists who have been influenced by feminist concerns, while Segal suggests that it is in men's better interests to change, she makes no direct reference to dance (either as an informative practice or visionary platform) in her discussions. As a consequence, she fails to acknowledge that this need for change is already being taken up by dance practitioners (both male and female) who are addressing issues surrounding masculinity. Even without this source of evidence, however, Segal articulates a compelling argument as to how a resolution to this crisis may be achieved.

Drawing upon a wide range of theoretical sources, Segal begins by stating that 'it is men themselves, and their attachment to traditional ideas of "manhood" which are very much part of the problem' (p.xix), where 'manhood' is not reducible to a set of personal attributes but corresponds to those 'institutional, cultural and discursive formations conceived hierarchically with men on top' (p.xxiii). Therefore, Segal contends, any attempt to resolve the crisis in masculinity must begin by addressing, not 'individual men and their behaviour,' but the 'taken-for-granted collective practices favouring men' (p.xxv). A starting point to such an investigation, she later proposes, could be to observe and draw inspiration from 'institutional, cultural and discursive' structures that are not organised with 'men on top'.

Like all the theorists discussed so far in this chapter, however, her suggestion that this strategy might provide a way forward is one in which the expressive agency of dance does not figure. This seems an unfortunate omission as dance performance is one of the very few 'cultural formations' or 'collective practices' in which, as it has already been suggested in this study, men are not favoured.²² Might not dance, in this respect, provide a valuable resource in any attempt towards finding a resolution to this crisis?

Elsewhere, the philosopher David Levin (1988) adopts a similar position to Segal when he contends that, because men are responsible for their dominant position in a hierarchic and oppressive sex-gender system, it is up to them to instigate change. His views are useful to this study because, not only does he hypothesise that change can only be achieved by questioning some of the old-fashioned parameters that dictate what constitutes masculinity and femininity, but that there is a major impediment to this form of revision. This he identifies as a resisting masculine will to power; a need to master and dominate, and thus retain a sense of identity.

Crucial to Levin's masculine 'will to power' is the assumption of a natural and intelligible link between gender and sexuality. More recent investigations, however, have challenged the validity of this form of biological determinism. Judith Butler (1990: 17), for example, claims that this relationship is not 'natural' but is based upon a matrix of cultural laws that regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality according to the 'heterosexualisation of desire'. She is also sceptical of a 'name and blame' agenda that has developed from adopting an unproblematised approach to assigning

gender to behavioural traits (Levin's *masculine* will to power). This form of association, common to a lot of thinking on gender, Butler argues, masks what she considers to be a more fundamental and persistent problem with notions of fixed identity that are rooted in 'true' genders and 'natural' sexes. She argues that, on the contrary, heterosexual identity is not *given* but *compulsory*, and 'requires and institutes the production of discrete and asymmetrical oppositions between "feminine" and "masculine," where these are understood as expressive attributes of "male" and "female".'

To support this cultural matrix, Butler adds, some forms of identity cannot 'exist.' To lend a sense of coherence and continuity to this regulatory practice, those forms in which gender does not follow from sex and 'those in which the practices of desire do not "follow" from either sex or gender,' have been excluded. Described by Butler as 'spectres of discontinuity and incoherence,' these impossible identities exert pressure upon the laws that govern the way persons are defined:

Their persistence and proliferation . . . provide critical opportunities to expose the limits and regulatory aims of that domain of intelligibility and, hence, open up within the very terms of that matrix of intelligibility rival and subversive matrices of gender disorder (p.17).

Butler contends that these 'gender discontinuities' expose regulatory ideals as both a norm and a fiction where, as she adds, 'this idealisation is an effect of corporeal signification' (p.136). Gender identity, Butler explains, is instituted by repetitive acts. It

is performative; a 'fantasy instituted and inscribed on the surface of bodies' that sustains the illusion of an internal and coherent gender core. Such elements as posture, gesture, costume, and speech acts, through their repetition, constitute identity. We all, she concludes, *perform* our gender.

Butler suggests that drag and cross-dressing, by 'playing upon the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is performed' (p.137), subvert the notion of a 'true' gender identity. Furthermore, because gender is already an imitation, there is an added dimension:

If the anatomy of the performer is already distinct from the gender of the performer, and both of these are distinct from the gender of the performance, then the performance suggests a dissonance not only between sex and performance, but sex and gender, and gender and performance.

Complex though this parodic proliferation is, it does not guarantee subversion. Butler recognises that, while some forms of parody are 'truly troubling', others 'become domesticated and re-circulated as instruments of cultural hegemony' (p.139). This leads her to ask, 'what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilises the naturalised categories of identity and desire?'

Posture, gesture and costume are constitutive elements of both gender identity and dance performance. Furthermore, while drag effects a hyperbolic representation of

gender identity in isolation, dance performs its gender identities in a dynamic network of relationships and often within the context of a fictional narrative structure. Could dance be the truly troubling 'gender performance' that Butler seeks? Moreover, could dance envision representations of masculinity that are able to problematise the very 'matrix of cultural laws that regulate the shape and meaning of sexuality' that Butler sees as inherently heteronormative?

Theoretical evidence raised in this chapter supports the notion that a challenge to the parameters of more orthodox models of masculine identity might involve: the problematisation of prescribed gender roles; the subversion of institutional, cultural and discursive hierarchies; a move away from sources of institutionalised power; a deconstruction of the asymmetrical oppositions between 'feminine' and 'masculine' (where these are understood as expressive attributes of, respectively, men and women) and the identification of discontinuity and incoherence. All of these suggested strategies, however, because they are derived from 'abstract' theoretical models, remain hypothetical. Nowhere is any space given to the material of the body as an agent of meaning that may contribute to ongoing thinking about masculinity.²³ As such, none of these modes of disruption are able to produce any clear evidence as to what form(s) of masculine identity may result from their implementation. It is in dance performance, it will be suggested, where material representations of gender might be found that not only correspond to but also, through their own expressive agency, can further expand upon these hypothetical challenges.

The first chapter in Part Three will consist of a close analysis of *The Hard Nut* (1993) and *Swan Lake* (1995). How both of these dance performances, either through a strategy of gender inversion, and/or the articulation of forms of desire that are excluded from the normative cultural code, can be read as a response to those challenges outlined above will be considered. Furthermore, and with respect to the *visionary* dimension of dance, key to these readings will be how elements of the performances not only reflect but, because they are not bound by linguistic and/or disciplinary parameters, enhance, question and/or problematise existing theoretical models of gender and sexual identity.

So far, the predominant theme in this chapter has been the impact of feminism on the nature and historical trajectory of thinking about gender. As modernist critical practices gave way to postmodern ones, the debating arena expanded and diversified as many other minority voices started to tackle issues related to gender and sexuality. Prominent amongst these were the various strands of gay/lesbian thinking, which, although indebted to feminist advances, pursued separatist agendas. Although both feminist and gay/lesbian research has continued to develop from a need to strategically oppose forms of cultural inequality and oppression, there are significant differences. While feminist scholars are motivated in response to a history of gender oppression, gay and lesbian theorists find inspiration by questioning some of the essentialist rhetoric that upholds cultural marginalization and suppresses social visibility. Aside from this, however, they all share a concern. For them, and for the aims of this study, the search is for articulations of gender and sexuality that go 'against the grain' of normative codes of representation.

3.1.2. Postmodernism: blurring the sex/gender divide.

How shifting social practices have contributed to what is now widely recognised as a crisis in masculinity has already been discussed in this chapter. Like Simpson, Maurizia Boscagli (1996) suggests that widespread changes in the fabric of society around the turn of the century created a sense of uncertainty for the male bourgeois subject. She states that, between 1880 and 1930, 'social, economic, and cultural changes corroded the authorial and authoritative position to which he had risen during the nineteenth century as *paterfamilias*, public man or entrepreneur' (p.1, original italics). As a response to this threat, a New Man was imagined that, according to Boscagli, could use his own physical body as a protection against dangerous cultural forces. Such spectacles as Johnny Weismuller's *Tarzan* or the 'brutalist musculature of fascist statuary displayed around the new Foro Italico stadium in Rome' (p.1) exemplified this early twentieth century Western preoccupation with a rugged, virile and muscular masculine ideal. This aesthetically and morally perfect figure, a distinctly modern interpretation of both the Vitruvian model and also the Nietzschean Superman, Boscagli claims, 'assumed an apotropaic value; it marked a struggle to resolve phantasmagorically, at the level of bodily representation, a moment of crisis in legitimacy and social power' (p.2).

Boscagli claims that just as this 'hyper-masculine' model was being widely acclaimed, however, its symbolic purpose was simultaneously being undermined by one of the most powerful destabilising forces at work during the beginnings of the twentieth century; the Hellenist practices of the *fin de siècle* art movement.²⁴ These counter-

hegemonic 'deviants' recognised and exploited an essentially modern paradox. Boscagli observes that, just at the moment when this new masculine identity based on 'physical prowess' (p.4) was appearing, his environment was rapidly undergoing a technological change from physical labour to machine mass-production. In a period that saw the beginnings of a shift from an economy of effort to one of control, 'the new male muscles were of no use' (p.5).²⁵ This vitalistic form, rendered obsolete through its excess, provoked readings of the male body that led to the foregrounding of a previously excluded libidinality. Rather than existing within the desexualised framework of natural masculine identity, these bodies,

gestured towards a symbolic economy that foregrounded excess, desire, sexuality, and the exhibitionist pleasure in being seen rather than the phallic propriety that had characterised the middle class male body in the nineteenth century (p.6).

This loss of functionality was heavily exploited by the predominantly homosexual *fin de siècle* aesthetes who transformed the now obsolete male body into a sexualised spectacle. One of these spectacular displays is the Faun in Vaslav Nijinsky's ballet *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (1912). According to Boscagli, the Faun exemplifies this new symbolic economy wherein innate wholeness constructed upon an ideal phallic form is inverted due to the destabilising effects of eroticism. Moreover, the arrival of this half-man/half-animal being marked the beginning of a landslide of what Boscagli (1996: 9) describes as 'anti-phallic representations' of the male body. No longer a constant in a modern world of flux Nijinsky's Faun, as 'a semiotic object continually

encoding contradictory meanings' (p.6), transformed the male body into the epitome of that flux under the banner of postmodernism. Employing a phrase elsewhere coined by Butler, Boscagli states that the Faun's exploitation of 'the Nietzschean figuration of masculinity stands as an instance of gender trouble' (p.6).²⁶

Although Boscagli briefly mentions the image of Nijinsky's Faun as an example of 'gender trouble', however, no other reference to dance as a potential source of anti-phallic imagery appears in her investigations. This omission limits the value of her model of the male body to the aims of this study as those qualities unique to dance, such as ephemerality and dynamism (as well as contextual and narrative factors), are not considered.²⁷ Nevertheless, her detailed descriptions of early twentieth century 'troubling' representations of the male body provide a useful socio-historical backdrop to this study because they exemplify how a deconstructive approach to reading specific images can help to displace institutionalised gender codes and thereby open the body to alternative meanings.

If the beginning of the twentieth century saw the beginning of 'a landslide,' the end, according to Peter Middleton (1992), witnessed its culmination in the widespread exploitation of the male body as an object for visual pleasure. He remarks that this devaluation of the sanctity of phallic masculinity, wherein 'manhood is used to sell everything from cigarettes and politicians to toilet cleaners and toys' (p.3), has, he believes, resulted in a loss of virility. Such narcissistic exhibitionism, he argues, has brought masculinity perilously close to that which had 'previously been segregated as Other' (p.4). It is perhaps ironic that the virile and heterosexual masculine model

promoted as a remedial response to a modern identity crisis should also be held responsible for the postmodern undermining of the sanctity of heteronormative values. For men, Middleton explains, this trivialisation has had critical consequences, where 'traditional male heterosexuality, which insists that it is always active, sadistic and desiring is now inundated with images of men's bodies as passive, masochistic and desired'. That, in the mass media, the image of the male has now joined the female as a fetish that invites the 'undifferentiated gaze' is noted by Simpson (1994: 7). According to Simpson, the controlling power of the gaze, a key mechanism that is supposed to privilege the male heterosexual population, has now become part of the apparatus that contributes to masculinity's undoing because it can now also be possessed by women and homosexual men.

Elsewhere, Susan Bordo (Goldstein 1994) describes this dispersal of the controlling power of the gaze to those deemed 'other' as a violation of masculinity. Furthermore, this violation, she states, can occur on three different levels. First, it deconstructs the active masculine role, where orthodox masculinity dreads being 'stripped of whatever armour it has constructed for itself, dreads being determined from without' (Goldstein 1994: 286). Second, if the gaze is of an overtly sexual nature then this constitutes an even greater threat in which penis size can be scrutinised and judged. Third, the fear of exposure, in a specific sexual context, is the heterosexual terror of anal penetration where the gaze defines the other male as receptacle of sexuality. Herein lies the paradox, for, as Bordo suggests, while 'it is the imagined effeminacy of homosexual men that makes them objects of sexual derision . . . it is their imagined masculinity . . . that makes them the objects of homosexual fear' (p.287). In the latter part of the

twentieth century this fear gained added momentum as concerns over the AIDS epidemic (the 'gay' plague) instigated a tabloid led upsurge in homophobic rhetoric.

Although Bordo's concept of the powerful gay gaze provides a credible explanation for the homophobic response to the crisis in masculinity, it is not without problems. First, it requires an essentialist construction of both homosexuality and heterosexuality. According to Bordo's hypothesis, while homosexual proximity effects a challenge, it only achieves this through its imagined 'otherness' to a presumed heterosexual norm. Second, her use of this concept to blame homophobia on a prejudicial and paranoid segment of the population rather than see it as an aspect of the way power is organised and deployed throughout society is, in itself, a form of prejudice. Ultimately, her confrontational 'gay gaze' strategy serves to demonise homosexuality and support a heterosexist bias that, as other critics such as Butler have since argued, has come under increased pressure due to the active involvement of both gay men in cultural practices and queer theory in academia.²⁸

Elsewhere, Simpson addresses the impact of this heightened visibility upon normative codes, arguing that gay men have 'queered the archetypal image of virility and hence questioned the whole notion of masculinity' to the point where such terms as man and manly have become 'free-floating signifiers with no referents'. He suggests that part of the growing sense of 'instability' stems from the increased difficulty in identifying a clear demarcation between a manly and 'phallic' heterosexuality and an unmanly and 'anti-phallic' homosexuality.²⁹

Segal (1990) relates much of this sense of instability to the emergence of a high profile gay culture and its emphasis both upon nourishing narcissism, androgyny and fashion-consciousness amongst men (both homosexual and heterosexual) and also what she refers to as a 'super macho style' (p.149).³⁰ This 'macho' style, epitomised by the pop group *Village People*, appears in various guises or 'clones': moustached and all in leather; crop-haired and denim clad or the archetypal image of the cowboy, construction worker, GI or cop.³¹ As a form of nostalgic imagery based upon fantasy constructs of hyper-masculinity, this gay machismo exposes 'the absurdity of masculinity more effectively than effeminacy' because, Segal explains, it undercuts masculine power through eroticism and hyperbole, while, at the same time, it challenges the stereotype of the weak and passive homosexual (1990: 149).

This suggestion that the usurpation of atypical masculine codes by gay men is more disruptive than a recourse to invertive strategies (i.e. Butler's examples of the drag performer and cross-dresser) is, however, contingent upon several factors such as context, as well as historical and cultural differences. For example, the level of disruption triggered by the 'leather clone' member of *Village People* is tempered through a celebrity status that does not apply to a similarly dressed figure seen drinking in the local pub or taking part in a gay pride march.³² Likewise, the increased level of visibility of 'butch' gay men, particularly in western urban areas, has done much to dilute their disruptive agency. Just as all forms of gender inversion are not necessarily subversive, neither, it could be contended, are all acts of hyper-masculinity.

Contingent factors aside, however, what both the drag and 'macho' gay figures expose, as pretend performatives of gender and/or sexual identity, is the unstable nature of the nexus of power and desire that equates heterosexuality with masculinity. This notion of a 'fundamental plasticity' of desire is outlined by Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 226):

The threat homosexuality poses to heterosexuality is its own contingency, and openendedness, its own tenuous hold over the multiplicity of sexual impulses and possibilities characterising all human sexuality.

Grosz's contention that the 'idea' of homosexuality is a destabilising force, because it reveals heterosexuality as more of a choice rather than a given, is shared by Simpson (1994: 7). He describes being gay as the 'greatest challenge to virility and man's claim to authenticity, naturalness, coherence and dominance' because it replaces the modern idea that man is a 'free, conscious, independent agent, his ego reigning supreme,' with the postmodern 'notion of subjectivity' (p.7). Like Simpson, other social theorists such as Middleton (1990), Bordo (Goldstein 1994) and Boscagli (1996) all imagine, in this postmodern disintegration of a modern heteronormic code, new opportunities for revision.

For example, Boscagli argues that the dislocation of 'the representation of masculinity away from the binarism of the heterosexual gender divide' can give rise to 'a semiotically open territory between normative masculinity and its abjected others' (p.9). Within this space, she suggests, 'new and not yet known figurations of gender

can be imagined and emplotted' (p.10). Similarly, Middleton sees in this breakdown the opportunity to 'rethink existing concepts of gender and identity in terms of the relations between society, reason and emotion' (p.12). Moreover, this re-introduction of what was previously relegated to the female domain (emotions), should involve an exploration of 'symbolic forms, of fantasies, inarticulate experiences and the activities of what has been called the unconscious . . . in modern men' (p.22). Likewise, Bordo (Goldstein 1994), discusses the merits of a return to the concepts of feelings and sensitivity. She remarks 'I find that it is precisely images of men (both homosexual and heterosexual) openly loving each other, in couples and in the community, that are most stimulating to my imagination of a revisioned masculinity.' Her notion of a harmonic future, in which men can freely express sensitivities and emotional qualities previously considered taboo, seems not only idealistic but also presumes that men never demonstrate these aspects of behaviour. Segal (1990), however, points out that men do display these emotions but only in the confines of secure homosocial spaces. She argues that 'it is only when men are seen at their most unquestionably masculine – as soldiers in combat, as footballers in action – that they can embrace, weep, display what Western manhood depicts as more feminine feelings and behaviour' (p.103).

All the theorists discussed so far in this section identify a link between the rise of gay representational politics and the postmodern demise of heteronormative ideology. While hypothesising upon the potential benefits of a more deconstructive approach to concepts of gender and sexual identity (specifically, the breakdown of the 'natural' bond between masculinity and heterosexuality, and an emphasis on exploring

masculinity as a series of changing sociohistoric, linguistic and/or psychological traits rather than a monolithic, biological given), however, they similarly fail to consider the dance arena as a possible source of new figurations of masculinity.

Chapter Seven will present an analysis of *Nelken* (1982) and *Enter Achilles* (1995), two dance works that address this postmodern crisis in masculinity. Of concern in these two readings will be the extent to which choreographic representations of contemporary male subjectivity, by exemplifying and problematising abstract theoretical models, are able to articulate alternative revisionist approaches to the crisis in masculine identity.

Fundamental to these two analyses will be how these two works, by exploring how emotional dysfunction, unarticulated phobias, repressed desires and communication difficulties plague contemporary men, envision what Bordo (Goldstein 1994: 290) refers to as the 'territory of the degraded'. This territory, she adds, is occupied by those who, because they reject or fail to meet heteronormative values, are deemed abject. Elsewhere, Elizabeth Grosz (1987: 109) provides a specific understanding of this term as,

a state of condition of the (proto-) subject that is related to its attempts to differentiate itself from the world and others. These paradoxical but necessary attempts at self-identity are bound up with various body cycles - the cycles of incorporation, depletion, loss, summed up as *forms of repetition* (original italics).

Grosz describes three categories of abjection; food, waste and signs of sexual difference. It is this third category that is key to this study. Referring to the Lacanian Symbolic order, where the Name of the Father 'embodies and represents the law' (p.110) of Patriarchy, Grosz defines abjection as the 'underside of the Symbolic order, what must be rejected or expelled, covered over and denied'; the 'excess' that must be removed in order for subjective identity to remain coherent.

Butler (1990) also sees, in the act of rejection, the establishment of a clear boundary between inner and outer, and an original identity and its defiled Other. What is expelled is then reviled. In cultural practices, this revulsion takes the form of misogyny while, in sexual politics, it appears in the language of heterosexism and the violence of homophobia. The presence of this abject Other attests to the continuing instability at the centre of subjectivity. As Butler (1990: 110) points out, 'it is a process of becoming' and could, in this precarious state, be undone and slip from its proper social mooring into the 'abyss': Bordo's 'territory of the degraded.'

Abjection, therefore, translates as the status of the subject who, as a result of 'inner exposure, of rupturing the 'outer' mantle of social conformity, of voiding himself of the restrictions of a patriarchal value system, loses symbolic identity. Moreover, for Grosz (1995: 113), abjection has a temporal and spatial dimension,

the maternal, imaginary space returns unpredictably in dreams, phobias, psychoses and in forms of writing. The *time* of abjection is a spasmodic, unmarked continual present, a time of timelessness, which is itself (timelessly) preserved in or as the unconscious.

'Dreams', 'phobias', 'continual present', 'spasmic' temporality, 'the unconscious:' these are the techniques of abjection abstracted by theory and contextualised in *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles*. It is a dynamic force that propels the bodies of these dancers, through movement and speech, towards the 'abyss' of non-identity. These two works, in their attempts to sublimate the horror of abjection through performance (p.113), articulate abjection as a prevailing and tangible social danger. It is one in which, as Grosz suggests, 'the ritual surrounding it serves to distance and protect subjects and social groups from that which blurs the boundaries and limits of individual and group existence' (p.114).

This hypothetical notion of expulsion will be dealt with in Chapter Seven. First, in *Nelken*, as it manifests itself as a deconstruction of the barrier that separates spectator from performer, individual from community, performer from role and the actual from the fictional. Second, in *Enter Achilles*, as it corresponds to the rejection of patriarchal law, in which counter-hegemonic expressions of masculine subjectivity are punished by a moral majority. In whatever form it takes it is always accompanied by violence. It leaves behind it the psychologically (and physically) damaged bodies of its victims who, through their manifold pain and suffering, contribute their own voice to hypothetical articulations upon the need for cultural revision.

In this section the discussion has focused on key issues drawn from some of the research into the postmodern development of gay identity politics and its impact upon the cultural, linguistic and psychoanalytical structures that serve to patrol and regulate masculine identity. What has been revealed is that, underlying these hypothetical

models, is a certain 'either/or' level of essentialism (the legacy of much feminist thinking). For example, the subject is either heterosexual or homosexual; wherein homosexuality is read as the axiomatic opposite to heterosexuality; a teleological view of sexuality and identity. This tendency, it was argued, although crucial to these debates, gives rise to two main problems. First, it risks directing the blame for the crisis in masculinity towards minority groups rather than seeing it as symptomatic of twentieth century Western culture *per se*. Second, it sees all representations of sexual identity as both static and 'given' rather than fluid and circumstantially determined. How these problems have been addressed will be considered in the following section of this chapter where the investigation will turn to the various subversive, transgressive and destabilising strategies that epitomise queer thinking and how they can further contribute to the readings in Part Three.

3.1.3. The 'queer' challenge: multiple, liminal and transgressive identities.

The last ten or so years of the twentieth century saw the development of a new branch of cultural studies; queer theory. Unlike gay/lesbian identity politics of the 1970s and 80s, queer theory begins from the assumption that sexual identities are a function of representations. Moreover, rather than interpreting identities in terms of how they can be realised as gay or lesbian, queer theory assumes that representations pre-exist and define, as well as complicate and disrupt, sexual identities. As such, queer theorists read texts with a great degree of specificity, attending to what characters take pleasure in, how this is tied to historically specific circumstances, and the representational dynamics and dilemmas in which characters

find themselves. These various aspects of queer theory testify to its potential benefit to a close study of alternative visions of masculinity in dance.

According to Michael Warner (1993), queer theory does for sexuality what feminism did for gender by using the same tools and working towards the same kinds of revision. As a more sceptical form of identity politics, however, it signals a break from what Warner describes as 'a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple interest-representation in favour of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal' (p.xxvi). Unlike 'compartmentalised' and out-moded gay and lesbian studies, Warner sees queer theory as a radical and unsanctioned discipline that can 'mess up the desexualised spaces of the academy, exude some rut, re-imagine the publics from and for which academic intellectuals write, dress and perform'. For dance scholars, it provides a conceptual framework in which to interpret representations of identity in dance works that resist categorisation according to 'mandatory gender divisions' such as male/female and heterosexual/homosexual. Furthermore, it gives a name and political edge to forms of identity that traditional dance studies have previously couched in negative terms such as 'deviant' or 'counter-normative.' Finally, and as Jordan and Thomas (1994: 8) suggest, by inserting differences within sexual orientation as a contingency factor in representational practices, it makes visible some of the codes that support a monological economy of identity:

Conventional behaviour can so easily become invisible behaviour. Often, it is only when the rules of behaviour have been broken that we come to understand that indeed, they constitute conventions of behaviour which are rule bound and subject to sanctions.

Elsewhere, Steven Seidman (Warner 1993) recognises queer theory, not only as a way of exposing and engaging with the structures of a masculinist signifying system, but as an agent of change. He suggests that it might 'offer a cultural resource to imagine rethinking identity and politics' (p.106). Expressing concern with a paradox that lies at the heart of both gay and feminist organisations, he describes how they 'strain towards erasing difference' while priding themselves on the 'celebration of the individual' (p.127). Furthermore, Seidman believes that these organisations have failed to keep in line with postmodern thinking:

Where gay liberation confronted a dialectic of identity and difference that revolved around gay/straight and man/woman polarities, currently these oppositions are multiplied a hundredfold as we introduce differences along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual act, class, lifestyle, and locale (p.129).

Like both Warner and Seidman, Peter Horne and Reina Lewis (1996: 1) identify a key difference between identities that are queer and those that are gay and lesbian. Inspired by the Freudian contention that pleasure bears no necessary or inevitable relation to a genital sexuality anchored in 'object choice' Horne and Lewis claim that to be 'queer' can also 'encompass a variety of desires and hybrid identities, countenancing elements of play and sexual practice, which also transgress the norms of what some have seen as more ostensibly "politically correct" forms of gay and lesbian identity' (1996: 1). This association between 'queer' and 'play' is important because it introduces an element of pleasure that, as Seidman points out, in a politics of contestation and resistance, tends to be overlooked. Being queer not only marks an opposition to disciplining, normalising social forces and 'administrative-juridico-

medical' (Seidman in Warner 1993: 134) forms of sexual identity, but also celebrates this refusal. To be 'queer', then, is to reject any fixed notion of sexuality and, instead, explore and encourage forms of desire and identity that are marginal, temporal, contingent and hybridic.

While many critics have welcomed the development of a fluid and improvisational approach to reading all representations of sexuality, however, others express concern with queer theory as a replacement for existing, less fragmentary ways of conceptualising identity. For example, Jonathan Weinberg (1996: 2) points to the possible dangers involved in queer theory's shift of the emphasis away from specific acts and identities to the ways in which gender organises and disorganises society. He states that 'if everything and everyone is potentially queer, then the specific stories of how gay and lesbian people have lived and represented their lives, as well as the record of their persecution and struggle for civil rights, may be passed over'. While he sees the potential benefits of adopting a queer approach towards reading works of art, this, he remarks, 'should not replace the task of recovering gay and lesbian iconographies and historical moments'. As a corrective, Weinberg advocates a more judicious strategy, wherein 'the two approaches - the queer, more theoretical and improvisational, the lesbian and gay, more dependant on archive and biography - can go on simultaneously'.

The possible advantages and disadvantages of queer theory in readings of dance works are yet to be fully realised. The introduction of this critical resource into analytic models has been hampered both by dance scholarship's resistance to adopting

'abstract' literary-based theoretical models and also a tendency for early queer theorists to couch their discussions in a tortuously obscurist political rhetoric that is too extreme to be of any tangible benefit to performance analysis. Signs of change can be detected, however, as dance scholarship continues to open itself to a broader range of theoretical concerns and queer theory relaxes its initial reactionary agenda.

The analysis of Javier de Frutos's *Transatlantic* (1996) in Part Three of this study will examine the extent to which dance performance lends itself as the ideal fictional platform for the expression of forms of identity that correspond to a queer praxis. Key will be a consideration of the exposed male body as a source of undifferentiated desire. By playing with the various mechanisms through which a heteronormative concept of masculinity is coded onto the male body, *Transatlantic*, it will be argued, envisions a uniquely queer vision of male identity. Moreover, of concern will be how a queer reading of qualities unique to this dance work both illuminate and problematise many of the strategies through which dance history claims to know gender and sexuality. In other words, to what extent this work go against the grain of what is considered certain and render queer the cultural codes that dictate what is normal and abnormal, decent and obscene, and gay and straight will be considered.

3.2. Conclusion.

How widespread changes in twentieth century culture have led to a cross-disciplinary re-think into the way that formations of gender and sexual identity are conceptualised has been described in this chapter. In the process, a range of key issues drawn from

feminist, gay and lesbian and queer theory that will form the theoretical framework to Part Three have been identified. While charting the development of debates on gender, this chapter has also presented an examination of the various ways that scholars imagine a politics of identity needs to progress and, in so doing, has highlighted a major difference in thinking. Some theorists acknowledge that there is still a need for further revision and advocate the complete disintegration of the binary codes that, although pervasive, are riddled with inconsistencies. Others, however, argue in favour of retaining some vestigial level of categorisation. For example, rather than calling for their redundancy, Butler (1990: 128) suggests that 'categories of true sex, discrete gender and specific sexuality' must be recaptured by a politics of subversion to become 'points of epistemic departure'. Key to this strategic essentialism, she adds, is a return to the lived body.

Butler goes on to argue that, in the signifying strategies of many of the major strands of Western thought, the body itself has been sabotaged, transformed into a passive medium.³³ Becoming so much inert matter it loses value; it cannot dance. Foster (1995), however, sees this practice of transfiguration of the body into a 'sublimated domain of values' (Butler 1990: 130) as an opportunity for non-canonical scholarship intervention. She draws a direct parallel between the 'scornful' treatment of the body and of minority groups in Western scholarship to argue that,

the canonical thrust of Western scholarship has worked at every turn to deny and repress or else to exoticise the experience of these people just as it has dismissed body-centred endeavours and the participation of the body in any endeavour.

(Foster 1995: 12)

The antidote to this repressive and exclusionary practice, Foster suggests, can be found in 'the critiques of canonical scholarship established in feminist and queer theory, post-colonial and minority discourses of inherent racial, class and gendered biases' (p.12). In the subversive strategies of such marginal discourses, the body becomes the focal point for any challenge to 'logocentric value systems'. Conditional to this agency, however, is a recognition of the body as more than 'just a sex' or 'holding ground for unconscious desires, instincts, drives, or impulses' or even a 'transparent conveyance of whatever meaning other cultural categories invested in it' (p.14). She then asks, 'what models of body cultivate physicality as a site for the invention of meaning?' (p.15).

Dance, Foster claims, 'cultivates a body that imitates as well as responds.' In performance, these bodies 'sustain a "conversation" . . . that imaginatively invents and then lucidly enunciates their specific corporeal identities' (p.15). Moreover, this conversation is one that 'moves critical studies of the body in new directions'. This visionary capacity, where meaning develops at the interface between dance performance and direct spectatorial engagement, set within the parameters of an 'illuminating' sociohistorical/theoretical framework, directs this study.

¹ Hatt, for example, understands *The Swimming Hole* as a redefinition of masculinity, while Cooper argues that more contemporary photographic images have polarised the debate over the symbolism of the male body.

² For example, it was argued that while Hanna's view of dance is as a reflection of culture, more recent scholarship points to a more dialogic relationship.

³ For example, and with reference to the Burt contribution, both Thomas and Popalisky point to the difficulties associated with finding terminology sensitive enough to describe marginal images of male dancers.

⁴ According to Jordan and Thomas (1994: 6), structuralism is a method of enquiry that seeks to explain dance in terms of the 'structures that lie below the surface level and that underscore it.' This seems a slightly different interpretation from the more widely accepted understanding of structuralism as the search for minimal units and systems of difference through which meaning is produced, as in language (semiotics, Saussure), kinship systems (anthropology, Levi-Strauss) and dreams and the unconscious (psychoanalysis, Lacan).

⁵ See Banes (1998) in 2.1.

⁶ According to Foster (1995: 15), ambulant scholarship serves as a timely antidote to traditional dance studies in which logocentric values prevail and the agency of the body is denied. An account of these values can be found in 2.2.

⁷ A demonstration of this approach is given in Mark Franko's (Morris 1996) analysis of Donya Feuer's *Laughter After All* (1960). Franko's text uses two different typefaces to distinguish between a reconstitution of the unmediated experience and sections of his mediated interpretation. What is at first abstract gains meaning as more formal aspects of the dance work (which includes interviews with the dancers and choreographer, photographic evidence and his own experience as a dancer with the company) give rise to a discussion of five different themes or 'theses.'

⁸ It is interesting to note that while Adshead-Lansdale and Foster also refer to interpretation as the process of giving meaning to dance, there is no evidence to suggest that they understand this *only* as a post-performance activity.

⁹ This seems to contradict Siegel's earlier argument concerning interpretation as a post-performance activity.

¹⁰ As to whether Burt is entirely consistent in his conditional application of deconstruction is, however, open to question. For example, Thomas and Popalisky express a concern with Burt's hierarchical approach to different dance forms that, within a deconstructive agenda, would not be possible.

¹¹ Finding the right balance is also important to this study. Hence, while roaming 'far afield' in the search for 'research methods and subject matter' (particularly in the second part of this chapter) any subsequent findings will be, as Adshead-Lansdale contends, 'matched by a critical awareness of *their capacity to respond to dance, and to illuminate it*'.

¹² For example, Thomas (1995), Burt (1995), Franko and Koritz (in Morris 1996), Daly (in Desmond 1997) and Banes (1998).

¹³ Polhemus's 'properly anthropological' (Thomas 1993: 3) version of culture 'as a way of life' (p.xv) contrasts with what Thomas describes as 'the more restricted stratified version of culture (high culture v. popular culture) which stems from the English literary tradition.' Unless otherwise stated, it is the first definition that will be used in this study, in which, as Polhemus states, culture encompasses 'everything which the members of a social group (*any social group*) have in common' (p.3, original italics). For example, the term 'gay culture' refers to a particular group identity that is based upon (but not solely

directed by) forms of same-sex desire and kinship. A more thorough discussion of gay identity politics can be found in 3.1.2 and 3.1.3.

¹⁴ See, in particular, Thomas's and Popalisky's comments on Burt in 2.2.

¹⁵ Although Barrett's findings are not directly quoted by Burt in his writing, this notion of difference as a linguistic construct corresponds to his own conditional application of deconstruction in his reading of representations of masculinity in dance.

¹⁶ She exemplifies 'human/animal, adult/child, singular/plural and autoerotic/alloerotic' as dimensions of sexual object-choice that are not 'fully subsumed under the hetero-homosexual binarism' (p.35).

¹⁷ See 1.1. The Vitruvian model.

¹⁸ Segal (1990: 64) finds the nature/nurture framework 'conceptually inadequate.' She points out that 'biology does affect culture, but not in ways that can be specified independently of that culture' and that we need to move beyond the nature/nurture debate.

¹⁹ See Segal (1990), Simpson (1994), Bordo (Goldstein 1994), Grosz (1995), Boscagli (1996) and Alcoff (in Duncan 1996).

²⁰ Both Grosz and Alcoff describe how Nietzsche, Foucault, Lacan and Freud, amongst others, are partly responsible for abstracting and reducing the body to a singular, and idealised, masculine model.

²¹ See Pat Kirkham's *The Gendered Object* (1996), especially Angela Partington on perfume packaging.

²² This notion that men are not favoured in dance performance refers to on stage visibility (particularly in classical ballet where women have tended to enjoy a lions share of roles) and off stage stigma (suspicions surrounding the sexual identity of men in dance far exceed those concerning women) and not to management and administrative power where men still tend to predominate. See also note three in the preface to this study.

²³ Even Butler's use of drag and role reversal as isolated instances of gender 'trouble' remain hypothetical, in that they are presented without any direct reference to practical examples.

²⁴ 'Hellenist practices' refers to a late nineteenth century interest in the Classical world and ancient art. For Hellenists such as Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley, whose desire was to make art out of life, 'the sculpted male body of Greek statuary was the epitome of a seamless unity between the aesthetic object and human sensuousness' (Boscagli 1996: 26).

²⁵ Jean Baudrillard in *The System of Objects* (1995) points to the contrast between an economy of effort (embodied nostalgically in tools like ploughs, scythes and pitchers) and one of control (buttons, pedals, photoelectric cells), and the shift towards the expenditure of minimal energy for maximal effect.

²⁶ A more detailed discussion of the Faun as an instance of 'gender trouble' can be found in Chapter Four of this study.

²⁷ Boscagli reads the Faun according to the same criteria that she employs for her literary examples.

²⁸ A discussion of queer theory can be found later in this chapter.

²⁹ In 'On the Nosology of Two Different Types of Homosexuality,' Sandor Ferenczi (1986) discusses two different kinds of homosexuality as, respectively, a flight from and to femininity: either into hyper-masculinity or effeminism.

³⁰ According to Segal, urban gay men have, since the formation of the Gay Liberation Front in the early 1970s, sought to overturn the concept of the stigmatised homosexual and gain recognition as a positive lifestyle. By the early 1990s this led to the formation of a thriving dance club scene, a wide range of gay and lesbian magazines and the promotion of gay films and novels, all of which are supported by a disposable income available to many gay men (the 'pink' pound). That these lifestyle practices, borne of political necessity, have since been (and continue to be) absorbed into more mainstream culture is noted by Segal. She points out that 'gay minority markets have often paved the way for subsequent mass markets – from disco music (which began in gay clubs) to perfume and jewellery for men, singles' bars and much more' (1990: 155).

³¹ In what has to be one of the most bizarre cases of 'outing,' it was recently announced in the popular tabloid press that, out of all of the members of *Village People*, only one of them was actually gay!

³² This is a reworking of the hypothetical example originally presented by Butler in which she describes how the sight of a transvestite on stage can compel pleasure and applause while the sight of the same transvestite on the seat next to us on the bus can compel fear, rage or even violence (quoted by Burt 1988: 19).

³³ Butler (1990: 130) offers as examples Sartre, de Beauvoir, Nietzsche, Freud and Foucault as theorists who have, she argues, understood the body as a 'blank page'. She adds that in order for their 'inscriptions' to signify, the body 'must itself be destroyed'.

PART TWO
VISIONS OF MASCULINITY IN DANCE.

CHAPTER FOUR
MASCULINITY IN DANCE: AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE.

4.0. Introduction.

This chapter will begin with an examination of the figure of Le Roi Soleil in *Le Ballet Royal de la Nuit* (1653), devised for and performed by King Louis XIV of France (the 'Sun' King). Concentrating on the symbolic purpose behind this pivotal role, what will be discussed is how the King exploited and developed court ballet to fulfil his desire to proclaim himself as the embodiment of absolute political power. What will be of concern is how the King, by transforming himself into a divine icon, impacted upon the 'natural' bond between masculine identity and power.

The second subject will be the male hero in the romantic ballet *La Sylphide* (1832), a work that marked 'the beginnings of women's ascendancy on the dance stage' (Banes 1998: 12). An examination will be made of the extent to which this ballet's representation of the suffering poet encapsulated Western man's quest for the feminine ideal. While acknowledging that this desire for the exotic and supernatural sylph was partly responsible for the temporary expulsion of the *male danseur* from the ballet stage, what will also be considered is the impact of elements of the choreography for the hero.

Third, this chapter will present a discussion of the impact of Nijinsky's role as the Faune in *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (Nijinsky 1912) and how it helped to raise the profile of the male ballet dancer and rescue the ballet genre from its marginal status.

Ramsay Burt (1995: 100) states that the 're-emergence of the male body in dance and ballet at the beginning of the twentieth century can be seen as a disruptive force',

one that, he qualifies, came about 'through the radicalism of early modernism.' In this chapter what will be asked is whether the source of this 'radicalism' could be attributed to the way in which the Faune epitomised the disruptive Hellenist challenge to modern eugenicist ideals. To this end, what will be explored is the extent to which the figure of the Faune, as an erotic icon, was able to bridge the gap between high and low art practices by trading upon a popularist preoccupation with spectacular images of the male form. Furthermore, the ways in which this ballet's shocking portrayal of animalistic behaviour both symbolised the revolutionary fervour that marked the beginnings of the twentieth century and paved the way for future modern and postmodern practices will also be considered.

4.1. Divinity: the Renaissance male dancer.

According to dance historians King Louis XIV used the spectacle of court ballet for political purposes.¹ This chapter will offer a 'speculative' account of the impact of this practice upon the King's own identity.² What will be examined is how the bond between identity and power is promoted through theatrical display and how this gives rise to a particular and 'troubling' model of masculine identity. Chapter One looked at visual representations of the male body and the artificial mechanisms through which an equation between an ideal model of masculinity and divine status is determined. What was also addressed was how the male body remains an unstable factor that exerts a pressure upon idealistic values by blurring the divide between licit identification and illicit desire. In this chapter what will be considered is the extent to which Louis' own body, by confusing the codes of gender representation, can

similarly be read as a site of trouble. In doing so, the aim will be to question the validity of what was identified in Chapter Two (in both historiography and more recent scholarship on dance) as a view of ballet as a vehicle that promotes ideal and eternal masculine values.

According to Peter Brinson and Clement Crisp (1970), at the end of *Le Ballets Royal de la Nuit* (1653) the young King appeared as the Sun, a spectacular figure around which masked courtiers circled like so many planets in the still controversial cosmology of Copernicus. What he was actually portraying was Apollo (the god of music, medicine, prophecy and archery), one of the many Greek gods who had passed into the allegorical conventions of Christian Europe (fig.7). His plan was to enshrine himself as a revered icon, not just for the masses but also for the higher nobility - the *haute monde* - who had previously been accustomed to regarding the King as no more than a first among equals atop a feudal system. This use of ballet to symbolise a change in the political structure of France from oligarchy to absolutism is described by Thomas Bryson (Desmond 1997: 60):

The king's image is where the king generates his personal authority, and in relation to that image all the lesser levels of the court hierarchy are measured: the king as solar centre of personal spectacle, round which all the lesser satellites of power revolve.

As Apollo (whose arrows, like piercing rays from the sun, had the power not only to bestow life but destroy), the King symbolised not only physical light but also mental illumination, by aligning himself as the corporeal emblem of knowledge, truth and moral purity.



Fig.7.

To secure his position as the personification of the Baroque itself, he built a number of elegant palaces during his reign (1643-1715) where his world might do him homage. It was the newly constructed and highly expensive hunting lodge, Versailles, that became the central temple of this 'Sun King.' Ballet was no mere distraction but the most spectacular mechanism through which the monarch could display his new regimen. Where France was the geographic centre of Europe, Versailles (no longer Paris) was the centre of France, the ballet was the symbolic centre of Versailles and Louis was the sun around which it all revolved. Bryson remarks that the King was not 'the reflection of a power located elsewhere, but power's actual locus' (p.60). As such,

if Louis XIV has himself represented in painting . . . as one who dances, it is because his dance, in its widest sense, orchestrates the entire milieu, from its mode of dress down to its actual revenues. Instead of gold as the infrastructure subtending court culture, the infrastructure becomes the king's manipulation of spectacle and prestige, and his orchestration of the courtier's bodies into a kind of permanent dance of power (p.61).

If Louis's reign heightened ballet's prominence in the court, it also led to its technical development as new steps were introduced, formalised and recorded. As Lynn Garafola (1997: 4) points out, during this time there was no differentiation between the sexes when it came to technique: both male and female courtiers were expected to execute all the new *pas*. It was the King's need to stay ahead of the court and uphold his status through performance that kept his dance masters busy inventing new steps and positions for him to execute.³ In his often-repeated role as the Sun, Louis also set the prerequisite standard in bearing and elegance of deportment which

would later epitomise the *danseur noble* of the Romantic period. While the symbolic import of the choreography reflected Louis' own desire for authoritarian power, his spectacular Sun costume, however, elicits a very different reading of identity. It was an extremely elaborate confection complete with plumed head-dress and highly decorative short skirt, worn over stockings, that emphasised the young King's slender and elegant frame.

By today's standards the look achieved seems to defy categorisation according to traditional western codes of gender representation: an identity constructed on the expression of a natural masculine power through the combination of artificial feminine display and a genderless movement vocabulary. This strategy would not have been considered inappropriate at the time, as this was a period in history when male courtiers were expected to take as many pains over their outward appearance as the women. During the Renaissance, difference between the sexes for the nobility was based solely upon a slavish attention to fashion and etiquette and 'sexuality was locked out' (Eva-Elizabeth Fischer 1998: 38).⁴

For Louis, the means to power was not achieved by promoting his masculine difference but through heightened, and spectacular, visibility. His body, with its sexual signification completely masked, is transformed into a hollow and genderless political vessel. At the very moment of aligning himself as an object of adoration, his own individual identity is surrendered: the King as the symbol of power becomes disassociated from Louis the man. In the equation between power and identity, the body as something of flesh and blood, is erased.

As a luminous vision of sexless and bodiless identity, the King corrupts the 'natural' bond between the male body and masculine power. Rather than integral, power is revealed as performative, its manifestation being the result of stylised gestures and acts inscribed on the body. In his role as the Sun, Louis can be read as a prototype queer identity: tied to neither a purely masculine or feminine vocabulary of expression and communicated through the deconstruction of the metaphysical divide that separates masculine power from feminine display. This unresolved heterogeneity signals the beginning of a gradual process of fragmentation that, throughout the rest of ballet's history, would give rise to further 'troubling' visions of the male dancer.

By using his own body as a template, Louis had set the standard for physical discipline that everyone else at the court had to follow. Towards the end of his reign and because of declining health, however, his own participation in these court dances gradually waned. With the formation of the *Académie Royale de Danse* in 1661, the use of ballet to promote autocratic power was overturned in favour of wider creative impulses, and, by 1670 'the age of the noble amateur came to an end' (Robertson and Hutera 1988: 11). Ballet now belonged to professional dancers and, relocated in theatres and opera houses, started to attract a larger audience. With the introduction of professional female dancers in 1681, ballet began to incorporate a wider and gender specific movement vocabulary. Ballet themes also changed, with plots based on the complexities of ancient allegory replaced by simpler ones that derived from a folkloric tradition.

While the symbolic function of ballet changed, many of the technical and stylistic features were retained and developed up to, and throughout, the Romantic period. With the premiere of *La Sylphide* (Taglioni) in 1832, ballet was to become the dramatic lexicon of a new poetic expression of identity, which brought with it a new image of the male dancer.

4.2. Heroism: the male dancer in Romantic ballet.

It is widely accepted amongst dance historians that the first major ballet of the Romantic era was *La Sylphide* (Taglioni 1832).⁵ Setting the standard for subsequent ballets created during this period, most notably *Giselle* (Coralli and Perrot 1841), the narrative has a tragic outcome for both the male and female protagonists.

On the eve of his wedding the hero, James, is visited by a sylph, a supernatural woodland creature. Visible only to him, she reappears the following day amidst the wedding guests. Declaring her love for him, she begs James to leave Effie, his bride-to-be, and join her and her immortal sisters in the woods. Instead, James decides to keep the sylph with him and so asks a witch for help. The witch gives him a magic scarf that, she deceptively claims, will make the sylph mortal. As the hero and sylph embrace, her wings fall off and she dies in his arms. James' desolation is compounded by the distant sound of church bells announcing the wedding of Effie to someone else.

La Sylphide's dramatisation of unobtainable love epitomised one of the central themes of the Romantic imagination that was already the inspiration behind much of the literature, painting and music of the period. In the two act Taglioni/Bournonville creations, however, the narrative is of secondary importance to the summoning of a new creature on stage. One image from the opening scene encapsulates perfectly the newly formed paradigm of Romanticism. It is not the vision of the Romantic hero but the 'tulle-skirted' (Robertson and Hutera 1988: 15) apparition of a young ballerina:

The curtain rises on James asleep in a chair; a winged Sylph, her white tulle skirts billowing round her, is poised beside him. Startled awake, James is instantaneously captivated by this otherworldly vision. Coyly eluding his touch, she flies away, up the chimney.⁶

The hero is initially asleep, implying that he has summoned the sylph from his subconscious. Man's dreams and fantasies and his constant search for poetic truth and beauty were the driving forces behind Romantic ballet's short-lived creative development. This scene also illuminates an unresolved dichotomy that lies at the heart of Romanticism: an unbridgeable gap between belief in the simple happiness of long ago places (James' ties to Effie and village life) and the dark brooding disaster of unobtainable love (the sylph and the forest). The tragic hero, according to Foster (1996: 11), is a 'misguided and tormented persona, stoic, pathetic, but also autonomous'. He is also, in his struggle to resolve the 'unrealised and unrealisable' dreams of the sylph against the 'harsh reality' of Effie, both the central focus for the narrative and its motivating force. The potency of this conflict between the real and

the imaginary leads Foster to ask, 'did the Sylphide really exist, or was she simply a symbol of the unrealisable aspirations that divided his soul?'

The idea that the sylph is a 'dream-like conjuration' (p.11), however, does not address an important shift in the balance of power that takes place in the ballet. Foster's argument that James' 'power to summon' proves his superiority is problematised by the subsequent behaviour of the sylph. It is she who seduces him, evades his touch and eventually succeeds in luring him away from his mortal bride. The impression that James, rather than remaining the motivating force behind the narrative, is its victim is also emphasised when another female, the Witch, aids his downfall. In *La Sylphide*, James is the only character who, influenced by events, undergoes a transformation. This change is demonstrated by comparing his two solos, one in each Act.

At the beginning, James' actions suggest a powerful figure (fig.8). Sally Banes (1988: 22) describes how he 'seems literally to jump for joy. And not only does he jump; he jumps high and wide'. His movement vocabulary includes multiple turns, fast beating steps and complex sequences of *jetés* that traverse the entire stage area. James' dancing in Act I of the Bournonville version is read by Banes as a dramatic demonstration of his physical prowess and virility:

When he jumps high and turns in mid air, the community can observe his strength and co-ordination. When he dispatches his *entrechats*, they can take stock of his ability for detailed precision, as well as the speed with which he works. His consumption of space signals a distinctly male-coded drive to control territoriality, which in turn connotes power' (p.22, original italics).



Fig.8.

The symbolic import of James' dancing in Act II suggests, however, that much of this controlling power is surrendered. His movements are no longer a demonstration of his autonomy and virility but are now tailored to closely resemble those of the sylphs with whom he occasionally shares the dance space. As Banes remarks, 'in the second solo, James seems less to be demonstrating his strength and skills than to be introducing himself, having a dance with his beloved, and then being incorporated into the group' (p.23).

For James, incorporation means the softening of his more 'macho' movement vocabulary. The Romantic ideal of the autonomous and controlling masculine ego is undermined by an investment in more feminine qualities. This critical flaw in James' character, this loss of controlling autonomous power, eventually contributes to his subsequent demise within the narrative. As a highly visible corruption of the ideal masculine code being nurtured throughout the Romantic period, this weakness of character had historical implications for the status of the male dancer. As Foster (1996: 11) remarks, it was during the Romantic period that the male *danseur* was tainted by 'wimpishness,' and worse, emblematised the possibility of transgressing the fine line between aestheticism and (homo)eroticism:

The anxiety provoked by the effeminate male dancer resulted not only from a sensuality and decorativeness entirely inappropriate for the male position in society, but also because it referenced a homoerotic aesthetic.

This led to a paradox. The male character was central to the plot because, as Foster continues, 'the male viewer, identifying with the male lead, confirmed his own sensitivity to and mastery over woman and story' (p.11). But the sense of insecurity caused by this 'feminisation of the representation of maleness' (Garafola 1997: 5) was a major concern. Elsewhere, Ramsay Burt (1995: 28) argues that a sense of dis-ease surrounding the masculine credentials of the *danseur* developed because he 'came too close for comfort to the blurred and problematic line that separates . . . necessary and approved homosocial male bonding from forbidden homosexual sexuality.'

The belief that the problematic status of the male dancer during the Romantic period stemmed from a public uneasiness with on-stage behaviour refers to more than matters of sexuality.⁷ For example, Burt considers class differences:

In 1840, the on-stage style and manner of male ballet dancers may have been too reminiscent of the male danseur noble of the pre-Romantic ballet and thus with the aristocrats who had been its patrons. These aristocratic associations surely prevented the male dancer presenting a role that mediated male middle-class values (p.25).

While ballet's aristocratic heritage may have been a cause for disquiet amongst the middle class audience, the male dancers display of 'rude strength and vigour' (p.27), because they connoted working-class values, may have been another source of fear and disgust.

Whether the male dancer upset the Romantic audience's values through suggestions of aberrant behaviour or invoked class-based prejudices, he had to go. But who would summon the ballerina on stage and dance with her? The solution was the female travesty dancer who could not only fill the male role but also preserve the 'homoerotic connotations of the performance . . . without any compromise to male superiority' (Foster 1996: 11) and add to the erotic spectacle.

During the Romantic period the male ballet dancer all but disappeared: an event that many dance critics consider as contributory to ballet's subsequent decline as a high art form.⁸ What is suggested in this chapter is that the circumstances leading to this predicament can be traced back to the behaviour of a specific character in a particular ballet. The role of James in *La Sylphide* saw the beginning of a downward trend for the male dancer in the Romantic period. Initially the driving force behind the narrative, then reduced to the lesser role of supporting attendant, by the end of the Romantic era (circa 1870) he was virtually eliminated. His departure, according to Brinson and Crisp (1970: 20), 'proved fatal in the end, almost destroying ballet as an art'. It would not be until the meteoric success of Nijinsky at the beginning of the twentieth century that the male dancer would reassert himself as an important figure in ballet and enjoy the same level of popularity previously bestowed upon female dancers.

4.3. Sexuality: early twentieth century man in ballet.

In Chapter Three it was described how the Nietzschean Superman, as the structuring trope of the modern New Man, was also exploited through inversion by the *fin de siècle* aesthetic movement. As a key weapon in their attack on bourgeois authority, artists such as Walter Pater, Oscar Wilde and Aubrey Beardsley inverted the phallic plenitude of this eugenicist model of masculinity to articulate a reading of identity that 'dramatised excessiveness and exhibited sexualization' (Boscagli 1996: 6). Maurizia Boscagli adds that 'signs of this complex, antiphallic masculinity can be detected in the erotic display of the male body that early twentieth century European culture both allowed and tried to manage'. One of the most spectacular displays of this antiphallic masculinity took place in Paris in 1912.

With the impresario Serge Diaghilev (1872-1929) firmly at the helm and Michel Fokine (1880-1942) as choreographer, the Ballets Russes opened their first season at the *Théâtre du Châtelet* in Paris on May 19th 1909, with five new works: *Les Sylphides*, *Cléopâtre*, *Le Pavillion d'Armide*, *Prince Igor* (an opera with a ballet *divertissement*) and *Le Festin*. As any dance history text will verify, this small breakaway Russian company changed the course of ballet history forever, rescuing it from music halls and palaces of varieties to give it high art status. Part of their success also involved the reintroduction of the male ballet dancer to the stage, where, as Burt (1995: 25) points out, 'critics and audiences realised that the female dancer looked better when supported by a good male dancer'.

The impact created by these new ballets was overshadowed, however, by the scandal provoked by another premiere that took place in the same theatre just three years later. *L'Après-midi d'un faune* (Nijinsky 1912) is a relatively short ballet choreographed and first danced by Vaslav Nijinsky.⁹ It marked a temporary purgation of the 'outmoded representational forms and conventions' (Burt 1995: 90) of the Romantic/Classical heritage that had previously been retained by the Ballets Russes. This work would also witness the continuing ascendance of the male dancer from his peripheral role as supportive attendant to one of celebrated solo status (a move that would not be repeated again until the 1960s with Rudolph Nureyev). *Faune's* abstract style also marked the beginnings of a distinctly modern approach to movement expression, paving the way towards the quasi-ritualistic *Le Sacre du Printemps* (Nijinsky 1913) the following year.

According to Robertson and Hutera (1988: 56), *L'Après-midi d'un faune* was 'an exercise in stylised eroticism'. The plot concerns how a mischievous Faune (in small tail, horns and pointed ears (fig.9)) tries to entice some passing nymphs into joining him in a frolic. Intrigued but wary, they dally and then fly off, but one of them drops a scarf. Like an animal playing with its prey, the Faune retrieves the scarf, drapes it over a rock, and, throwing his head back in a soundless laugh, presses out his longing against the fabric. Burt (1995: 91) describes how, in the original performance, the final moments of the ballet may have been more explicit than this, with the Faune appearing to masturbate onto the scarf.¹⁰ Faced with a possible charge of indecency, this first version was toned down for subsequent performances.¹¹



Fig.9.

Those members of the first night audience who were not shocked by the explicit masturbation mime were outraged by the anticlassical movements that Nijinsky had devised for himself and the nymphs. Mimicking a Greek frieze, the *corps* of dancers, wearing sandals instead of *pointe* shoes, move back and forth across the stage in two-dimensional planes. Replacing the obligatory use of turn-out in the legs with a parallel stance while holding their arms in sharp angular shapes, they walk to a complex system of counting that barely follows the rhythmic structure of the dreamlike Debussy music. By removing all traces of artificial facial expression from the *corps* and eradicating any suggestion of virtuosity, the choreography provides a new and abstract space for the dancers' bodies' to explore. According to the critic Jacques Rivière, by twisting and contorting the dancers' bodies into distorted shapes, Nijinsky created a unique anti-representational vocabulary of bodily expression and,

at last they speak. From all those bizarre and twisted forms arises a strange materialisation; they distinctly reveal a thousand complex and mysterious objects that now need only to be looked at.

(Copeland and Cohen 1983: 120)

By combining an amoral narrative with an antiballetic movement vocabulary, *L'Après-midi d'un faune* epitomised the provocative nature of a new aesthetic wave that was sweeping across Europe at the beginning of the twentieth century. 'Surprise me' was the most often heard battle cry of the modern period, with rebellious artists from across many art forms determined to push back the boundaries of the accepted and the traditional in their search for the new and the radical. As Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (1976: 24) claim: 'the shock, the violation of expected continuities,

the elements of de-creation and crisis, is a crucial element of the style.' To overthrow what had gone before became one of the key dynamic forces of the period.

Modernism often involved an anarchic rebellion that appeared to target the moralising State apparatus. It was also a paradoxical juxtaposition of nostalgia for an imagined and pagan primitivism and an anticipation of the future. *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, by combining Greek myth with a revolutionary movement style, was part of this rebellion. Through his exhibition of 'pure, natural, and innocent behaviour' (Burt 1995: 91), the figure of the Faune encapsulated man's desire for escape from the pressures of bourgeois ideology. His half-man/half-animal body symbolised a spectacular inversion of a modern model of masculine identity that, elsewhere, was being promoted as part of an 'ideology of nationalism and social obedience' (Boscagli 1996: 3).

According to the modernists, urban living is a prison-like existence that man must escape in order to preserve his manhood. Only away from civilisation can 'man become superman and recover all his feral and joyous freedom and . . . take off his encumbering social mask and become himself' (p.81). This promotion of 'natural' manly qualities and the revitalisation of a crumbling masculine ego was already being made available to the bourgeoisie through the mass circulation of models built upon the Nietzschean ideal. Popularised icons of the Superman 'redefined the unique, perfectly masculine Nietzschean body in terms of artifice, decoration, and self display . . . whose value and power actually relied on the gaze of the audience' (p.94).

Boscagli exemplifies two versions of this 'popular icon': the Edwardian body-builder Eugen Sandow and Tarzan, the hero from Edgar Rice Burroughs' novel *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912). Both figures combined the illusion of natural manliness with exhibitionism. While promoting man's 'natural' supremacy, their theatrical display of masculine virility and physical perfection transformed the male body into an object without 'functionality' (p.102). In a period that saw the move from manual labour towards mechanisation, their overt muscularity served no apparent purpose. They became objects of desire, sites 'of scopophilic pleasure that appealed to the imaginary of the viewer.'

By using his physically 'perfect' body as a commodity, Sandow sold an idealised image of natural masculinity to a panic-consumerist culture that saw in his phallic virility a phantasmagorical identity that could act as a defence against the imagined threat posed by 'the crowd, women, the weak, and the racially other' (p.95). Tarzan, meanwhile, appealed to the modern middle-class male by displaying 'his physique while negotiating the necessary wildness of the bourgeois as blond beast of prey' (p.117). By identifying himself with this half-man/half-animal hero, the city-dweller could re-invent for himself an idealistic and naturalised masculinity in the fantasy environment of the primal jungle.¹²

It is by tapping into this fantasy idealism that the vision of the Faune can be read as part of a Hellenist challenge to modern masculine values that also bridges the gap between high and low art practices. Both Nijinsky's Faune and Sandow borrow freely from classical iconography. While Sandow uses it to legitimise his claim to a 'natural'

masculine authenticity, the Faune exploits it as a mock setting for an exhibition of narcissism. Tarzan and Nijinsky appear as creatures that are half-man/half-animal: Tarzan becoming a safe vehicle for modern escapist fantasies of an untainted masculine identity; the Faune subverting this spectacle into a demonstration of amoral, bestial behaviour. All three bodies are virtually nude: Sandow dressed only in a posing pouch, Tarzan in a loincloth and Nijinsky's Faune in a figure hugging body-stocking. While Sandow and Tarzan veil the erotic connotations of their necessary exposure behind a homosocial economy based upon the support of eugenicist values, the Faune strips away such pretence by inscribing the male body as a source for unregulated desire.

These three spectacular representations of the male body were contemporaneous. Nijinsky's scandalous performance of autoeroticism took place during a time when these popular images were being greedily absorbed by a panic consumerist white male culture that believed it was losing touch with its 'natural' masculinity. By appealing to this paranoia, the Faune gained a crucial edge over more wholesome, eugenicist models. At the same time, the Faune (like Sandow and Tarzan) pointed towards a masculinity that was, as Boscagli argues, both excessive and riddled with anti-phallic signification. Although already unstable, it was by removing these modern masculine values from the security of homosocial environments and re-situating them within the feminising context of the ballet arena that opened the male body to the disruptive force of undifferentiated desire. By subverting the phallic pretences of Sandow's feats of muscular strength and Tarzan's masochistic heroism into a spectacular performance of narcissistic self-seeking sexual gratification, Nijinsky was

using the same symbolic mechanisms upon which this modern masculinity was built in order to expose its flawed construction.

In his own chapter on Nijinsky, Burt (1995: 87) asks, 'to what extent and in what contexts did modernist works of art have the power to attack and disrupt dominant ideologies?' His concern is how Nijinsky managed to create for himself a 'detached and critical distance' from which he could 'challenge assumptions about "natural" masculinity' (p.87). He suggests that two factors played an important part in the development of 'heterodox images' in early twentieth century ballet.¹³ It was both their sexual orientation and exotic Russianness, Burt argues, that provided Nijinsky and Diaghilev with an 'outside view' (p.79) of both the 'restrictions of Victorian gender norms' (p.77) and the Western preoccupation with asserting traditional male values.

In *L'Après-midi d'un faune*, however, the power to challenge came not from detachment but through proximity. Its subversive articulation of male identity was achieved by problematising the idealistic pretensions that underpinned modern Western masculine values. While choreographic innovation certainly contributed to the success of the Ballets Russes, it was the vision of the Faune that epitomised the radical possibilities of both the ballet medium and theatre dance in general. Moreover, it was a radicalism that does not belong solely to the twentieth century but dates back to the early formative years of ballet.

The radical history of the male ballet dancer traces a movement away from the harmonised geometric designs of a holistic Plato/Christian rationality, through the

psychological turmoil of nihilist/utopianist Romantic imaginings, to the anarchic paganism of a fragmentary modern subjectivity. This journey, however, is marked by another, closely related transformation: the gradual exposure of the actual male body.

It was a striptease that took several hundred years: beginning with King Louis XIV in his elaborate and gender-masking Sun costume; via the Romantic hero of *La Sylphide* with his folk costume of plain tunic and kilt; to the suggestion of near-nudity provided by the body stocking and fig leaf of the Faune. One interpretation of this historical disrobing reflects the formal development of the genre. As the technique became more elaborate and expansive, requiring greater effort and attention to detail, and as the choreography demanded more nuances in physical expression, so the costume needed to be less restrictive and concealing.

A second interpretation of this exposure addresses a shift both in cultural attitudes towards the male body and the construction of the ballet audience. During Louis' reign, ballet was a court activity and both the dancers and spectators were members of the aristocracy. The emphasis was on the relationship between power and spectacle in which the physical body was disavowed by being buried beneath elaborate costumes and bounded by codes of conduct and rules of etiquette.

During the Romantic period the audience was predominantly male and middle-class and attention focused on the feminine form as both erotic spectacle and symbol of man's escapist fantasies. Male characters were needed to fulfil the requirements of the narrative but the appearance and behaviour of male dancers conflicted with

contemporaneous attitudes surrounding bourgeois male identity. It is no coincidence that at the moment when James appeared onstage with nothing but a kilt to cover his modesty, that concerns about male involvement in ballet became widespread. His temporary replacement by the *en travesti* performer solved this problem, but not without serious consequences for the genre.

Patrons of the Ballets Russes included many luminaries from the other arts, many of whom were women and homosexual men.¹⁴ It is not unlikely that both of these groups would have enjoyed the semi-nude display of the male form. Although the beginnings of the twentieth century European culture still bore the legacy of a nineteenth century gender ideology, Diaghilev and Nijinsky's homosexuality and non-western background provided them with 'an outside view of masculine identity' (Burt 1995: 79).

4.4. Conclusion.

This discussion of the development of the male role in the ballet canon supports a claim that, throughout his history, the male dancer has been an agent of change: a visionary conduit between aesthetic concerns and contemporaneous cultural mores. Furthermore, although there are important differences between ballet and postmodern dance works, they share a sensitivity towards changes in their respective social contexts. As is suggested in this chapter, this cultural awareness is exemplified by the shifting status of the male dancer, a figure who remains the target of varying degrees of controversy, disapproval or public scandal.

Underlying this problematic status is the tension between the medium and the message wherein the one criterion unique to dance, the expressive agency of the body, is more associated with feminine than with masculine values. In ballet, with its emphasis upon the display of elegance, grace and gentility, this conflict is particularly pronounced. The male dancer, regardless of virtuoso demonstrations of athletic ability or association with the promotion of orthodox heterosexual values via the narrative, is, to some extent, inadvertently going 'against the grain' of conservative attitudes regarding what it means to be masculine.

An additional troubling factor is the complex nature of the relationship between the identity of the dancer and the role being performed. While the symbolism of the Sun was crucial for King Louis XIV's own political aspirations, men who dance the role of James in *La Sylphide* may have little more in common with this Romantic figure beyond their gender. Because both dancer and character occupy the same dancing body, however, so the expressive attributes of the role cannot easily be distinguished from those that belong to the performer. For example, key to Burt's argument is that Nijinsky's off stage homosexuality (particularly his relationship with Diaghilev) played a significant factor in both his creative genius and his controversial roles, particularly the Faune. What is inherent to the role and what the performer brings to it become fused; the agency to communicate the characteristics of the role coexists with the possibility of it imparting something about the man who dances it.¹⁵ In the feminising dance arena, this overlap between life and art has serious consequences not only for the individual dancer, but also for the whole masculine canon. Even the emphatic claims for heterosexuality made by the dancers in Birdwhistell (1969) are

acknowledged by the author as little defence against the stigma that society attaches to men who dance (see 2.1.).

Throughout history the appearance and status of the male ballet dancer has undergone continual transformation. The frequency and scale of these changes correspond to contemporaneous shifts in attitude about masculinity in the wider social sphere. Moreover, this view contrasts previous claims in both historiography and dance scholarship that men in ballet represent eternal and orthodox values. On the ballet stage, however, the concern (and public interest) has rarely been with the orthodox but more towards the exotic and the flamboyant. Through this high level of contrasting visibility, the male dancer not only reflects but also contributes to changes in cultural practice by exerting a reactionary pressure upon existing codes. While the motivating force behind such innovation varies, whether political, aesthetic or both, the impact upon the medium is the same. Each historical transformation of the male figure not only affects the way masculinity is conceptualised in ballet itself, but also plays a key part in the development and status of the art form as a whole. The gradual disappearance of the male dancer during the Romantic period and the subsequent decline of ballet as a serious art form is a clear example of this co-dependency.

¹ See Terry (1978), Bland and Percival (1984), Robertson and Hutera (1988) and Bryson in Desmond (1997).

² The use of the term 'speculative' is especially relevant here. A major obstacle that confronts this historical research is the shortage of reliable and accurate documentation, particularly in relation to the specifics of dance performance at the French court of the seventeenth century. Although pictures of the young King and courtiers are useful, they tell us little more than what the dancers looked like. Likewise, while notation of some of the court ballets explains the patterns of movement and specific *pas*, they are unable to convey the expressive and dynamic qualities of the dance. Even contemporary reconstructions of court dances (which are, sadly, seldom performed), although insightful, can only offer an interpretation of the originals. Nevertheless, by piecing together these available fragments, an interpretative strategy that is of use to this study can be made.

³ Because no one who wished to succeed at court would dare to criticise the King, there is a lack of reliable documentation about his abilities as a dancer. While it is widely recognised that the King performed from a very early age and spent a large part of the day practising, one particular step throws doubt upon his competence. The *entrechat Royale* (named after the King) is a small jump during which the ankles beat together before crossing the feet. It was created for Louis because he was supposedly unable to execute an *entrechat quatre*, a more difficult step in which the feet cross and then return to their original position before landing.

⁴ Along with access to the public sphere, educational opportunity and standards of chastity.

⁵ See Brinson and Crisp (1970), Garafola (1997), Robertson and Hutera (1988) and Banes (1998). There are two versions of this ballet, the original Taglioni (1832) of which only a reconstruction exists on film, and the Bournonville (1836). The version of *La Sylphide* used in this analysis, is a recording of the Bournonville version by the Royal Danish Ballet in 1988: see videography.

⁶ According to Robertson and Hutera (1988) this is the Bournonville staging but they don't specify which production.

⁷ This sense of uneasiness is captured (and probably enhanced) in the writings of Romantic critics such as Théophile Gautier (Guest 1986) and Jules Janin (Chapman in Garafola 1997).

⁸ Giannandrea Poesio remarks, however, that although the male ballet dancer became almost extinct throughout most of Europe (particularly France and England) during the first half of the nineteenth century, he continued to enjoy popularity both in Italy and Denmark (Poesio in Garafola 1997).

⁹ See videography.

¹⁰ Richard Buckle (1988: 282), in his biography of Nijinsky, describes how 'the Faun holds up the veil [scarf], nuzzles in it, then stretching it out on the ground, lowers himself onto it, head tucked under, and finally . . . consummates his union with it, taut on the ground, by a convulsive jerk'. Although he acknowledges that opinions vary as to the explicit nature of this final movement, Buckle contends that, originally, Nijinsky 'slid his hands *under* his body in such a way as to suggest masturbation' (p.283, original italics). He also points out that, while a police injunction contributed to the toning down of this action, it could also have been due to more aesthetic sensibilities. He states that 'Nijinsky's ultimate gesture could have been slightly out of keeping with the non-representational choreography of the ballet and the subsequent change was probably an improvement' (p.284). Whatever the reason, it had little impact upon the work's notoriety and 'a world-wide controversy exploded' (p.288).

¹¹ In the version used for this study, the final moments consist of the Faune thrusting his hips repeatedly onto the scarf before throwing his head back in ecstasy and then seemingly falling asleep on the scarf as the lights and music fade (Joffrey Ballet 1980).

¹² For a similar proposition see Burt's discussion of the popularity of Josephine Baker in *Alien Bodies* (1998).

¹³ The term heterodox, first used by Garafola in the context of dance, refers to male roles that 'transgressed rigid categories of masculine behaviour' (Burt 1995: 75).

¹⁴ See Burt (1995: 76).

¹⁵ In the case of Nijinsky the opposite is also true, wherein Nijinsky's 'closet' homosexual identity provides possible clues to the motivation behind his choice of subject matter and performance style.

CHAPTER FIVE
MASCULINITY AND DANCE TODAY.

5.0. Introduction.

This chapter will present a discussion of the representation of masculinity in a selection of works by contemporary male dance artists. Although it will address the status of male dance today, the concern is not to represent the entire spectrum of practices, styles, themes and ideologies that have been pursued under the alternative dance umbrella. Nor will it be an exhaustive historical account of the development of male dance in the late twentieth century. Rather, the aim will be to identify the extent to which the legacy of innovation and controversy surrounding men in ballet has contributed to the development different visions of masculinity in more recent *avant-garde* works.

This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the American modern dance tradition and its contribution to the development of contemporary male dance imagery and practices before turning to British postmodern dance in more detail. After an examination of some constructions of orthodox masculinity what will be investigated in this section are the various ways in which contemporary practitioners are using dance to address this orthodox code and the traditional values it supports. A small example of works will be chosen in order to examine the extent to which they can be read as exerting a pressure upon the way dance constructs formal gender identities through devices such as inversion, abjection or the articulation of camp and queer identity.

First, the discussion will focus upon how role reversal and the adoption of certain elements of the feminine code can be read as a challenge to more orthodox models of gender identity. Second, there will be an examination of how dance creates images of alienation and abjection and how these correspond to what critics call 'the crisis in masculinity.' Lastly, what will be speculated are the political aspirations of camp performance and the troubling effects of representations of queer identity. A key example of a practitioner whose work, it will be suggested, corresponds to an interpretation of camp as the strategy and tactics of queer parody will be discussed.¹

5.1. American modern dance.

According to Burt (1995), early American modern dance, particularly the influential work produced by Ted Shawn (1891-1975) and Martha Graham (1894-1991), was predominantly informed by White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) values. He states that 'Graham and Shawn, each in their own way, developed in dance the image of a heroic masculinity which is valorised with reference to nature, heterosexuality and religion, and presented in a style and vocabulary that looks muscular and hard' (p.102). Burt goes on to suggest that the 'ideal' masculinity promoted in their works was a conservative and defensive response to challenges to male hegemony taking place in America in the first half of the twentieth century. Furthermore, Shawn's own 'ruggedly virile' image that he created for himself and his fellow male dancers in works such as *Savage Dance* (1912), *Invocation to the Thunderbird* and *Pyrrhic Warriors* (both of 1918) can also be interpreted as a rejection of the 'supposed effeminess of the European ballet tradition' (p.106).²

This 'ruggedly virile' male imagery also finds its way into Graham's work, particularly in her 'Greek' pieces such as *Cave of the Heart* (1946), *Night Journey* (1947) and *Clytemnestra* (1958). As with Shawn's own canon, this emphasis upon excessive physicality in Graham's work was contemporaneous with fears concerning the softening effects of civilised European values upon American men. This 'pro-male reassertion of traditional masculine qualities – strength, hardness, aggressiveness, expansiveness' was so hyperbolic that, as Burt (p.118) describes, it transformed Graham's men into 'one dimensional macho "Greek" Hell's Angels of dance'. It is no surprise that Paul Taylor (a member of Graham's company) was led to comment that her male dancers were little more than 'dancing phalluses.' Sally Banes' (1998: 159) reading of *Night Journey* as a work in which Oedipus 'is a completely domineering, even brutal, suitor' to an acquiescent Jocasta supports this description.

Burt (1995: 118) adds that, although Graham frequently exploited the erotic potential of the male body in her work, it was tightly reined within a heterosexual matrix in which 'the power of the male body is acknowledged as an unproblematic norm'. Moreover, this conservative representation of masculinity set a standard that persevered throughout the American modern dance tradition up to and including works produced by José Limón (1908-1972) and Alvin Ailey (1931-1989).³

While the development of American modern dance is often read as contributory to the improved status of women in dance, it did little for men. Even in Graham's other works such as *Appalachian Spring* (1940) and *Dark Meadow* (1946) things did not improve. Heavily influenced by a postwar gender and sexual ideology prevalent in the

United States that 'celebrated men's return from the war and promised to send women home' (Banes 1998: 166), it could even be argued as retrogressive for the status of men in Western theatre dance.

If the sexual politics of early American modern dance (circa 1940s and 50s) were highly conservative, in the following *avant-garde* wave and the move from expressionism to minimalism (circa 1950s and 60s), they were virtually non-existent.⁴ The lack of commitment towards gender issues demonstrated by the founder members of the Judson Collective is noted by Burt (1995: 154). He points out that 'without a sexual politics, there is no method of ensuring that brave new ways of dancing are necessarily any better, in a political sense, than the bad old ones'.

As with the early modern American tradition, the concept of masculinity as an 'unproblematic norm' (p.158) also predominates in works produced by many American postmodern practitioners during the 1960s and early 70s. According to Burt, artists such Merce Cunningham (1919-), Steve Paxton (1939-), Trisha Brown (1936-) and Yvonne Rainer (1934-) shared a 'neutral aesthetic disposition' in which differences between the genders are ignored. While responsible for pushing back the boundaries of what constitutes dance, this has not, Burt continues, 'brought about a situation in which the normality of the movement qualities traditionally associated with masculinity are questioned' (p.158). It is this approach to dance and its tendency towards the de-emphasis of sexuality and gender-specific movement that also found its way across the Atlantic during the 1960s with the founding and development of the various strands of contemporary dance in Britain.⁵

5.2. Postmodern Dance in Britain.

This section will begin with a discussion of those practitioners who continue to adopt images of men based upon the American WASP model of a virile masculinity. This will be followed by an investigation of those who create works that oppose these WASP values through a recourse to inversion, abjection or camp/queer practices.

5.2.1. Images of Orthodox Masculinity.

The London Contemporary Dance Theatre (LCDT, founded as the Contemporary Dance Group in 1967) brought both the Graham method and aesthetic philosophy to Britain under the guidance of its director and main choreographer Robert Cohan. The company was hugely successful and dominated the mainstream British contemporary dance scene, producing and touring such works as Cohan's *Hunter of Angels* (1967), *Cell* (1969), *Stages* (1971) and *Nymphs* (1976).⁶ Another major choreographer, Robert North, also created many works for LCDT including *Troy Game* (1974).

Troy Game stands out as one of the very few British dance works choreographed during the 1970s specifically for an all male ensemble. The use of rhythm, strength and stamina demonstrated by six semi-naked men was so popular that the work was eventually taken into the repertoire of companies such as the Dance Theatre of Harlem in 1979 and the Royal Ballet in 1980. It is a comic piece, a 'cheerful tongue-in-cheek men's display that underlines the jocularly in jock competitiveness' (Robertson and Hutera 1988: 214). It can also be read as a subtle parody of the

'ideal' masculine imagery expressed by Shawn in his works. While *Troy Game* puts these macho traits into a humorous context, however, it doesn't question or challenge them. Rather, its propensity towards knockabout athleticism upholds and celebrates an orthodox set of values as innate to men while dispelling any homoerotic charge associated with their semi-nude appearance. Specific elements in the choreography further endorse this equation between masculinity and machismo as natural. For example, one dancer who displays 'feminine' qualities in his movement is made a figure of fun by the others, while another adopts a fey 'hair-flicking' gesture for comic purposes. Such less-than-masculine behaviours, while treated with humour in *Troy Game*, have a more serious consequence when they appear in *Enter Achilles*, one of the works discussed in Chapter Seven.

LCDT and its associated school contributed to the foundation and development of the alternative dance scene in Britain and pushed back the boundaries of dance choreography. While experimenting with location, multi-media and choreographic form and style, the majority of works produced by practitioners such as Robert Cohan (*Cell*, 1969; *Stages*, 1971) Robert North (*Troy Game*, 1974; *Still Life*, 1975) and later Siobhan Davies (*Celebration*, 1979) and Dan Wagoner (*Taxi Dances*, 1974; *Seven Tears*, 1979) all retained a relatively conventional approach towards representing gender. While demonstrating a greater level of equality between the sexes in terms of technical requirements and expressivity, certain traditions were harder to shake off and the men still did most of the lifting and supporting. Even in works produced during the 1980s such as *Dances of Love and Death* (Cohan, 1981), *Free Setting* (Siobhan Davies, 1981) and *Chamber Dances* (Cohan, 1982), all produced after the last links

with Graham had been formally broken, the status and function of the male dancer remained unchanged.

As Burt remarks, the radical approach towards form demonstrated by companies such as LCDT did not contribute towards the development of alternative images of male identity. By continually failing to question the way dance represents masculinity such attempts at gender neutrality fail because, as Burt (1995: 158) adds,

the power implicit in a male presence on the dance stage is problematic and will not just go away when it is ignored. It will continually reassert itself, unless or until a conscious attempt is made to dismantle it or absorb and redirect it.

Although not in itself radical, the representation of masculinity prevalent in both the American modern scene and early British contemporary works does have value to this study. Many of the following practitioners, while rejecting many of the stylistic conventions of European ballet, also incorporated a corruption of the modern American model into their masculine imagery. In Chapter Four it was described how the legacy of the male ballet dancer is towards exoticism, flamboyancy and controversy. These traits provide a clue as to the impetus and inspiration behind strategies of gender disruption pursued by many contemporary dance practitioners.

5.2.2. Subversive practices: inversion/abjection/camp and queer identities.

Whether it is through subversion of the male/female dyad, or the articulation of aspects of identity that are elsewhere suppressed, or a recourse to flamboyant and shocking spectacle, the intention of the following practitioners is the same. It is to disrupt the ways in which traditional models of gender identity are represented in dance and open up the limited scope of expression available to them, both as dancers and as social beings.

One of the most visibly disruptive mechanisms available to men in dance is role reversal. In the majority of cases, however, the predominant aim is towards humorous ends as the comic foil, the grotesque caricature or the female disguise (where the male dresses up as the woman to trick or evade another character).⁷ Rather than providing an historical overview of these more light-hearted forms of gender parody, what will be examined in this section is how elements of the female code are being adopted into recent works in order to address issues of masculinity.

Outside the safe parameters of drag or pantomime, some practitioners value gender inversion as a lucrative form of social commentary. They incorporate elements of the feminine code into their performance agenda in order to express concern with the current state of gender politics, articulate aspects of their own sexuality or as a way of declaring a dissatisfaction with the limited scope of expression available to them as men both on and off stage. An artist who addresses the last issue is Richard Move.

Move is an American choreographer and dancer who, in full Martha Graham drag, reconstructs many of her solo pieces. Promoted as both a homage to Graham as a performer and an *en-travestie* re-construction of her choreographic style, his most recent work *Martha@DanceUmbrella* (1999) was premiered as part of the 1999 London Dance Umbrella. Central to this work is his recreation of *Lamentation* (1930), one of Graham's more idiosyncratic and intensely intimate solos. Most striking about this short work is that the dancer remains seated and wears a long tube of tight but stretchy fabric with only the face, neck, hands and feet exposed. The body is contorted and twisted through a tortuous series of angular shapes, the fabric both allowing, emphasising and adding tension to the movement. *Lamentation* is a dance of mourning. As Graham (1991: 117) describes, the costume 'indicates the tragedy that obsesses the body, the ability to stretch inside your own skin, to witness and test the perimeters and boundaries of grief, which is honourable and universal'.

Although the spectator is aware that, in Move's version of *Lamentation*, the dancer is male, there is no investment in dishonouring Graham's original intentions. Rather, by adopting her mantle, Move gains access to and explores the physical 'parameters' of expressions of angst and suffering that, for men, remain otherwise suppressed.

Rather than a recourse to aggression and violence, which are the emotional qualities traditionally attributed to the masculine canon, Move's performance suggests that there are other, more passive, options.

Another practitioner who explores areas of dance not usually associated with men is Bart De Block. He is a Belgian born dancer who, after training in classical ballet,

decided to work *en pointe*. Les Ballets de Trockadero de Monte Carlo, an all-male drag company famous for their comic renditions of ballet works, recognised his talent and invited him to join them for an extended season. His one stipulation was that, although in full ballerina drag, he would only perform serious roles. Building on his early success, he eventually stopped wearing the tutu and wig but retained the *pointe* shoes. These he used to great effect in a later, Balanchine inspired, solo created for him by choreographer Mark Baldwin.

Block describes the effect of wearing *pointe* shoes as transformative. He doesn't believe it to be a way of gaining access into a 'female awareness of the body' (De Block in Feuchtner 1998: 30), but one that makes the male body behave in different ways:

The body undergoes some restructuring and a man begins to feel things men do not feel, even without ballet shoes. You have to become softer, no longer wanting to take such big leaps.

De Block's success in the Baldwin solo has, the dancer claims, led him in a new direction as a male dancer and opened up whole sections of the theatre dance repertoire previously unavailable to him. As with *Move*, it is the more serious implications of entering into territories previously occupied (and often held sacred) by women that continue to inspire his art.

His contribution to the development of male dance has been to challenge the attitude that men *en pointe* are merely comical or a gimmick and, in its place, claim it as a legitimate and worthwhile addition to the masculine technical repertoire. De Block, however, is not the only male dance practitioner to break down the barriers between the sexes in this way: Matthew Hawkins, Mats Ek, Mark Morris and Michael Clark have also created works that include *pointe* work for men.

Whether men can and should be allowed to dance in *pointe* shoes is addressed by Richard Glasstone. He argues that the cultural shift towards sexual equality should be reflected in the way dancers are trained in the classroom. The qualities required for classical dance such as 'rhythmic precision, fluency of phrasing and clarity of form' (Glasstone 1998: 33) are, Glasstone claims, not gender specific. The separation of the sexes in ballet training has, he adds, come as a result of 'pseudo-romantic mannerisms' developed during the nineteenth century. As ballet develops and changes he sees no logical reason why *pointe* work should continue to be regarded as 'exclusively or typically feminine' (p.33).

The idea that the ballet arena is a *milieu* in which aspects of the formal gender code are being addressed and challenged has still to make any profound impact upon even some of the most recent writings on dance. To view ballet as an old-fashioned institution that stands for all that is out-moded and old-fashioned in dance practice, is to ignore its ongoing influence upon, and close allegiance to, developments taking place elsewhere in theatre dance practice. Just as Move's work can be read as taking modern dance in a new direction, so de Block's achievements in the ballet medium

highlight its hitherto disregarded experimental and unconventional dimension. Both practitioners borrow from the female vocabulary of these genres to say something different about their own identity, but, in turn, these invertive strategies reflect back on, and cause us to re-evaluate, the original material.

It is not only the feminising *pointe* shoe that has found its way into the male dance vocabulary. As part of their gender disruptive agenda, some practitioners have also introduced another aspect of the female code into their works: the skirt.

Richard Dixon (1998: 24) points out that, in dance, the man in a skirt has a 'noble tradition' dating back to Shawn and Graham for whom it represents the 'exotic, the primeval and the mythical.' He observes, however, that more recent practitioners have used the skirt, not to represent a sense of nostalgia for a lost heroism, but as a way of questioning some of the 'male stereotyping and the sexual responses and expectations of audiences' (p.24). Referring to works in which the men don items of female attire such as *Our Caca Phoney H, Our Caca Phoney H* (1985) by Michael Clark, *Bound To Please* (1997) by Lloyd Newson and *Grass* (1997) by Javier de Frutos, Dixon suggests that their *success de scandal* stems from the way that 'the dress renders a sexual vulnerability to the male physique, however brawny, and makes the viewer assess afresh their ocular conditioning and their idea of what is socially and sexually acceptable' (p.27).

While the use of skirts for male dancers goes as far back as Louis XIV in his elaborate Sun Costume it is not a practice that has filtered through into mainstream

dance practice or cultural life. Both on stage and off, a man in female attire still creates an impact, a situation exploited by practitioners such as Move and de Block. As Richard Merz (1998: 11) argues, however, their agenda is more than just to court controversy but to say something about themselves as men. He argues that 'men in tutus and ballet shoes are endowed with an appeal and fascination which goes far beyond the effect of being comical and good for surprises.' Merz's implication that playing with gender (whether it is borrowing from the female dance code or role reversal) may have more than shock value will be key to the analysis of Mark Morris's *The Hard Nut* (1993) and Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995) in Chapter Six.

Other themes explored by recent male dance practitioners are alienation and abjection. These artists, like those discussed previously, see contemporary man as complex and uncertain, in a state of crisis and dissatisfied with predetermined social roles. Their works can be read as a platform upon which they can explore aspects of their own identity that, because they not conform to mainstream cultural expectations, would otherwise remain unarticulated.

One such work is *Critical Mass*, a short duet danced by Jordi Cortes Molina and its choreographer Russell Maliphant. A version made especially for television was shown on Channel Four as part of their *Dance on Four* series (1999). This screen adaptation employs a complex array of technical devices such as the fading in and out of the dancers, rapid changes in camera angles and sudden shifts in location to produce a sense of disorientation in the spectator. Sometimes the dance space is reminiscent of the interior of a submarine or a prison cell or even a deserted beach. The lighting

design enhances this feeling of estrangement from the work, with the dancers sometimes only silhouettes or distorted by shadows. The two men look identical: their shaved heads and nondescript clothes make it difficult to tell them apart or who they are supposed to be. According to the constantly changing setting they become naval cadets, convicts or even lovers. These elements, set against a mixture of industrial sounds and hard-techno dance music, gives the piece a dark and oppressive quality.

The style of movement in *Critical Mass* is based on the contact improvisation technique also popular with one of Malipant's contemporaries and former colleague, Lloyd Newson of DV8. The choreography is often very lyrical and includes shared lifts and balances that might suggest a romantic engagement. Although the two men move within an intimate kinesphere, however, a key element in the work suggests that this is not an exploration of homosexual desire but abjection. There is barely any eye contact between these two men or expression on their faces. Devoid of emotion or obvious sense of purpose and estranged from each other and their environment, these men are not lovers but impassive moving machines.

The subject matter of estrangement as an inability to communicate and abjection as a loss of subjectivity, demonstrated in *Critical Mass*, will be explored in Part Three.

Concentrating on two works, *Nelken* (1982) by Pina Bausch and *Enter Achilles* (1995) by Lloyd Newson, what will be considered in Chapter Seven is the extent to which these negative traits can be read as contributory to the malaise that surrounds contemporary masculine identity.

While some contemporary practitioners use inversion or abjection as a way of making visible aspects of masculinity, others find recourse to spectacle and high camp. Prominent amongst these artists is the dancer/choreographer Michael Clark (1962-). Due to the scathing critical response to such works as *No Fire Escape in Hell* (1986), *Because We Must* (1987), *I Am Curious Orange* (1988) and *Mmm* (1992) Clark enjoyed a 'bad boy' celebrity status in dance circles. His strategy in these works has been to shock and offend but at the same time to beguile through his complex and often beautiful choreography and performance. He has invented his own unique dance vocabulary that replaces ballet's requisite stability in the lower torso with pelvic ripples and jazz-inspired hip swings and gyrations. On top of this, and drawing heavily from his own classical training, he adds the pure classical *port de bras*, clean *arabesque* lines and use of turnout in the legs. Clark's parodic blend of the new and old combined with a 'very idiosyncratic, imaginative, and sometimes perverse (or subversive) choice of costume, set, props and music' (Bremser 1994: 64) lead to a queer reading of his work.

What makes his works as queer is the way Clark wilfully transgresses gender codes both through his 'angelic virtuoso dancing' (Burt 1995: 51) and eclectic appearance. For example, in *Our Caca Phoney H Our Caca Phoney H* (1975), he dances in a white apron, bubble curl wig and bare bottom while wielding a dildo, while in *Hetrospective* (1989) he appears in nothing more than a pair of fur muffs that hide his genitals. The use of highly provocative, gender-bending, imagery and a movement style that, in its emphasis upon the pelvis, 'has inevitable sexual connotations' (p.184), are the key strategies that lead to a reading of Clark's works as queer.

Moreover, as Burt adds, when Clark is the dancer it becomes a self-indulgent 'display of male homosexual eroticism.'

Many critics deride Clark for his on stage indulgences, narcissism and an easy reliance upon unsophisticated theatricality in the place of choreographic invention. Clark's on stage excesses and anarchic sensibilities, however, point to the difficulty that many choreographers face in trying to overturn expectations. It is a problem, Burt suggests, that goes back to the advent of gay liberation in the 1960s. Since then, he adds, 'many queer choreographers have tried to break out of the straight jacket which has made camp performance on stage socially acceptable and hence politically ineffective, and have tried to get back into their work the radical political agency of coming out' (Burt 1998: 19).⁸ The main weapon that queer performers such as Clark have at their disposal is the shock tactic:

It is surely this imperative which underlies queer post-modern choreographers' strategic assaults on artistic conventions and traditions, and their attempts to bring down the institutionally sanctioned barricades which protect life from art, and thus speak the 'truth' about their sexuality.

Another practitioner who deliberately sets out to break with convention is Lindsay Kemp (1939 -), a choreographer who gained notoriety through works such as *The Big Parade* (1977), *Cruel Garden* (1977) and *A Midsummer Nights' Dream* (1979). His glitteringly camp, often erotic and flamboyant style embraces dance, mime and *commedia dell'arte* while his own appearance critics often describe as

hermaphroditic. This fusion of the traditional with the *avant-garde* and aspects of the male and female code makes Kemp Clark's predecessor.

Like Kemp, Clark's politics are also a cause for widespread critical speculation. While some applaud Clark's carnivalesque and irreverent inversion of institutional values, others despair at his lack of commitment towards any identifiable cause. He is unpopular with both gay activists and feminists, who take particular offence at his use of cross-dressing which, according to Mackrell (1991: 52), 'tends towards a tarty, unserious guying of women.'

Dance critics also continue to regard Clark as an 'anathema' and argue that 'his obscenities can seem less a subversion of repressive mores than a cheap, exploitative display' (p.52). For example, Burt (1995: 184) asks whether Clark's work does more to support than challenge presuppositions:

Surely rather than being shocked by Clark into reassessing their attitudes towards gender and sexuality, straight spectators are more likely to be titillated by his sensationalism while securely feeling that it confirms their sense that gay men are just not like 'us' at all.

It is this divisive attitude towards 'straight' and 'gay' that a queer agenda addresses. The last chapter in Part Three will be a close reading of *Transatlantic* (1996) by Javier de Frutos, a work that includes male nudity. As such this work questions the way that dance deals with notions of sensationalism, 'otherness' and the subversive impact of homoeroticism upon orthodox masculine values.

5.3. Conclusion.

In this chapter ways in which male practitioners working today have used dance to explore aspects of their own identity and sexuality that are otherwise unavailable to them within the restricted hegemonic discourses of other contemporary western cultural practices have been discussed. This provides a contextual frame for the detailed analyses that follow in Part Three.

¹ Both 'camp' and 'queer' are highly unstable terms, open to constant re-definition and misinterpretation. Although this study has discussed these terms in detail (see 3.1.3.), some further qualification as to their application in this chapter may be useful.

Lynne Segal (1990: 144) describes camp as 'the suppression of "masculine" behaviour for a type of parody of "femininity" ' and traces its origins to male behaviour in developing gay sub-cultures during the 1960s. She then goes on to associate it with a 'positive aesthetic sensibility' that can be found in high culture: 'art, theatre, ballet, music, literature and, especially, opera' (p.145). With the rise of Gay Liberation during the 1970s, Segal identifies a shift in meaning as camp was absorbed into a politics 'which provided the first exhaustive critique, and assertively self-conscious rejection, of dominant forms of masculinity by men themselves' (p.146).

Moe Meyer (1994) supports Segal's argument, but also contends that camp is an enactment that produces social visibility. It is, she adds, a solely queer discourse and therefore 'all un-queer activities that have previously been accepted as "camp" . . . have been redefined as examples of the appropriation of queer praxis' (p.1). The term 'queer' has also undergone a process of appropriation. Previously a derogatory term, it is now used as an 'affirmative self-nominated identity label' (p.2) that, as Meyer proposes, 'constitutes a radical challenge to the entire concept of identity based upon sexual orientation or sexual desire.' Moreover, as an oppositional term, Meyer acknowledges Butler to state that 'what "queer" signals is an ontological challenge that displaces bourgeois notions of the Self as unique, abiding and continuous while substituting instead a concept of the Self as performative, improvisational, discontinuous and processually constituted by repetitive and stylised acts' (p.3). As a corrective, Meyer attempts to return a discrete political agenda to these two terms when she states that 'there are not different kinds of camp. There is only one. And it is queer' (p.5).

² Burt (1995: 110) also argues that Shawn exploited this 'virile' model as a cover for his own, and his dancers, homosexuality.'

³ For a more complete discussion of representations of Latin American and black American masculine identity see Burt (1995: 121-134) and also DeFrantz in Morris (1996).

⁴ See Burt (1995: 136) and also Cohen in Copeland and Cohen (1983: 172-3).

⁵ Stephanie Jordan (1992: 3) identifies the two major branches of contemporary dance that developed in Britain during the 1960s and 70s as 'a more formalist phase of contemporary dance, and New Dance/postmodern dance'. She recognises, however, that how a work is categorised remains divided between those who take a historical trajectory and those who interpret stylistic elements. Elsewhere, Judith Mackrell (1991) points out that how dance works are classified is not definitive but open to interpretation. For example, a work may be described as either 'New Dance' or postmodern dance, according to the wishes of the practitioner, critic, or historian (all of whom may apply these labels retrospectively and for different reasons).

⁶ For a detailed history of LCDT and its major choreographer/dancers see Mansfield in White (1985).

⁷ Perhaps the most successful company that exploits the comic potential of drag is Les Ballets Trocadero de Monte Carlo. While noted for their technically accomplished parodies of the classical repertoire and sending up some of the conventions and pretensions of ballet, their knockabout antics have little subversive agency.

⁸ Burt's use of the term 'queer,' in this context, is used to define both gay and straight postmodern practitioners who are 'exploring erotic and seductive modes of experience' (1998: 20) that earlier twentieth century choreographers tried to eschew. It is a slightly different understanding of the term given in 3.1.3. as a sceptical form of identity politics.

PART THREE

AGAINST THE GRAIN: ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF MASCULINITY
IN CONTEMPORARY DANCE.

CHAPTER SIX
INVERSION AND SUBVERSION IN MARK MORRIS'S *THE HARD NUT* (1993)
AND MATTHEW BOURNE'S *SWAN LAKE* (1995).

6.0. Introduction.

The Hard Nut (Morris 1993) and *Swan Lake* (Bourne 1995) are two works that employ various gender invertive strategies in the context of a contemporary re-working of a classical ballet story. Apart from role reversal (male dancer in female role) and drag (man disguised as woman)¹, these works also explore other more subtle forms of 'gender play.' These include the masking of the dancer's gender (occlusion) and the practice of incorporating aspects of the female code into the male dancer's choreography (*pastiche*). In this chapter what will be considered is the extent to which these acts of transgression, set in works that blend a traditional and an *avant-garde* movement vocabulary, disrupt normative codes of representation and provide space in which alternative models of masculine identity may be envisioned.

In Chapter Five, how male contemporary dance practitioners are adopting various gender invertive strategies into their performances in order to say something about themselves as men have been discussed. As Butler (1990: 139) points out, however, not all parodic practices are 'truly troubling'. Indeed, the use of drag in theatre dance is not in itself new. It was during the height of the Romantic period in ballet (1830s and 1840s) that the ballerina *en travestie* became fashionable. This relatively short-lived phenomenon was, however, no more than a ruse to rid the stage of the male dancer and heighten the erotic spectacle (see 4.2). Furthermore, because it served to quell anxieties about men in ballet while sexually exploiting women, it did more to bolster normative codes of representation than 'trouble' them.²

Drag also appears in many late nineteenth and early twentieth century ballets.³ The grotesque and absurd posturings of these pantomimic characters, however, are so ridiculous that this serves to dilute any impact they might otherwise have upon the formal gender code. As with their Romantic predecessors, their function in the ballet narrative is more often supportive than disruptive. Their hyperbolic mannerisms are merely a form of dissonance safely contextualised within a narrative that, elsewhere, seeks to define models of masculine identity as unproblematic.

While the legacy of drag in ballet carries little subversive agency, it can, however, be read as a source of inspiration to the various strategies of gender inversion explored in Morris's *The Hard Nut* and Bourne's *Swan Lake*. As such, in this chapter, the aim will be to identify what factors determine the difference between acts of inversion that effect a subversion of orthodox codes and those that, for whatever reason, do not. To this end, each reading will address Judith Butler's challenge to find gender performances that, by enacting the performativity of gender itself, can 'trouble' the naturalised categories of identity and desire.⁴

While the reading of *The Hard Nut* will incorporate both Butler's theory and Gay Morris's assessment of the performance, the analysis of *Swan Lake* will be set in Sedgwick's discussion of sexuality and Bourne's own evaluation of the work. The chapter will conclude with an assessment of the extent to which these two works, by adopting various strategies of gender inversion, 'truly trouble' orthodox codes of representation and articulate alternative models of masculine identity.

6.1. Mark Morris.

After studying ballet and ethnic dance, Morris joined a Balkan dance troupe and initially considered becoming a flamenco dancer. His plans changed when, shortly after working as assistant to Twyla Tharp on the 1979 film version of *Hair*, he set up his own dance company. They performed at the Merce Cunningham Studio in New York the following year. Favourable reviews soon brought him widespread public attention as an exciting and imaginative choreographer.

His particular choreographic style springs from an eclectic blend of modern, jazz and ballet. This corresponds to the wide range of subject matter he tackles, such as romantic love, depersonalised sex and spiritual suffering, or championship wrestling and striptease. His choice of music is also a *pot pourri* of different composers and genres from various historical periods including Brahms, Vivaldi, country and western, gospel, Liberace and Yoko Ono. His outrageously excessive tastes, use of nudity and drag contributed to his early *avant-garde* popularity and he was soon receiving commissions to devise works for Joffrey Ballet and American Ballet Theatre.

The Hard Nut (1991) is a reworking in 1960s style of an E. T. A. Hoffmann fairytale used for the libretto of the Ivanov ballet *The Nutcracker* (1892). Set to the original Tchaikovsky score, Morris reworks the story into a complex and subtly sinister fantasy that incorporates slapstick comedy, *en travesti* roles, parody and pantomime.

6.2. *The Hard Nut*.

The narrative of *The Hard Nut* concerns the development of an intimate relationship between two central protagonists. Apart from the more orthodox romantic one between Maria and the Nutcracker there is a same-sex bond between the Nutcracker and Drosselmeyer.⁵ Gay Morris (1996: 150) claims that *The Hard Nut* 'especially plays on ballet's highly developed vocabulary of male and female steps and conventions which stress heterosexual roles and male domination'. It is through this 'playful' tactic, she argues, that the choreographer Mark Morris 'challenges the relationship between gender, sexuality and desire in a rather complex way' (p.155). According to Gay Morris, the duet between Drosselmeyer and the Nutcracker exemplifies this complexity and articulates a harmonic vision of love without desire. Her analytic strategy, however, is to ascribe meaning to the choreography according to how it corresponds to the narrative. Sensing that, because she privileges the libretto over movement import, something has been overlooked, a different approach to the duet will be adopted in this chapter. Furthermore, men dance both the Nutcracker and Drosselmeyer roles in *The Hard Nut's* predecessor, *The Nutcracker* (Ivanov 1892). While Mark Morris keeps to this arrangement, he changes their movement lexicon, and it is how this substitution of choreographic styles impacts upon Gay Morris's interpretation that will contribute to the evaluation of this duet.

In *The Hard Nut*, the characters of the Housekeeper and Mrs. Stahlbaum are two drag roles. Their comic appearance and behaviour, although pantomime dame in essence, also draws upon elements of the female ballet lexicon for inspiration. As

such, in this analysis what will be considered is the extent to which they exemplify the sort of 'truly troubling' performance that Butler (1990: 139) seeks when she asks:

What performance where [sic] will invert the inner/outer distinction and compel a radical rethinking of the psychological presuppositions of gender identity and sexuality? What performance where [sic] will compel a reconsideration of the *place* and stability of the masculine and the feminine? And what kind of gender performance will enact and reveal the performativity of gender itself in a way that destabilises the naturalised categories of identity and desire? (original italics).

There is an additional factor concerning the Housekeeper that implies a more radical level of disruption than female impersonation alone might suggest. According to Gay Morris, the dancer who plays this role has undergone a sex-change. In response to this insight (an aspect of the character that the performance does not reveal), what will be explored is the extent to which the Housekeeper not only fulfils Butler's hypothetical 'inner/outer' model but, through a giddy conflation of the distinction between the actuality of the dancer and the fiction of the character, radically subverts the dualism that she imagines.⁶

Because she is both black and *en pointe*, the Housekeeper is the most visible cross-gender role in the work, but there are others.⁷ Mrs. Stahlbaum is another drag act whose performance, compared to the Housekeeper's, is more low-key. By comparing these two characters in this analysis, what will be considered is what impact different levels of investment in hyperbole have upon disruptive agency. Cross-dressing

proliferates throughout *The Hard Nut*. In addition to Mrs. Stahlbaum's son Fritz, who is played by a woman, there is also the *corps*. Their costumes and choreography in their snowflake and flower dances serve to mask their gender and it is the effect of this 'occlusive' strategy upon the way dance represents traditional codes that will be investigated.

According to Gay Morris, both *The Hard Nut* and Butler's theory articulate a similar agenda. It is, she claims, to 'decentre' the hegemony of heterosexual love and no longer value it as unique and pre-determined but as both a choice and an 'idealised fiction' (1996: 155). Where Gay Morris believes that the performance and theory differ is the outcome of such a decentering strategy. Gay Morris believes that *The Hard Nut* expresses utopian aspirations in which all individuals are 'capable of love, and all love counts equally.' She identifies the culmination of such a harmonic ethos in the *finale*, where 'gender yields to a human love in which all people can share' in an 'idealised vision of community' (p.156). Butler, however, maintains that although the power structures that govern gender codes are unstable they will never fully disappear. She, as Gay Morris claims, retains a more pessimistic attitude towards such 'visionary' expectations:

She considers it impossible, in any event, because we exist within a heterosexual matrix where there is no beyond or before. We can't refuse the heterosexual power structure, we can only re-deploy its power (p. 155).

In the last part of the analysis what will be addressed is this friction between Gay Morris's utopian reading of *The Hard Nut* and Butler's more dystopian view of unyielding heterosexual power structures. Key to this part of the analysis will be a consideration of the narrative context in which the various 'plays on gender' occur because, as Butler points out, 'parodic displacement . . . depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered' (Butler 1990: 139). *The Hard Nut* is a light-hearted and, according to Gay Morris, an ultimately celebratory fiction. Therefore, in this analysis what will be addressed is both the narrative and choreographic import of the *finale* in order to assess to what extent this work can be read as an example of a 'truly troubling' performance that subverts a gender code that Butler sees as indestructible.

6.2.1. The Nutcracker and Drosselmeyer.

The duet between Drosselmeyer and the Nutcracker takes place in Act I. It begins with the two men separated by a semi-transparent screen, with the Nutcracker in front and Drosselmeyer, who copies his movements, behind. As the music builds the screen is removed, allowing them to dance together. Their choreography is a fluid and graceful combination of lifts, mirroring movements and sequences of initiation and response, an example of which takes place near the beginning of the duet.

While resting his head on Drosselmeyer's supportive hand and gazing up into his eyes, the Nutcracker is slowly and gently lifted from his crouched position into a high *attitude* pose. It is a tender gesture that implies their relative status in the duet, while,

at the same time, gently parodies the mechanics of the *pas de deux* of ballet classicism. At another point early in the duet the taller Drosselmeyer guides the more diminutive Nutcracker while he executes a promenade in *arabesque*, another motif derived from the ballet vocabulary.⁸ These two moves, as a fusion of archetypal male and female movement lexicons, suggest an investment in *pastiche*, a practice that continues throughout the duet. Their relationship develops through a continual interplay of archetypal masculine and feminine traits as they modulate between large movement patterns that boldly traverse the entire stage space and more intimate and gentle sequences of holding and touching. Furthermore, these two men occasionally reverse their respective status in the duet, with Drosselmeyer assuming the passive (feminine) role and the Nutcracker taking the (masculine) initiative. An example of this takes place towards the end of the duet.

The Nutcracker, while standing behind Drosselmeyer, gently folds his arm around the older man and places his hand upon his chest. With their gaze focused upon the prostrate body of Maria, they then repeat this move. This time their positions are reversed and it is the Nutcracker who is embraced. The meaning of this gesture is ambiguous. While demonstrative of licit male bonding, it also invokes a more disturbing interpretation of their relationship as sexually charged. Key to this notion is the relationship between their choreography and the music.

The music that accompanies this duet is both lyrical and passionate, full of dramatic crescendos and a soaring violin melody. This combination of this highly romantic sound and intimate choreography suggests a brief narrative of desire between two

men. As the prone body of Maria unfortunately testifies, however, this duet does not take place in isolation but in the context of a much larger narrative. Hence, any aspirations towards same-sex desire that it articulates are tempered by the strictures imposed by the plot. It is at this point that an unresolved tension develops between the narrative and the choreography. While the licit machinations of the plot serve to dilute the illicit homoerotic charge created through their movements, it is this same spectre of deviance that problematises the authorised version of events.

According to Gay Morris, this duet expresses the platonic love between an uncle and his nephew. Except for the unconscious Maria, however, it takes place on an empty stage. With no other characters present who might legitimate their behaviour within the confines of a familial framework, not only is the distinction between a homosocial and a homoerotic bond drawn perilously thin, but the suggestion that these two men are engaged in a secret incestual relationship can also be inferred.

Ultimately, both interpretations of this duet are inconclusive. The tension borne of this unresolved friction between narrative and choreographic meaning serves to dilute Gay Morris's more utopian interpretation of *The Hard Nut* as a future vision of harmonic universalism. In contrast to her belief that this duet articulates a vision of love without desire, what is suggested in this analysis is that what is offered is an ambivalence tainted by the spectre of deviant sexual behaviour.

Two other key figures in *The Hard Nut*, the Housekeeper and Mrs. Stahlbaum, will be examined next. Of concern will be the extent to which these two characters, not so

much by exploring issues related to masculinity but broader problems surrounding gender, correspond to Gay Morris's utopian claims for the work.

6.2.2. The Housekeeper and Mrs. Stahlbaum.

Dressed in a smart black dress and frilly little apron while teetering around the stage on matching black *pointe* shoes, the Housekeeper makes a dramatic impression every time she appears. When she is first seen, cleverly framed by a doorway, she is up on full *pointe* with arms crossed and lips pursed in a comical expression of disapproval. Employing the full gamut of hyperbolic gestures, from expansive finger wagging to eyes rolled heavenward in a pantomimic demonstration of despair, she exercises strict but fair control over the three children in her charge. Her more caring and maternal instincts are also demonstrated when she is later witnessed rocking a pram and playing peek-a-boo games with the baby Princess Perlipat: her small and ludicrous white apron now replaced by a huge and equally ridiculous pink bonnet.

She seems to be the only responsible member of the otherwise chaotic Stahlbaum household. Combining the image of the strict and surrogate matriarch with the clucking fussiness of an overzealous mother hen, her household duties extend beyond the care of the children to keeping the elder family members in check.

Whether it is serving drinks at the Christmas party, controlling the drunken behaviour of Mr. Stahlbaum with a disapproving pout or, as the last character to leave the stage at the end of the performance, remembering to switch off the television, she retains a controlling influence over everyone and everything around her.

Being not just the only black character, but also dressed almost entirely in black, she resembles the family less readily than she does the monochrome surroundings. This is further emphasised when, in correspondence with the colourful setting of the Princess Perlipat story, she augments her costume with a splash of pink.

Both her appearance and social position (hers is the only evident servile role) separate her from the rest of the family. It is perhaps ironic that, although lower in status, she is noticeably higher in stature. When she rises up on to full *pointe*, she towers over everyone except Drosselmeyer. This high level of contrasting visibility brings with it a degree of agency. As such, what will be considered is to what extent this character can be read as a form of gender performance that, in correspondence with Butler's request, 'destabilises the naturalised categories of identity and desire.' It will do this in two ways. First, it will look at the Housekeeper as a more straightforward drag role. Second, and in response to Gay Morris's insight into the dancer's background, as a transsexual who is parodying a drag role.

The performance of the Housekeeper reads like a catalogue of hyperbolic feminine acts and gestures. While reading a magazine, she eagerly rubs her wrist on the page and smells the perfume sample, her false eyelashes fluttering in an absurdly over-the-top demonstration of delight. When pushing the drinks trolley while *en pointe*, she seductively wiggles her protruding bottom from side to side as she slowly makes her way around the room, much to the fascination of the male guests at the party. As the nanny, her expansively mimed call for help is reminiscent of the melodramatic performances of archetypal female characters in old black and white films.

As a drag role the Housekeeper can be read as a site of subversive proliferation within the matrix of the intelligible through the hyperbolic excesses of her performance. This figure actively reveals gender to be an applied (therefore unstable) construct built upon the repetition of essentialist gender-based acts. By parodying the performative essence of gender, the Housekeeper deconstructs any notion of an originary gender identity. As Butler remarks, 'in imitating gender, drag implicitly reveals the imitative structure of gender itself - as well as its contingency' (1990: 137).

Butler goes on to suggest that drag disrupts the formal gender code because it plays upon 'the distinction between the anatomy of the performer and the gender that is being performed' (p.137). Effectiveness, however, is contingent upon context for, as Butler comments, 'parodic displacement . . . depends on a context and reception in which subversive confusions can be fostered' (p.139). So, to what extent do 'context' and 'reception' impact upon the agency to trouble 'naturalised categories of identity and desire?' First, *The Hard Nut* is a light-hearted escapist fantasy in which the Housekeeper retains a servile position. As has already been described, both her social position and her appearance distance her from the central machinations of the plot. Although she gives the impression of being a figure of authority, she has little influence over the course of events. She is no more than a foil: an amusing yet ineffectual distraction within the proceedings not all that remote from eighteenth and nineteenth ballet conventions. Second, the ludicrous apings of femininity that characterise the Housekeepers' performance are so hyperbolic that, rather than blurring the distinction between an 'anatomical' gender identity and its 'external' performative, what is received is a man in an archetypal drag role.

The Housekeeper's absurd posturings belie the knowledge that beneath the fiction of drag is another fiction, that of anatomical inversion. Mark Morris devised the role of the Housekeeper specifically for Kraig Patterson, an African American dancer and transsexual. Blurring the boundary between the fiction of a drag role and the reality of surgical gender realignment, and between an internal gender identity and its external performative manifestation, this figure dances at the crossroads of what Butler refers to as the distinction of the intelligible from the unintelligible.

Any attempt to apply any secure gender category to this figure is continually undermined. Is this dancer a man, now recognised as a woman, playing a woman? Or is it a woman, playing a man, who is performing a drag role? Not only is the binary heterosexual matrix challenged, but the polar relationship between the illusion of an internal gender identity and its external performance, imagined by Butler, is also problematised. This profusion or multi-layering of fictions is, however, alluded to by Butler when she argues the case for gender parody as a potentially subversive act:

This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests openness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalised or essentialist gender identities.

(Butler 1990: 138)

By trying to identify the difference between the dancer's and the character's body what is exposed is the limitation of existing linguistic structures. The figure of the Housekeeper complicates these structures through a fluid interplay of essentialist gender codes and, what Gay Morris describes as, 'a complex mixture of conflicting

gender cues, movement, and the disruption of heterosexually based dance conventions' (Morris 1996: 146). This complexity disrupts the institutionalised dialectic of gender difference, and secure categories of identity are displaced. As a confusing vision of gender plurality that undermines hegemony, the Housekeeper exemplifies the 'discontinuity and incoherence' (Butler 1990: 18) at the centre of cultural practice.

This reading of the Housekeeper as a transsexual parody of femininity that subverts the dichotomous underpinnings of cultural codes of identity is, however, purely hypothetical. It falls short of meeting the requirements of a 'truly troubling' performance because it is too reliant upon (off stage) insight while, at the same time, occluded through (on stage) hyperbolic excess and contextual factors.

Paradoxically, the more subtle display of femininity by Mrs. Stahlbaum is far more subversive. The realisation that this is another drag role comes as more of a revelation. Unlike the Housekeeper, Mrs. Stahlbaum has a more active role in the narrative. Not only is she the mother to Maria, and hence responsible for her maturation and eligibility, but, in the story of Princess Perlipat she makes another appearance as the Queen. As a comparatively less obvious impersonation, this matriarchal character not only expresses stereotypical expressions of femininity through her excessively fluttery and dainty performance, but, being a particularly large figure, also parodies the more simpering and insipid gestures of traditionally svelte ballerinas. While dancing alongside the flowers, her more rotund frame does not restrict her movement and, with her long skirts billowing around her, she elegantly dismisses the presumption that fat people cannot dance.

To suggest that the low-key feminine identity of Mrs. Stahlbaum appears more troubling than that expressed by the Housekeeper (even with the additional help of *pointe* shoes) is to recognise that the more excessive the performance of femininity is, regardless of the occluded truth, the less impact it has. Furthermore, and in reference to Butler's theory, the performative construction of the dancer playing the Housekeeper is no match for the performance of the Housekeeper herself. The more complex 'inner' identity of the dancer is occluded by the 'outer' fiction of an implausible femininity articulated by the character. Both narrative constraints and an investment in performative excesses serve to diminish her disruptive agency. In contrast, the character of Mrs. Stahlbaum assumes a pivotal role in the plot and avoids estrangement that comes from hyperbolic excess. While the Housekeeper fails to articulate a challenge to conventional gender codes from the outside, Mrs. Stahlbaum succeeds from the inside.

Nancy Duncan (1996: 2) claims that 'those who come closest to the abstract human ideal are able to dominate'. It corresponds that it is proximity to this 'human ideal' that dictates what is truly subversive and what is not. This is the key difference between the Housekeeper's high-profile and Mrs. Stahlbaum's low-profile character in that it is this second, and subtler instance of gender inversion that comes closer to the 'truly troubling' model imagined by Butler (1990: 139). That it does not fully succeed refers back to Mrs. Stahlbaum's status in the narrative. Although a powerful presence, her primary contribution to the story is to secure her daughter's future happiness through heterosexual love and marriage.

The character of Mrs. Stahlbaum, while disrupting cultural hegemony through her appearance and choreography, ultimately contributes to its maintenance in the narrative. Although treated parodically, the elements of the female code that contribute to both the Housekeeper and Mrs. Stahlbaum's performance are subservience and maternalism, and archetypal gender values are sustained. In the next part of this analysis two dances by the *corps* will be discussed as another form of gender play in which the dancer's 'true' gender identity is masked. What will be asked is if this tactic of occlusion not only succeeds in disrupting conventional values but also corresponds to the harmonic vision imagined by Gay Morris.

6.2.3. Snowflakes and Flowers: the *corps*.

The costumes worn by the *corps* in the dance of the snowflakes are a combination of the stereotypical and the confectionery. With their hair completely hidden by white ice-cream shaped hats and bodies partly covered by little sleeveless tops and flimsy tutus, only those parts of the body that betray no outwardly visible sign of anatomical gender difference such as arms, midriffs and legs are exposed.⁹ Also, while some of the dancers remain barefoot, others are *en pointe*: the decision as to who gets to wear shoes being arbitrary rather than gender specific.¹⁰ These clever costuming devices produce a group of dancers who defy gender-based identification.¹¹

The choreography for these snowflakes is a relatively simple combination of delicate *courouing* and dramatic split *jetés* derived from the classical ballet movement lexicon. While in traditional ballet the vocabulary is gender-specific, however, in *The Hard Nut*

all the dancers execute these archetypal female and male steps. In this and in the later flower dance none of the dancers gain prominence. They all explore the personal kinesphere of the ballerina as well as demonstrate a mastery over stage-space usually associated with male ballet dancers.

As though representing the build-up to a snowstorm, the snowflake dance begins gently, with small clusters of dancers repeatedly traversing the stage sprinkling handfuls of snow. As the music builds, these groups become larger and dramatic explosions replace the gentle scattering action. At the climax, the dancers criss-cross each other in faster succession until a thin blanket of snow covers the entire floor-space. As the music fades and the curtain falls, Drosselmeyer walks across the stage, leaving behind him a trail of footprints.

The effect of gender occlusion is created through three interwoven strategies. First, the clever use of costume. Second, the deconstruction of a gender-based dance vocabulary. Third, their symbolic role. Snowflakes have no gender. Flowers, however, are almost always iconographically represented as feminine.¹²

As flowers, the male and female members of the chorus wear hats that this time resemble upturned flower buds. This organic motif also influences the design of their brightly coloured dresses. Sleeveless and made from a light and semi-transparent fabric, these petal-like costumes suggest more than they actually reveal. This investment in floral symbolism also applies to their choreography.

Unlike the aerial quality of the snowflakes, the movement of these flowers is more earthbound. Gravity seems to pull their flower-petal limbs downwards as they swing their heavy arms loosely from side to side while they traverse the stage in circular and linear formations. Also, in accordance with the belief that each one has its own unique pattern, the snowflakes dance either in small groups, pairs, or solo and never make any physical contact with each other. As flowers, they predominantly dance in unison, and their choreography also incorporates lifts and holds.

At one point, one of the dancing flowers holds another upside-down and swings him/her from side to side like a pendulum in time with the music, while the other flowers weave in concentric circles around them. Later, half of the dancers lie on their backs with their bare legs sticking up in the air and their bottoms towards the audience while the other half of the chorus hold on to their feet to form a long line of criss-crossing 'V' shapes. Joan Acocella (1994: 39) claims that Morris 'loves buttocks' and, referring to this moment when this 'seat of humility' is emphasised, sees it as mere innocent, non-sexually motivated play. Defining the buttocks as the most hard-working and unsung part of the body, she understands them only in terms of a symbolic point of vulnerability, as the place 'where you get kicked' (p.39).

This 'innocent' interpretation is problematised, however, when this 'cheeky' display is read as part of the overall symbolic import of the choreography and contextualised within the narrative of the work. There are far too many sexually coded elements in this flower dance for Acocella's interpretation to retain credibility. First, the large image of the flower that appears on the backdrop that closely resembles female

genitalia and, second, the long climactic build in the Romantic music which, in this context (as with the duet between the Nutcracker and Drosselmeyer) suggests sexual climax. Third, the continual physical contact between the dancers. While half of the dancers are lying on the floor with their legs up in the air, the other half are holding their feet wide apart. Furthermore, this dance is meant as a celebration of Marie's coming of age; the culmination of her passage from innocent girlhood to worldly adulthood and marriage. The sexual import of this dance is further underlined by the way the flowers depart from the stage.

After the music is over, and with their bodies almost bent double, the dancers slowly depart from the stage. Just as the final image of the snowflakes sees them scattered across the stage and individually spinning round in tiny circles *en pointe* as though weightless, so the conclusion of the flower dance finds the same dancers now gathered together in a compact line, seemingly spent and lifeless as a result of their physical exertion. The suggestion of post-coital exhaustion is almost unavoidable.

The earthy quality of the flower dance choreography attests to an expression of stylised eroticism. Just as the snowflakes, dressed in white and employing an airborne and ethereal choreographic style ascend towards a metaphysical purity, so these same dancers, now as flowers, generate sensuality borne of pure physicality. As snowflakes they impart fragility, nobility and chastity. As flowers they become robust, base and libidinous.

Physical difference is replaced by metaphysical difference; the hierarchical economy of the male/female dyad is substituted by a symbolic representation of the mind/body split. Because the snowflakes descend from above, their corporeal schema is aligned with a de-corporealized and desexualised rational purity (masculine). The flowers ascend from the ground up, and, as such, remain rooted in the machinations of a polymorphous and irrational sexuality (feminine).¹³ This metaphysical division, although inscribed on seemingly genderless bodies, re-inserts an old-fashioned gender dualism that, according to Gay Morris, this performance elsewhere disrupts.

Both the snowflake and flower dance are *divertissements* in the performance. As such, they serve no obvious function in the development of the narrative. As with the comic performance of the Housekeeper, these two dances are a decorative foil to events happening elsewhere. Their articulation of harmonic equality between the genders, although beautiful, has no influence upon the outcome of the plot.

Having evaluated the subversive potential of all three forms of gender play in *The Hard Nut*, what remains problematic is either an unresolved friction between identity and desire, hyperbolic excess or the suggestion of a surrogate hierarchy. In all three cases, the source of this dilemma is an unresolved conflict between the symbolic import of the choreography and narrative as a source of meaning. This conflict, and how it affects the 'truly troubling' subversive potential of the performance, will be addressed in the next section of this analysis. Focusing on key elements of the choreography it will seek to qualify Gay Morris's (1996: 155) interpretation of *The Hard Nut* as a utopian 'challenge to heterosexual regulation'.

6.2.4. The *finale*.

In classical ballet, if the story is a happy one, the *finale* usually takes the form of a wedding celebration where the young couple dance together to proclaim their love. According to critics, their *grand pas de deux*, with its sustained lifts, supported *pirouettes* and final clinch, all executed without any visible effort, demonstrates the harmony of heterosexual union.¹⁴

In the *Grand Pas de Deux finale* of *The Hard Nut* the central romantic couple does not receive the same privilege as their classical ballet counterparts, but share the dance space with the rest of the dancers. The culmination of this equality is demonstrated when all the dancers perform either *pirouettes à la second* or *fouettes* in unison. These bravura turns, traditionally part of a solo for male (*à la seconde*) or female dancer (*fouettes*), are notoriously difficult to execute.¹⁵ Filling the stage and spinning madly while the Tchaikovsky music winds up to another climax, individual virtuosity is replaced by 'good humoured effort' (Acocella 1994: 41). The desire for technical perfection is forfeited by the free-for-all attitude of these whirling dervishes, interpreted by Acocella as ' . . . like watching ten people try to climb a flagpole simultaneously'.

Elsewhere, Gay Morris (1996: 155) interprets this group activity with its 'dazzling array of gender roles' as a utopian expression of ideal human kinship that, she adds, is far more persuasive than Butler's hypothetical model. Considering that Gay Morris's view of this work tends to privilege plot over performance, this is a curious

hypothesis. Read out of context, her utopian claim for the *finale* is credible. This dance, however, represents a celebration of an orthodox heterosexual bond between only two of the characters; Maria and the Nutcracker. This aspect of the *finale* is clearly exemplified when the couple are seen repeatedly kissing. Not only does this gesture reinforce their heterosexuality but also serves to dispel any suggestion that the Nutcracker may be tainted by the spectre of deviance as a result of his earlier duet with Drosselmeyer. Furthermore, as Gay Morris notes, in the solo sections of the *finale* '(Mark) Morris uses balletic conventions "straight", that is non-parodically, to define the couple's heterosexuality' (p.155). While the Nutcracker gets to traverse the stage with huge flying leaps, Maria's choreography includes intricate footwork in a more intimate kinesphere.

This non-parodic treatment of the central couple reads as an investment in a gender economy that, elsewhere in *The Hard Nut*, is parodied, inverted or occluded. For the Nutcracker, whose (re-established) heterosexuality already provides him with an historically superior status in culture, the consequences are even greater. Far from deposing a masculine claim to power, this performance celebrates it. This investment in convention throws serious doubt upon Gay Morris's opinion that the dethroning of the romantic couple in the *finale* is the choreographer's 'greatest challenge to heterosexual regulation' (1996: 155). She does admit, however, that Mark Morris has set his sights a little lower and is less interested in excluding heterosexuality from the equation and more concerned with 'disrupting assumptions'. She states that 'rather than being compulsory, heterosexuality in Morris's world is simply one more gender possibility'. This raises an important question: is disruption enough?

By adopting a narrative closely associated with the strictures of the classical ballet genre, *The Hard Nut* subscribes to a practice where a strict dichotomy of gender based roles is not only mandatory but deeply embedded in both plot and choreography. The manufactured fantasy of the ballet narrative is an idealistic environment where everything is imbued with a deep-seated morality: where goodness finally prevails over evil and where only heterosexual love is recognised and accepted. Simply rearranging or blurring the gender of the company and leaving the heterosexual couple both intact and central is not enough to dispel the powerful historical stigma of how classical ballet narrative upholds the gender dichotomy.

The impact of this conservative attitude in the performance serves to diminish its more 'troubling' potential. The best *The Hard Nut* can hope for, as Gay Morris herself admits, is to 'ruffle the waters of gender identity' (Morris 1996: 143). This, as has been contended in this analysis, is not enough to justify Gay Morris's interpretation of *The Hard Nut* as an idealised vision of community in which love means everyone, women and men.

6.3. Matthew Bourne and Adventures in Motion Pictures.

Bourne created Adventures in Motion Pictures with eight other Laban graduates in 1987. Their first productions were *Spitfire* (1988), *Infernal Galop* (1989), and *Town and Country* (1991). He was also commissioned to produce a version of *The Nutcracker* for Opera North that won critical acclaim when it premiered at the 1992 Edinburgh Festival.

Swan Lake (1995) was first performed at the Sadlers Wells Theatre before transferring to the Piccadilly Theatre for a record-breaking season. It won the 1996 Olivier Award for best new dance production. *Swan Lake* is not Bourne's first exploration of the classical ballet canon. Apart from *The Nutcracker*, he has also choreographed a comic pastiche of *La Sylphide* called *Highland Fling* (1994). In his version the original setting of a Scottish glen becomes a housing estate in contemporary Glasgow, while the Romantic dreams of the hero are interpreted as a more contemporary drug-induced fantasy (Robertson 1995: 7).

Swan Lake is Bourne's largest scale work to date with a large *corps* of dancers and full orchestra. While keeping to the original Tchaikovsky music, he substitutes the original Petipa and Ivanov choreography with his own contemporary movement lexicon. Rather than being a comic send-up of ballet aesthetics and conduct, like *Highland Fling*, this work keeps to the more serious intent of the original ballet version.

6.4. *Swan Lake*.

Swan Lake (Ivanov and Petipa 1895) is perhaps one of the world's best loved ballets that tells of the tragic love between a young Prince Siegfried and Odile; a swan who is really a Princess put under a spell by an evil sorcerer. The choreographer Matthew Bourne modifies this romantic tale, first, by replacing the original Ivanov/Petipa ballet choreography with his own contemporary dance style and second, by reversing the gender of the swan and the *corps* from female to male.¹⁶ Although his version centres upon an intimate relationship between two male characters, however, Bourne claims that his intention was not to produce a gay version of *Swan Lake*:

You could read that into it if you wanted to, you could read the ballet on several levels. The Prince is a troubled person and there is a kind of erotic pull with the Swan, but it's certainly not the only element. I want to cover a much wider emotional field, to offer something for everyone, something moving.

(Bourne in Meisner 1995: 20)

Bourne implies that, although he changes the gender of the Swan to male, to view his version of *Swan Lake* solely as an exploration of homosexual love is to transform it into a quasi-romantic piece of gay propaganda. This, in turn, would risk limiting its appeal by alienating a large section of the viewing public, and even ghettoise the work. To counter this possibility, Bourne deliberately downplays the homosexual dimension of the work and emphasises its 'wider' emotional qualities.

This analysis will begin by addressing the choreography for the Prince and the Swan in their *pas de deux* to ask whether it corresponds to these more 'universal' aspirations. Moreover, what will be suggested is that, in order for this representation of male bonding to be read as more than an exploration of homosexual love means an investment in challenging some of the barriers that serve to describe same-sex relationships as 'other' to or 'different' from heterosexist norms of masculine behaviour. Therefore, in this analysis, what will be considered is whether the choreography for this duet can be read as a disruption of the frames that seek to separate licit homosocial identity from illicit homosexual desire: a barrier that, as this study earlier contended, is already rendered unstable by men in dance.¹⁷ What will be of particular concern is how masculinity, as an already 'anxiously claimed identity' (Segal 1990: xxx) is further problematised when its supportive mechanisms are replaced by an investment in the less than secure import of dance.

The discussion of Hatt's findings in Chapter Two has suggested that, without these supportive mechanisms, the link between the male body and heterosexual identity is destabilised, giving rise to the 'spectre' of deviance. Consequently, what will be considered is to what extent *Swan Lake's* movement-based interpretation of a same-sex relationship can be read as subversive of heteronormative values that seek to regulate masculine identity.

This duet is set against a backdrop of two different communities; the *corps* of swans and the Court. As such, in this reading, what will be considered is the influence that the contrasting value systems articulated by these two societies has upon the

outcome of the alliance between the Prince and the Swan. Their function in the narrative will be read as a fictional representation of cultural attitudes that dictate what is and what is not acceptable behaviour between men. In addition, the *corps* contribute their own agenda of 'gender play' to the performance and this will also be addressed.

When asked why he chose to use an all-male *corps* of swans, Bourne responds by describing two related concerns. First, a desire to imbue the choreography with a masculine strength and power that, at the same time, isn't based upon 'any of the macho thrusting and pouting ego associated with much choreography for male dancers' (Bourne in Hughes 1996: 8). Second, a belief that swans have more masculine than feminine qualities. He states: 'the idea of a male swan makes complete sense to me, the strength, the beauty, the enormous wingspan of these creatures suggests to me the musculature of a male dancer much more readily than a ballerina in a white tutu' (p.7).

What will be examined is whether, by removing stereotypical 'macho' elements while retaining masculine qualities such as 'strength' and 'musculature', the swans' choreography corresponds to an alternative to orthodox models of male identity. The search for alterity is already being pursued in recent theoretical work in which aspects of sexuality are being addressed. Orientations of sexuality, according to Sedgwick (1990: 34), are highly unstable constructs. She remarks that,

. . . the most dramatic difference between gender and sexual orientation - that virtually all people are publicly and unalterably assigned to one or the other gender, and from birth - seems, if anything, to mean that it is, rather, sexual orientation, with its far greater potential for rearrangement, ambiguity, and representational doubleness, that would offer the apter deconstructive object.

So, to what extent can *Swan Lake*, by playing with the already 'ambiguous' frames of sexual identity, be read as subversive of the fundamental mechanisms that naturalise the relationship between masculinity and heterosexuality? As Sedgwick points out, this bond is already problematic, and prone to 'rearrangement.' She adds that 'an essentialism of sexual object-choice is far less easy to maintain, far more visibly incoherent, more visibly stressed and challenged at every point in the culture than any essentialism of gender' (1990: 34). Therefore, in this analysis, what will be explored is how dance, as one of these 'points of culture', visibly articulates this sense of incoherence surrounding sexual object-choice through the deployment of gender inversion.

6.4.1. The Prince and the Swan.

Swan Lake opens with the Prince, as a young child, asleep in his enormous royal bed. A swan appears at the window and looks down on the boy.¹⁸ Startled awake, the Prince looks up at the window but the creature has vanished. His mother, the Queen, enters and seeing that her only son is upset, reaches out and touches his forehead. This is no maternal gesture of comfort but a clinical check for fever and when he tries to embrace her, she backs away and eventually leaves him.

This dark and nightmarish Prologue sets the tone for the rest of the performance. It also raises questions concerning the nature of the relationship between the Prince and the Swan.¹⁹ First, the Swan's appearance suggests that Siegfried is a troubled character; why else would he dream of swans? Second, is this creature a spectre drawn from the Prince's own subconscious or an independent identity? Because the Prince is a single, fatherless and seemingly unloved child does the Swan therefore symbolise a substitute source of sibling, paternal or even romantic love?

They finally meet when the boy has reached maturity as an unhappy heir to the throne. Following an undignified ejection from a sleazy club, the drunken Prince makes his way to a deserted park with the intention of drowning himself in the lake. The Swan, accompanied by his *corps* and seemingly unaffected by age, appears in time to stop the Prince from taking his own life.

The structure of the scene between the Prince, the Swan and the *corps* is built upon a combination of solo, duet and group dances. It is also a long scene (it takes up all of Act II) that sees their relationship move through three phases, from investigation, to initiation and finally to acceptance. To chart the progression of their liaison and ascertain its nature, two aspects of the choreography will be discussed. First, the level of involvement of the Prince in the action and, second, the physical contact between him and the Swan.

When the Swan first appears he articulates his wariness of the Prince in three different ways: a wing-like movement of the arms, a symbolic 'beak' shape with the

hands and an *attitude* pose.²⁰ To keep him at bay while he is being investigated, the Swan repeatedly sweeps his arms over the Prince's head, forcing him to either move back or crouch down. The other swans also adopt this gesture as a form of defence and to stop the Prince from getting too close to their leader.

The 'beak' gesture is another defensive tactic where the hands, pressed firmly together, are placed in front of the face with the fingers pointing outwards. The hardness of the beak, produced by the stiffness of the fingers, is in marked contrast to the way the hands are used at other times to represent the softness of wing-feathers.

The notion that the Swan, although wary, is simultaneously curious of this stranger is symbolised by the paradoxical quality of the *attitude*. Balancing on one leg, with the other stretched behind, the Swan raises his arms aloft and folds the front arm over his head and lets the back arm stretch away with the fingers drooping down. The Swan adopts this pose, with minor modifications, throughout the Act. For example, sometimes both arms are folded over the head, or the back leg is bent round to form a gentle curve. In another variation, one of the arms is waved back and forth over the head while the foot gently and repeatedly brushes the floor in a pawing action. While the action with the arm suggests a beckoning gesture, the movement of the leg implies that the Swan is preparing to attack. With the gaze focused in one direction and the limbs pointing in the other, there is a suggestion of a two-way dynamic.

It is this position that the Swan adopts during the initial exploratory moments of his encounter with the Prince. While his body is directed towards the Prince, the face,

shielded by an arm, is turned away. The *attitude* pose also sees the introduction of physical contact between the two characters. While holding this position, the Swan slowly bends and lifts his leg behind him. As the Prince gently takes hold of the proffered limb, the Swan turns his head and their eyes meet. They remain locked together in their first embrace until the Swan, apparently assured that this man does not constitute a threat, breaks free. This act of compliance by the Swan is imbued with eroticism. While demonstrating a willingness to be touched, it also instigates a new-found intimacy between these two characters; the implication of a desiring relationship being reinforced through their mutual gaze.

At the beginning of the Act the Swan's movements are fast and aggressive. He traverses the stage with high leaps and fast turns in the air while, at the same time, tries to intimidate and elude the Prince by adopting a wide range of both attack and defence gestures. As the Swan becomes more accustomed to this stranger, however, this initially threatening atmosphere gradually dissipates. As the tempo of the music decreases, the choreography changes from lively and aerial to soft and lyrical and the distance between the Swan and the Prince closes. This change of mood introduces the next stage of their relationship and they dance their first duet.

This duet sees the extensive use of two distinct choreographic motifs: mirroring and canon.²¹ Sometimes the two characters perform the same movements at the same time. While one dancer leads with the left, the other leads with the right, giving the impression they are each other's reflection. At other times the *corps* copy one of the couple's movement phrases a few counts later and both versions overlap. Throughout

this sequence there is no further physical contact between the couple and as they exit to allow the *corps* to occupy centre stage, they exit in opposite directions. While 'investigation' saw the first tentative introduction of the Prince into the swan's fold, 'initiation' constitutes his permission to move amongst and observe the swans at close range. It also reveals a gradual change in the Prince's behaviour, from static and nervous spectator to active and confident participant.

Although he enthusiastically joins in with the Swan's choreography, his initiation remains incomplete. There is one key aspect of the Prince's appearance that marks him as an outsider: his shiny black boots. Just as the Swan and his *corps* express a sense of freedom through the aerial quality of their barefoot dancing, so these boots act as a reminder that the Prince is still tied to the world of the court. As such, his place within the swan's society can only be temporary. When the swans take to the air (suggested by large slow arm movements) he is left behind on the ground, with the illusion of flight being emphasised by his upward gaze.

While the Prince's initiation can be exemplified by his participation in the dancing, 'acceptance' sees his relationship with the Swan become even more intimate. The tenor and complexity of their bond can be implied by three key gestures initiated by the Swan, the first of which occurs after the *corps* have left the stage and the Swan has performed a short lyrical solo. Again the Prince's upward gaze suggests that, during this solo, the Swan is airborne. The Swan approaches (or lands) and leans forward, pressing his leg into the Prince's back. He immediately rises in response to this part coy, part affectionate invitation and they continue their *pas de deux*.

Whereas earlier in the Act they danced separately and explored the full extent of the space, now their choreography is more intimate. It is also full of lifts and sustained balances, with both dancers taking turns as the supportive partner. At the beginning of this analysis it was suggested that the initial appearance of the Swan could be attributed to the Prince's need for sibling, paternal and/or romantic affection. As such, does this 'nudging' gesture and the sense of equality demonstrated in the duet suggest a brotherly love between these two characters?

The end of their duet is marked by the second gesture by the Swan when he gently rubs the side of his face on the Prince's chest. It is an act charged with eroticism; its sexual import is intensified by the Prince's expression of ecstasy. This 'rubbing' gesture is later copied by the Prince, implying that both characters share in their desire for the other. Does this mean that the relationship has shifted from platonic love to sexual lust?

Like the second 'rubbing' action, the third gesture serves to add another dimension to the bond between the Swan and the Prince. Similarly, and to emphasise its significance, it is one that also occurs twice: first in this lakeside Act and again at the end of the performance. The moment when the Swan lifts the Prince into his arms, according to Bourne, marks the culminating point in their relationship:

In purely physical terms the height of the relationship is when the Swan lifts up the Prince and wraps him in its wings, like a child. This is the single most important image in the whole piece because it is so simple and so universal - the need to be held - and everyone can identify with it.

(Bourne in Hughes 1996: 8)

If the first gesture can be read as sibling affection, and the second as sexual desire, does this third one represent paternal love? Even the choreographer refers to the Prince as being 'a child' at this point. Furthermore, this idea that the Swan symbolises all the forms of love that are absent from the Prince's royal life is alluded to by Bourne. The Swan, he states, 'is all the things the Prince wants but is denied by his constrained life. He represents freedom. Sometimes he also provides a fatherly kind of affection - that's the premise of the *pas de deux*' (Bourne in Meisner 1995: 20).

Elsewhere, the choreographer describes the Swan as 'a kind of alter ego that reflects the mood or state of mind that the Prince is feeling. The relationship does, however, have a very powerful erotic charge, and, this is important - the lure of the unknown. . .' (Bourne in Hughes 1996: 8). Bourne implies that the Swan is both a fantasy figure drawn from the Prince's own subconscious and a creature of flesh and blood; a notion that is carried over into the choreography. The Swan is only seen by the Prince at night and never ages, which suggests a dream manifestation, yet he initiates most of the developments of the relationship, thus giving the impression of autonomy. Also, although the Swan first appears while the Prince is asleep, when they finally meet in the park the Prince, although less than sober, is awake. It could be argued that the Swan's active role in the relationship corresponds to the Prince's own need for guidance and protection, but this does not explain why he is abandoned at the end of the lakeside Act. Ultimately, the identity and symbolic role of the Swan remains an enigma.

This complexity, in which the figure of the Swan remains the unresolved and elusive agent, corresponds to Bourne's earlier interpretation of his *Swan Lake* as more than an exploration of homosexual love. As such, in this analysis what will be considered is to what extent this duet can be read as disruptive of essentialist codes that, as Sedgwick (1990) argues, continue to categorise same-sex desire in terms of its otherness to orthodoxy. To address this notion, however, two additional factors will first be considered. Both refer to the respective backgrounds of the Swan and the Prince; the *corps* and the Court.

6.4.2. The *corps*.

Apart from their gender, one of the most striking visual aspects of these swans is their costume, which consists of a pair of white short-legged trousers covered in feathers. Barefoot and bare-chested, and daubed with a single black stripe that goes from the top of their forehead to the bridge of the nose, they combine an animal symbolism with human (male) eroticism. This part bird/part man strategy also directs the *corps*' movement lexicon in which the expressive quality of the arms is fundamental. Most frequently used to represent wings in flight, there is however a deliberate avoidance of any comic implications in such a practice. Indeed, one of the most arresting and beautiful images they create is when they first appear to the Prince in Act II.

Subtly lit from above and set behind a thin gauze, the swans stand in a close formation, with the ones at the front lower down than the ones positioned behind. With their heads bent forwards they move their outstretched arms gently up and down

in slow, undulating waves. It is at once a simple but nonetheless beautiful vision, and one that, reflecting Bourne's intentions, is not meant to be parodic:

You won't dare laugh at them. They aren't funny, they have a very masculine presence. Nothing in the movement says send-up. My intention with the lakeside act was always that it should be beautiful, and the power of all the men on stage is wonderful. It's thrilling to see so many men dancing together.

(Bourne in Meisner 1995: 20)

To give the impression that they have been flying and are landing on the water, they stretch their arms wide and high, in the same way that swans use their wings like brakes to slow their descent. Although their movement vocabulary predominantly refers to the more noble and statuesque quality of these most romantic of creatures, it is not totally devoid of humour. For example, the dance of the cygnets is a light-hearted sequence that wittily refers to the less-than-elegant and playful behaviour of fledgling swans. While they dart, skip and strut across the stage, they keep their arms folded behind them, bobbing their heads in time with the music. Occasionally they execute a large jump, unfolding their arms mid-air as if attempting to fly. At other times they suddenly stop mid-movement and, tilting their heads to one side, stare out towards the auditorium.

Bourne claims that this scene with the cygnets draws its choreographic inspiration from the activities of young swans. He adds that, although it is highly comical and uses the same Tchaikovsky music, it is not meant as a parody of the original ballet.

He states:

The vision of a ballerina as the swan is so embedded in everyone's consciousness that it would have made it extremely difficult to supplant that image with my own ideas had I used female dancers. By using men, you are wiping away all those mental pictures in the audience's mind and freeing up their imagination, ready to experience something new.

(Bourne in Hughes 1996: 7/8) ²²

Bourne's motivation for using male dancers stems not from a desire to satirise the female role in classical ballet but to find a new dance lexicon for men. He explains:

I think also that I wanted to experiment with male dancing; to try and create something beautiful and lyrical for male dancers without emasculating them in any way. It was important to me that the swans have a very masculine presence and certainly no suggestion of feyness or camp.

Of concern is to what extent a beautiful and lyrical choreographic style that, at the same time, is not 'fey' or 'camp,' can be read as corresponding to a different ('new') articulation of masculine presence. Furthermore, how can it be defined without recourse to an essentialist rhetoric that seeks to uphold a heteronormic logic in which categories of sexuality remain unproblematised?

In Chapter Three how, in recent feminist and queer discourse, the concept of difference based upon axiomatic opposition has given way to the notion of 'pure' difference or difference with no identity was discussed.²³ Referring to theorists such as Michèle Barrett and Eve Sedgwick, Elizabeth Grosz (1995: 53) states:

. . . difference is seen not as difference *from* a pre-given norm, but as *pure difference*, difference in itself, difference with *no identity*. Difference, viewed as distinction, implies the pre-valuation of one of the terms from which the difference of the other is drawn; pure difference refuses to privilege either term (original italics).

How this 'pure difference' corresponds to a concept of these swans as an alternative masculine presence can be interpreted by reading aspects of their appearance and choreography as expressive of male sexuality.

The erotic charge produced by these bare-chested swans has already been noted. Furthermore, because their movement lexicon incorporates large jumps alongside intricate footwork, and both aggressive and gentle arm gestures, it can be read as a fusion of archetypal male and female expressive qualities. These male swans, however, all perform the same choreography and, as such, replace any sense of gender-based difference with 'sameness.' In Bourne's terms they become neither 'macho' or 'fey.' Referring back to the previous notion of pure difference, what is being suggested in this analysis is that these swans transgress the heterosexist matrix by articulating a form of sexual identity with no axiomatic opposite; neither heterosexual nor homosexual.

As with the previous analysis of *The Hard Nut*, however, the extent to which this can be read as disruptive of hegemony is contingent upon the relationship between the symbolic import of the choreography and the narrative. Having proposed that both the central couple and the *corps* express alterity by troubling a heterosexist code that

defines same-sex desire as 'other,' what will now be considered is the *finale*. Of concern will be what impact the events in the last scene have upon *Swan Lake's* aspirations towards the subversion of orthodox masculine values.

6.4.3. The *finale*.

The final Act of *Swan Lake* finds the Prince once more in his bed and unable to communicate with his mother. Having been witnessed trying to kiss another man at the Ball earlier that evening, he is treated for his 'illness' by numerous injections and then abandoned.²⁴ Whereas previously the Swan visits the Prince when he is either asleep or drunk, this time he is heavily drugged. Each time it is at night and he is alone. Once again, the idea that these swans may be no more than a figment of the Prince's tortured imagination is left unresolved.

According to the libretto that accompanies the video recording of the performance, *Swan Lake* has an idyllic conclusion. It describes how 'the Swan appears, taking Prince Siegfried on a journey, in which he shows the Prince how he can release himself into a better, more peaceful world' (Hughes 1996: 5). This suggestion of a utopian conclusion, however, seems to contrast sharply with the import of the choreography.

The Swan emerges out of the Prince's bed and the couple embrace. The other swans also appear and, dragging the Prince away, proceed to attack him with a frenzied series of sharp stabs with their 'beaks' (hands) and blows with their 'wings' (arms).

The Swan manages to pull them away and they escape, leaving behind them the Prince's inert body. The Swan's attempts to revive him, although hopeless at first, finally are met with a response. Copying a gesture first seen in the park, the Swan takes the Prince into his arms. While carrying him back to the bed, however, the *corps* return and another battle ensues. This time, while some hold Siegfried back, others climb onto the bed and attack the Swan. At the end of the fight, the swans move away from the now empty bed and flee from the room. The Queen enters to discover her son's apparently dead body while, in the window the Swan appears, this time cradling the body of the younger Prince in his arms.

This tragic scene, full of images of violence and destruction, bears little relationship to the libretto's more uplifting description of events. In order to address this tension between choreography and narrative, and what impact it has upon the way *Swan Lake* articulates same-sex relationships, several questions concerning the final moments of the work need to be answered. First, why do the swans attack the Prince? Is it jealousy that inspires them, in that the Swan may abandon his life with the flock to be with the Prince? Or is it because they fear that, because he is an outsider, this man could taint their flock?

While he danced with the swans in the park, the Prince's black boots implied an allegiance to the civilised world of the Court; a lifestyle far removed from the untamed existence of the barefoot swans. Furthermore, the major concern of the Court is to get the Prince married and presumably continue the royal dynasty through offspring. This is a society built upon an orthodox code that views same-sex desire as an 'illness,'

and defines same-sex relationships as 'other' to heteronormative masculine values. Difference in the dyadic Court means *axiomatic* difference while, for the all-male *corps* of swans, it means *pure* difference. As such, the Prince symbolises a masculinist code of values poisonous to these 'pure' swans.

Second, why do the *corps* then attack the Swan? Is it because they view him as a traitor who must therefore be expelled from their midst or, is it a sacrificial act for the sake of love? By destroying both the bodies of the Swan and the Prince, have their souls been released so, as the libretto romantically states, they may be joined in a 'better, more peaceful world?'

The last image sees the Swan cradling the young, rather than the adult, Prince in his arms. Throughout their earlier duet in the park, the choreography suggested that their bond challenged stereotypical assumptions about same-sex kinship. This final image implies that the relationship between them is a paternal one, with the Swan as surrogate father figure. Hence, any previous tension between identity and desire provoked by this couple is now dissipated. Furthermore, the analysis of *The Hard Nut* argued that the spectre of deviance that surrounded the character of the Nutcracker was exorcised by his heterosexual behaviour with Maria in the *finale*. Similarly, any suggestion of the relationship between the Swan and the Prince as transgressive is undermined by this last 'cradling' motif. While implying that their bond is one that even death cannot sever, the *finale* of *Swan Lake* also sees their removal to another 'better, more peaceful' place. The 'trouble' caused by their relationship has no lasting impact and their respective communities, although bereft, are stabilised.

6.5. Conclusion.

At the beginning of this Chapter it was asked whether the various forms of gender inversion in Morris's *The Hard Nut* and Bourne's *Swan Lake* could be read as subversive of orthodox codes of gender representation. Furthermore, it sought to establish to what extent these two contemporary works, by destabilising cultural hegemony, could articulate alternative visions of masculine identity.

Although the choreography and characters in *The Hard Nut* and *Swan Lake* 'play' with gender conventions, their subversive impact is heavily diluted through an unquestioning investment in traditional values elsewhere in the works. First, an allegiance to the original narrative structure, which, as the reading of the *finales* demonstrated, either concludes with the celebration of heterosexual love or the removal/destruction of forms of same-sex desire. Second, in *The Hard Nut*, the 'straight' treatment of the central couple, particularly the Nutcracker, in the final *pas de deux*. This was considered a key drawback to this work's more utopian aspirations which all other subversive strategies were powerless to rectify.

That the sexuality of the male character has an effect upon disruptive agency was picked up in the previous analysis. Unlike *The Hard Nut*, the central relationship is same-sex in which the identity of the Swan, unlike the Nutcracker, remains unresolved. Based upon this factor, how much further this work went towards effecting a more challenging subversion of orthodox notions of masculinity and heterosexist claims to authority was of particular concern.

At the beginning of the analysis it was asked whether *Swan Lake*, as a performance that uses gender inversion as a way of 'troubling' the codes that define same-sex relationships as 'other,' could be read as a challenge to the fundamental mechanisms that naturalise the relationship between masculinity and heterosexuality. As with *The Hard Nut*, the problem was located in the unresolved friction between narrative values and movement import, particularly in the final moments of the work.

Both *The Hard Nut* and *Swan Lake*, for all their invertive practices, eventually fall short of articulating a 'truly troubling' challenge to the cultural hegemony in the form of an alternative vision of masculine identity. Key to this failing is the investment in formal narrative structures that conclude with either the celebration of heterosexual values or the banishment of unorthodox forms of love. In both works, the status of the formal gender hierarchy, although inverted, occluded or parodied, is ultimately re-established in a framework in which traditional masculinist values remain dominant.²⁵

What this suggests is that to challenge orthodoxy means an investment in questioning the ideological mechanisms that support and maintain the cultural hegemony. This is the premise of the next chapter. It will present a reading of two works that, by addressing what has already been identified by theorists in Chapter Three as the crisis in masculinity, add their own distinct voice to the call for the dissolution of the institutional, cultural and discursive forces that seek to regulate contemporary Western identity.

¹ There is a key difference between role-reversal and drag. Role-reversal usually refers to a replacement of one gender with another. For example, when either the male or female partner is changed in a *pas de deux*, making it a duet between two men or women (see both the second analysis in this chapter and the analysis in Chapter Eight). Drag describes the strategy in which the true gender identity is occluded beneath a (usually hyperbolic) performance of the opposite gender.

² Sally Banes (1998: 40/41) remarks that while women's travesty roles in Romantic ballet allowed them to bare their legs to the knee and thus marked an important stage in the history of the emancipation of the female body it also 'catered to the male voyeurism of nineteenth-century audiences'.

³ Several ballets spring to mind: *The Sleeping Beauty* (Petipa 1890) in which the evil fairy Carabosse is often played by a man, *Cinderella* (Ashton 1948) in which the choreographer and Robert Helpmann originally played the parts of the two ugly sisters and *La Fille mal Gardée* (Ashton's 1960 reworking of the original 1789 Dauberval ballet) which includes the famous clog dancing travesty role, Widow Simone.

⁴ See the discussion of Butler in 3.1.1.

⁵ See synopsis in the Appendix.

⁶ This notion of insight, where knowing more than the performance might reveal, is significant to this reading at this point. Without knowing that the dancer playing the part of the Housekeeper has undergone gender re-alignment surgery, the role can be read as a drag performance. This added complication, however, raises pertinent issues concerning gender performativity and linguistic codes of representation already being debated elsewhere. As such, this analysis will draw upon this factor in its evaluation.

⁷ The Housekeeper is played by a black dancer and, as such, can also be read as a parody of stereotypical images of the negro servant. For a detailed study of black participation in Western dance, see Thomas de Frantz (Morris 1996).

⁸ A common feature of the ballet *pas de deux*, the promenade is usually performed by the ballerina, who holds an *arabesque* while her male partner slowly turns her in a circle.

⁹ This notion of outward signs of gender difference is one where corporeal differences are recognised most frequently through a play of flatness and bulges on the landscape of the human (hence gendered) body. Male dancers have a bulge in the groin and a flat chest whereas female dancers have the obverse – flatness to the groin and bulges on the chest. In the contemporary dance sphere, however, these anatomical signs of difference are not always so obvious, and particularly for female dancers who are usually thin and muscular, can be readily masked and/or misread.

¹⁰ What is being presumed here is that the choreographer's decision as to who gets to perform *en pointe* corresponds less to gender and more to ability.

¹¹ It is not a complete cover-up. Although all the sites on the body where tell-tale signs of gender can be recognised – chest, hair, crotches - are either completely masked (the hats) or suggestively veiled (the skirts), there is one place where the cultural codes of practice for men and women seem to allocate a corporeal gender difference: the armpits. Men tend to have hairy armpits whereas women, conforming to requirements of Western cultural tastes, tend to shave theirs. In this contemporary climate where gender-based norms of social behaviour are constantly being re-defined: where male bodybuilders and Olympic swimmers regularly shave off all their body hair; and the pop-singer Madonna lets hers grow as part of her gender-bending image, however, even this corporeal sign of difference is not absolute.

¹² This association between flowers and femininity is also key to the analysis of *Nelken* in Chapter Seven.

¹³ See Linda Alcoff's comments about 'higher' masculine reason and 'lower' feminine feelings and desires in 3.1.1. of this study.

¹⁴ See Foster's 'the Ballerina's Phallic Pointe' in Foster (1996) and Daly in Desmond (1996).

¹⁵ The danger is that, if the dancer is not vigilant and completely centred, he or she will move away from their spot and, especially on the crowded stage-space of *The Hard Nut*, collide with another dancer.

¹⁶ Bourne also makes several adjustments to the original story. For example, he introduces a death in the Third Act where the Prince's fiancée is accidentally shot. Curiously, this dramatic moment is not mentioned in the libretto that accompanies the video recording. Although this analysis is primarily concerned with the performance, the friction between the import of the choreography and the description of events given by this written synopsis will be key to the final part of this reading.

¹⁷ For example, 2.1. described some of the extreme (yet ultimately futile) measures adopted in ballet historiography to destroy the link between male dance and the spectre of deviance. Elsewhere, 5.2. examined a number of male dance practitioners who exploit this legacy to say something new about contemporary masculinity.

¹⁸ Although described here as a window, the libretto defines it as a mirror. Because this is a performance-based study, however, this analysis will keep to this initial 'window' interpretation; a key factor in how the Swan is interpreted.

¹⁹ In the rest of this analysis, the capital 'S' will be used to differentiate the Swan from his *corps*.

²⁰ This *attitude* pose is a contemporary reworking of the classical ballet position in which the dancer, while balanced on one leg, lifts and bends the other leg round behind him/her.

²¹ The term 'canon' is a term most commonly used in music. *The Oxford Companion to Music* (Ward 1978: 151) describes it thus; 'the voice (or, it may be melodic instrument part) that begins the canonic passage shall be closely imitated note for note, by some other voice (or part), beginning later and overlapping the first one'.

²² The dance of the cygnets, with its formal line of young ballerinas, with their arms linked and their heads moving from side to side while crossing the stage, stands out as probably one of the most instantly recognisable sections of the Petipa/Ivanov ballet. Although Bourne suggests that this is one of the 'mental pictures' that he wanted to eliminate, his own use of bobbing heads and hands behind the back strongly evokes the original choreography.

²³ See Barrett and Sedgwick in 3.1.

²⁴ See synopsis in Appendix.

²⁵ On a more pragmatic level, this conclusion regarding the subversive agency of *The Hard Nut* and *Swan Lake* should, perhaps come as no surprise, particularly when it is remembered that they are the most popular and most lucrative works in the current repertoires of Morris's and Bourne's companies. Indeed, the Arts Council manages and co-ordinates the staging of these productions in Britain through the National Dance Co-ordinating Committee. Thus the presentation of these works represents a significant investment for which they need a significant return. While Morris exists in an environment that is largely devoid of subsidy, Bourne used *Swan Lake* to launch his company free from state subsidy. This opens a reading of these works as products of an arts industry which follows some capitalist models and which, in turn, might mean that the extent of subversion must be limited and that the dominant ideology must ultimately prevail.

CHAPTER SEVEN
ALIENATION AND ABJECTION IN PINA BAUSCH'S *NELKEN* (1982)
AND LLOYD NEWSON'S *ENTER ACHILLES* (1995).

7.0. Introduction.

Pina Bausch's Tanztheater Wuppertal and DV8, under the direction of Lloyd Newson, have been hailed as two of the most exciting companies on the contemporary theatre dance scene. Their often graphic and disturbing portrayals of physical violence and social estrangement set within works that take the dance medium, dancers, and spectators to extremes has resulted in a considerable amount of speculation. The main thrust of this critical concern centres upon motivation. For example, of the Bausch canon, Sally Banes asks 'is she criticising or enjoying the by-products of the harsh world and the daily anguish she describes? In a similar vein, Marcia Siegel doubts whether Bausch's 'advertisement of negative images constitutes an argument against them'.¹

Elsewhere, in response to what he sees as an 'undercurrent of violence and images of abject inadequacy' in DV8 works, Keith Watson is led to inquire 'is a male statement being made?' (Watson 95/96: 18). Judith Mackrell believes that there is but then expresses concern as to whether dance is the appropriate polemical forum for asking 'fundamental questions of what constitutes masculinity' (Mackrell in *The Guardian*, September 1995: 9). This issue surrounding dance as a form of social commentary and/or reformist platform is particularly relevant to this chapter's evaluation of Bausch's *Nelken* (1982) and Lloyd Newson's *Enter Achilles* (1995).

What does unite criticism and provide this chapter with its analytical agenda, however, is the belief that, because these practitioners bring on stage some of the

ugliest and most distressing aspects of male behaviour, they raise fundamental questions about what it means to be a man in contemporary society. To this end, this chapter will present a reading of *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles* as fictional accounts of what social theorists describe as the 'crisis in masculinity' (see 3.1.1.).

Although in Chapter Three attention was drawn to a number of contributory sociohistorical and political factors, what was contended was that underlying this crisis is an ongoing conflict between an institutionalised Law of the phallus that serves to protect masculine identity from the threat of deviance, and a need to effectively challenge the mechanisms that support old-fashioned and restrictive heteronormative values. In *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles* this discord transforms the dance space into a war zone, a territory occupied by those who do not conform to acceptable codes of behaviour and others who, representing the forces of institutional oppression and regulation, punish them for their transgressions. Punishment for these traitors takes the form of social ostracism (alienation) and the loss of identity (abjection).²

Rather than looking at these two works in terms of reportage, however, what will be considered in this chapter is the extent to which they can both be read as remedial. Through a close investigation of pertinent performance elements, debate will centre upon the extent to which *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles* not only interpret this contemporary malaise but also, as informative cultural practices, envision possible solutions through articulations of alterity.

7.1. Pina Bausch.

Bausch started her training with Kurt Jooss at the Folkwang School, of which she is now director. After studying at Julliard in New York with Antony Tudor she briefly joined the New American Ballet Company before returning to Essen to work as a soloist for Jooss. Critical acclaim for her first piece of choreography, *Fragmente* (1968), inspired her to set up her own independent company. She founded Tanztheater Wuppertal in 1973 with whom she produced many works including *The Rite of Spring* (1975), *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1976), *Bluebeard* (1977), *Cafe Müller* (1978) and *Nelken* (1982).

Her works are frequently designed on a grand scale both in size and length, utilising the whole of the available stage space up to the back wall and running for several hours without an interval. Continuing to defy the parameters of what is traditionally recognised as dance performance, Bausch productions also weave different choreographic genres like ballet and contemporary dance together with a range of other performance techniques like cabaret, mime, fashion shows and daredevil stunts. This idiosyncratic assemblage is then left open-ended and inconclusive, forcing the spectator to make their own decision as to the works' meaning.

Many Bausch works also involve an unusual stage-space design, in which the surface of the performing area is either strewn with dead leaves as in *Bluebeard*, water in *Arien* (1979), mud for *Rite of Spring*, dirt in *Gebirge* (1984) or, as in the case of *Nelken*, thousands of identical pink carnations.

7.2. *Nelken (Carnations)*.

Central to this analysis of *Nelken* will be an examination of the relationship between subject matter and performance style. The search for a connection between theme and structure is often undertaken by critics in their attempt to discern meaning in Bausch works. For example, Sally Banes states:

The pieces proceed not by causality, but by accretion. An image is gradually, laboriously built, then abandoned. It is partly this structural disconnectedness among intensely lived events that creates the pervasive sense of alienation and angst.³

Banes' reference to 'lived events' highlights another Bausch motif where dancers often step out of their dance role, face the audience, and recount short stories based upon their own real-life experiences. This autobiographical aspect breaks down the barrier between the actual and the fictional, dancer and spectator, and the dancer as performer and social being. Johannes Birringer explains:

The 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.⁴

For Birringer, the dancers in Bausch works express both an 'inner' sense of individualism and an 'outward' public identity and it is the friction between these two

aspects that, he believes, provides the performances with relevance as socio-political documents. This study's analysis of *Nelken* will begin by addressing this notion as it is exemplified by two dancers; the Signer and the Accordionist, one male and the other female. What will be considered is to what extent their personal accounts and subsequent choreography, by disrupting the institutional codes that inform gender representation, articulate alternative models of identity and sociality. Furthermore, this investigation will be set within recent debates on gender and the body, most notably Arthur W. Frank's notion of the 'communicating body' and David Levin's 'body of depths', in order to ask whether these two figures' actions can be considered as a curative response to some of the institutionalised forces that seek to regulate male and female identity and behaviour.

A sense of individual struggle against the institution pervades *Nelken*. The second section of the analysis will look at how this conflict is made manifest in three dance sequences. In her discussion of the Bausch canon, Banes remarks that 'life seems both plodding and obdurate, despite intermittent flashes of wonder and lightness, on the one hand, and nearly non-stop histrionics, on the other'.⁵ In this part of the reading what will be considered is how this dynamic contrast between 'plodding' and 'histrionic,' as suggested by the choreography, corresponds to the ways in which the 'obdurate' state apparatus attempts to control behaviour and what happens when these barriers are breached by individual acts of anarchy. Moreover, it will be asked what effect this rebellious activity has upon the dancers and whether this constitutes a need for reform.

Lastly, this analysis will address the final moments of *Nelken* and draw together the main strands of this chapter's debate: the critical debate over dance as commentary or reform, the notion of state versus the individual and pertinent theoretical findings. Setting these alongside a reading of key performance elements including the use of autobiography, choreography and stage setting, what will be asked is to what extent the *finale* of *Nelken* envisions a possible antidote to the current crisis in masculinity in the form of an alternative to existing dualistic codes of gender representation.

7.2.1. The Signer and the Accordionist.

Near the beginning of *Nelken*, a solitary man walks to the front of the stage and addresses the audience. He says that he has been learning sign language and, as a recording of a song is played, he proceeds to transform the lyrics into a complex series of hand gestures. The song is George Gershwin's *The Man I Love* sung by Sophie Tucker:

*One day he'll come along. The man I love.
And he'll be big and strong. The man I love.
And when he comes my way,
I'll do my best to make him stay.*

As the disembodied female voice sings of her dream-man, this man turns her words into movement. It is an intimate and light-hearted, yet slightly disturbing scene. The conflict revolves around the paradoxical juxtaposition of her impassioned vocal rendition and the cool-blooded but animated choreography for his hands and fingers. Throughout the demonstration, his face remains passive. It is an interpretation in

which the expressive quality of the song is removed. The spectator is caught between an empathetic attachment to the lyrics and an estrangement from its visible source. By decontextualising these female emotions the Signer denaturalises the association between femininity and desire. Gender based codes of behaviour are thus rendered artificial, performative.

Scattered throughout the performance there are several scenes similar to this one. Without apparent inducement or obvious preamble, dancers come to the front of the stage to divulge some piece of personal history. These mini-confessionals appear in sharp focus only to be immediately lost again amidst the large-scale chaos of the performance. This practice infects the whole work with a tension, where the borderline between fiction and actuality is blurred through an emotional link with the spectator. Then, through a series of alienation techniques, these dancers undercut 'the spectator's sympathetic identification by presenting their role-playing as self consciously theatrical' (Manning 1986: 61). Elsewhere, Servos (1984: 21) describes this act as a form of didacticism, a 'gestus of indication' wherein 'the conscious technique of alienation, as well as a special use of comedy, have increasingly become characteristic means of portraiture.'

The Signer makes two appearances, once at the beginning and again at the end of the work. Each time the scene is the same yet its repetition serves to make more familiar what was initially strange. Having already made performative the vocabulary of female desire, this second time his esoteric actions serve to recontextualise it as part of his own male canon or 'portrait.'

The Signer's body also epitomises hypothetical models found in recent sociological and philosophical discourse: Arthur W. Frank's 'communicating body' and David Levin's 'body of depths'. Frank states that 'the essential quality of the communicative body is that it is a body *in process* of creating itself' (Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner 1991: 79, original italics). The Signer, according to Frank's hypothesis, articulates a form of identity based upon a desire for dyadic expression that is usually associated with the female sex, unlike monadic desire, which is male.⁶ This communicating body is often found in dance because, he adds, 'dance evolves through the contingency of the body, this contingency being dance's source of change and inspiration' (p.80). Furthermore, Frank states, dance is 'communal' and forms a relationship that goes beyond the body of the dancer and 'extends to the bodies of the other(s)' through participation in the dance. In *Nelken*, however, this sense of sharing also extends to spectatorship through the confrontational nature of the Signer's performance.

By expressing himself through movement, the Signer reformulates his body as a vision of alternative male identity, not in an act of rebellion against his masculine heritage but as an expansion of its scope. As Frank claims, 'the body continues to be formed among institutions and discourses, but these are now media for its expression. For the communicative body institutions and discourses now enable more than they constrain' (p.80). Elsewhere, the Signer corresponds to an identity that finds its origins in a different kind of order beyond that of biology or society. It is an origin, David Levin (1988: 311) argues,

. . . not in any ultimate metaphysical sense, a sense that is patriarchal, but origin, rather, in the sense of locus or proximate cause: the point where a succession of events of particular importance to embodied mortals always begins.

This is the fundamental quality of the 'body of depths.' There is another figure in *Nelken* that, while reflecting and developing Frank's notion of dyadic sharing, also exemplifies Levin's concept of locus; the Accordionist.

Shortly after the Signer's departure a young woman comes on stage carrying an accordion. She walks carefully between the blooms to the front of the stage and faces the audience. The instrument she carries is never played nor does she speak. Apart from the accordion, which barely covers her breasts and crotch, she is virtually naked. This tension created between her brave exposure and modest coverage, combined with the mystery of silence, provides her with a compelling presence. She at once demands the undifferentiated gaze of the audience and deliberately fails to respond to it.

She too makes another appearance towards the end of the work. Again she carries, but does not play, the accordion. On this second occasion, however, she explains that she also knows a form of sign language and proceeds to demonstrate four hand movements that describe the seasons of the year. As she repeats them, they transform into a piece of intimate choreography. Slowly and in single file, the other dancers appear. They too perform these movements as they make a long winding path across the stage. Music plays. It is a gentle and lilting melody. Each dancer

follows the Accordionist, picking up the undulating rhythm of her steps yet, although the moves are the same, each dancer, due to difference in height or length of limb, modifies them. It is a subtle interpretation based not on gender difference but on individual body shape.

The exposure of her body to the audience provides the female Accordionist with a power that is not based on strength but on fragility. Josephine Leask (1995: 85) remarks, 'the Accordion player is adored, and seems to represent a superior female authority . . . both the audience and company are under her power'. Her control of the audience's attention is not through force but takes the form of a flirtation. Through this seduction, she denies the audience the exercise of their judgement of her from an objective distance. She exemplifies what Ramsay Burt describes as 'the seductive dancer' who, because they 'involve spectators in an erotic way' can, he claims, 'rob them of their detachment' (Burt 1998: 20).

As with the Signer, the tension borne of the Accordionist's mysterious presence is dissipated by her actions during her second appearance. As this woman leads the other dancers in slow circular patterns around the stage she keeps her coy gaze focused on the audience. Once again there is a sense that something is being shared, an act that requires the spectator to participate by applying meaning. As the other dancers copy this new physical language of expression it becomes a celebration of communality, not only between the dancers but also between them and the audience. It is a new 'felt sense' of subjective identity that needs to be learnt. As such, the Accordionist exemplifies Levin's hypothetical notion of 'a body whose

radical nature holds within it an inherent sociality which is different from the alienated sociality that presently holds sway, cut off from . . . our deeper human nature' (Levin 1988: 329).

Levin sees in this 'sociality' the potential for envisioning a 'deeper' and more profound alternative to the prevailing norms and standards that correspond to institutionalised forms of gender identity. Drawing upon Merleau-Ponty's theory, Levin suggests that 'his concept of a transhistorical flesh enables us to bring out the deeply concealed potential, always carried by our body of experience, for a radical critique of the existing body politic' (p.330). The Accordionist's dance is an act of gentle anarchy where the dancer's sameness and difference can be read as a form of order that is, as Levin claims, 'inevitably subversive, and inevitably opposed to any order, any *ârc*he, which lays claim to exclusive and totalitarian authority' (p.331).

This 'body of depths' expresses its own deeply concealed primordial code that cannot be rationalised according to logocentric values. As Elias elsewhere suggests, 'if a logic exists, it is not a logic of the consciousness, but of the body' (Servos 1984: 22). This subversive potential, expressed in *Nelken* through vignettes of personal history, goes beneath the surface veneer of what Levin describes as an 'exclusive and totalitarian authority.' He goes on to claim, however, that the rejection of the existing order could not be achieved without suffering but remains inconclusive as to what form it might take. It has already been stated that the Signer and the Accordionist come on both at the beginning and at the end of the work. What takes place between these two appearances provides a clear account of this pain.

7.2.2. Three dances.

By halfway through the performance the majority of the flowers are crushed. Several male dancers, all wearing women's dresses, walk round in a circle holding hands. Their faces are downcast and their tread is heavy and plodding. They seem united by a sense of shared misery. Another man is seated on a chair outside the ring. They stop walking and one man breaks from the group and, approaching this solitary figure, silently gestures for him to join them. The man, however, remains obdurate.

Receiving no response, he gently manipulates the man like a puppet, making him act out alternate gestures of anger and frustration. First he places the man's hands on either side of his face and slowly moves his head from side to side. It appears that he is shaking his head in despair. He tries another gesture and lifts his arms by the elbows and waves them in the air. The seated man's head tips back and it seems as though he is cursing the heavens for his sad plight. Finally he releases this inanimate man and steps back as though contemplating another course of action.

Another dancer from the circle approaches and lifts the man from the chair and sets him on his hands and knees. With his head hanging down his arm is moved slowly up and down, making his fist strike the floor in apparent hopeless rage. This pattern of manipulated gestures repeats many times but without response. He is a hopeless case and their vain attempts are finally abandoned. Claspings his hand, another man draws him into the circle of mourners and their somnambulistic ritual continues.

The men performing this miserable dance turn their rounded backs on the rest of a society that would most likely chastise them for being pathetic. Having replaced the strong clean lines of their opening evening suits for the soft fluid shape of these dresses, their appearance reads as an act of dis-empowerment. These are not men dressing up as women but undressing themselves as men. The norms and standards of cultural practice that define expressions of femininity as a weakness and a flaw that must remain hidden are demonstrated as oppressive to both genders. In their heavy, plodding dance these men find their group identity not through a discourse that provides them with superiority but through a mourning of its inevitable loss. Their manufactured gestures of silent despair demonstrate that vulnerability and passivity, far from being innate and gender based, are a performative response to the prevailing and obdurate body politic.

Theirs is a dance of gender melancholia in which masculinity becomes performance and gestures become *gestus*. Johannes Birringer explains: 'Every pose, every still, and every movement of the body partakes in the particular representational economy with which a culture directs and dominates what is perceived as reality'.⁷ In *Nelken*, what constitutes 'reality' and what is fiction is left for the audience to decide and this gives the performance a dynamic impact that reaches a dramatic peak at the centre of the work.

The dancers, as overdeveloped children, occupy the performance time by playing games, telling stories and dancing together in this Eden-like environment. At the beginning there is no ruling figure, no patriarchal authority controlling their antics and

telling them how to behave. Josephine Leask remarks, 'they are all in the same boat, no one is the boss, everyone is just as helpless and afraid, but at the same time trying to put on a brave face' (1995: 83). Just like children, however, they are occasionally vicious, spiteful and aggressive. They are unaccountably moody, often indifferent to each other's plight, and seemingly irrational. Also, like inmates from an insane asylum, they exist within a seemingly unrestrained world of madness. Linking these two institutions together, Leask describes *Nelken* as 'a series of pictures from childhood. Silent moments of nostalgia are disrupted by eruptions of chaos in which several unrelated incidents happen simultaneously'.

The largest of these 'eruptions of chaos' that takes place in the middle of the performance involves some of the most frenetic choreography. It also sees the building of two enormous cardboard box towers on either side of the stage, behind which two high scaffolding structures are set. Prior to this construction work, the dancers lie quietly in a circle of tipped over chairs holding hands listening to a recording of a Schubert string quartet. A woman stands and reads aloud a letter from her father in which he recounts his concern as to her welfare. One by one and without warning, the other dancers break away from their circle, run to the front of the stage and, opening their arms wide, seem to try and embrace the entire audience. This gesture of love, however, is met with no response and the dancers slowly return to their meditative circle.

A different female dancer picks up a microphone and starts rushing around the stage yelling and screaming in her own, foreign tongue. She becomes increasingly

hysterical and indecipherable in her panic-stricken performance. The excitement continues to build when the dancers begin collecting up their chairs. They rearrange them in lines, sit on them and perform a lyrical pattern of repeated swaying and dipping movements with their bodies. The pace soon quickens so that even before the line is complete, it is broken by one of the performers only to be reformed at a new position on the stage.

As the towers of boxes continue to grow in height and the woman's screaming reaches an almost painful intensity, the dancer's movements become faster and larger. They are soon running with the chairs from one space to the next without waiting for the last dancer to even begin. Two large Alsatian dogs are brought on. Responding to the bustling activity all around them, they begin to bark eagerly and pull on their leashes that are held tightly by two security guards. As Leask remarks, 'one feels that this group of children are being tested by the hurdles of life, hanging on together in a supportive group, carrying on with their play, ever optimistic, the eye of a cyclone of authority and threatening adult violence' (Leask 1995: 85). The tension builds until, finally, two stunt men ascend the scaffolding and jump into the piles of boxes. The excitement is temporarily dissipated and the two men appear from amidst the rubble, their smart suits seemingly unruffled by their dangerous fall.

Almost unnoticed in the middle of the floor, however, and wearing a crumpled dress, is another man. With no apparent provocation, he suddenly becomes angry and begins shouting, either at the dancers to clear the stage space of debris, or at the audience. 'If you really want to see something, I'll show you' he yells. He executes a

series of virtuoso ballet steps but the applause that greets his display just makes him angrier. What is the cause for his rage? Elias suggests that the dancer, by demonstrating his technical competence, is making an analogy between ballet and institutionalised codes of behaviour. Because they require discipline, self control and deny self-expression, both must be challenged:

Ideally and typically the *danse d'école*, with its preference for technical perfection, embodies the highly differentiated physical and mental control to which people in the industrial age must submit themselves. But classical dance, more or less unconsciously, reflects the limitations of the body. In dance theatre, on the other hand, this unconscious and poor continuity is halted abruptly. The unfulfilled desires, which have survived the progress of history inside the body, demand their due.

(Elias in Servos 1984: 26)

That dance can be read as representative of both the 'outer nature' of a state apparatus that controls and rationalises behaviour as well as a means to express 'inner nature' is exemplified in the following scene.

Another man in a formal suit steps forward and, interrupting the childish tantrums of the ballet dancer, announces 'your passport please! And put some proper clothes on.' This 'Customs Official' then makes him act like a goat with appropriate sounds, then a barking dog, a parrot and finally a frog leaping between the flowers. This sudden shift from bravura male dance to childish animal impersonations initially provokes laughter from the audience. It doesn't last long. His treatment soon develops into a disturbing scene of abject humiliation as the figure of authority metamorphoses into a macabre

symbol of omnipresent State control. Here at last is the ruling Law of the Father replete with all its cold and unsympathetic institutional codes of social conduct; the archetypal grey-suited figure of command whose authoritarian gaze disempowers the individual. Robbed of his talent as a dancer, and reduced to dumb animal, he becomes abject. His lack of social restraint is revealed to be a dangerous force that must be punished by the regulating power of the institution:

The increasing removal of power from the individual, its concentration in the hands of institutions, and its ultimate delegation of the state, contrasts with the processes by which external compulsions are internalised to self-compulsions. The link between 'external' (state power) and 'internal' (individual affect structures) are anxieties.

(Elias in Servos 1984: 27)

The critical distance between the spectator and the performance is constantly undermined through acts of confrontation such as these; whether it is through a sympathetic concern for the male dancers melancholic plight or an anxious concern for the dancer who is crushed under the heels of a dictator. The third dance, however, sees the male dancers further disavow any possibility of critical detachment through the conduit of pain.

The scene begins with a man calmly standing centre stage chopping onions and moulding the pieces into a large pile on the edge of a table. A man walks on and calmly presses his face into the heap. Many members of the audience gasp in horror. After several seconds, he stands upright, bits of onion still clinging to his face. He

makes no attempt to remove them. He then walks to the front of the stage and remains still. Another next man enters and takes two handfuls of the onions and rubs them vigorously into his face. The audience response is more audible. He joins the other man, neither of them making any attempt to relieve themselves of what must be extreme discomfort. The ritual repeats several times until all the men form a line along the front of the stage. The audience becomes more and more restless, seemingly distressed by what they are witnessing. Any logical and detached explanation for the performers' behaviour is replaced by a need for its end.

The conduit for this shared experience between the dancer and the spectator is actual pain. It is a form of confrontation far more extreme than the sense of empathy for the man humiliated before the figure of authority and the various instances of personal revelation and physical exposure given by the dancers. These self-induced acts of violence force the spectator to respond to the performance directly through the emotions. Susan Kozel (1993/4: 52), in her analysis of Bausch performances, describes this as a phenomenological return to the lived experience, where it is the dancers themselves who suffer authentic pain and hardship. In this unsettling process the audience can no longer remain passive but are now required to actively complete the work:

The inside meets the outside through her choreography: the inner experiences of the viewers are invited to rise to the surface and engage with the spectacle on the stage (p.52).

Elsewhere, Jochen Schmidt (Servos 1984: 20) suggests that Bausch works are not 'self-sustaining works of art' because 'in order to develop completely, they require an *active onlooker*' (original italics). The spectator, he explains, makes a 'sense connection' with the performance, a moment in which 'the corporeality (the physical awareness portrayed) on the stage relates to the physical experience of the onlooker.' Schmidt then points out, however, that 'this connection is dependant upon the concrete (physical) expectations of the onlooker, which are disappointed, confirmed or confounded by the activities on the stage, and thus provide the opportunity to learn new lessons' (Schmidt in Servos 1984: 20).

These three dances describe a progression that makes sense of the second appearance of the Signer and the Accordionist. These acts of passive misery, childish protestation and physical suffering serve to question the norms and standards through which men and women are supposed to exist and relate to one another. By bringing the spectator closer to the actual lives of the dancers, either through confession, seduction, empathy or pain, *Nelken* is able to create an environment in which monological reason is replaced by dyadic sharing. As Schmidt contends, 'the point of departure is authentic, subjective experience, which is also demanded of the audience . . . It does not *pretend*. It *is*' (p.21, original italics). It is this 'sense connection,' exemplified by the double appearance by Signer and the Accordionist and implied by Schmidt, that needs to be learned and fostered. It is also one that resists being categorised according to the modern metaphysical tradition in which identity is valued only in relation to its social or biological opposite.

The following section looks at the last part of *Nelken*. Of concern will be how the actual experiences of these dancers can be read as a challenge to Institutional codes that regulate gender behaviour. As such, what will be asked is to what extent *Nelken* articulates an alternative vision of identity that encompasses both a new sense of 'sociality' without the loss of subjectivity.

7.2.3. The final *tableau*.

Although *Nelken* seems to be structured around a series of unconnected events, there is one aspect of the work that implies a beginning and ending; the carnations. A sense of development can be recognised through the ongoing destruction of these flowers that, by the end, lay completely scattered and squashed. This impacts upon the way the performance articulates identity. Just as, at the beginning, the flowers seem perfect, identical and beautiful, so do the bodies of these dancers. All their personal revelations, their exposed weaknesses, flaws and idiosyncrasies, however, gradually strip away this fictional surface to reveal actual imperfection. Their bodies convey the accumulated marks of their irrational behaviour and by the end of the performance both they and the spectators are physically and emotionally drained.

There is a strong connection between these carnations and the bodies of the performers that is key to the way in which *Nelken* expresses a need for revision. As part of the dissolution of the metaphysical tradition, one of the agendas proposed by Levin was the scopic expansion of the expressive vocabulary that relates to men. It is a strategy that can be exemplified by examining the iconography of the flower.

Like the dancers, these flowers are all identical in their fragility. The flower, with its delicate natural form and gentle perfume, is a poetic image of femininity. The flower is also rooted in the ground and once picked or crushed underfoot will eventually wilt and die. Only in the undisturbed habitat of the on-stage garden can the flowers survive and at the beginning of the performance the dancers are seen taking great care to avoid damaging them. As well as suggesting that the bodies of these dancers are inscribed with feminine qualities, there is also a disruptive dimension to this equation. It is a further articulation of the friction between the actual and the fictive, and the natural and the performative.

Although flowers are a product of nature, their perfect uniformity and the perception that they are seemingly growing on a theatre stage de-naturalises them. Likewise, the authentic experiences of the dancers (whether it is pain or the sharing of personal stories with the audience) take place in a performance arena. This exploitation of the tension between the inner experiences of the dancers and the outer surface of theatricality also takes on board the question of culturally informed gender practice:

Such explicit references to the social reality of the theatre merely highlight the process through which Bausch's choreography of the social physique translates emotional needs - experienced as a generally oppressive compulsion that assumes specific male and female forms - into a wider constellation of cultural attitudes toward the genres that inform such attitudes.⁸

This 'oppressive compulsion,' revealed by the melancholic men in their circle dance, the angry ballet dancer or the men who rub onion into their faces, leads to an instability or incoherence at the centre of masculine identity. What fills the gap left by this sense of abjection is revealed in the final moments of *Nelken*. Furthermore, it originates in the symbolic relationship between the dancers and the flowers.

In the final moments of the performance all the dancers enter for the last time. They are all wearing rather shabby dresses identical to the ones worn by the men when they performed their circle dance. As they come on their arms are held above their heads in a balletic fifth position. Holding this circular shape, they step to the front of the stage and explain to the audience their reasons for wanting to be dancers. Some confess their motivation as a political act of defiance; 'because I didn't want to be a soldier.' Others are more personal and based upon a need for attention and individual expression: 'so that I could be different.'

Having given their explanations and with their arms still held aloft, they move upstage to form a *tableau*. All around them the flowers lie crushed. Taking their place are these bodies. While each one forms part of a community they each retain a sense of their own identity based upon their confessions and the different size of circle they make with their arms. Difference based on gender no longer functions as the primary basis of identity for these dancers. Hierarchical division is replaced by an alternative form of kinship that can be read as a challenge to the metaphysical duality described elsewhere by Levin.

Levin (1988: 282) describes how the unitary thinking that characterises the masculinist tradition can be displaced by what he defines as 'primordial kinship.' It is a form of sociality that, he claims, exposes the artificial limits of the 'binary logic' of gender that lies at the heart of metaphysical cultural practice. Levin goes on to define 'primordial kinship' as an interactive universalism which acknowledges and celebrates a deeper 'felt sense' of the plurality of subjective identity that goes beyond the constraints of the gender dyad. This rejection of metaphysical duality, he contends, repudiates the notion of the body as 'a material substratum' for the imprinting of social forms or as a 'machine' of drives and desires' (p.304). In its place, Levin imagines a new kind of order, although, as discussed, he remains unclear as to what form it might take. More importantly, his hypothesis offers no clue as to how such an order might lend itself to the configuration of future models of gender identity.

It is in theatre dance, as a body-centred activity and microcosm of shifting cultural mores, where a more tangible conception of the direction that such reform should take might be identified. *Nelken*, by denaturalising the gendered underpinnings of behaviour through various alienating techniques, provides a visionary model of Levin's hypothesis in the form of an alternative and deeper sense of kinship.

In the next analysis the political aspirations of this 'primordial kinship' will be further explored. In particular, what will be considered is what effect the transposition from the protective fantasy landscape of *Nelken* into a very different and archetypal masculine environment has upon this ideology.

7.3. Lloyd Newson and DV8.

Lloyd Newson and Nigel Charnock created DV8 Physical Theatre Company in 1986. It was designed as a flexible project-by-project based company in which the number of dancers employed would vary from one piece to the next. Their first critical success was *My Sex, Our Dance* (1987), a duet for Newson and Charnock. One of their most important works is *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988). It is a bleak and sinister production based on the book by Brian Masters called *Killing For Company*, which was an account of the notorious mass murderer Dennis Nilsen. A later version by Newson made specifically for television received widespread critical acclaim. Its disturbing subject matter put DV8 at the forefront of the contemporary dance scene as an exciting company that wasn't afraid of tackling controversial issues including gay sex, pornography and representations of sexual violence. Two other major dance pieces that also transferred from stage to screen were *Strange Fish* (1992) and *Enter Achilles* (1995).

The filmed version of *Enter Achilles* is more than just a recording of the stage performance for it incorporates real interior and exterior locations, clever use of camera angles and editing.⁹ It demonstrates that DV8 are expanding their repertoire and are concerned with reaching a wider audience. This production also marks a turning point with Newson moving away from his concern with predominantly gay themes to explore the wider field of contemporary western male behaviour.

7.4. *Enter Achilles*.

In terms of style and content, Robertson and Hutera (1988: 237) see a direct link between the Bausch canon and the 'non-narrative but emotional dance-theatre' work of DV8. Both, they continue, 'pull no punches, either physically or emotionally' in their 'bald approach' towards challenging assumptions about the way men and women behave and interact. As to whether *Enter Achilles* has this impact Judith Mackrell remains sceptical. Instead of exposing 'some of the hidden areas of the male psyche', Mackrell argues that DV8 merely presents a 'series of stereotypes' (1995: 9). This, Newson admits, is one of the problems with non-literary art forms, in that although much of the subject matter in *Enter Achilles* was drawn from the dancers own experiences, turning it into choreography tends to make it appear more generalised. Precise social details become larger statements and, as a result:

Apart from a few snatched moments of camaraderie, a guilty bit of sensitivity, and, of course the token vulnerable gay man, there was no glimpse of the way individuals operate within the social mould, of the tensions between men's eccentricities and decencies and their horrible gang behaviour.

(Mackrell 1995: 10)

Although critical of the work as a 'credible human document', Mackrell's suggestion that men have both an individual ('eccentricities and decencies') and social dimension ('horrible gang behaviour') and that these are incompatible, is pertinent to this study. This dichotomy, she contends, is not addressed in *Enter Achilles* and in its place is a

form of tokenism. The validity of this judgement will be considered in this analysis by investigating to what extent, by using an archetypal masculine environment as the setting for specific examples of what motivates male aggression, the work is able to avoid generalisations yet still raise questions about masculine behaviour.

As with Bausch, critical concern over what DV8 are addressing and the level to which their works can be considered effective as social documents is fundamental to this analysis. Like Bausch, Lloyd Newson tends to draw on his own and his dancers' real-life experiences for inspiration and subject matter. This practice, as critics suggest, bridges the distance between the spectator and the performer. Moreover, as Keith Watson (95/96: 19) contends, this gives the performance both poignancy and a sense of insight:

What marks *Enter Achilles* out as a stirring dance documentary is the way the action is inextricably drawn from the lives of the performers, mirroring the cares and concerns which in turn echo those of the target audience.

His suggestion that *Enter Achilles* has a specific meaning that relates to a 'target audience' is a moot point but it does indicate that a key debate is being addressed in the work that is particularly relevant to this study. In interview, DV8 choreographer Lloyd Newson remarks that 'men have been criticised for oppressing women . . . but we also have to realise how much we oppress ourselves' (Newson in Mackrell 1995: 10). He goes on to describe how the only emotions most men can express are anger or humour, and that 'so much of our masculinity is defined by negatives'.

Enter Achilles tells of the activities of eight young men who are out for a night of drinking in a city pub. The analysis will begin with a description of the opening sequence in which the interactive gang behaviour of the young men is first seen. Through a symbolic reading of the choreography what will be asked is to what extent their activities corresponds to Newson's 'negative definition' of masculinity and thus raises questions about what is and is not considered acceptable.

Four dance sequences that centre on the beer glass will then be described. By setting performance-based findings in the context of recent theoretical debate (most notably Levin's call for the dissolution of the modern metaphysical tradition) the aim will be to ascertain whether *Enter Achilles* provides a possible antidote to the crisis in masculinity in the form of an alternative model of male identity.

This will be followed by an examination of two other characters who appear during the evening; Superman and an inflatable Sex Doll. Of concern will be what impact these figures, as two fantasy icons that theorist believe reveal deep-rooted aspects of the male psyche, have on the way *Enter Achilles* articulates masculinity. The last part of this analysis will then present a discussion of the final moments of the work and an investigation in to what extent its graphic portrayal of abject violence not only functions as a critique of contemporary masculine behaviour but serves as testament to the need for change.

7.4.1. Précis: mythical sources.

According to Homer's *Iliad*, because only one of his parents was a God, Achilles the warrior was mortal and therefore destined to die. To save him, his mother Thetis took him to the river Styx and, holding him by one heel, dipped him in the water. The river only protected those parts of the body it touched leaving one part, his heel, untouched.

Thetis knew that Achilles would die if he fought Odysseus in the Trojan War.

Therefore, she sent her son to stay with a sympathetic King who dressed the young Achilles as one of his own daughters. Hearing that Achilles was in hiding, Odysseus pretended to be a peddler and went to the palace bearing jewellery, scarves and a sword. Just as the King's daughters came to examine these articles, Odysseus arranged for the alarm to be raised that the palace was under attack. Achilles tore off his disguise and grabbed the sword, ready to do battle. His fate was sealed.

Although an iconised hero of antiquity, the story of Achilles is very useful to this study as it illuminates two key issues that, elsewhere, contemporary cultural theorists view as causal to the current crisis in masculine identity. First, far from being innate, masculine identity is revealed as an artificial and protective barrier that is also flawed. Second, masculinity is only recognised according to the Law of the phallus; its power rendering all other aspects of identity obsolete. Moreover, it is the dependency upon this phallic object (the sword) as a symbol of masculinity that leads to this warrior's disaster.

7.4.2. The peer group.

Mark Simpson (1994: 81) gives a clear indication of where he believes the location of the fatal flaw in contemporary masculinity lies:

With so much at stake, and given Freud's contention that anality is not sublimated completely, it is perhaps to be expected that one of the most characteristic features of heterosexual men is obsessive, paranoid concern about their own arses.

This 'paranoid concern' also provides an explanation for the interactive behaviour of the men near the beginning of *Enter Achilles* when they groom themselves in front of a large pub mirror. There are no women present so the reason behind this meticulous preening is a telling one where notions of social conformity and self-regulation become important factors. On the surface, they are simply preparing for a night of drunken fun, but there is a hidden agenda behind this activity. What they are doing is making sure that their armour is in place, confirming to themselves that their outward, public appearance is smooth and unblemished. The scope of their self-inspection is, however, limited to the front of their own body: the site of this fatal flaw (their asses) can, as the subsequent events of the evening reveal, only be accessed by others.

They play dextrous pint-passing games, with the beer-glass becoming an agent of movement and homosocial bonding between the men. Its introduction into the movement lexicon transforms their previous everyday gestures such as hair combing, adjusting their jackets or shaking hands into an acrobatic and daredevil display. With

an assurance based on filial trust, they carry, support and throw their bodies and beer-glasses between and over each other with increasing ease. The glasses themselves become attached to the men like surrogate dance partners. They greet each other with raucous shouts and tackles reminiscent of a rugby game, stealing and reclaiming the glasses from each other, while the lyrics of the pub-music plead 'hands off, she's mine.'

The pint-glass, however, is more than just an agent of movement and male bonding. As a reading of its iconography suggests, this object is key to the way this work articulates masculinity. Although an archetypal masculine prop loaded with symbolic import it is also a hollow and fragile vessel. Furthermore, if the pint glass denotes this peer group's manliness, what about the beer it contains? Not only are these men aggressively possessive over their glasses but take great care never to allow a drop of alcohol to be spilled. So, in this symbolic reading, does the empty glass mean impotence?

According to Keith Watson, in *Enter Achilles* the pint-glass is a 'totem of insecurity in an unreliable world' (95/96: 18). Just as Achilles the warrior reached for the sword as an act of defence and thereby revealed his identity, so too do these men wield their pint glasses. Its polysemantic function in *Enter Achilles* is to both symbolise and protect a masculine identity that, as the tragic fate of Achilles and the following sequence in *Enter Achilles* suggests, nevertheless remains flawed.

As this tribal dance ends all but one of these men watch a televised football match: their light-hearted play giving way to the more serious business of watching professional sport. The monitor is set high on the wall so, as they look up, their gaze resembles an act of homage. When a goal is scored they toast the winners with mutual backslaps and hugs. As Simpson (1994: 70) remarks, 'the manly passion of football is permitted because it is predicated on manly violence, without which the passions would no longer be manly'.

These footballers are their contemporary heroes and inspirational role-models. Their unison cheering becomes a hymn of praise both for the game as an expression of natural skill and prowess and for the player who, according to Simpson, 'is able, by dint of stamina and "ball-skills," to appropriate to himself and his body phallic attributes that would otherwise never be his' (p.85). Not only does the player win these manly attributes but, through association, so does the male spectator. In the clear-cut rules of football they can all become champions; their mass worship of athletic strength providing a much-needed legitimacy to their intimate homosocial bonding. As Simpson (p.71) suggests, 'the boundaries of what is permissible in men's lives' are clearly drawn in the iconography of football.

What is not only permissible but also actively worshipped and desired is phallic power, whether it is in the mock battle over possession of the pint-glass or the football. Both objects can be read as 'ultimate symbols of desire' (p.79) through which the owner can demonstrate a level of power. Beneath this obsessive desire for power, however, is a phobia. Just as the acquisition of these symbols denotes licit active

manliness so can their temporary loss mean illicit passivity. Within this relationship, the loser becomes what Simpson terms 'the fucked,' for whom 'the shame of which isolates them as much as scoring the goal unites; the terrible private secret of the anus, the vulnerability of the male to penetration, has been made public' (p.80).

In *Enter Achilles*, masculinity is described according to three key phallic traits; a directly frontal and hence limited spatial projection, a defensive attitude towards their own virility epitomised by their obsessive desire for the pint glass and a communal 'passion' that can only be expressed when channelled through highly regulated homosocial activities like watching sport. Surrounding themselves with this outer mantle of phallic power testifies to the belief that active masculinity is competitively upheld as a panic defence against the fear of being 'fucked,' the point of penetration being the anus. According to Simpson, the anus not only represents homosexuality but also represents it in its passive, effeminate form 'which is the primary meaning of homosexuality in the masculine sexual economy' (p.81).

In the midst of the beer-swilling, foul-mouthed and aggressive interaction of these eight men there are four telling scenes that, because the one object links them all, will be referred to as the 'beer-glass' dances. Although separated (and partly inspired) by other events and shifts in location, when read together they describe a narrative of rejection, reciprocation, reclamation and finally re-education. As part of the visionary agenda of this study, what will be examined is the extent to which these 'beer-glass' dances not only provide a telling account of, but also provide a possible antidote to, the crisis in masculinity.

7.4.3. Four beer-glass dances.

While most of the men in the pub watch the football, another is left alone at the bar with his empty pint-glass; his earlier karaoke song having been interrupted when the others switched on the jukebox. His singing was a moment of tender revelation, a sentimental appeal for love and affection. This passionate activity, unlike football spectatorship, overstepped the boundaries of the peer group's homosocial code of conduct and thus had to be stopped. According to Peter Middleton (1992: 120), this man threatened to topple one of the three pillars of maleness; invulnerability.¹⁰ Like Simpson, Middleton believes that 'men are effectively defined as a social group for whom only a limited range of forms of interaction are valid within the public space'. His suggestion that validity depends upon location is a key point. Not only was the karaoke song an unregulated form of passion but it also took place in one of the major strongholds of homosocial masculinity; the pub. This is a highly fortified environment defended by an arsenal of symbols that pertain to competitive and virile masculinity; the pool table, the television (which shows football) and the bar stocked with alcohol and littered with pint-glasses.

Interpreting his vocal display as a threat to their macho stronghold, the karaoke singer is judged unmanly, overpowered and rejected from the peer group who leave him alone at the bar. Masculinity, for this community of men, is not only upheld through specific rules of social conduct to which all men must comply to gain acceptance, but it also needs a secure environment in which it can exist. As such, these men cannot allow their territory to be associated with sentimentality, an inherently feminine and

hence homosexually aligned quality.

The music changes and a female voice offers support and sympathetic advice when it sings 'don't be afraid, be strong.' The karaoke singer screams into the deep well of his pint glass; his earlier ability to express care through the song is now distorted into an ugly primal wail of frustration and anger. It is an action that might be considered revelatory in the light of Susan Bordo's (Goldstein 1994: 266) suggestion that 'far fresher insights can be gained by reading the male body through the window of its vulnerabilities rather than the dense armour of its power'. Contrary to Bordo's opinion, however, the karaoke singers 'armour' is not dense but perilously thin and, just like the football or the pint-glass, its loss leads to symbolic castration.

In his pained cry of anguish a 'fresh' and as yet unformed voice of dissent can be inferred through which, Levin (1988: 329) suggests, 'we may find new resources for questioning and changing our prevailing norms and standards'. This is the first beer-glass dance and his, like those of the Signer and the Accordionist in *Nelken*, is a 'body of depths' (see 7.2.1.). It is, according to Levin, a visionary body 'whose radical nature holds within it an inherent sociality which is different from the alienated sociality that presently holds sway'. His incoherence suggests that this alternative vision is still in the painful process of becoming; articulating a sense of self 'feeling, today, very empty, very much alone, very unsure of itself: a self in fragments, a self in the fury of Being' (p.15).

Levin suggests that underlying this 'fury of Being' there exists a struggle between an 'essentially fixed identity' and a 'self which lives with a continuously changing identity: a self open to changes in itself; a self which changes in response to changes in the world; a self capable of changing the conditions of its world according to the need' (p.17). If this first beer-glass dance can be read as a call for revision then, remaining with Levin's line of thought, does it also correspond to the development of a new form of humanism, a 'care for the self?' If so, then it still lacks a social dimension. It requires the added contribution of someone whose journey towards re-education has already begun.

Another young man enters the pub and changes the rowdy music on the jukebox into a slow and lilting waltz tune. He begins to dance with his half-full pint glass. His soft and fluid choreography is an elegant and feminised pastiche of the more macho beer-dance performed earlier by the peer group. There is the same controlled assurance and dexterity but while before it was an act of mutual reinforcement and homosocial bonding through competition here it is transformed into an intimate expression of individuality.

This lone dancer is observed in his introverted performance by one of the peer group. Elsewhere, Ramsay Burt (1995) considers the discomfiting impact that DV8 works (like Bausch pieces) have on the spectator. Referring to *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988), he describes how, by having one of the male dancers observing the actions of the others, this 'has the effect of making the individual audience member shift their point of view, and make them aware that they too are

outside the action and watching it, thus denaturalising the conventional role of the spectator's gaze' (Burt 1995: 189). It is a technique that, as Burt continues, challenges assumptions because it 'prompts the audience to consider whether or not they accept that the behaviour presented in the piece is totally alien to them. It thus questions what is and what is not considered acceptable masculine behaviour'. Having already witnessed how the peer group uses the beer-glass, this dance seems strange ('alien') yet, as suggested by the gaze of the other man, compelling. Is this a dance of seduction? If so, then the beer-glass's function as a symbol of an acceptable homosocial model of identity is corrupted, becoming a totem of 'unacceptable' homosexual desire.

While continuing to dance with the pint-glass, this stranger occasionally glances back and smiles at his admirer. Through this mutual gaze, a secret intimacy is created between these two characters. Elsewhere, Bordo (Goldstein 1994: 301) describes relationships of this kind as an 'erotics of friendship', wherein the gaze,

no longer revolves around the dynamics of 'looking at' or 'being looked at' . . . but around the mutuality of truly seeing and being seen, a meeting of subjectivities in which what is being experienced is the recognition of knowing and being known by another.

This 'meeting of subjectivities,' she suggests, disrupts the economy of the gaze as a mechanism that, as this study contends, serves to maintain the orthodox masculine code.¹¹ Similarly, Levin (1988: 329) sees in this mutuality an opportunity to break the 'state of bondage' implicit to 'the prevailing system of norms' and, in its place he

imagines a new form of sociality. This 'radical reflection,' he states, 'brings to light an interpenetration of glances, of gazes . . . The seer can feel his seeing as it is felt, or received, by the other, the one whom he sees. The seer and the other as seen belong to the same flesh' (1988: 333). According to Levin, such a communicative model of primordial kinship remains hypothetical: a 'future possibility' (p.334). *Enter Achilles*, however, suggests otherwise and although it occurs only fleetingly, this 'erotics of friendship' has a significant impact upon the way this work articulates masculinity.

As the other men become aware of the unorthodox and flirtatious behaviour of the stranger the atmosphere reverts to one of intimidation and provocation. Sensing a threat to their fragile stronghold of machismo, the peer group crowds around this interloper and turn their backs on him. Breaking free and moving to a different space, the man continues to dance. This time the men trap him in the corner and proceed to engage in lewd and stereotypical homophobic gesturing, which comprises a crude combination of camp posturing and imagined acts of homosexual sex.

Gaining no reaction, the ringleader holds the man in an intimate embrace and gently kisses his hand and then, almost, his lips. There is still no response to this daring buffoonery so the attackers, in their frustration, resort to physical violence. In the ensuing sequence there is a telling reversal of power roles. As individual outsider, the group places him in the weaker position. Due to his silent impenetrability and their subsequent failed attempts at provocation, however, he usurps the dominant position through their impotence. He gains a form of power that, reminiscent of the *Accordionist in Nelken*, is based not on active strength but on passive weakness.

Faced with the possibility of humiliation, the peer group has no other option but brute force and a fight begins. Their violent retribution, however, is undermined through comedy. The man breaks free and, while rapidly spinning around, sheds his outer layer of clothing to reveal his true 'inner' identity. He is Superman, indestructible hero of comic book fame and, as a contemporary fantasy image of man to which young boys are meant to aspire, the ultimate symbol of masculine phallic potency.¹²

If the first beer-glass dance marked both the moment of rejection and the birth-cry of a yet unformed vision of humanism, this second dance signals its inter-social dimension. It is a kinship that disrupts the outer mantle of the phallic code by investing it with an intimate and erotic charge through the device of the mutual gaze. This reciprocity, Levin claims, is already pre-existent and schematised in the body:

Reciprocity at the level of moral choice, moral autonomy, is possible because of the fact that, as soon as there are two visionary beings within the same field of visibility, there is *already* a primordial, inaugurative layout (*legein*) of reversibilities (1988: 333).

If, as Levin proposes, there is already a sense of universality 'schematised in the body' (p.334), does this mean that all men have the potential to revise their masculine identity? If this is true then how is it to be realised within the present social matrix? In response to this, Levin proposes the creation of a new body, a new sense of Self that can replace the nihilistic void that exists beneath the fractured shell of modern masculine subjectivity. As part of an ongoing process of becoming, he infers that

growth can be achieved through an investment in feelings:

The more we see it and feel it, the more, that is, we can sense and recognise it, the more we can develop its potential, drawing upon our bodily felt sense of its 'image' for the building of a new body politic: a body politic more responsive to the deepest needs of the individual body as a body of depths, a body of flesh (p.334).

Can this new body politic be envisioned in the mutual relationship between the two men in the second beer glass dance? If so, it still remains a fragile construct and is easily destroyed by the oppressive power of the peer-group's phallic gaze. As with the first beer-glass dance and its appeal for care, this alterity cannot be sustained in this highly defended environment; Superman is evicted from the premises leaving the other man alone.¹³

Now alone, this man finds the remote control and turns the television to a channel that shows just static. He then pours dregs of beer from other pint glasses into his own. He brings this glass to his lips as if to drink but, instead, pours the contents through his outstretched fingers and onto the floor. Crouching down, he casually begins to trace patterns with his fingers in the puddle, gradually building up the size of the movement until he is rubbing his face and upper body in the liquid. The choreography becomes increasingly expansive until his entire body is writhing and twisting on the floor and his shirt is soaked with beer. Where the previous beer-glass dance was fluid and graceful and followed the rhythmic pattern of the melodic tune, this one degenerates into disjointed twists and spasmodic twitches and is

accompanied by the hiss of the television. Finally he reaches for the now empty glass only to succeed in knocking it over, marking the end of this third beer-glass dance.

The formation of a new and more expressive vision of masculinity has reached its third stage. The first was marked by frustration against the prevailing phallic Law and a desire for care while the second saw the subversion of the phallic potency of the pint-glass and the articulation of the mutual gaze of kinship. This third stage sees an attempt at rebirth but it seems that, once surrendered, phallic masculinity cannot be regained. The journey remains incomplete. The last vestiges of phallic masculinity are now removed, the birth-cry of a new, visionary sense of masculine identity has been heard and the reciprocal nature of a new expressivity based on mutual kinship has been articulated. The last stage, re-education, requires a new location outside the competitively maintained fortress environment of phallic masculinity.

This third beer-glass dancer is distracted from his misery by the reappearance of Superman who enters the pub through one window, crawls along the wall and then exits through a different window.¹⁴ The man follows him outside and is led through a tiny gap into a fenced-off yard behind the pub. Superman catches a football as it magically falls from the sky. He begins to roll it round his body in a fluid and skilled piece of choreography similar in style to the second beer-glass dance performed by this same character in civilian disguise. The ball is passed and Superman leaves. The beer-glass as locus of movement has now metamorphosed into a football. Although the man's initial attempts to mimic the fluid style of movement demonstrated by the superhero seem comparatively clumsy, he gradually improves. His management of

the ball becomes as elegant and skilled as Superman's and the rite of passage from rejection to re-education has come full circle in this fourth and final beer glass/football dance.

In this narrative the beer-glass, as symbolic of phallic masculinity, slips from its proper mooring and takes on a fluid and unstable character: first, an empty cavern of frustration (the abyss); second, a focus of intimate play as replacement partner or lover; third, a vessel containing what could be interpreted as amniotic fluid, tears, or even semen; fourth, finally metamorphosed into a football, another symbol of phallic masculine identity.

There is, however, a short but telling coda to this sequence when one of the peer group arrives and watches the fourth dance. Once again, the ball is passed along but instead of trying to learn this alternative skill, the new owner proceeds to kick the ball about. The masculine symbolic value of the football is re-established. Earlier, it was asked whether all men have the potential to revision. This scene suggests that they do not. This act of reversion, however, is punished by the Superman character who re-appears, takes the ball and threatens the man with a razor. He speaks in a strange language but his orders are understood by this man who bares his chest, legs and buttocks. Superman proceeds to shave him before making him to lie facedown on the floor. Finally, Superman produces a knife and punctures the football. Like the ball, this man's masculinity is a fragile construct and is easily deflated. Unlike the second beer-glass dance, however, it is not the oppressive power of the peer-group's phallic gaze that leads to destruction but a new and, seemingly, more powerful force.

7.4.4. Superman and the sex doll.

Middleton (1992) suggests that a reading of the iconography of Superman as a muscle-clad fantasy role model for young men reveals some of the psychic structures of masculinity. First, unlike Achilles, Superman is without flaw and therefore indestructible. Second, being the only survivor from his home planet, he also possesses a secret alien language. Third, his gaze is so powerful that not only can he see through walls but, by shooting red beams from his eyes, burn through them too. Superman, according to Middleton, has the ultimate male gaze.

In *Enter Achilles*, the peer group tries to bully, physically assault and chase off the Superman character, but without success. Not only does this man single-handedly thwart their gang attempts to beat him but on one occasion manages to turn the tables. Although his commands are indecipherable, he is able to bend another man to his will through the power of the stare. Furthermore, his movement skills with the beer-glass and football are, in contrast to those demonstrated by the peer group, highly unconventional. He combines this 'secret alien language' with flirtatious glances that compel the spectator to follow.

Although this behaviour seems to correspond to attributes that Middleton claims are possessed by the original comic book hero, there are other aspects of the *Enter Achilles* Superman that appear incongruous. First, his superhero outfit doesn't fit correctly, but hangs loosely on his slim body; the archetypal huge bulging muscles, cleverly enhanced by the close-fitting fabric, are missing. Second, the lettering on the

front is not the recognised 'S' sign for Superman but reads 'CK,' suggesting a possible reference to Clark Kent, his bumbling alter ego.¹⁵ Third, he never flies but crawls along walls and up and down ropes (like Spiderman), spins around to reveal his 'inner' identity (like Wonder Woman) and, when another man borrows his cape, he sings the theme tune associated with the wrong superhero (Batman). Through all of these conflicting signals, the hyper-masculine ideal that Superman serves to promote and that all men are meant to aspire is undermined. What takes the place of this archetypal and muscular strength is an alternative form of power; seduction.

Reverting to his civilian disguise, Superman re-enters the pub and puts on some disco music. While moving between the peer group he wiggles his hips and, putting his fingers in front of his eyes, mimics the fluttering of long eyelashes. Staring at the men one at a time, he beckons them to dance with him. Goaded by his flirtatious behaviour, the peer group joins in and, as they copy his gestures, the dancing gradually gets more lewd and overtly sexual. Egged on even further, they pull their shirts over their heads, throw beer over each other and then drop their trousers.

This self-exposure undermines the thinly veiled distinction between licit homosociality and illicit homosexuality. As Kenneth Dutton (1995: 300) states, 'to present the skin surface as "object of the gaze" is not a traditional male dominance signal, but on the contrary a sign of subversion or seductiveness'. By exposing their bodies to one another, the power of the phallus as a secure basis for heterosexual identity is dissipated by the spectre of deviance symbolised by the ever-present and homosexually coded anus.

Other members of the peer-group arrive and interrupt this orgy. The following ugly scene includes a moment where one of the assailants attempts to push the face of one of the transgressors into a pint-glass lying on the floor. Is this a reminder of what is at stake, of what has been sacrificed? If so, then theirs is the phobic response to the recognition of the greatest and terminal threat to masculinity; the spectacle of the male body.

When he first revealed himself in the pub, the Superman character was overpowered and ejected. He was visibly 'other' to the peer group and hence an easy target. The second time, however, Superman is in disguise and it is the peer group who reveal themselves as the enemy. No longer possessing the phallus, they *become* the phallus, desired by the homosexual who is no longer 'other' to these men. The spectre of homosexuality, rather than being locked into the congenital body of the Superman character, has now infiltrated the masculine canon of the peer group and threatens its destruction. Simpson (1994: 83) states, 'the real enemy is a man's own body and his forbidden erotic relation to it'. The sense of fear and shame is that of abjection, where identity based upon the phallus is revealed as unstable while that based upon the anus can never be completely sublimated:

Being a man is a state of constant negation, there being nothing to avow that is as significant as the disavowal. The penis can be taken away but the anus cannot - it can only be *used* (p.83, original italics).

The true threat to masculine identity is longer external, but stems from the peer group's forbidden relationship to their own body. In *Enter Achilles*, the spectre of illicit homosexual desire is more powerful than legitimate homosocial identity; Superman is stronger than Achilles and the symbolism of phallus is no match for that of the anus. Moreover, the need to disavow the loss of virility caused by this exposure leads to the most graphic and disturbing scene in the work where the men take out their frustrations on an inflatable sex doll. Like the pint-glass and the football, the sex-doll is another totem of male insecurity, and man's dependence upon it demonstrates a constant need to validate his virility. It is also an empty vessel.

This doll is passed between the men, each one being goaded into ever-more horrific acts of depravity. They pour beer over it, throw and kick it around like a football, rape it with a beer-bottle and finally, after smashing the bottle on the wall, use it to stab the doll repeatedly in the face. Blood flows from the doll as it slowly deflates.

If masculinity was previously fragile as the glass, transient as alcohol and hollow as the football, has it now reached its most self-destructive form in the shape of this doll? If so, then what takes place is not male violence towards women but self-mutilation. These men are not sadists but masochists and the blood that issues from the doll is their own.

This final scene in *Enter Achilles* is the most graphic of a series of conflicts between the need to preserve phallic masculine identity and the growing recognition of its flawed nature. Acts of aggression testify not to phallic potency but a frustration

towards an inability to disavow the threat of its loss. Constant attempts to patrol behaviour through self regulation and peer-group monitoring are vain attempts to overcome the terror of what lies beneath the surface of their masculine identity: desire. Although denied and repelled by these men, this aspect of the male psyche can never be completely sublimated.

In *Enter Achilles* masculine identity is totally dependent upon the Law of the Phallus for its stability and coherence. Transgression through articulations of non-conformist behaviour leaves these men abject while, elsewhere, in the battle for phallic power, no-one wins; no-one has the phallus. Symbols that promote 'warrior' masculinity (the beer-glass, the football and the inflatable doll) are expendable and, far from supporting the masculine identity of these men, lead to its loss. Trapped in this oppressive environment of fear and violence, these men are unable to escape their warrior destiny and their bodies bleed and die.

7.5. Conclusion.

At the beginning of this chapter it was asked whether, by articulating a fictional account of some of the factors that, elsewhere, theorists consider as contributory to the current crisis in masculinity, *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles* could be read as a call for change. In other words, are they reflective or informative, reportage or polemic in essence? To this end, to what extent and in what ways theatre dance, by disrupting normative gender codes, could provide space in which an alternative model of

masculine identity might be envisioned was considered. As with the previous chapter, conditional to this analytical strategy is the difference between a utopian and dystopian outcome for the characters.

Nelken and *Enter Achilles* both describe a battle between two opposing forces. On the one side is the law of the institution (represented by the Customs Official in *Nelken* and the peer group in *Enter Achilles*) while, on the other, is the desire for freedom of expression (as demonstrated by such figures as the angry ballet dancer in *Nelken* and the karaoke singer in *Enter Achilles*). Moreover, for the men in these works, underlying this tension is a more fundamental crisis between the impossibility of meeting the requirements of an orthodox model of masculinity and the frustrations that impede articulations of alterity. Transgression, in the form of a corruption of an outer mantle of social conformity through visible, gestural or vocal displays of an inner subjective self, are continually met by violence and suffering. The form of punishment is social ostracism (alienation) and the humiliating loss of identity (abjection). This sense of struggle is common to both works but where they differ is in the import of the resolution.

Nelken's final scene sees all the dancers in a *tableau* suggestive of a new model of sociality (Levin's primordial kinship) in which identity is no longer defined solely according to an institutionalised gender code. This utopianistic future vision of alterity, however, contrasts sharply with the atmosphere created in the closing moments of *Enter Achilles*. This work paints a dystopian picture of a contemporary masculine identity that has no other recourse to expression beyond the code of the phallus.

While the fantasy Eden-like environment of *Nelken* saw the blossoming of a form of humanism in the form of a body of depths, *Enter Achilles* sees its eventual destruction within the heavily fortified masculine stronghold of the pub. The flowers of *Nelken* are no match for the pint glasses of *Enter Achilles*.

Although the end of *Enter Achilles* suggests that any attempt to articulate alterity by rejecting orthodox masculine values remains a futile task, it does provide a clue as to another option. Key to this strategy is the relationship between man and his body which, in *Enter Achilles*, is problematised. This is particularly evident in the imagined gay night-club sequence where the semi-nude antics of the men elicit some of the most aggressive behaviour.

Rather than repudiating the power of the phallus, in the next chapter what will be discussed is how one practitioner is exploiting it through a deliberate queering of its economy.

¹ For Banes and Siegel reviews see Supree, B. et al, 'What the Critics Say About Tanztheater', *TDR* 30:2 (T110), Summer 1986, p.80-84.

² For a definition of abjection useful to this study see 3.1.2.

³ For Banes review see Supree, B. et al, 'What the Critics Say About Tanztheater', *TDR* 30:2 (T110), Summer 1986, p.80-84.

⁴ For Birringer review see Supree, B. et al, 'What the Critics Say About Tanztheater', *TDR* 30:2 (T110), Summer 1986, p.80-84.

⁵ See Supree, B. et al, p.83.

⁶ See Frank in Featherstone, Hepworth and Turner (1991) for a more detailed explanation of the difference between monadic and dyadic expression as it relates to female and male sexuality.

⁷ See Supree, B. et al, p.86.

⁸ See Supree, B. et al, p.90.

⁹ It is the film version that is being used in this reading. Wherever possible, it will refer to the use of the camera and editing techniques. The concern, however, is not with differences between film and live performance but rather how the work addresses issues related to masculine identity.

¹⁰ Middleton (1992: 121) defines the three pillars of maleness as 'strength, invulnerability and competitive edge'.

¹¹ See in particular, Hatt in 1.2 and Dyer in 1.3 and Bordo and Simpson in 3.1.3.

¹² The significance of the Superman character will be explored in greater detail at a later point in this analysis.

¹³ Shortly after the second beer-glass dance there is another sequence that, although not part of the narrative described by the quartet, provides a useful motive for what takes place in the third beer-glass dance.

During the battle between the peer group and Superman, the man who first watched the second beer-glass dance moves away. Like the karaoke singer, he too sits alone at the bar. He is joined by the peer group's ringleader, who, by surreptitiously placing his hand upon the other's knee, initiates an intimate duet. Unlike the reciprocal nature of the relationship created in the second beer-glass dance, however, here the roles are clearly defined as active and passive. The ringleader, ignoring the protesting gestures of the other man, leads him towards closer levels of intimacy until, wrapped in each other's arms, they reach the floor. The ringleader stares down at his trapped partner. Unlike the earlier visionary gaze, this is a highly charged look of sexual dominance.

¹⁴ The superhero skills that he displays seem incorrect. It is well known that it is Spiderman who scales walls, not Superman. It is a clever sequence of deceptive camera-work. Seeing the man traverse the wall, seemingly terrified of falling, there is no indication of his height from the ground. He climbs out of another window, hangs down and calls for help. He falls and the other man rushes to help him. Meanwhile, this Superman character suddenly appears in the window which, it transpires, is actually on the ground floor.

¹⁵ The 'CK' logo could also refer to Calvin Klein, a fashionable and expensive brand of clothes popularised during the 1990s by young gay men.

CHAPTER EIGHT
EROTICISM AND 'QUEERNESS' IN JAVIER DE FRUTOS'S
***TRANSATLANTIC* (1996).**

8.0. Javier de Frutos.

Venezuelan born, Javier de Frutos trained as a dancer initially at the London Contemporary Dance School before going to the Merce Cunningham School in New York. He then moved to Spain in 1992 to become one of the founder members of La Porta, a platform for independent performers in Barcelona. It was while in residence as choreographer at the Chisenhale Dance Space in 1994, however, that he produced his first dance piece, *Dialogue Between Hemispheres*. Later works include his own solo version of *Rite of Spring* called *The Palace Does Not Forgive* (1994), *Gota a Gota* (1994), *Frasquita* (1994), *Sweetie J* (1995), *Meeting J* (1995), *Out of J* (1996) and *Camal Glory* (1996).

Transatlantic (1996) is a solo work that sees de Frutos dance to a recording of the entire soundtrack of *Gypsy* by Styne and Sondheim. The performance that forms the basis for this analysis took place on October 21st as part of the 1996 Dance Umbrella festival at the Royal Festival Hall at the South Bank Centre, London.

Upon winning the Prix d'auteur at Bagnole for *Transatlantic*, he went on to produce *Grass* (1998). This is a trio work for de Frutos, Jamie Watton and Pary Naderi set to the music of Puccini's *Madame Butterfly*. Later work has included *The Celebrated Soubrette* (2000) which, created for Rambert Dance Company, has drawn de Frutos into the mainstream of dance.

8.1. Introduction.

Transatlantic (1996) is a solo dance work in which the male dancer/choreographer Javier de Frutos performs completely naked. This chapter will present a close analysis of this work in which the central concern will be what impact the combination of de Frutos's nudity and choreographic style impacts upon the relationship between masculine identity and its representation.

The nature of the relationship between representations of the male body and identity has, throughout this study, been claimed as a crucial factor in how masculinity is both conceptualised and problematised. For example, in Chapter One, it was argued that painted and photographic images of the naked male, because they invite an undifferentiated gaze, 'trouble' normative masculine codes. The following overview of dance historiography in Chapter Two also drew attention to an ongoing, yet unspoken, concern with the unstable nature of the male body in dance. This issue was again explored in the discussion of the 'troubled' history of the male ballet dancer in Chapter Four. In Chapter Five, how some contemporary dance practitioners have exploited this 'instability' in order to draw attention to matters of gender and sexual identity was also noted. In each case, evidence suggests that the cause for this instability is the possibility of the male body being indiscriminately viewed as a desirable commodity. To view the male body according criteria that, historically, has only been acceptable when applied to the female form, raises the spectre of homoeroticism which, in turn, compromises masculine status.

Inspired by these findings, how an interpretation of the male body in dance as desired/erotic object might be read as a challenge to orthodox masculine values was investigated in Chapter Six. For example, although *The Hard Nut* and *Swan Lake* culminate in the promotion of a stable heteronormative code, several moments in each work could be interpreted as disruptive. Moreover, the return to stability, it was claimed, could only be achieved either through the relegation of all forms of non-heterosexual love, as in *The Hard Nut*, or the destruction of same-sex desire in *Swan Lake*. While the agency of these works to articulate alternative visions of masculine identity was ultimately undermined, however, in both cases one of the 'troubling' factors was identified as the articulation of desire for the male body. Furthermore, this idea of desire as a disruptive force was developed in the analysis of *Enter Achilles* where it was suggested that man's relationship to his own body is an uneasy one that impacts upon the stability of his (assumed) heterosexual masculine identity.

The notion of desire as an agent of change is the impetus behind this chapter's exploration into the ways in which the nude male body in dance can be read as a 'queer' challenge to orthodox masculine values.¹ Moreover, the term 'queer,' in the context of this reading, will refer not only the way the erotic charge of the male dancer's body may be read as a threat to the stability of masculinist codes. As was pointed out in Chapter Three, one of the factors that mark out transgressive practices as queer is the extent to which they incorporate a sense of 'play' and 'pleasure' (see 3.1.3). To that end, what will be examined is the extent to which, by 'playing' with the mechanisms through which the male body is coded, *Transatlantic* lends itself as the ideal fictional platform for the expression of forms of identity that correspond to a

queer praxis. What will also be explored is how queer reading of qualities unique to this dance work both illuminate and problematise many of the strategies through which dance history claims to know gender and sexuality.

Historically, one of the most 'difficult' or 'unsettling' aspects of the nude male body is the exposed penis. As the discussion of the Eakins' painting *The Swimming Hole* in Chapter Two highlighted, the original poses adopted by the photographed models are modified so that the genitalia is hidden. This, it was suggested, was done partly in response to a certain sense of Victorian prudery but also in order to protect the masculine status of Eakin's male subjects. As the photograph of the male model sporting an erection suggests, blatant exposure renders the male figure vulnerable to ridicule and disappointment, while no such possibility can be evoked by the (fully dressed yet highly suggestive) image of Bogart. The penis, it was argued, is no match for the phallus as a way of conferring power.

This analysis will begin with an examination of the opening section of *Transatlantic* where all of de Frutos's nude body is seen for the first time. What will be considered is the extent to which this form of confrontation raises questions about the relationship between the penis and its symbolic manifestation, the phallus, and how this impacts upon the way this dance work represents masculinity. In other words, how is the body-as-phallus iconography of the male nude affected through the deliberate exposure of the single feature of the male body that can undermine the illusory power of the phallus? According to Bordo (Goldstein 1994), the model of heterosexual male identity centred on the power of the phallus is a construct of a Western, phallogocentric

imagination and, hence, is riddled with inconsistencies. She suggests that these inconsistencies that 'haunt' phallic unity can be identified through a reading of the iconography of the penis:

Rather than exhibiting constancy of form, it is perhaps the most visibly mutable of bodily parts; it evokes the temporal not the eternal. And far from maintaining a steady will and purpose, it is mercurial, temperamental, unpredictable (p.266).

'Mercurial', 'temperamental' and 'unpredictable' are, within western discourse, often considered to be terms associated with femininity. They also describe the body in dance. As such, by demonstrating these qualities through exposure and movement, de Frutos's nudity will be read as it informs both the choreographic style and structure of *Transatlantic* in terms of a direct challenge to the phallus as the unitary symbol of masculinity. Moreover, what will be examined is the extent to which theoretical constructs used in some of the most recent thinking on gender discussed in Chapter Three are supported, exemplified and/or problematised by subsequent performance based findings.

The first section of *Transatlantic* is performed in complete silence, while the rest of the work is structured according to songs from the show *Gypsy* (Styne and Sondheim); a musical based on the life of stripper Gypsy Rose Lee. How the lyrics of these songs correspond to, and affect the import of, de Frutos's choreography will be discussed in the second section of this analysis. Of concern will be to what extent de

Frutos's body (unlike that of the stripper in the musical), although undermining the mystery of the phallus through exposure, is still able to invite the gaze. Elsewhere, theorists suggest that, upon disclosure, the male body loses its magnetism, its fascination. For example, Jean-Luc Nancy (MacCannell and Zakarin 1994: 29) claims that 'a naked body gives no sign and reveals nothing, nothing other than this: that there is nothing to reveal, that everything is there, exposed . . . ' The body that Nancy describes is hypothetical, genderless, static and decontextualised while de Frutos's body is real, kinetic, male and set in a performance context. Although naked, it is still encoded. As Keith Watson (96/97: 30) states, 'his [de Frutos's] skin becomes his costume'. Elsewhere, de Frutos also points out that, once nude, 'your alphabet increases enormously. You choreograph your neck, your shoulders, your pecs, your stomach. There is so much more than arms, legs and torso' (Sacks 1997: 29).

De Frutos also choreographs other body-parts not usually attributed with expressive agency including his buttocks and his torso. Focusing on three specific sections of the work, what will be investigated is the symbolic significance of this practice as it corresponds to *Transatlantic's* agenda of queer reform. One of the main reformist aims of queer theory is to reveal strategies used in the regulation of sexual behaviour that result in the oppression of sexual dissidents who violate sexual taboos or do not conform to culturally sanctioned gender roles. To that end, of concern will be to what extent de Frutos's suggestion of 'perverse' sexual practices and behaviours such as auto-eroticism, exhibitionism and masochism, violate or go 'against the grain' of what is acceptable for men to do in dance. According to gender theorists, such activities can be understood as performances of complex power relationships that are not

linked either to gender or sexual identity nor towards any direct purpose, but are temporal, shifting and playful. As such, what will be asked is the extent to which this agenda of 'play' can be read as contributing to *Transatlantic's* articulation of a new, and uniquely erotic, vision of masculinity in dance.

8.1.1. The opening scene.

Transatlantic begins in complete silence. In a faint blue light, the naked de Frutos slowly walks on through a doorframe upstage right, turns sideways, and momentarily assumes a pose with his legs placed wide apart and his arms thrusting outwards. Due to the pre-performance publicity, that this is a work danced by a naked man is already common knowledge. Under this very dim light, however, it is difficult to see any telltale gender signs. In fact, is this bald, long-limbed creature even human? De Frutos then tentatively starts to circumnavigate a large white circle marked out on the floor. His steps, sometimes executed with all the trepidation of a young child or large and more confident like an adult, are all extremely slow and full of pauses, allowing the audience to eventually view his entire body from all sides. The semidarkness, however, continues to act like a veil that diffuses the more confrontational aspect of his nudity. It is only when he interrupts his second circular journey and steps behind a small window frame set downstage left where the stage lighting is brighter that his nakedness, and his gender, becomes apparent. He peers out at the audience, his facial expression a mixture of curiosity and shyness.

He remains at the window only briefly before resuming his slow circular journey. Upon reaching the doorframe he suddenly changes his posture and exits at a normal walking pace. After a pause, he returns to the stage and repeats the entire sequence, only this time the tempo of his stride is increased. Again he stops at the window but this time only a fraction of his body appears in the frame, his face remaining hidden. Once more he moves back to the doorframe and exits. He repeats this sequence once more at an even faster pace and, upon reaching the window-frame, makes a dismissive gesture with his hand. This time, instead of leaving the stage through the doorframe, he stops. The lights fade and the overture to *Gypsy* is played.²

Although this opening sequence is relatively simple in terms of choreography, it is loaded with symbolic import. Beginning with the dancer's nakedness, this dance can be read as addressing three key issues. First, the difference between identity as performance and performative, wherein seemingly ordinary movements and gestures are made extraordinary both through the use of repetition and modulation, and also because they are executed by a naked man in the context of a dance performance. Second, the mutual gaze between performer and spectator and third, the relationship between subjective masculine identity and the iconography of the body-as-phallus.

The predominant source of choreographic material in this first dance is a walking pattern. By playing with the rhythm and size of his steps, de Frutos transforms this most basic of movements into an act, a skill. Read as a symbolic expression of human development, from the slow and clumsy steps of a young child to the swift and confident stride of an adult, his repeated circumnavigation of the stage suggests that

even the most basic movements are not natural but achieved: performative. His three appearances at the window support this idea, where a body language that suggests insecurity is succeeded by one that denotes confidence and then dismissiveness.

De Frutos's gaze through the window also initiates a unique relationship with the spectator, as the choreographer himself states: '*Transatlantic* was very carefully crafted to be an ongoing dialogue with the audience; the gaze is always directed at the audience' (de Frutos in Snape 1988: 21). Elsewhere, according to Stanton Garner (1995: 48), this returning gaze of the performer,

. . . renders objective, suddenly and vulnerably embodied, an audience that had, through a self-effacing voyeurism, collaborated in the relegation of the body to image. In so doing, he activates the disruption always latent in performance, where the body is an object of vision that itself can look back.

The distance between performer and spectator, through this 'disruption,' is replaced by an embodied sense of 'mutual' involvement where de Frutos's corporeal presence, in its 'livedness,' acts as a material resistance to any relegation as dephysicalized sign. As Garner explains, 'the body's livedness involves both observer and observed in a relationship of mutual inherence within a field of observation subversive of such positional categories' (p.50). De Frutos endorses this hypothesis when he remarks that *Transatlantic* 'is not a confrontational piece, it is a very conversational piece' (de Frutos in Snape 1988: 21). Like a conversation, this opening sequence is developmental where any curiosity about de Frutos's nudity gradually transforms into

a sense of familiarity through which the performer can communicate.

Garner goes on to suggest that this 'subversive' mutuality remains incomplete in both the drama and film media. Because the actor is looking out through the eyes of the character, this becomes an obstacle that obscures the body's true livedness. There is also another impediment where the actor's body, as 'an object of vision,' is masked by costume. De Frutos's dancing body is nude; there remains nothing to impede the collapse of what Garner refers to as positional categories. As such, de Frutos's gaze,

like the body's living presence that it asserts, exceeds the containing parameters of representational space and confronts the audience's gaze with an intersubjectivity that represents a potential or actual 'catastrophe' in terms of spectatorial detachment (1995: 49).

In other words, by being nude and employing an esoteric movement style, de Frutos is able to draw the spectator into the work by making them ask key questions. For example, Judith Mackrell (96/97: 57) touches upon both Garner's notion of the 'lived' presence of the body as a 'catastrophe' and de Frutos's own interpretation of the work as 'conversational'. She remarks that, in *Transatlantic*, it is

impossible to view the human body as a pure instrument of music or dance. He performs naked, which means that we are instantly buzzing with questions about his nature (the ultimate tease?), his motives (vanity or confrontation?), and his own comfort (is he chilly, embarrassed, and will his willy get in the way?).

As with the dancers in *Nelken*, such questions draw the spectator into the work because they represent a concern for the performer as a person, and hence a need to ascribe motivation to their actions. In *Nelken*, however, this bond is created through a different form of confrontation, the threshold being the limits of human endurance to pain and humiliation. In *Transatlantic*, it is developmental and based on mutual curiosity. De Frutos explains:

It was for me and also for the audience, very slowly getting used to this person until you say 'well now I want to see him moving differently, because I have already seen the whole totality of the body'.

(de Frutos in Snape 1998: 21)

The bond between dancer and spectator is not based on Otherness, where the male body, as focus of the undifferentiated gaze of desire becomes inscribed as exotic and muscular fetish. Unlike Nijinsky's Faun in *L'Après midi d'un faune* de Frutos's is not a body-as-phallus. Rather, his naked form corresponds to a reading of masculinity that is modelled on Everyman. As Anne Sacks remarks, 'he does not have a perfect body. He is no Chippendale but a Chris Evans type with good muscle tone' (1997: 29).³

Furthermore, because de Frutos begins the performance already naked there is no investment in an erotic economy based upon masochistic postponement as epitomised by male strip acts:

What is eroticised in the male stripper routines is not the strip, not the exposure of nakedness, but the teasing display of phallic power, concentrated in the hard, pumped-up armour of muscle and the covered frontal bulge, straining against its confinements. Their penises they keep to themselves.

(Goldstein 1994: 269)

By showing his penis, de Frutos deconstructs this 'teasing' and 'concentrated' phallocentric economy. Rather than being an end to the performance, the complete exposure of the male body provides a new and dynamic space for an alternative, and more holistic, articulation of male eroticism. Frutos explains,

because I was on stage for such a long time naked, half way through the piece people started realising the neutrality: that the concentration had to be in the body as a whole rather than the genitals.

(de Frutos in Snape 1998: 21)

Elsewhere, this notion of viewing the body as a whole is noted by Sacks who describes how, in *Transatlantic*, the spectator's gaze is diffused. Instead of attention being focused upon some 'frontal bulge', it follows 'the contours of his physique, past the hollows of the shoulder plates to the pads of muscle, along the seams of the spine and down the corrugations of the ribs' (1997: 29).

Having divested the male body of phallic value and 'diffused' the gaze of desire, all in this opening sequence, de Frutos uses the rest of *Transatlantic* to explore the expressive capabilities of his body. That he uses the entire soundtrack to a musical

based on the life of a stripper as his accompaniment seems, at first, somewhat puzzling but, as will be suggested in the next section of this analysis, it is key to the 'queer' model of reform that *Transatlantic* articulates.

8.1.2. The soundtrack.

How the musical *Gypsy* contributes to the articulation of an agenda of queer disruption begins with the effect that physical exposure has upon different gender identities. The musical tells of how a young woman, by using her own body as a commodity, achieves fame and independence. As object of male desire, she conforms to a masculinist notion of the female, that of Other to masculinity. This Otherness, founded upon a perpetual lack according to Elizabeth Grosz (1990: 121), can be traced back to Biblical sources: 'Salome's dance, like striptease, can only seduce when at least one veil remains, alluring yet hiding the *nothing* of woman's sex' (original italics). This is the same 'veil' that, according to Bordo, also 'allures yet hides' the penis; where '*nothing*' alludes to the lack of the penis for the woman and phallus for the man.

Through an ironic association with the female stripper in the soundtrack, de Frutos inverts his own phallic heritage. The last veil has already been lifted to reveal not the phallus but a real penis (neither Salome, Rose nor de Frutos has the phallus). As Bordo (Goldstein 1994: 268) explains, the 'soft and injurable penis' is no match for the phallus as a symbol of masculine virility and power. Elsewhere, as Grosz (1990: 118) states, 'even in Lacan's terms the penis can only ever approximate the function of the

phallus'. The 'deficient' penis, now exposed, threatens the Phallic law and, because culture insists on defining sexuality according to a dichotomy based on possession or lack of this one signifier, de Frutos becomes feminised. According to Anne Munster (Grosz 1987: 125), he is 'the man who flashes, exposes his penis; feminine because he has challenged the veiled law of phallocentrism'.

Within this 'veiled law', according to Grosz (1990: 121), the imaginary phallus privileges masculinity through its alignment with the penis; 'from being a Real organ, the penis becomes an imaginary object dividing the sexes according to its presence or absence'. Accordingly, what separates masculinity from femininity is the possession or lack of characteristic phallic traits; hardness, strength, verticality and constancy. Moreover, these are the qualities most often admired in men's dancing.

De Frutos inverts this code and his heritage through an investment in softness, malleability and horizontality; the iconography of the penis. These are also the movement qualities he explores in some of the more humorous parts of *Transatlantic* where he makes his buttocks and penis dance. Furthermore, it is the relationship between the import of the choreography and the lyrics of the soundtrack that suggest a 'queer' praxis.

8.1.3. The buttocks.

Illuminated by a single spotlight, de Frutos bends over to show his bare bottom to the audience; the rest of his body remains in shadow. As the music begins he wiggles,

flexes and moves his buttocks up and down and occasionally sticks his penis between his thighs so that it points towards the audience. The accompanying song is a light-hearted and gentle tune that refers to both a cow and mooning.⁴

At the beginning, this dance merely seems a parodic interpretation of the lyrics but as it continues an unexpected morphology takes place. Because his buttocks are the only clearly visible part of his body they lose their anatomical point of reference. These two animated mounds of flesh, now dissociated from the body, surpass their derogated symbolic value and a key aspect of male sexual identity is inverted.

Like the buttocks, de Frutos's penis, while momentarily placed between the thighs, is transformed to become a detachable plaything. Not only is the penis made to appear ludicrous but, by being placed beneath the anus, loses symbolic status. This agenda of 'play' also occurs in another dance when de Frutos repeatedly jumps in the air, causing his penis to bob up and down. Although he is drawing attention to his genitals, his actions suggest that he has no control over them (although, ironically, de Frutos deliberately engineers this situation). While the buttock muscles are seen as an alternative locus for expressive movement, the penis becomes so much useless flesh and the symbolic penis/anus hierarchy is inverted.⁵

De Frutos's choreography for his buttocks and penis, although essentially comical, can also be read as addressing a crucial aspect of how the male body in dance can articulate an agenda of queer disruption. Because men possess both the frontality of penetration (the penis) and its inverse penetrability (the anus), it is only upon the

exposed surface of the male body that this sort of invertive strategy can be inscribed.⁶ This is exemplified by de Frutos's choreography in another part of *Transatlantic*.

Lying horizontal in a narrow corridor of light along the back of the stage, de Frutos arches and contracts his spine as he slowly crawls from one side of the stage to the other. This writhing and twisting action transforms the archetypal hard and solid male body into something fluid and malleable. This ironic inversion of masculine (phallic) traits is emphasised by the lyrics of the song 'Everything's Coming up Roses.'

Three-quarters of the way across the stage, de Frutos stops in his journey, his buttocks now highlighted in a small pool of light. As the music builds he lifts and lowers his bottom, slowly at first and then with increasing violence. By passively offering his anus and simultaneously actively thrusting his groin into the floor in a crude caricature of penetrative sex, there is a further destabilisation of the boundary between masculine as active and feminine as passive. More than mere caricature, however, this sequence can also be read as part of *Transatlantic's* articulation of some of the 'darker' aspects of human sexuality.

De Frutos's offering of his anus to the audience suggests more than just an arbitrary alternate locus of movement. As a gesture that occurs repeatedly throughout the work, it also implies more than a comic inversion of the male sexual code. Rather, de Frutos's behaviour can be read as a play upon the complex power relations that define and regulate sexual identity. For example, in gender theory the anus is frequently read as symbolic of passivity. In a previous section of *Transatlantic*, where

de Frutos's backside is used as the main focus for the choreography, this notion of the anus being little more than a passive receptacle for the other's desire, is already problematised. Furthermore, it is de Frutos's choreography and his clever use of lighting that directs the spectator's gaze and shifts power to the dancer. Reminiscent of the slave/master relationship in sado-masochistic practices, it is the slave who has the power through their willingness to give the master the decision-making role.

As a form of exhibitionism, and unlike male strip-show dancers, it is the exposed anus that becomes the focus for erotic interest. De Frutos, by flaunting his willingness to be penetrated, rather than his power to penetrate, deliberately plays with mechanisms of sexuality that previously have formed part of the female and the homosexual male canon. In *Enter Achilles*, the anus becomes a threat; its exposure acting as a reminder that all men, regardless of sexual orientation, are capable of being viewed as receptacles of the Other's desire. This investment of the anus with power to corrupt leads to heterosexual panic and violence. In *Transatlantic*, however, its exposure poses a challenge to what Kaja Silverman elsewhere describes as 'the hierarchy of genital sexuality' (Silverman 1992: 187). As suggestive of sexual perversion, it inscribes the male body with an erotic narrative that, Silverman suggests,

Subverts many of the binary oppositions upon which the social order rests: it crosses the boundary separating food from excrement (coprophilia); human from animal (bestiality); life from death (necrophilia); adult from child (pederasty); and pleasure from pain (masochism).

Most significantly, what transforms de Frutos's suggestion of perversion into an act of queer disruption, is that the viewing (and passive) participant in this exhibition remains an unknown factor. Moreover, there is nothing in *Transatlantic* that is identifiable as pertaining to a specific sexual orientation. Categories of gender and sexual object-choice, in the subjective/objective play between spectator and performer, become blurred. The phallocentrism of male eroticism, having already been deconstructed, is now replaced with an alternative, more playful and polymorphous articulation of the erotic male body.

Like all the other dance pieces analysed in this study, *Transatlantic* is a work that can be read on many different levels, or through different 'lenses.' For example, Mackrell claims that *Transatlantic* is 'about his life in USA and aspirations to be a performer' (96/97: 57). While this interpretation coincides with the title of the piece, the use of a distinctly American-style musical soundtrack and what de Frutos may have said in interview, it is very difficult to find anything in the choreography that supports this reading. Alternatively, because *Transatlantic* presents the solo male body in a work set to a narrative that describes the career of a female stripper, it is equally difficult not to read it as a deconstruction of the orthodox male code. As has so far been suggested in this analysis, however, this process of deconstruction is designed to 'wipe the slate clean' and provide space in which de Frutos can create.

Unlike the meaning given by Mackrell, the one offered in this analysis is both inspired and supported by a symbolic reading of the choreography. Beginning with de Frutos's exposure of his penis and diffusion of the phallocentric gaze of desire in the opening

section, this analysis then explored how de Frutos problematises the equation between masculinity and virility through inversion and parody. As individual acts of disruption, however, these do not constitute a queer agenda. Rather, what is being suggested is that they open a line of communication between de Frutos and the spectator based on a shared sense of curiosity, humour and pathos. In the next section of the analysis, however, to what extent this intimate 'conversation' creates an atmosphere in which a 'queer' vision of erotic male identity can be nurtured will be explored.

8.1.4. Two window dances.

Reflecting the gentle and intimate atmosphere invoked by the lyrics ('little lamb', 'little fish') de Frutos gazes calmly out towards the audience through a small window-frame set downstage left. As the song refers to a 'little lamb' he slowly raises his hand with the palm facing outwards while the word 'window' appears on the back wall.⁷ His fingers part to form what has become recognised in Western popular television culture as a Vulcan sign of peace and welcome.⁸ He then touches his forehead with the other hand and gazes downwards before slowly sinking beneath the frame of the window.

As he rises again the lyrics change to describe a 'little fish' and de Frutos turns his Vulcan sign sideways to mime a fish. As the 'fish' swims past it appears to bite off his nipples. The fish gesture then changes back to the Vulcan sign as he once more sinks below the frame.

Mackrell (96/97: 58) describes *Transatlantic* as an 'alien landscape' in which de Frutos is the 'permanent outsider.' She also sees the work as a mixture of mime and dance in that, although such gestures as 'Vulcan' and 'fish,' as part of de Frutos's 'physical diary,' have a direct representational quality, 'they also satisfy as pure dance'. She adds that 'de Frutos works by inventing choreographic vignettes in which a small range of gestures is repeated over and over again, but with intense, surprising variations of rhythm and scale'.

In the highly coded choreography of this window dance the 'alien' Vulcan sign, paradoxically, appears as a familiar reference point. Is de Frutos suggesting that he is on the outside looking in, as imagined by Mackrell, or vice versa? Does this gesture signify that he does not pose a threat or is it an invitation? If these hand signals are representative, as Mackrell suggests, what does the 'fish' shape mean? Is de Frutos merely translating the lyrics of the song or is there another more coded agenda? As suggested by Mackrell, trying to provide meaning to each individual gesture bears little fruit. Interpreted as part of de Frutos's physical diary, as part of the 'queering' narrative of *Transatlantic*, however, these hand gestures render strange the narrative of the lyrics. Just as de Frutos's choreography for his buttocks deconstructs 'natural' phallic male eroticism and so gives expressive agency to other parts of the body not normally attributed with movement import, so too do these 'unnatural' shapes imply that the hands are capable of more than their own 'natural' everyday lexicon (waving, pointing etc.).⁹

De Frutos's agenda of queering various 'natural' aspects of the body's expressive lexicon through movement is also explored in the second window dance in which de Frutos stands on a stool so that only his torso and arm are visible. The song from *Gypsy* that accompanies this dance is delivered by three seasoned female strippers who explain to the young Rose that she has got to have 'a gimmick' if she wants success. The first stripper plays a trumpet, the second one has electric lights on her costume, and the third uses what she obliquely refers to as 'finesse'. Copying the structure of the song, de Frutos divides the choreography into three sections, each with its own signatory movement.

In the first part of the song, de Frutos transforms the stripper's grunting sound into a series of contractions of his stomach muscles. In the second, he places one hand on his hip and swings it from side to side, while in the third he gently strokes his hand across his lower abdomen in a circular motion. When all the strippers sing together at the end of the song, he combines all three gestures to create a humorous rhythmic pattern of thrusting, swaying and caressing.

By setting these gentle movements of the torso to a song that deconstructs the physical mechanics of female eroticism ('gimmicks'), de Frutos's performance not only disrupts gender conventions but 'queers' them. The song already suggests that female sexuality, because it is instituted by repetitive acts, is performative (see 3.1.1). By transposing these already artificial gender-based gestures onto a male body, a further level of disruption is engineered, as the difference between what constitutes male and female eroticism is blurred. This is choreography for the arm, hips and

abdomen; parts of the body that, like the buttocks or hands, are not gender specific. The rest of the body, as in the previous dances, is in darkness. Moreover, and again like the buttock and hand choreography, all of the movements and the performance space (the window-frame) are small. Within this intimate kinesphere, de Frutos's body articulates a vision of eroticism that is sensual, pluralistic, playful and, it will be argued, non-confrontational.

It has already been noted that de Frutos sees *Transatlantic* as a conversational piece. Key to this dialogue is the return gaze of the dancer. In this second window dance, however, the face remains hidden. As with the contemporary photographs of body-parts discussed in Chapter One of this study (and de Frutos's previous dance for his buttocks), this omission of the face both objectifies the male body and renders it strange, almost unrecognisable. This, in turn, undermines its potency. So, while performing a series of movements that are set to a song that describes how the female body can attract the gaze, the threatening potential of these suggestive actions is undermined.

Although Mackrell's interpretation of *Transatlantic* as autobiographical has been questioned (see p.277), this work seems to suggest a journey. Having divested the male body of its phallic heritage, de Frutos uses a highly localised movement lexicon in order to articulate a new, and seemingly more vulnerable, sense of masculine identity. Key to this 'vulnerability' is the style of movement de Frutos adopts. The history of men in dance attests to a preoccupation with bravura demonstrations of athletic strength and technical mastery; the body as a beautiful expression of the

choreographer's art. In contrast, nearly all of de Frutos's choreography is on a small-scale and non-virtuosic. He also hardly ever leaves the ground. In fact, much of *Transatlantic* sees de Frutos either writhing, sitting or lying on the floor often in 'ugly' or distorted positions.

At the end of this *Transatlantic* journey there is a short reprise of the song 'Everything's Coming Up Roses' sung by the mother of Gypsy Rose Lee. The song describes how, having spent all her life trying to make her daughter a success, this woman is now left behind and alone. Her frustration and grief, however, is soon replaced with the realisation that she has sacrificed the pursuit of her own happiness by living vicariously through her daughter. As she repeatedly declaims 'for me' at the end of the song, however, there is an underlying sense that she may have left it too late.

De Frutos, illuminated by a single overhead light, interprets the angry sentiment of this song by repeatedly slapping his face, crouching on the floor or thrusting his chest towards the audience; his previously calm expression now distorted into a grimace. It is perhaps the most violent and disturbing section of *Transatlantic* conveying, perhaps, de Frutos's own painful realisation and subsequent frustration that his choreographed challenge to the way society regulates and suppresses behaviour may have little impact on the world outside the performance space. As this last song fades, de Frutos slowly walks backwards through the doorway into darkness, his arms outstretched in a gesture that could suggest either pleading for acceptance or resignation that, in the present cultural climate, this is not yet possible.

8.2. Conclusion.

In this analysis of *Transatlantic* it was considered how the fusion of nudity with an intimate and highly idiosyncratic dance style lent itself to the articulation of a 'holistic' vision of erotic male identity. Beginning with a detailed discussion of the symbolic import of the silent opening sequence, of concern was to what extent de Frutos's behaviour could be interpreted as a 'playful' subversion of the Phallic Law. Debate then focused on the relationship between the performance and the soundtrack, the economy of the mutual gaze and de Frutos's choreography for body-parts not usually attributed with expressive agency (buttocks, penis, hands and torso) to investigate whether this led to an articulation of queer reform.

Although, in *Transatlantic*, the male body can be read as erotic, this is achieved without recourse to a confrontational investment in exotic muscular Otherness; the 'body-as-phallus'. In contrast, *Transatlantic* articulates an intimate and non-confrontational eroticism at the 'conversational' interface between performer and audience; the body as 'Everyman.' By rejecting the legacy of the phallus as a male performance dynamic and the active-passive nexus that it invokes, de Frutos is able to create a new and open space in which to explore the expressive capabilities of the male body as a holistic vision of playful and pleasurable queer identity.

One of the concerns with queer theory is that its fluid and improvisational approach to reading representations of sexuality may be used to replace forms of identity that people choose for themselves (particularly gay and lesbian). As a corrective, and

similar to deconstructionist approaches to reading gender, many theorists now advocate a more judicious and conditional use of queer theory. To date, there is very little in queer theory that addresses how the male body in dance represents masculinity. Similarly dance theorists remain sceptical of adopting 'abstract' literary-based models in their studies as they fear it risks overlooking those qualities unique to dance. The application of queer theory has, however, proved useful to this analysis as, like de Frutos's choreography, it celebrates a fluid and improvisational approach to representations of gender and sexual identity. Both *Transatlantic* and queer theory also consider the body as a resource for questioning the validity of fixed notions of sexuality by exploring forms of identity that are temporal, contingent and hybridic. In this sense, it is the dance work that directs the theoretical lens through which it can best be read.

Transatlantic, in one respect, can be read as a nostalgic piece. It offers an almost antiquated vision of the male body reminiscent of the Eakin's photographs of men and young boys enjoying a nude bathe in a lake. Inscribed with an imagined innocence that has since been tainted by a Victorian prudishness about the naked form, *Transatlantic* conjures an almost poetic and childlike conception of the expressive male body.

In another sense, *Transatlantic* can also be understood as forward looking in its anticipation of what a future vision of male eroticism might be like. Through a series of deconstructive strategies, it engineers a break from the phallic legacy of men in dance by suggesting that the male body is capable of far more than demonstrations

of a (masculine) will to power. Hardness, verticality and large movements are replaced by a softness and an intimate kinesphere, and blatant exhibitions of the male body as phallic champion are overturned through an investment in subtlety and humour.

At the centre of this two-way dynamic between past and future, is de Frutos's own real and kinetic male body. The dancer uses the choreography to play upon many of the dualisms through which dance determines and attempts to control gender difference; subjective/objective, active/passive, phallic/non-phallic and logic/emotion. In so doing, *Transatlantic* is able to give a body and a new perspective to abstract models conceptualised in queer thinking.

¹ A detailed discussion of the concept of 'queer' and its contribution to the analyses in Part Three can be found in 3.1.3.

² A highly romanticised account of the true-life story of Gypsy Rose Lee, *Gypsy* tells the story of a young girl called Rose who, pressurised by her stage-struck mother to become a legitimate star, eventually discovers her talent as a stripper in the less than legitimate Burlesque shows. Her notoriety leads her away from the clutches of her disapproving parent and into a confrontation with her. Finally, their relationship is rebuilt as a friendship. The musical is a life journey from childhood dependence to adult autonomy.

³ The Chippendales are a group of young American men who enjoyed widespread but short-lived success with their suggestive stage performances. Displaying their highly muscular bodies by stripping down to their underwear, they never went as far as showing their penises. Chris Evans is a radio and television celebrity who achieved fame by appealing to the 1990's 'lad' culture.

⁴ The word 'mooning' has two meanings. The first and somewhat romantic interpretation refers to a form of longing. The second and more colloquial version of the word refers to the act of baring of the buttocks.

⁵ That the penis has no agency of its own is also demonstrated by the way de Frutos has to use his hands to push it between his legs.

⁶ Grosz (1990: 164) argues that transgression or disruption of the symbolic order can only come from within. She states that 'it is only from a position within the symbolic that it can be ruptured or transgressed. It is only those who actually occupy the position of speaking/ representing subject who can undermine or subvert the limits of representation.' This position, she adds, belongs uniquely to men who, 'alone can occupy the (unstable) position of speaking subject within and transgressive of the symbolic; he is the speaker/painter/musician who subjects the symbolic to its own excesses and possibilities of subversion'.

⁷ The relevance of these projected words, which appear randomly throughout the performance and correspond to both parts of the stage set ('door' and 'exit' being other examples) and the location of the dancer, is unknown beyond a reference to postmodern mixed-media practices.

⁸ The Vulcan hand gesture is taken from *Star Trek*, the popular American television series of the late 1960s and early 1970s. One of the main characters, Mr. Spock, an alien member of the crew of the Starship Enterprise, uses this particular hand-gesture as a symbol of both peace and welcome.

⁹ Both the Vulcan sign and the fish shape require the fingers to be parted to form a 'V' shape and this requires a level of concentration.

**CHAPTER NINE:
CONCLUSION.**

During the final moments of *Transatlantic*, Javier de Frutos's choreography and facial expression combine to articulate a sense of rage and desperation. Read through the lens of queer reformist thinking, the interpretation of his behaviour given in the previous chapter's analysis of this work suggested a reference to the difficulties involved in expressing a sense of individuality in a cultural climate of regulation, blanket categorisation and discrimination.

Alongside this queer agenda, however, there is another possible interpretation of de Frutos's actions that corresponds to a sensibility frequently expressed throughout the history of dance scholarship. This is the notion that, despite the potential of a dance work to raise important questions about gender representation, outside the performance arena existing perceptions of the male dancer seem highly resistant to change. As with all the other works discussed in this study, the impact that *Transatlantic* has on attitudes surrounding men in dance has to be weighed against certain limiting social factors. First, theatre dance performance, particularly contemporary dance, tends to attract only a tiny fraction of the general public. With larger scale dance works, the shortage of adequate performance space outside large cities and the often high ticket price tends to dissuade all but the most enthusiastic and urban dwelling members of the public. Only very rarely does a dance work find its way on to television and possibly attract a wider audience. Even then, the transfer from stage to small-screen may lessen its impact. Second, dance, like its sister art opera, is also a highly coded art form; whatever message it contains can often be very difficult to discern. Third, like other performing arts, it is a fictional spectacle and is therefore considered as being separate from the day to day existence of the public.

As demonstrated by the number of challenging theatre dance works that have been devised and performed in the last few decades, however, these limiting factors have failed to deter practitioners from pursuing their creative and political aspirations.

Furthermore, the need to provoke debate or to instigate social reform, to a greater or lesser extent, is an inspirational force in all art forms in which theatre dance continues to be an important and influential constituent.

An additional limiting factor that impacts upon dance's ability to elicit reform, particularly with regard to attitudes towards male dancers, however, is its own socio-cultural legacy. As Burt (1995: 1) remarks, theatre dance is not considered an activity suitable for boys to pursue.¹ Its stigma is that it promotes effeminacy and even homosexuality; a belief that, throughout the twentieth century, has been fuelled by the changing (and many consider, weakening) status of men in western society. Changes in the workplace and the structure of the family, the impact of feminism and gay/lesbian identity politics and the growth of a commodity capitalism aimed at men have all, to some extent, been seen as contributing towards a sense of crisis that is then projected on to the male dancer. Instead of supporting and protecting an increasingly troubled masculine status, male dancers were (and to some extent, still are) regarded as traitors.

Set against this backdrop of dance's limited appeal and cultural prejudice, is the figure of the male dancer. In a medium where women practitioners continue to predominate, however, he elicits a level of interest not experienced by female dancers. His minority status lends him a level of enigmatic visibility which may, or may not, be advantageous. Even when dancing the most romantic *pas de deux*, for example, he is far more likely to

be susceptible to questions concerning sexual identity than his female partner. If dancing alone or with another male dancer, regardless of the style or genre of the choreography, or the character he may be portraying, the level of speculation risks becoming even more pronounced. It seems that the agency of the male dancer to project his or the choreographer's ideas (whether reformist or not) beyond the footlights is little match for culture's own capacity to inscribe its own values and attitudes onto him. It remains an uneven playing field.

As evinced in all the analyses in this study, a key underlying problem with the male dancer is the friction between masculinity and 'feminising' physical spectacle. The history of men in dance, particularly during the nineteenth and twentieth century, reads as an ongoing struggle between two opposing forces. In one corner is a staid and morally defensive code that dictates that the male body should not indiscriminately be viewed as an object of pleasure. Man, according to this law, is a creature of logic, rationality and clarity. In the other corner is dance performance which, as a body-centred activity, is sensual, libidinous and a somatic distraction. Dance celebrates the beauty and the expressive capabilities of the vitalistic human form through movement and, in so doing, reaffirms a sense of physicality that, in respect to men, patriarchal ideology has consistently tried to ignore.

This ignorance has underscored the less than harmonious history of men in theatre dance. Since the beginning of the nineteenth century, he has been greeted with ridicule, moral outrage and accusations of perversity, only then to be briefly banished from the performance arena altogether and replaced by the female *en travestie* dancer. Even

when allowed to dance, he has rarely enjoyed more than a supporting role. Even with the success of the Ballets Russes and the birth of modern dance at the beginning of the twentieth century, the male dancer (except for Nijinsky and to a lesser extent, Ted Shawn) still didn't receive the same amount of work and critical acclaim that was bestowed upon female dancers. With the link between men who dance and homosexuality established during Nijinsky's brief performing career, an even more potent weapon was added to the anti-men-who-dance rhetoric; homophobia.

The battle between these two sides – patriarchal law and the male dancer – continued throughout the twentieth century. Ironically, however, negative propaganda meant to dissuade men from dancing has also inadvertently contributed to the development of some of the most exciting and provocative choreography. For example, it is almost impossible to imagine the scale and diverse nature of late-twentieth century dance practice addressing aspects of gender and sexual identity without the existence of homophobia to fuel it. Social and legal discrimination, 'queer-bashing' and the labelling of AIDS as 'the gay plague' have all, to greater or lesser extent, contributed towards a major creative backlash. This recent wave of socio-politically motivated work has, in turn, led to the 1980s 'explosion' of dance studies. Although many other transformations that occurred during the twentieth century also played a major part in the development of this new branch of academic research, it is on-stage rather than off-stage activity that can be accredited with having provided the predominant impetus.

New ideas about gender and sexual identity being articulated through dance, however, require a new and more culturally sensitive theoretical framework through which they

can be read. Existing formalist models of dance analysis provide little space for discussions of representation while those used in literary and visual arts analysis take no account of qualities particular to dance performance. As such, models were needed that could not only place dance works within a pertinent socio-historical context but could also draw upon some of the latest thinking on gender being articulated elsewhere. At the forefront of this thinking were the various branches of feminism and it is their politically motivated concerns with women's history, status and representation that has shaped and directed these new models.

Although feminist theory has been of enormous benefit to dance scholarship by giving it the same credibility as other more established arts research projects, however, it has led to a critical imbalance. Within this new field of academic study, detailed investigations into representations of masculinity are few and far between. Although the inclusion of gay/lesbian and, most recently, queer theory has provided an extra and much needed conceptual resource for dance scholars there still remains a paucity of literature devoted to the ways in which dance addresses male concerns.

This minority status, both of the male figure in dance and dance in academia lends pertinence to the study of the former in the context of the latter. Taking this as a cue, this research enquiry began by asking to what extent an investigation into the ways in which masculinity is represented in theatre dance could make a contribution to current thinking on gender. In other words, is dance visionary? By articulating aspects of Western masculine identity that problematise existing and more orthodox codes of

representation, could dance be revealed as not only a reflection of cultural attitudes about gender but also as an agent of reform?

Chapter One of this study began with a discussion of this orthodox representational code as it corresponds to the history of iconographic images of the male body. Using the figure of the Vitruvian man as a template, what was discovered was that its perfect geometric proportions were meant to demonstrate the idea that man was the embodiment of a divine law. As the apotheosis of God's creation, man was the morally incorruptible and natural heir to power. A closer inspection of this figure revealed, however, that this perfection was, in truth, achieved through a process of manipulation; a testament to the artificial mechanisms through which man has engineered his own superior status. While the Vitruvian model can be read as an example of an ongoing struggle between imperfect man and his ideal projection, however, the concept of masculinity it articulates remains highly resistant to change. As exemplified by the history of figurative art, the male body is a fortress that is meant to both exemplify and defend 'natural' masculine qualities such as strength, endurance, rationality and dominance. As suggested by early to middle twentieth century models, just as changes in the surrounding social climate threatened to undermine these qualities, so the means of self-defence increased to the point where, as in the image of Humphrey Bogart, the male body itself almost disappears under its own symbolic weight. As also implied by the nude model sporting an erection, the struggle to portray man as phallic champion can sometimes render all other aspects of identity invisible.

Exploiting this object/subject dynamic, the last part of Chapter One presented an investigation of the extent to which late twentieth century photographic artwork can be read as deconstructing the mechanisms through which male models are able to retain power while being objects of the gaze. What was found was that the association between the male body and the concept of phallic masculinity was so deeply embedded in the history of visual art that it could only be problematised by adopting extremist measures; fragmentation, decapitation and even the omission of the body itself from the frame.

Having determined a useful concept of what is widely held as normative masculinity, the visual mechanisms through which it is articulated and the means through which it can be problematised, this study then presented a discussion of dance texts. Key to this second chapter was the extent to which qualities unique to dance impact upon this normative masculine code and how this has been addressed in the literature. Continuing a chronological agenda that was established in the previous chapter, it began with an examination of ballet historiography. That the same preoccupation with promoting certain qualities evinced in regards to visual imagery was also found in the rhetoric used to describe male ballet dancers was less surprising than the way any connection between men in dance and anything that might undermine their natural 'heroic' status was avoided. As such, there is no reference made to eroticism or sensuality while homosexuality (the ultimate form of deviance) is relegated to 'off-stage' activity. According to this historiographical literature, even in dance, the male body is an unproblematic icon that both exemplifies and celebrates normative masculine values.

The development of dance scholarship in the late twentieth century, however, witnessed a dramatic break from the narrow purview of this idealistic rhetoric. This provided a new space wherein dance's agency to articulate hitherto disregarded aspects, dimensions and differences in masculinity could be investigated. While the adoption of frameworks that posit dance within the terrain of some of the most recent thinking about identity and its representation contributed towards helping the study of dance catch up with other more established branches of arts analysis, there was an unfortunate consequence of this new agenda. This was the development of a hierarchical approach to reading different dance forms.

Placed on the top rung of this ladder were *avant-garde* works that were both charged with and judged according to how well they coped with the remedial task of questioning the way dance traditionally represents gender. On the bottom rung was the 'unsound' and institutionalised classical ballet tradition; the vanguard of antiquated and paternalistic attitudes concerning gender. As such, and according to much of the early dance scholarship literature, Classical ballet man is read as Vitruvian in essence: muscular, virile, controlling and unproblematic. The only difference is that, these 'masterful' qualities, so celebrated in earlier historiographical literature are now criticised, with the male ballet dancer conceptualised as symbolic of the unequal ways through which power is distributed between the genders in the wider cultural arena. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, the problem lies less with the male dancer himself, but rather the politically motivated agendas through which he has often been read. While early dance scholarship's essentialist construction of the male ballet dancer was deemed necessary to a predominantly feminist concern with

addressing women's involvement in dance, it has done little to improve our understanding of him.

The rapid development and sophistication of dance scholarship has, however, replaced much of this initial elitism with a more sensitive and unbiased approach. As discussed in Chapter Three, key to this was a shift away from how dance works exemplify generic, historical and narrative codes and towards closer inspections of how these codes modulate and develop according to qualities unique to individual works. Furthermore, this technique was enhanced and supported by dance scholarship's ability to incorporate ideas from an ever-widening disciplinary spectrum to the point where it was possible to read dance works through any number of different theoretical perspectives. Fearing that, in the midst of all this activity, dance itself may be lost, an important condition was added in that, in the process of analysis, the dance work itself must take priority as agent of meaning and be the prime stimulus in deciding the most appropriate theoretical 'lens' or 'lenses' through which it should be read.

As evinced in Chapter Two of this study, much of the extant literature to have come out of the recent 'explosion' of dance studies has been concerned with discussions of women's involvement. This trend is reflected in the predominantly feminist-led rhetoric being employed in their analytical models. This study recognises the valuable contribution that feminist thinking has made (and continues to make), particularly in terms of revealing the complex, uneven and previously unacknowledged ways in which dance organises the distribution of power between the genders. It was also

argued, however, that these political motivated agendas might direct the ways in which models of masculinity are conceptualised and thus overlook other key aspects of male identity. As such, in Chapter Three, an examination of how masculine concerns are being addressed in other, non-dance, areas of critical thinking was undertaken in order to discover to what extent they might contribute to the formulation of a gender framework orientated towards the study of men in dance.

Among the major concerns discussed in Chapter Three were: the relationship between gender and sexuality; the 'crisis' in masculinity; the law of the phallus; homosexuality; abjection; and queer identities. Not only did this part of the enquiry contribute towards providing a useful psychological, historical and linguistic background to the visual codes through which normative masculinity is articulated, but many of the findings also suggested the possible means through which this model might be problematised.

For example, many theorists believe that, due to progressive changes in twentieth century cultural practice, the 'natural' link between gender and sexuality has been unravelled. In particular, the investigation into gay/lesbian thought highlighted the impossibility of differentiating between the 'butch' heterosexual and 'effeminate' homosexual man in the present climate of straight male narcissism and gay machismo. This deconstruction of archetypal codes of behaviour and representation is taken a step further under the rubric of queer theorists who contend that more attention should be given to how identities change according to different socio-historical circumstances. Rather than continuing to try and read sexuality according to

static dyadic codes, they advocate a more fluid and improvisational approach that pays attention to differences within as well as between forms of identity.

Having investigated how various different areas of critical thinking conceptualise masculinity and how these could contribute to readings of the male body in dance, the next part of this study addressed historical factors. In particular, the purpose of Chapters Four and Five was to explore the extent to which theoretical findings might help to problematise many of the widely held assumptions about the history of men in dance by revealing aspects of their legacy that more traditional historiography has tended to overlook. Focusing on individual male roles in both ballet and other theatre dance forms, attention was paid to both performance elements (choreography, costume, narrative) and relevant socio-historical factors. This strategy not only demonstrated that the history of the male dancer could be traced according to the twin forces of innovation and controversy, but that the division between institutionalised ballet and reformist *avant-garde* practice is misleading and unhelpful.

Supported by a pertinent theoretical and historical framework, five dance works were read in Part Three of this study. Using the argument that dance can be read 'against the grain and provide 'alternative models of masculinity in contemporary dance', the first two works examined are re-workings of classical ballet narratives in which the most notable changes are the replacement of the original choreography with a more contemporary movement vocabulary and the use of role-reversal. While Mark Morris's *The Hard Nut* presents both men and women performing *en travestie* and an androgynous chorus, Matthew Bourne's *Swan Lake* places a man in the role of the

swan who is then supported by an all male *corps*. As a consequence, how the combination of these two factors (movement import and gender inversion) could be read as being disruptive of the way dance conventionally represents gender directed both analyses.

While it was argued that specific instances in the performances problematised normative codes of masculinity, these were safely contained in a narrative structure that concludes by supporting a heterosexist gender ideology. In respect to the aims of this study, this was a less than satisfactory result. It did, however, indicate the direction a more successful subversive agenda might take. Rather than 'playing' with orthodox codes of representation, would not a greater impact be achieved by questioning the cultural institutions of power that determine and regulate these codes?

This question is potentially addressed by the two dance works discussed in Chapter Seven; Pina Bausch's *Nelken* and DV8's *Enter Achilles*. Both works explore the links between masculinity and authority, whether in the ways in which 'faceless' institutions of paternalistic power govern social behaviour, as in *Nelken*, or how peer-group pressure is used by men as a means to regulate and maintain their own superior status, as in *Enter Achilles*. Set against these two dystopian backdrops are individuals who, because they articulate non-conformist attitudes, are punished either by being stripped of their social identity or ostracised from the group dynamic. These choreographic demonstrations of rebelliousness are also set within the context of works that challenge dance performance conventions through the use of speech,

song, aerial acrobatics and stunt-work. This notion of the form reflecting the content was considered a key factor in the dance work's agency to problematise normalising gender codes.

The Hard Nut and *Swan Lake*, it was claimed, seem primarily concerned with disguise, whether it is by masking true gender identity or hiding same-sex desire behind a sham arranged marriage. *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles*, in contrast, are occupied with the business of exposure. These two works strip away the protective outer layers of social conformity and explore the idiosyncratic phobias, secret desires and obsessions that lie just beneath the surface. Gender identity is revealed as nothing more than a set of imposed and socially constructed behavioural codes that serve and protect the status quo.

Even within the Eden-like performance space of *Nelken* the final gesture towards a new and more sensitive communal sense of identity seems as fragile as the flowers that lie broken beneath the dancer's feet. Indeed, in the harsh urban terrain of *Enter Achilles* similar articulations of compassion or care are ultimately crushed under the heel of graphically violent displays of depravity. In both works, masculinity symbolises everything that is wrong with contemporary Western society; it is the enemy of expressive freedom and individuality. It is a seemingly irresistible will to power that, whether manifested as authoritarianism or homophobia, the rule of law or the mob, preys upon the weak and the different.

The Hard Nut and *Swan Lake* question the visual and gestural codes through which gender difference is defined while *Nelken* and *Enter Achilles* challenge the institutions of power through which masculinity gains strength. Regardless of the subversive methods employed in these works, however, in the end orthodox masculine values remain unproblematised. Is this possibly because, for all their disruptive tactics, they all fail to identify and hence tackle the symbolic essence of normative masculinity; the phallus?

Javier de Frutos's *Transatlantic* is a complex and paradoxical mix of nudity and gender ambiguity, masochism and tender sensuality, and intimacy and alienation. Moreover, unlike all the other works discussed in this study it is a solo piece performed on a small scale. Read through the lens of queer reformist thinking, it was asked to what extent *Transatlantic's* agenda of disempowerment through exposure and movement import was better able to articulate a 'visionary' model of masculine identity than the dance works previously discussed.

An answer to this might be found by returning to some of the visual evidence discussed in the last part of Chapter One. With more immediacy and insight than can be found in recent theoretical excursions into gender representation, perhaps, late twentieth century photographers of the body have sought to completely overturn everything that the male figure has traditionally symbolised. To this end, extreme measures such as fragmentation, decapitation, reference to 'perverse' sexual practices, extreme close-up and a de-emphasis of phallic properties such as musculature and athleticism have been employed. These static and two-dimensional

figurative concepts are, in *Transatlantic*, transcribed on to a dynamic and three-dimensional human body.

This use of other visual arts media as an analytic stimulus does not necessarily forecast the redundancy of theoretical models in dance analysis. Rather, it acts as a much needed reminder of the importance of the body as agent of meaning in otherwise 'abstract' conceptual methodologies. Whatever the medium, it is the material body's own resistance that stops it from being reduced to metaphor; a crucial factor in recent dance scholarship where increasingly complex theoretical models of gender are being introduced.

At the beginning of this study it was proposed that dance performance, more than any other art form, could be considered the ideal platform for the articulation of representations of masculinity that go 'against the grain' of orthodox models. It was also suggested that dance was 'visionary', in that the non-conformist images of masculinity it expresses could be read as a means towards a more reformist understanding of gender and sexual identity. In other words, could dance bring about some level of cultural enlightenment?

A cynical response to this aspiration might be that this is too much to expect and that a more modest claim on behalf of dance's agency would stand a greater chance of critical success. To 'play safe' in this way, however, is to give way to pessimism whereas a more ambitious enterprise such as the one undertaken in this study has demonstrated that, although there remains a disproportionate number of dance works

that support and celebrate traditional gender codes, some whilst seeming to transgress them, there are also signs that this is changing. For example, all of the practitioners discussed in Part Three of this study are still working. As they, and others, continue to produce new works that push back the boundaries of theatre dance practice, the opportunity for further debate will persist as dance presents models of masculinity that go 'against the grain.'

¹ The film *Billy Elliot* (2000) tells of a young boy who discovers both a love and a talent for dance. Overcoming both the stigma of being the only boy in the ballet class and his own father's initial adversity, he gains a place at the Royal Ballet School and eventual triumph as a solo performer. The high-profile success of this film has not directly resulted in a sudden increase in the number of boys taking up dance as a career but, by providing a positive role-model, it does help to dispel much of the misunderstanding and prejudice that surrounds men who dance.

APPENDIX.

The Hard Nut synopsis.

Act I.

It is Christmas Eve in the Stahlbaum household and the parents are preparing to receive their party guests. The scene opens with the three children, Marie, her younger brother Fritz and elder sister Louise watching the television in the den. Realising that they are missing out on the fun going on in the next room they make several attempts to get out but find their escape route blocked by the Housekeeper. The scene changes to the front room. It is nine o'clock and nearly time for the guests to arrive. The tree is wheeled in and lit and presents are exchanged, while the Housekeeper brings the television through from the other room and switches it on to show a picture of a blazing log fire. Guests arrive and the party quickly gets under way.

One of the guests is Marie's uncle Drosselmeyer. He brings two huge parcels that contain a life-size remote-controlled doll for Louise and robot for Fritz. His gift for Marie is a nutcracker carved in the shape of a young man. Jealous of Marie's beautiful toy, Fritz steals it and in the ensuing fight the handle is broken off, only to be hastily repaired by Marie. As the party finishes and guests depart, Drosselmeyer, the last to leave, turns the hands of the clock to midnight.

Unable to sleep, Marie and her brother come back to the front room and their earlier fight continues. Marie wins and Fritz runs off. As the clock strikes the hour a gradual metamorphosis takes place and she shrinks to the size of the nutcracker toy. Suddenly, a horde of rats appear from under the sofa and attack some toy American GI soldiers who have emerged from under the tree. Led by the now animate Nutcracker, the battle escalates until he succeeds in chopping off two of the three heads of the Rat King. In the ensuing panic Marie throws her slipper at the rat and finally kills him. She faints. Drosselmeyer reappears and dances with the Nutcracker who has transformed into Drosselmeyer's handsome young nephew. After their duet they carry the still prone Marie onto the sofa and wheel it off.

Act II.

The curtain rises to reveal Marie now recovering from the battle and lying on the sofa. Drosselmeyer arrives and, to comfort his patient, tells her the story of Princess Perlipat. The scene changes to the action of Drosselmeyer's story when the princess's nanny (played by the Housekeeper) appears pushing large pram. While she is playing with the baby, Maria's parents enter in the guise of the King and Queen. Finally getting the baby to sleep they begin to sneak off but the Queen suddenly spies some rats and she and the King shoo them away. Relieved that the baby is now safe, the Royal couple departs and the nanny falls asleep. The rats, led by the Rat Queen, re-enter, climb into the pram and bite the baby. Alerted by the histrionics of the nanny, the King, Queen and Drosselmeyer return to hear from the rats how the disfiguring curse may be lifted.

Drosselmeyer ordered by the household to search for a young man who can break the spell, travels around the world but with no success. Time runs out and he returns to the Kingdom empty-handed. Several local men attempt to break open the nut with their teeth only to fail. Only Drosselmeyer's own nephew manages to break open the nut but in the ensuing excitement accidentally kills the Rat Queen. As a punishment he is doomed to disfigurement and adroitly rejected by the now beautiful Princess (Marie's sister, Louise). Marie intervenes to save the young man by offering her hand instead. The Queen is joined by a chorus of flowers to dance her happiness at her (step) daughter's coming of age.

In the final scene, Louise and Fritz are back in the den now watching Marie on the television being kissed by the Nutcracker. The Housekeeper re-enters and ushers the children to bed.

***Swan Lake synopsis.*¹**

Prologue.

The performance begins with the young Prince asleep in the Royal bedroom. Above him, an image of a swan appears in the window.² Traumatized by this vision he wakes up and seeks comfort from his mother, the Queen. She rejects his plea for solace and leaves.

Act I.

The household staff prepares the Prince for his official duties. During the performance of ceremonial duties the Prince transforms from boy to man. This act also introduces the Prince's fiancée who, after causing an embarrassing scene at the theatre, runs off. The Prince follows her to a club, where he gets involved in a drunken brawl and is thrown out.

Act II.

The Prince ends up in a park where he decides to drown himself in the lake. He is stopped in his tracks by a swan. Diverted from his mission, he spends the rest of the evening with the swan and his flock.

Act III.

A Ball has been arranged by the Queen as a way of introducing the Prince to more suitable women. During the proceedings, a dark stranger arrives, whom the Prince seems to recognise. This stranger dances with all the women at the ball including the Queen and the fiancée. Later, the Prince and the stranger are alone and, in the semidarkness, dance an intimate duet.

As the lights come up the other guests reappear. The stranger reveals his identity by daubing his forehead with cigarette ash. The Prince tries to embrace him but is rejected. Panicking, the Prince draws a gun, there is a scuffle and the Prince's fiancée is shot.

Act IV.

The Prince, once again in the Royal bedroom, is visited by a Doctor who administers an injection before departing. The Swan appears from under the pillows and they embrace. The other swans arrive and there is fight which results in the lead swan being destroyed.

The lifeless body of the Prince is discovered by the Queen. Her efforts to rouse him are unsuccessful while in the window an image of the Swan carrying the young Prince appears.

¹ This version of events is based upon the live performance and film evidence. A more detailed (and slightly different) synopsis can be found in the leaflet that accompanies the video.

² Opinions differ as to whether it is a window or a mirror above the bed. As the analysis argues, this ambiguity impacts upon how the Swan is interpreted.

List of illustrations.

Fig.

1. *Vitruvian Man*, da Vinci (1487), p.21.
2. *Como Vitruvius*, Cesarino (1521), p.22.
3. *The Watering Hole* (1883), Thomas Eakins, p.30.
4. Original photograph used as basis for *The Watering Hole*, Thomas Eakins, p.31.
5. Unknown model from US magazine 'Blueboy', courtesy of Dyer in *Screen* 23:3-4, Sept/Oct 1982, p.38.
6. Humphrey Bogart, photographed by Warner, courtesy of Dyer in *Screen* 23:3-4, Sept/Oct 1982, p.39.
7. Louis XIV as le Roi Soleil in *Le Ballet de la Nuit* 1653, taken from Jonas 1992, p.133.
8. Erik Bruhn as James in *La Sylphide*, photographed by Martha Swope, taken from Terry (1978), p.140.
9. Vaslav Nijinsky as the Faune in *L'Après midi d'un faune*, courtesy of Dance Collection, the New York Public Library at Lincoln Centre, Library and Museum of Performing Arts, taken from Bland and Percival (1984), p.146.

VIDEOGRAPHY.

Enter Achilles, choreographed by Lloyd Newson for DV8, music by Adrian Johnston, 1995: televised version directed by Clara van Gool, 1995.

L'Après midi d'un faune, 1973, choreographed and danced by Nijinsky, Dance Films Archivio: an approximate reconstruction of the original ballet choreographed and performed by Nijinsky in 1912 using still photographs and drawings and set to the music by Debussy.

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The Hard Nut, choreographed by Mark Morris, 1991: televised version.

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