

**A FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALIST EXAMINATION  
AROUND THE UTILISATION OF THE BODY AS A  
CONTESTED SITE OF STRUGGLE FOR MEANING IN  
CONTEMPORARY THEATRE DANCE IN SOUTH  
AFRICA**

**By  
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**Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts (Coursework) in the Drama and Performance Studies  
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## DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work unless specifically referenced within the text. It is being submitted for the Degree of Master of Arts (Coursework) in the Faculty of Humanities, University of Natal, Durban.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarahleigh Castelyn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, circular initial 'S'.

Sarahleigh Castelyn

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This thesis is dedicated to the late Harold Castelyn and Kate Willy.

## **ABSTRACT**

Using a framework of feminism and poststructuralism, this thesis aims to interrogate the utilisation of the body as a contested site of struggle for meaning in contemporary theatre dance in South Africa. "Both feminism, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern for the body" (Brown, 1983: 198). A feminist analysis of dance can offer a tool to interrogate the dominant discourses of gender and race that surround and permeate both the female and male body in contemporary theatre dance. The body is not a neutral site onto which cultural codes and conventions are inscribed, as the dancer's body is always marked in the physical sense of gender and race. This thesis aims to decode the body and examine how the discourses of gender and race are embodied by the moving body on stage - specifically in the South African (KwaZulu-Natal) context.

By a feminist appropriation of the poststructural endeavour, this research will look at how the body, as discourse, can be interrogated to examine how the interconnected discourses of gender and race surround and permeate the moving body. The utilisation of a poststructural paradigm will aid in the examination of how the dominant discourses of gender and race are hegemonically imposed onto the body. Poststructuralism also offers an understanding that there exist counter-discourses that have the ability to resist the dominant discourses of gender and race. This notion becomes important to the study of contemporary theatre dance as an art form. This thesis will examine how South African (Durban-based) contemporary theatre dance choreographers explore the body's potential to be subversive in performance. The thesis will focus on the body's ability to interrogate the discourses that operate in its surroundings and permeate its lived reality.

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## **INTRODUCTION.**

Adrienne Sichel, *The Stats*<sup>1</sup> dance critic, on the opening of the KwaZulu-Natal 1998 JOMBA! Dance Festival at The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre stated that there is an "absence of fully-fledged academic dance faculties as recent as 1997" (1998: 1). Dance needs to be rendered as an academic discipline as there exists a lack of South African academic interrogation into contemporary theatre dance, specifically in the South African context. This thesis aims at offering some academic discourse around South African dance history in an attempt to address the lack of interrogation of these issues within tertiary institutions.

In South Africa, the moving body has been marginalised from academic investigation. There needs to be an attempt made to examine how the body exists in, and is permeated by, the discourses of race and gender that surround and intersect with the body in society, and how this has affected the body on stage. The term 'moving body' is a reference to the body in dance and the discourses that surround it as it moves on stage. The movement of the body deconstructs the passivity of the body and constitutes it as an active agent in the discursive field. Selected contemporary theatre dance choreographers utilise the active status of the moving body to interrogate the construction of the body in society. An investigation into how the choreographers in South African contemporary theatre dance and a critique of their works they have produced, will reveal the discourses operating in South Africa, and how they have affected the body. Adrienne Sichel stated further that "Dancing bodies not only reflect the way things are. They also have the potential to effect change" (1998: 1). Thus, an academic investigation into the moving body on stage will hopefully provide some discussion into how South Africans can break the limitations of the constructs of gender and race.

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<sup>1</sup> Johannesburg daily newspaper.

Using a framework of feminism and its appropriation of poststructuralism, this thesis aims to interrogate the utilisation of the body as a contested site of struggle for meaning in contemporary theatre dance in South Africa. "Both feminism, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern for the body" (Brown, 1994: 198). Feminist media studies (Kuhn, 1985) has mainly concerned itself with issues surrounding the reception and construction of the female body, and attempted to deconstruct the cultural constructions of gendered movements. However, Brown (1983) states that dance has been largely ignored by feminist studies and likewise dance studies has to some extent ignored feminist analysis despite the existence of a majority of female dance practitioners (198).

Among all the arts in western culture, dance may have the most to gain from feminist analysis. Certainly the two are highly compatible. Dance is an art form of the body, and the body is where gender distinctions are generally understood to originate. (Daly, 1991: 2).

Dance utilises the body as the medium of expression. Dancer's bodies, through constructed movements choreographed by the choreographer, convey the choreographer's intention and are instruments through which the choreographer communicates a message or an intention to the audience. A feminist analysis of dance can offer a way of interrogating the dominant discourses of gender and race that surround and permeate both the female and male body in dance. However, the body is not a neutral site onto which cultural codes and conventions are inscribed. Loots states in her article "Colonised Bodies: Overcoming Gender Constructions of Bodies in Dance and Movement Education in South Africa" (1995) that "the body and its uses are not neutral but carry social constructions which are connected to gendered conditions of use and reception" (53). Thus the dancer's body is always marked in the physical sense of gender, and for the purpose of this thesis, race. There is a need to examine how the discourses in operation in society, for example, gender and race, have constituted the moving body on stage.

Feminists have appropriated Foucault's poststructural endeavor around the body as a site of struggle (see for example, Weedon, 1997) as it offers an understanding of the construction and reception of the body (say female), and offers the notion of the body's ability to resist the dominant discourses that surround and permeate it. Feminism can offer an examination into and focus on the moving body of both men and women. Feminism's appropriation of poststructuralism can offer a method to concentrate on the actual physical flesh of the lived-in body and how the discourses operating in society affect the embodied flesh.

Representations in dance might therefore be seen as ideologically produced and historically and socially situated. (Butt, 1995: 31).

Therefore a feminist appropriation of poststructuralism can offer a method to deconstruct and interrogate the discourses and power operations that affect and are reflected in the codes and conventions of dance and its instrument the body.

In *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1. An Introduction* (1976) Foucault interrogated the body as a site of struggle in the discourse of sexuality where he attempted to "show how deployments of power are directly connected to the body - to bodies, functions, physiological processes, sensations, and pleasures" (151). While Foucault articulated the body as a site of struggle for meaning and power, he did not, however, interrogate that the discourses operating in and through the female body are, or will, be different to those operating on the male body, and, by appropriation for this thesis, the black and white body. What Foucault neglected is the feminist challenge to poststructural thinking; that is, how gender affects and effects the discourses operating through or around the body. By a feminist appropriation of the poststructural endeavor, this research will look at how the body, as discourse, can be interrogated to examine how the interconnected discourses of gender and race surround and permeate the moving body. The utilisation of a

poststructural paradigm will aid in the examination of how race and gender are constituted, and are imposed onto the body through hegemonic operations. Poststructuralism also offers an understanding that there exist counter-discourses that have the ability to resist the dominant discourses in society. This notion becomes important to the study of contemporary theatre dance as the art form according to *The Star's* dance critic Adrienne Sichel, has "potential to effect change" (1998: 1). Contemporary theatre dance explores the body's potential to be subversive and its ability to interrogate the ideologies that operate in its surroundings and permeate its lived reality.

In the first chapter; *A feminist appropriation of poststructuralism as a tool for analysing the moving body in contemporary theatre dance*, the relevance (and tensions) of feminism and poststructuralism will be examined. The appropriation of these two paradigms or philosophies will be employed to interrogate the discourses that surround and permeate the body (and in this instance, the moving performing body). This chapter will also interrogate how the moving body in contemporary theatre dance is surrounded and permeated by discourses on stage and what affect these discourses have on the representation of the moving body on stage. The chapter will also examine how the moving body in dance is used to comment on or to interrogate the discourses that are operating in society.

The second chapter is titled *An interrogation of the discourses operating in selected contemporary theatre dance in the United States of America and Britain and how these discourses affect (and effect) the moving body in contemporary theatre dance*. This chapter will consist of an inquiry into selected contemporary American and British choreographers and their manipulation or utilisation of the moving body in their dance works. This will be done to set up a comparative framework for discussion of local South African dance practitioners or choreographers.

*Interrogating the utilisation of the body in the following South African (Durban-based) choreographers' dance works: Jay Pather, Lliane Loots and David Gouldie* is the title of the third chapter. The feminist poststructuralist framework is employed to analyse the choreographers utilisation of the moving body, in their respective dance works, to either comment on or to interrogate the discourses of gender and race that surround and permeate the moving body.

The final concluding chapter will interrogate the notion that contemporary theatre dance could offer possible solutions or methods that would allow the physical body the ability to resist the dominant discourses that constantly surround and permeate it.

Feminism and poststructuralism can offer a conceptual framework to interrogate dance history and the discourses operating at that particular historical context. The theories can offer an explanation into how the body on stage becomes permeated by the discourses in operation, and a means to resist (in terms of counter-practice) the constitutions of gender and race. Contemporary theatre dance might offer the body a place of resistance to the dominant discourses in operation (in South Africa).

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **A feminist appropriation of poststructuralism as a tool for analysing the moving body in contemporary theatre dance**

In order to position this, the chapter will deal with the following; firstly, feminism and its concern with the body. Secondly, with feminism and its concern with the moving female body in contemporary theatre dance. This particular section will highlight aspects of feminism and its relationship to, and concern with, the moving body in dance. Following this section will be a feminist appropriation of poststructuralism in relation to the moving body. The relevance and tensions between these two paradigms, and their relationship to the moving body, is explored in this section. The third section of this chapter will deal with the definition and development of western contemporary theatre dance. This section will function as a background for the following chapter's interrogation of selected American and British contemporary choreographers' utilisation of the body as a contested site of struggle.

#### **a. Feminism and its concern with the body**

The term feminism is a political word encompassing a variety of categories of feminist theory and practice that wield different foci. Chris Weedon in her book *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* (1997) describes feminism ) as a politics that is "directed at changing existing power relations between ;j women and men in society" (1). Women's biological difference from men has resulted and determined the sociological differences in the roles and positions

offered to women in society.

Patriarchal power rests on the social meanings given to biological sexual difference. In patriarchal discourse, the nature and social role of women are defined in relation to a norm, which is man. (Weedon, 1997: 2).

Although feminism has concerned itself with issues surrounding the female body, it seldom interrogates the actual physical flesh of the female body. This thesis combines Foucault's siting of the body as discourse and feminism's analysis of the body in dance to interrogate how the discourses of gender and race embody the body on stage. The physical body is the primary site of intersection with, and permeation of, the discourses in operation in society, for example, gender and race. The physical body is constructed through and by its interaction with various discourses, and it is this construction and interaction that affects the manner in which the body interacts with society. It is above all, the female body, which is the instrument through which society's standards of property, appearance, and behavior are expressed. These societal standards of property, appearance, and behavior are the physical ramifications and effects of the discourses of gender, race, class, and culture that permeate the actual physical flesh of the female body. The intersection of biological and social factors creates a unique system of oppression for each woman, and it is the actual physical flesh of the female body that first comes into interaction with the discourses of gender and race.

Formerly, the body was dominantly conceptualized as a fixed, unitary, primarily biological reality. Today, more and more scholars have come to regard the body as a historical, plural, culturally mediated form. (Bordo, 1989: 166).

From this perspective, the body is not a neutral surface. It cannot simply be reduced to a biological form. Rather it is historically and socially positioned

primarily because of its sex and race, which immediately biologically marks the body as it enters the world. The body is the core and primary site of social experience. The body is constructed through the discourses<sup>2</sup> that it comes into operation with, such as the discourses of gender and race.<sup>3</sup> To understand the body, there needs to be an understanding of who owns and 'controls' the body in every aspect of human life; the body at work, at home and in play. Connell in *Masculinities* (1995) states that "bodily experience is often central in memories of our lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are" (52). There needs to be an examination of the discourses that are embodied in the physical flesh. It is through the body that people make contact with their surroundings and thus the body becomes a primary site of social experience (and struggle).

## **b. Feminism and its concern with the moving body in western contemporary theatre dance**

Western contemporary theatre dance uses the body as a medium of expression. Dancer's bodies, through the utilisation of constructed movements created by the choreographer, convey and communicate the choreographer's

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<sup>2</sup> Discourses are ways of constituting knowledge to examine power relations. They articulate and construct subjects and have institutional bases in society, for example through religion (church) or educational systems (schools). The subject is positioned in society through a range of discourses and the subject defines her/himself in relation to the discourses that are in operation. The subject is the product of a range of discourses and has a specific relationship and experience through the discourses. Discourses are historically specific and therefore are not static. Each particular discourse has a variety of subject positions, which are in a constant state of competition. This competition amongst the variety of subject positions of the discourse entails that there exists reverse or counter-discourse(s) to that particular discourse. For instance, discourses pre-exist the subject's birth; if the subject is born into the body of a woman, she is hegemonically impelled to take on certain discourses but she is not compelled to.

<sup>3</sup> This thesis does recognise that there are other discourses that permeate and affect the body, for instance, culture, sexuality, and nationality. However, this thesis will only be dealing with the discourses of gender and race.

intention or message to the audience.<sup>4</sup> The movement of the body (and bodies) is utilised to convey emotion, characters, narrative, and form to the audience. By employing feminism as a method to study dance (and in terms of this thesis, western contemporary theatre dance), one is able to deconstruct the female body of the dancer and her role offered in dance at a specific historical moment. An example of this would be the 'romantic ballerina' of the 1820's who was dressed in a tutu which was arranged to present her legs (and her underwear) to the audience specifically for the voyeuristic pleasure of the 'male gaze'.<sup>5</sup> By contrasting a contemporary theatre dance pioneer, for example, the American Isadora Duncan<sup>6</sup>, with the 'romantic ballerina', it is evident how revolutionary Isadora Duncan was by dancing barefoot in free-flowing garments instead of a tutu and pointe shoes.

once declared that her art was "symbolic of the freedom of woman and her emancipation from the hidebound conventions that are the warp and woof of New England's Puritanism". (Copeland, 1990: 8).

Duncan actively broke the codes and conventions that surrounded her as a female dancer in the 1920's. Isadora Duncan rejected the classical ballet's vocabulary and narrative style, and the roles that the dance form offered to female dancers. Instead, she experimented with her own response to her environment, expressing this through movement and dance. Duncan in 1928 stated that:

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<sup>4</sup> This thesis will also attempt to show how in some cases dance can be employed as an artistic tool to question the patriarchal (heterosexual structures) and discourses that are in operation in society. Dance can interrogate stereotypes and roles offered to women (and men) in society.

<sup>5</sup> The 'male gaze' will be dealt with in detail later in this chapter of this thesis. Performance theory has appropriated Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze' in film as many theatre and dance works are also based on the narrative paradigm that relies on the presence of opposing genders and the communication that takes place between them. Mulvey adopts Freud's scopophilic instinct where one subject looks at another as an erotic object. See Mulvey, L. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema." In *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3.

<sup>6</sup> Isadora Duncan and other dance practitioners will be dealt with later in this chapter of this thesis. With hindsight, Duncan occupies an essentialist feminist position, yet in her historical context, she was revolutionary in her response to society's codes and conventions.

the dancer of the future...will dance not in the form of nymph, nor fairy, nor coquette, but in the form of woman in her greatest and purest expression. She will realize the mission of woman's body and the holiness of all its parts (Cohen, 1974:129).

Classical/Romantic Ballet as the dominant western performance dance form, clearly demonstrated how the female form has been manipulated into the "bearer and object of male desire" (Brown, 1994: 204). With the influence of the Second Wave of Feminism in the 1960's, contemporary theatre dance practitioners began to deconstruct the gender stereotypes and the gendered definitions of movement in dance and especially, the cultural inscriptions that were imposed onto the female form. According to Brown (1994: 198):

Both feminism, as a politics, and dance, as a cultural practice, share a concern for the female body. For feminists the body is understood as the primary site of social production and inscription, whereas for dance it is its capacity for movement which is the central concern.

On the stage, the female physical body is encoded with meaning and cultural practices. Marianne Goldberg (who positions herself as a radical feminist) argues that the physicality of the body is organised into:

an opposition of so-called 'masculine' and 'feminine' movement choices which are social and artistic conventions rather than physical or biological fact. The body is constructed through discourse. (1987/88: 8).

Marianne Goldberg rejects that there exists an essential female movement or feminine gestural pattern of movement. With the employment of her own image in the article, she interrogates the construction of feminine and masculine movements. Goldberg states that the body can "lie as easily as the word" (1987/88: 9). This statement conveys the belief that the body is not a

neutral or passive site on which cultural impositions are made, rather it is the focal point which displays the intersection of discourses, power operations and cultural practices, for example race and sexual identity.

Gendered definitions of movement are inscribed onto physical bodies from a subject's first interaction with their surrounding environment. These cultural constructs are employed in narrative dance, like classical ballet, to allow the narrative continuation. Goldberg stresses that:

Without the polarities of masculine and feminine movements, the conventional dance narratives could not progress. To maintain these narratives, the woman's body serves as a spectacle, arranged and displayed frontally in open, vulnerable positions (1987/88: 12).

These feminine and masculine movements, specifically in classical and romantic ballet, limit the dancer in experimenting with new and inventive ways to move. By deconstructing the body of movements that are gender defined, movement vocabularies can allow for experimentation and the formation of new dance languages.<sup>7</sup>

Performance theory<sup>8</sup> has appropriated Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze', which she utilised as a method in interrogating the relationship between the viewing audience and film.<sup>9</sup> An example of this method in interrogating the relationship between viewer and performance can be employed in classical/romantic ballet, whereby the 'male gaze' is constructed when the audience member (who is both assumed and constructed to be

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<sup>7</sup> The Judson Dance Theatre, who formed in 1963, profoundly challenged gendered movement vocabularies. The Judson Dance Theatre will be dealt with in the following chapter of this thesis.

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Goldberg, M. 1987/88. "Ballerinas and Ball Passing". In *Women and Performance -A Journal of Feminist Theory*, Vol. 3, No. 2.

<sup>9</sup> See Mulvey, L. 1975. "Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema". In *Screen*, Vol. 16, No. 3.

male<sup>10</sup>) is invited to identify with the male protagonist or lead dancer's desire for the female character or dancer.<sup>11</sup> The female form is objectified due to either the costuming of the female body, or the choreographic structure such as narrative paradigm or the movement vocabulary. Through the connection between the audience member and the male protagonist, the audience member also objectifies the female performer.

The male ballet dancer does not acknowledge that he is being watched and constantly views the female ballet dancer as object to be owned within the narrative structure. This strengthens the identification process between the male ballet dancer and the audience member. Male ballet dancers appear powerful on stage and perform the convention of masculine movements involving spectacular displays of skill. This is to ensure that the male form is less objectified and not rendered as a passive object on the stage. The male dancer's role in the dance (mainly in classical/romantic ballet) and his masculine movements are constructed as active and technically powerful in order to portray (western) cultural constructions of masculinity. The various cultural codes and conventions that operate in dance forms such as classical/romantic ballet support the construction of both hegemonic

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<sup>10</sup> The audience are constructed as male, as the erotic objectification of the male body in dance would allow a homoerotic viewing of the male body, which is a threat to the dominant heterosexual patriarchal society. Another connection to this association could be that the male heterosexual audience member actively constructs the male dancer as powerful and an active agent to ensure that no homoerotic spectatorship will occur.

<sup>11</sup> Ballet as a dance form has shifted, whereby contemporary ballet practitioners have challenged ballet's rigid technique and vocabulary. Contemporary ballet is flexible in form and content, and in some cases such as Mathew Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995), the gender-specific roles have been subverted in that the role of the swans are danced by male ballerinas. Ballet offers contemporary dance a structured technique to utilise as a form of training for dancers and a vocabulary for contemporary dance choreographers to select from or reject when creating dance works.

masculinity and hegemonic femininity.<sup>12</sup> These cultural codes and conventions are not stagnant, but shift to ensure the maintenance of the active role of the male ballet dancer, the passive role of the female ballet dancer and the dominance of hegemony in relation to hegemonic masculinity or patriarchal power relations.<sup>13</sup>

The 'male gaze' constructs the female body as a cultural commodity to be consumed by the audience member as his object of desire. (Though the audience member can own the right to look at the female ballet dancer, he cannot touch her. Constructed as 'other', the complete possession of the female ballet dancer as (sexual) object is constantly deferred and rendered inaccessible). Thus, the audience member derives pleasure from watching her as an erotic object. According to Brown, the female ballet dancer is the "bearer and object of male desire" (1994: 203). The female classical/romantic ballet dancer is denied a voice through which to speak out against her objectification and is limited by her feminine movements so as not to disrupt the "safe fantasizing of the male voyeur" (Brown, 1994: 203). These gendered movements limit the movement dance language of classical/romantic ballet and are cultural constructs that are imposed onto the physical form in certain forms of dance.

Despite this, dance is about watching the body move on stage. The audience

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<sup>12</sup> Hegemony is a concept that is derived from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of how a certain group in society claims and sustains a leading position in the social life of that society (Connell, 1995: 77). Included in this is how subjects in the society socially consent to adopt the dominant discourses in operation. These dominant discourses are grounded in the material life of the society and operate through corresponding institutions such as the church, press and schools. However, these dominant discourses are never fixed and their position in society is constantly contested. Hegemonic masculinity is constructed as the discourse that supports the maintenance and legitimisation of a heterosexual and patriarchal society. The female dancer is also an instrument of hegemony, in that her role and her movement language are constructed to support plural femininity whereby she remains passive and does not pose a threat to a heterosexual and patriarchal society.

<sup>13</sup> Not all dance forms fit into this category, especially contemporary theatre dance which aims to reject hegemonic structures. An interrogation of contemporary theatre dance which seeks to deconstruct the hegemonic power structures operating in dance, for example The Judson Dance Theatre, will be discussed in the following chapter of this thesis.

are asked to actively and subjectively view the dancer's body in motion and stillness. The act of moving challenges the passivity and object status of the body. This act of viewing the body in motion is an integral aspect of dance and dancing. Spectatorship is as important as the movements of the dancer on stage as one cannot exist without the other. Laura Mulvey's notion of the 'male gaze' does offer a method to interrogate the relationship between the viewer and performer. However, since Mulvey's theory of the 'male gaze' was constructed to interrogate film, it is not suited to interrogate all forms of dance. Dance is about the moving body, and because of this motion, the body has the ability to transgress constructions. Contemporary dance choreographers, through the utilisation of the body in motion, are able to challenge the audience to reassess their perceptions of the body (and its constructions). The moving body can highlight, for the audience, the operations of the dominant discourses of gender and race. Through choreography, choreographers can call into question what is considered masculine or feminine movement. The body can challenge the hegemonic discourses of gender and race through the exposure (and employment) of the counter-discourses which exist in opposition to the dominant discourses in society.<sup>14</sup> It is able to draw attention to (and make obvious), the workings of gendered discourse and their embodiment. Though the moving body operates in (and is affected by) the discourses of gender and race, it can, in contemporary theatre dance, expose the discourses' effect on the body to the audience. The moving body can offer new possibilities for the body to the audience through the medium of dance.

Spectators' responses to a dance performance are made not only in relation to their own experiences of embodiment but also in response to visual imagery and cues. The primary mode of expression in dance is the body; in theatre, however, dance is something that a spectator watches. (Burt, 1995: 50).

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<sup>14</sup> Counter-discourses operate in resistance to the dominant discourses in society. See page 16 of this thesis.

In contemporary theatre dance, the actual body is moving in space which cannot be captured as it is transient.<sup>15</sup> Contemporary theatre dance asks the audience to watch and look at the body moving on stage. The problem in looking at the moving body on stage is that the act of looking is gendered (as Mulvey has pointed out) and it is this gendered looking that selected contemporary theatre dance practitioners aim to challenge.<sup>16</sup>

### **c. A feminist appropriation of poststructuralism in relation to the moving body**

Poststructuralism offers feminisms the notion that the discourses of race, class, gender, sexuality and culture are interconnected (hooks, 1986: 22). Gender as social practice, cannot avoid interaction with the other social practices of race, class and sexuality. There is interplay of discourses and these have a specific effect on each subject. The moving body in dance is a multiple fragmented body that is permeated by, and has the opportunity (using choreography) to interrogate the discourses that are in operation. Foucault in *The History of Sexuality. Volume One. An Introduction* (1976) offered the viewpoint that bodies embody discourses and "deployments of power are directly connected to the body" (152).

The body enacts and is affected by the discourses in society, as the body is the first site of interaction in the world of discourses. Feminism has appropriated Foucault's notion that bodies are disciplined and regimented, by for instance the discourse of sexuality. Foucault politicised the body and examined the manner in which discourses enacted on the body are historically specific. However, Foucault's interrogation of discourses' effect (and permeation) of the human body failed to recognise that the human body is

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<sup>15</sup> This thesis is dealing with live performances of western contemporary theatre dance. Interrogations of Laura Mulvey's 'male gaze' operates in a different context in film and video performances of western contemporary theatre dance.

<sup>16</sup> The Judson Dance Theatre practitioners, such as Yvonne Rainer, attempted to deconstruct the gendered act of looking at the moving body on stage.

primarily marked by its anatomy.<sup>17</sup> This anatomical marking of the human flesh places the body into a particular gender category (say female), and this particular 'sexed body' will experience a different interplay of discourses from the other 'sexed body' (say male). Feminism's appropriation of poststructuralism can offer a method to concentrate on the actual physical flesh of the lived-in body and how the discourses operating in society affect the embodied flesh of the subject; this will have bearing on any analysis of twentieth century dance performance. Foucault articulated the body as a site of struggle for meaning and power. However, he did not interrogate that the discourses operating in and through the female body are (or will be) different to those operating on the male body, and by appropriation for this thesis, the black and white body. McHoul and Grace state in their book *A Foucault Primer: Discourse, Power and the Subject* (1993) that "Foucault conducts his investigations of sexual ethics by ignoring the inequality at the core of subjectivity" (121).

Therefore, each subject is constructed through a unique interaction with the discourses in operation. For instance, the black female body of a dancer is situated in the discursive fields of racism, sexism and the constructions of the 'white beauty norms' when performing to a mainly white audience. Black female dancers are limited in their expression through feminine movements and race. Their bodies are constructed through the discourses of gender and race because of their sex and colour. To escape the constructions of gender and race that are imposed onto (and appear on) the body is a mammoth task for contemporary dance choreographers and dancers.

Poststructuralism also offers an understanding that there exist counter-discourses that have the ability to resist dominant discourses in society. It is

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<sup>17</sup> This thesis does acknowledge that the biological difference between male and female is not entirely fixed and sometimes can occur in one physical body, or can be altered from one state to the other by medical science. However, for the purpose of this thesis, the biological and anatomical difference between the sexes will be assumed to be in a static position and that there exists a "physical sense of maleness and femaleness" (Connell, 1995: 52).

necessary to examine the relations between the variety of discourses and how they operate against or in agreement with each other. Discourses are not fixed; rather they are in a constant state of flux. The positioning of discourses are constantly contested and altered because of their interaction with the other discourses operating in society. Poststructuralism offers feminism the notion that bodies are able to resist the dominant discourses in society due to the understanding that there are counter-discourses in operation. The body (as discourse) is constantly shifting and is never fixed. Cultural constrictions, (which are directly linked to the constructions of race and gender), imposed on the physical form, are not concrete. Rather they respond to the discourses that are currently operating. The body is the site of the intersections and permeations of these discourses, and by analysing the body, the discourses' physical manifestations and implications are revealed. The body is constituted within discourse and therefore is a discursive site. Brown (1994: 204) states that:

Representations of the female body depends on the sets of rules, codes and conventions which are specific to a genre and period of dance, and in turn, are related to prevailing beliefs and ideologies within the wider context of society.

A feminist poststructuralist analysis of dance and its medium of the body uncovers the power operations that surround the body and infect the body. The female (and male) form in dance becomes a manifestation of the discourses intersecting in society. According to Jill Dolan "Poststructuralist performance criticism looks at the power structures underlying representation, and the means by which subjectivity is shaped and withheld through discourse" (1989: 64). The body in dance not only enacts the discourses operating in society, but also can become a physical site of interrogation and experimentation of race, gender, and cultural constructions. This interplay allows for the discovery of new movement languages in dance. Dance offers feminism (and by appropriation poststructuralism) a means to

interrogate and restructure the female (and male) physical form in society. The dancing body can offer a form of resistance to the dominant discourses that are in operation in society. The body, which is the primary site and core onto which (and through which) discourses move, can also be the first point of resistance to the dominant discourses of gender, race, (and culture).

#### **d. Definition and development of western contemporary theatre dance**

Western contemporary theatre dance emerged in the beginning of the twentieth century primarily in the United States of America. It was a unique and powerful art form that rebelled against the rigid stereotyped choreography and productions of classical and romantic ballet, which was regarded as the western dominant theatre dance form.<sup>18</sup>

Early modern dance is first and foremost a repudiation of late nineteenth century ballet. And it is essential to recognise that this repudiation is boldly feminist in character. (Copeland, 1990: 8).

Western contemporary theatre dance rejected the set vocabulary and traditional themes of classical and romantic ballet. Contemporary theatre dance responds to modern concerns. The developing art form

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<sup>18</sup> Like their American counterparts, European contemporary theatre dance pioneers like Rudolf Laban and Alwin Nikolai were rebelling against the classical and romantic ballet dance form as well. See Laban (1988). However, for the purpose of this thesis, this chapter will concentrate on the American pioneers of contemporary theatre dance.

reflected many of the issues of 'modernity' that artists tackled in their art works.<sup>19</sup> It was in all senses modern in that it broke with the tradition of ballet. The dance form developed from the basis of natural and expressive movement, freed from the constrictions of the rigid structure of the classical and romantic ballet movement vocabulary (Kraus, 1967: 137). The dance form began to define itself as an art form in itself and was primarily based on natural movement rather than classical/romantic ballet's preoccupation with overriding sets and costumes. The modern dance form was driven by the desire to communicate through the movement of the body and the dance practitioners used this freedom of movement to express their emotive concerns. The dance form was not decorative but rather stripped down to abstract and formal qualities that seemed stark in contrast to the lavish opulence of the romantic and classical ballet. Contemporary theatre dance rejected the tradition of classical/romantic ballet and developed into an art form where dance was employed as a means of personal expression. The American dance practitioners of this era, for example Isadora Duncan, Loie Fuller and Martha Graham, were concerned with conveying their own particular subjectivities, revealing their own personal experiences, be those political and/or social.

The early years of modern and post-modern dance were contemporaneous with two great waves of feminist thought. Thus, it's entirely possible that one of the principal reasons modern and post-modern dance were pioneered by women is that they are probably the only major art forms prior to the 1970s to derive so much of their energy, their inspiration, indeed even their imagery, from the

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<sup>19</sup> The issues of 'modernity' when expressed through the use of dance are: the rejection of tradition (classical ballet), the utilisation of the art form as a means of personal expression, the preoccupation with ancient civilisations' cultural practices, artists of the modern period's anti-authoritarian stance, and their concern with living in the modern period and its affect on the individual. The notion of 'modernity' is an ongoing debate in academia. The debate whether 'modernity' is a legitimate movement is not necessary for this thesis. Rather, the issues that 'modernity' encompassed are reflected in the emergence of contemporary theatre dance and there is a general acceptance that 'modernity' is legitimate when interrogating contemporary theatre dance. See Kraus (1967).

feminist movement. To these choreographic pioneers, a new way of moving helped set the stage for a new mode of being. (Copeland: 1990: 8).

There were numerous approaches to contemporary theatre dance because of the freedom to create a new dance vocabulary and a new dance form, and this resulted in its eclectic nature. The driving force and result of contemporary theatre dance was the freedom of the choreographer to invent the style and context - indeed it was understood as the birth of the art of choreography.

Around the turn of the twentieth century, contemporary dance was considered little more than a music hall performance. The rejection of classical/romantic ballet and traditional dance by pioneer contemporary dance practitioners', like Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham's, led to the development of American contemporary theatre dance as an art or performance form in its own right. The most important outcome of this period in contemporary theatre dance was that it heralded the beginning of viewing dance as an art form and the celebration of the choreographer as an artist.

The American Isadora Duncan (1878 -1927) is regarded as one of the first pioneers of contemporary theatre dance. Duncan was completely opposed to both the content and movement limitations of classical ballet. She abandoned the conventional corset and ballet slippers of the classical dancers, and danced barefoot in loose tunics using a simple 'found' movement.<sup>20</sup> The rejection of tradition (classical and romantic ballet) freed the dancing body from the rigid technical movement vocabulary of classical and romantic ballet. Duncan described dance as an emotional experience in which "the natural language of that soul will have become the movement of the body" (Cohen,

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<sup>20</sup> Isadora Duncan states that; "To find those primary movements for the human body from which shall evolve the movements of the future dancer in ever-varying, natural, unending sequences, that is the duty of the new dancer of today" (Cohen, 1974: 125).

1974: 129). Roger Copeland states that "Duncan was offended by ballet not only because she thought of it as corseted movement, but also because it projected what she believed to be a socially pernicious image of women" (1990: 8). Duncan used the art form as a means of personal expression that freed dance into a personalised, expressive art form. However, her concept of dance as a form of personal expression did not include a formalised technique.

Ruth St Denis (1879 -1968) and her husband Ted Shawn (1891-1972) founded one of the first modern dance schools in America known as The Denishawn School of Dance in 1914. Both St Denis and Shawn challenged the notion of dance as purely a form of entertainment. Instead, they believed it to serve as a form of social commentary. Ruth St Denis contributed to the new dance form in many ways by adding the layers of theatricality such as the importance of costumes, colour, scenery, and lighting. Unlike classical/romantic ballet's preoccupation with theatricality, these theatrical devices were secondary to the movement. St Denis experimented with religious themes and ethnic dances. Unlike Duncan, who looked to the Greeks as the representatives of the ideals of art, St Denis was influenced by eastern myths. Her fondness for oriental forms and legends has been criticised as being escapist yet her attempt at reconstructing or interpreting other cultures went far beyond classical/romantic ballet's constant re-stagings of known works with known dance vocabulary. Besides being one of the first to begin a technical training system for dancers, Shawn sanctioned the need to develop male dancers and to recognise dance as a worthy art form for men. Both St Denis and Shawn provided their school (Denishawn) as a training grounds for dancers. Many of these dancers, like the pioneers of contemporary theatre dance, would use dance as a means of furthering the notion of dance as an art form, both politically and socially.

Martha Graham (1894-1991) left the Denishawn company in 1923 and has arguably influenced the dance form to a far greater degree than any of her

other peers. Graham explored a diverse range of themes: American pioneers, Greek myth and abstract themes to name a few. She experimented with both realism and abstraction and was both introspective (1930: *Lamentations*) and reflective (1935: *Frontier*) in her dance works. Martha Graham's greatest legacy is her formalised technique, in which she (and her present followers) explored free flowing movement principles. She established a sequential technique for the development of the body to its potential based on the idea of the contraction and the release of the body. Unlike classical/romantic ballet where the dancer's body is trained to escape the floor through the utilisation of jumps and lifts, Graham's technique rooted the body to the floor. Classical/Romantic ballet makes use of a bar as a support for training whilst the Martha Graham technique uses the floor as a support in training the body in movement.

Through their rebellion against classical/romantic ballet and their experimentation in contemporary theatre dance, both Duncan and St Denis liberated and broke the puritanical attitude towards the moving female body on stage. Added to this, and of most importance, Graham's movement technique was based on the notion that the pelvis, the centre of the female anatomy, is the starting point of all movement. However, an irony exists, in that in Graham's opposition to ballet as a formalised technique and her development of the 'natural' movement of her predecessors, such as Duncan and St Denis, resulted in her technique becoming institutionalised and forming part of the establishment. The driving force of contemporary theatre dance is the freedom of the choreographer to invent the style and context, and the dance practitioners of the 1960's, influenced by notions of postmodernism<sup>21</sup>, would break away from their modernist predecessors and create their own dance works and movement vocabularies - further challenging the ground laid down by dancers/choreographers like Duncan, Denis, Shawn, and Graham.

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<sup>21</sup> Postmodernism and its relation to contemporary dance will be dealt with in the second chapter of this thesis.

### **e. Concluding Remarks**

A feminist appropriation of poststructuralism can offer a valuable method to analyse the employment of the moving body in western contemporary theatre dance in terms of the discourses of gender and race. The body both enacts and is affected by the discourses of gender and race as it is the body that is the primary site of interaction in the discursive field. A feminist poststructuralist analysis of dance and its medium, the body, can uncover the power operations and discourses that surround and permeate the body. The body in dance is a manifestation of selected discourses intersecting in society at a particular historical moment. However, the body in dance does not only reflect the discourses operating in society, but also can become a physical site of interrogation and experimentation of the discourses of gender and race. The moving body can offer a form of resistance and subversion to the dominant discourses of gender and race. Though the body is the primary site of intersection and permeation with the discourses of gender and race, it can also be the primary site of resistance to the dominant discourses in operation, as the body is both agent and object in the discursive field.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **An interrogation of the discourses operating in selected contemporary theatre dance in the United States of America and Britain and how these discourses affect (and effect) the moving body in contemporary theatre dance**

This chapter, by examining selected contemporary American and British choreographers and their utilisation of the moving body as a contested site of struggle for meaning, will set up a comparative framework for discussion of specifically KwaZulu-Natal contemporary theatre dance practitioners. The first section of this chapter will focus on American contemporary theatre dance, interrogating The Judson Dance Theatre in the 1960's, especially the work of Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer.<sup>22</sup> This particular section will interrogate the choreographic solutions that The Judson Dance Theatre offered in the United States of America in the beginning of the 1960s. The section will show the

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<sup>22</sup> This thesis is not interrogating the history of contemporary theatre dance. Rather, it is focusing on the utilisation of the body as a site of struggle for meaning in specific moments of dance history. Steve Paxton and Yvonne Rainer of The Judson Dance Theatre, and DV8 Physical Theatre Company, have been selected as comparative references for the South African choreographers due to a number of factors. Firstly, The Judson Dance Theatre were an important moment in dance history. They were the main exponents of what Sally Banes refers to as 'post-modern dance' (1977: xiiv). They have greatly influenced choreographers around the globe. Secondly, DV8 Physical Theatre Company too have been an important event in dance history, not only in their style of dance, but in their choice of content. Where The Judson Dance Theatre are classified as 'post-modern dance', DV8 Physical Theatre can be classified as 'postmodern dance'. According to Sally Banes in her book *Terpischore in Sneakers. Post-Modern Dances (1977)* there are two stages in dance occurring from the early 1960's onwards (89). There is an earlier 'analytic' period of post-modern dance where choreographers began engagement with certain aspects of modern society, and that this dance form was occurring after the era of Martha Graham and her peers of modern dance. The later stage of dance was classified as the 'metaphoric' period where postmodernism in dance re-discovered representation (Banes, 1977: 89). The selection of these various choreographers and dance companies functions as a global reference point for the South African choreographers, whereby this thesis aims to place our local choreographers in a global setting.

failure of selected American choreographers to recognise the interconnectedness of gender and race due to a certain level of (historical) naivete. The final section of this chapter will highlight the work of DV8 Physical Theatre Company, a British dance company that became prominent in the 1980's who deal with issues of sexuality and the dancing body as a sexual subject. By interrogating selected American and British choreographic works, a comparative analysis will be made with the South African (Durban-based) choreographers in the following chapter.

## **a. American contemporary theatre dance**

### **i. The Judson Dance Theatre and post-modern dance**

With the influence of the Second Wave of Feminism and postmodernism, dance practitioners in America in the 1960s experimented and attempted to deconstruct the gender construction of the dancer's body. Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer were part of the founding members of The Judson Dance Theatre in 1962. The Judson Church in Greenwich Village in New York became a focal point for vanguard activity throughout the 1960's.

A key concept of post-modern dance was the performance of dance in a space that was previously not associated with dance performances. The church where the dance practitioners of The Judson Dance Theatre worked and performed, became a laboratory for movement experiments where traditions were bypassed, rules were broken and dance was re-thought and re-defined.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Contemporary theatre dance is a relatively recent art form, and because of this, its relationship to postmodernism operates (and occurs) in a different manner as opposed to other art forms such as visual art. The term post-modern is employed in this thesis to refer to contemporary dance practitioners such as The Judson Dance Theatre who choreographed dance works after the modern period of dance. See Page 21 of this thesis. Postmodern dance refers to dance that was preoccupied with and reflects notions of postmodernism.

Postmodernism is a controversial term surrounded by debate concerning its legitimacy.

It refers, first of all, to a complex of anti-modernist artistic strategies which emerged in the 1950s and developed momentum in the course of the 1960s. However, because it was used for diametrically opposed practices in different artistic disciplines, the term was deeply problematic almost right from the start. (Bertens, 1995: 3).

According to popular academia, there are two facets of postmodernism; a celebration of the status quo or a resistance of the status quo and a deconstruction of modernism, and sometimes both facets.

Postmodernist strategies/devices are the rejection of narrative structure and this is reflected in the utilisation of montage in contemporary theatre dance. It also refers to the exploration of the paradoxical resulting in the dance work being open-ended and/or of a de-structured nature. Post-modern dance works, in both form and content, are multifaceted and fragmented.

If we regard postmodernism neither in a chronological sense as something that comes 'after' modernism, nor as an anti - (modern) movement, we can agree with those who postulate that postmodernism means the end of single world views and explanations, and a respect for difference, the regional and particular. Being 'always hybrid, mixed, ambiguous', as Jencks (Charles) claims, Postmodernism is not anti-modern. It accepts modernization, but it refuses to give (the) prophets of the modern world their previously pre-eminent place. (Werner, 1999: 18).

The dancing body in post-modern dance raises important questions concerning the body as a site of contested struggle for meaning. The dancing body became the subject in post-modern dance. Post-modern dance allows

the body a Voice' to express and convey its place in the discourses that are operating in society. This allows the body the ability to be subversive and sometimes enables the body to create a new sense of time and space. In post-modern dance, the body can escape commodification and the control and socialisation of the discourses in operation. For example, masculine and feminine movements can be, and are subverted. However, simple reversals of gendered physicality and movement are not necessarily solutions for the body in its attempt to escape the discourses of gender and race.

In post-modern dance, the gendered constructions of masculinity and femininity that surrounded the body were called into question.

Postmodern dance, a rebellion against modern dance that both women and men have been developing since the 1960s, has tended to de-emphasize sexuality and gender-specific movement. (Hanna, 1987: 33).

This was another post-modern aspect to The Judson Dance Theatre in that they questioned previous dance styles and vocabularies. The group also questioned what constituted dance and incorporated individuals who had no dance experience or training. John Percival highlights this postmodern concept of The Judson Dance Theatre.

However, because of the moment, the uncluttered space, the particular group maybe, the opportunity definitely and the freedom from financial concern (there simply was no money, this was accepted as a spur to invention rather than a handicap), the traditions as they existed in the formal sense were bypassed. This bypassing has allowed for a diversity in the approach to work and for radical experimentation as well as the inclusion as performers and choreographers of those who in a traditional sense would not be considered dancers. (1971: 12).

Yvonne Rainer<sup>24</sup> choreographed movement for both male and female dancers and she did not differentiate the type of movement needed for the particular sex. For Rainer, and other members of The Judson Dance Theatre, sexual differentiated movements limited choreography and it was problematic to combine these two distinct types of movement together. Therefore they perceived the body as a machine and emphasised the similarities, not differences, between the sexes. The Judson Dance Theatre attempted to experiment with the physicality of the human body highlighting a simplicity and flow in certain types of movement. One of the most revolutionary ideas to be implemented by the group was that all movement, be it walking or running, is a form of dance, and that any physical body type can dance.

## **ii. Steve Paxton and the constructions of masculinity**

The male body of a dancer is not a neutral site onto which cultural codes and conventions are inscribed. Rather, it is in a biological sense a male body that is surrounded by and penetrated with the codes and conventions of dance pertaining to particular genres and specific historical periods. The dominant discourses surrounding and permeating the male body of a dancer are (primarily) the constructions of masculinity, and how this masculinity affects the moving male body in dance. The first interaction with society is through the medium of the body and immediately societal codes and conventions are inscribed onto the body. The physical flesh of the male body intersects with the constructions of masculinity and it is this material flesh that is central to the constructions of masculinity. Robert Connell in *Masculinities* (1995: 52) highlights the physical sense of the male body and its intersection with the constructions of masculinity when he states:

A re-thinking may start by acknowledging that, in our culture at least the physical sense of maleness and femaleness is central to the

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<sup>24</sup> Yvonne Rainer was one of the founding members of The Judson Dance Theatre. Rainer both choreographed and danced. She will be discussed later in this chapter of this thesis.

cultural interpretation of gender. Masculine gender is (among other things) a certain feel to the skin, certain muscular shapes and tensions, certain postures and ways of moving, certain possibilities in sex. Bodily experience is often central in memories of our own lives, and thus in our understanding of who and what we are.

Masculinity is not a monolithic construction; rather there exist multiple masculinities as the discourses of masculinity intersect with the discourses of race, class, culture, and sexuality. Connell extends this argument by including gender's interaction "with nationality or position in the world order" (1995: 75). These constructions of masculinity are not fixed but are constantly shifting and changing as the discourses, for example sexuality, are constantly in a state of flux, and it is this continuous altering that affects masculinities and ensures that the discourses of masculinity are never fixed. The examination of historical periods reveals the changing nature of the construction of masculinities due to their interplay with the discourses in operation. Connell (1995: 73) states that:

Any one masculinity, as a configuration of practice, is simultaneously positioned in a number of structures of relationship, which may be following different trajectories. Accordingly, masculinity like femininity is always liable to internal contradiction and historical disruption.

It is necessary to examine the relations between the variety of masculinities and how they operate against or in agreement with each other. Their position is constantly contested and altering because of their interaction with the variety of discourses operating in society, for instance, the discourses of race, class, culture, and sexuality. The interaction of the discourses of race, class, culture, and sexuality, affect the form the masculinities construct, therefore constructing a variety of masculinities.

Hegemony is a concept that is derived from Antonio Gramsci's analysis of how a certain group in society claims and sustains a leading position in the social life of that society (Connell, 1995: 77). Included in this concept is how subjects in the society socially consent to adopt the dominant discourses in operation. These dominant discourses are grounded in the material life of the society and operate through corresponding institutions such as the church, press and schools. However, these dominant discourses are never fixed and their position is constantly contested. Hegemonic masculinity is never a fixed type remaining constantly the same. Connell (1995: 76) states that:

It is, rather, the masculinity that occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations, a position always contestable.

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed as the discourse that supports the maintenance and legitimisation of a heterosexual patriarchal society. Connell (1995: 77) articulates hegemonic masculinity:

as the configuration of gender practice which embodies the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimacy of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordination of women.

There exists a masculinity hierarchy in society that positions white heterosexual masculinity as the dominant masculinity operating in society. Amongst the variety of masculinities operating, there is an on-going process of domination and subordination between these various discourses of masculinity. Homosexual masculinity is positioned at the base of the masculinity hierarchy.

The 'male gaze' is constructed in theatre and dance (especially in classical and romantic ballet) whereby the audience member identifies with the male

protagonist or male lead dancer's desire for the female character or dancer.<sup>25</sup> The female dancer is objectified, and through the connection between the audience member and the male dancer, the audience member further objectifies the female dancer. The male dancer does not acknowledge that he is being watched and constantly views the female dancer as object. This strengthens the identification process between the male dancer and the audience member. Male dancers appear powerful on stage and perform the convention of masculine movements involving spectacular displays of skill. This is to ensure that the male form is not objectified and rendered as a passive object on the stage. The male dancer's role in the dance (mainly in classical ballet) and his masculine movements are constructed as active and technically powerful in order to portray the cultural constructions of masculinity. The various cultural codes and conventions that operate in dance forms such as classical ballet support the construction of hegemonic masculinity. These constructed masculine movements limit the male dancer and in effect oppress both male and female dancers. Classical ballet relies on the conventions of masculine and feminine movements to ensure narrative flow.

structures exist within the way a story is told that makes us identify with particular characters, and, in mainstream cultural forms, this identification is regulated to reinforce dominant notions of masculinity and femininity. (Burt, 1995: 57).

However, these gendered movements limit the movement dance language and are cultural constructs that are imposed onto the human physical form in dance.

The profession will never be truly destigmatised for men (or women)

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<sup>25</sup> Performance theory has appropriated Laura Mulvey's article "Visual Pleasure and narrative cinema" (1975) and the notion of the 'male gaze' to interrogate spectatorship and narrative structure in theatre and dance. See Goldberg (1987/8) and Burt (1995). As argued in page 16 of this thesis.

as long as the masculine - feminine difference is maintained, because it is due to this polarity that dance was dubbed "effeminate" in the first place. (Daly, 1987/88: 61).

The male dancer evades objectification by the audience unlike his female counterpart who is objectified through the 'male gaze'. The cultural codes and conventions in dance (especially classical ballet) ensure the maintenance of the female dancer as object and the male dancer as an active subject. Raymond Burt in *The Male Dancer. Bodies, Spectacle, Sexual/ties* (1995) articulates that "where the conventions are adhered to, the image resists being objectified and appreciated from an erotic point of view" (53). The audience is constructed as masculine and to allow the erotic objectification of the male form in dance would disrupt the hegemonic masculinity in operation. This would allow a homoerotic viewing of the male body, which poses the greatest threat to hegemonic masculinity. Burt (1995: 12) highlights the relation between male dancers and homosexuality and states:

But for many people, a key source of contemporary prejudice is the association between male dancers and homosexuality. It is true that there are a lot of gay men involved in the dance world. Although by no means all male dancers are gay, this is what the prejudice suggests. One explanation of macho male display dance is sometimes surely that dancers are trying to show that they are not effeminate, where 'effeminate' is a code word for homosexual.

Another connection to this association could be that the male heterosexual audience member actively constructs the male dancer as powerful and an active agent in the dance to ensure that no homoerotic spectatorship will occur as this would be a great threat to the maintenance and legitimisation of hegemonic masculinity.

Steve Paxton and the other dance practitioners of The Judson Dance Theatre believed that feminine and masculine movements limited movement and it was problematic to combine the two distinct types of movement.<sup>26</sup> Paxton viewed the body as unisexual and ignored conventional portrayals of masculinity. He revolutionised contemporary dance with his 'contact improvisation' which he developed by experimenting with partners giving and taking weight (1972). The practice of contact improvisation rapidly spread amongst dancers and choreographers in America, and ultimately throughout the world. It is widely practiced today.

Practitioners of contact improvisation create dance through collaborating and interacting with the physical forces of weight and momentum.

The dancers are supposed to be absorbed in experiencing the movement and sensing (largely through touch) the experience of their partners; in order to allow momentum to develop, dancers have to keep their energy freely flowing, abandoning self-control in favor of mutual trust and interaction. (Novack, 1988: 104).

Contact improvisation can be compared to a non-violent martial art. The practitioners of this dance form conduct the body as a machine and disregard the cultural constructions of masculine and feminine movements allowing for experimentation and development of new movement languages as the dancers are not limited by artificial constructions of gendered movement. However, according to Burt (1995) the movement qualities of the male dancer can "support, and conform to, conservative notions of masculine identity" (148). Contact improvisation is based on trust between the partners because the spontaneous movement patterns and exchanges of weight develop from wordless communication and confidence that one partner will support and rescue the other. Besides the qualities of strength and virtuosity,

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<sup>26</sup> Steve Paxton was a founding member of The Judson Dance Theatre. He is known for his work in contact improvisation as both choreographer and dancer.

there are, amongst others, the qualities of caring and trust which expose aspects that are suppressed in hegemonic masculinity.

Another revolutionary factor of contact improvisation was that male bodies closely moved together. This broke the cultural codes and conventions that surrounded the male body in dance. Burt (1995:153) highlights the advances Paxton and contact improvisation conducted in the interrogation of the constructions of masculinity and masculine movements and states that:

Through unconventional uses of the body, the spectacle of a man and a woman or two men dancing in contact may in some cases challenge the spectator to reassess aspects of masculine identity and experience that are generally denied or rendered invisible in mainstream cultural forms - softness, non-competitiveness, responsiveness, caring. This can in some contexts denaturalize the dominance implicit in the male dancer's presence. There have been instances where male dancers have used movement related to or derived from contact to explore issues relating to gender and sexuality.<sup>27</sup>

### **Mi. Yvonne Rainer and the de-sexualisation of the female form**

Yvonne Rainer published a statement in 1965 which has become known as her 'NO Manifesto' in which she stated "NO to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe...no to seduction of spectator by the wiles of the performer..." (Copeland, 1990: 8). Her feminist concerns are not only apparent and articulated in her manifesto but are conveyed in the dance works she choreographed and performed. She once declared her "rage

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<sup>27</sup> This particular comment will be discussed in reference to DV8 Physical Theatre Company and their interrogation of masculinity and sexuality through the medium of the body. A conclusion in terms of masculinity and dance will be discussed later in this chapter of this thesis.

at the impoverishment of ideas, narcissism, and disguised sexual exhibitionism of most dancing" (Copeland, 1990: 27).

Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*, which was originally titled *The Mind Is A Muscle* (which highlights the post-modern concern of abstract thought), was an attempt to negate the 'male gaze'. Rainer progressed through a series of continuous simple movements whereby she always turned her head from the audience. She never made eye contact with the audience. This was in opposition to Isadora Duncan who acknowledged the audience's spectatorship. Rainer attempted to deflect the 'male gaze' and make the audience aware of how they objectify the female form on stage. She used her body as a machine and attempted to de-sexualise her body. Marianne Goldberg in her article "Ballerinas and Ball Passing" (1997/88) states that there is something "erotic" in watching a female dancer reflecting the 'male gaze' and attempting to refuse objectification by not allowing eye-contact with the audience and by turning her head away from them (11). However, it is Rainer who states that she is "concerned that the spectator will be seduced by the wiles of the performer, not that the performers will fall victim to a predatory gaze" (Copeland, 1990: 28).

Rainer's movements were intended as gender-neutral. However, no movements that a dancer's body executes are neutral. At a base level, the fact that they are being performed questions their neutrality. Rather all movements are constructed, as the body is not a neutral zone, as it is a site of flesh that is situated at the centre of intersecting discourses. The members of the Judson Dance Theatre and Marianne Goldberg failed to recognise the intersection of the discourses of gender and race. Judith Butler in *Gender Trouble* (1990) interrogates the presumption that the body exists as a neutral zone. Butler (1990: 8) states that:

the body is figured as a mere instrument or a medium for which a set of cultural meanings are only externally related. But "the body" is it

itself a construction, as are the myriad "bodies" that constitute the domain of gendered subjects. Bodies cannot be said to have a signifiable existence prior to the mark of their gender.

However, a unisexual view of dance is problematic, as bodies are anatomically different according to their respective sex. The Judson Dance Theatre did interrogate how gendered movements are constructed as exclusive of a particular sex and are fixed. However, it is not only gender that marks the physical flesh. Race interconnects with the gendered body thus implementing the non-neutrality of the physical body because of the racial and gendered discourses intersecting the actual body. Black women undergo a double form of oppression. Not only are they oppressed because of their sex, but also because of their actual skin colour. At a visual level, the race of a dancer is conveyed to the audience. The race of a dancer intersects with the movements that the dancer executes.

The body is not a neutral zone because of the actual physical pigmentation of the skin. A black dancer's body on stage is encoded with the discourse of race, which is conveyed to the audience. A black female body of a dancer is situated in the discursive fields of racism, sexism and the constructions of 'white beauty norms'. In the 1960's and 1970's, white feminist dance practitioners, such as Yvonne Rainer, were concerned with technique, the nature of dance and the de-sexualisation of the female body, and not how the discourse race intersects with and constructs the dancing body. Whereas the white female dancer's body may in some cases be objectified through the 'male gaze', the black female dancer is further objectified and othered because of her race.

A major difference that occurred between white feminist dance practitioners and black feminist dance practitioners was the issue of sexuality. Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A* utilises the body as a machine-like structure moving through space. Rainer:

regards the body as a system of gears and levers with an infinity of motor options, and attempts to create a performing situation in which various of these possibilities are explored. She finds that emotional concerns, and particularly those that are connected with sexual feelings often clutter the viewers' eyes as what the actual physicality of the action is. In an attempt to demythologize the body sexually she has from time to time introduced nudity into her work with precisely the same detached sense that she would produce any unexpected prop. (McDonagh, 1990: 94).

This de-sexualisation of the body by white feminist dancers is remarkably different from the black feminist dancers who reaffirmed their sexual power through the medium of dance. Dance practitioners like Pearl Primus and Bebe Miller celebrated the power of black female sexuality in their respective dances. Adair (1992: 161) states:

Black women's sexuality has frequently been denied by others, but despite this, their resistance comes from a strong tradition of determining their own sexuality.

Pearl Primus, a choreographer and dance anthropologist attempted to reverse black stereotypes. Involved in issues of identity politics, Primus wanted to build pride amongst African-American people and therefore strongly utilised African dance in her choreography. Another Black female dancer, Bebe Miller, started her own company in 1984. Her work was an attempt to offer alternatives to the black male and female stereotypes in dance promoted by, for example The Alvin Ailey Company, in which the men are often exaggeratedly virile and athletic, and the women overtly sensuous.

The body can be offered as a stage, where choreographers and dancers can experiment with and construct limitless movements, yet the physical body on

stage is read by the audience as belonging to a particular sex, gender, race, cultural, and age group. Though the Civil Rights Movement was occurring in the United States of America in the 1960's, the discourse of race was largely ignored by prominent white contemporary dance practitioners. Therefore the attempts by the dance practitioners of the 1960's, particularly The Judson Dance Theatre, might have broken the boundaries of gendered movements, but due to a certain level of naivete<sup>28</sup>, they did not interrogate how the body signifies race, and sex.

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<sup>28</sup> This naivete also exists in thinking that if a dancer does not look at the audience the 'male gaze' has been broken.

## **b. British contemporary theatre dance**

### **i. DV8 Physical Theatre Company and the discourse of sexuality**

Founded in the 1980's, Lloyd Newson and his British based physical theatre company DV8 Physical Theatre Company explore issues of masculinity and sexuality through the medium of the body.<sup>29</sup> Using the physicality of the male body, DV8 Physical Theatre Company interrogates the constructions of masculinity and sexuality and exposes repressed aspects of masculinity, and the bleak situation of sexual relationships between male and female, and male and male relationships. In their first piece *My Sex, Our Dance* (1986) Lloyd Newson and Nigel Chamock occupy marginalised positions in society, that of homosexual men. Their physicality in their performance undermines any remnant of the notion that male dancers are 'effeminate' as they conduct powerful movements.<sup>30</sup> *My Sex, Our Dance* (1986) and *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988) challenge the audience's perception of constructed masculinity.

When *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* was first performed at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London in October 1988, it came at a time when gay men were under considerable public pressure on three fronts: from the threat of AIDS, from hostile press coverage of AIDS and from Clause 28 of the 1988 Local Government Bill which made it illegal for local authorities in Great Britain to intentionally promote homosexuality or publish material with the intention of promoting homosexuality. (Burt, 1995: 187).

DV8 Physical Theatre Company exposes the constructions of masculinity and interrogates hegemonic masculinity through dance. *Dead Dreams of*

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<sup>29</sup> DV8 Physical Theatre Company was founded by Lloyd Newson. He both choreographed and dances in the company's performances.

<sup>30</sup> Burt in *The Male Dancer. Bodies, Spectacle, Sexualities* (1995) highlights the relation between male dancers and the discourse of sexuality. See page 32 of this thesis.

*Monochrome Men* highlights how men, be they straight or gay, are unable to form 'meaningful' relationships because of the negative effect of the discourse of hegemonic masculinity (1995: 188). In the dance work, there is a performer who witnesses the other dancers in their sado-masochist situations. This onlooker disrupts the audience's gaze, in that the audience is challenged to consider that they are watching men who are watching men. Thus making the audience part of the arena of sexual politics which is considered to be deviant. DV8 Physical Theatre Company:

prompt[s] the audience to consider whether or not they accept that the behavior in the piece is totally alien to them. It thus questions and problematizes the criteria behind the distinction between what is and is not considered acceptable masculine behavior. (Burt, 1995: 189).

DV8 Physical Theatre Company's dance-work *Enter Achilles* (1996) attempts to interrogate the construction of masculinity of the British working class. Set in a pub, the hegemonic masculinity of that particular group in society is questioned by DV8 Physical Theatre Company. An interplay of characters/dancers exposes how certain men willingly submit to the dominant discourse of masculinity whereas another man will question it and subvert it exposing the construction and artificial quality of the hegemonic masculinity in operation. Rupert Christiansen in his article "Weakness in the heel" (1996) criticises Newson and articulates that Newson presents the men "as a herd of stupid, frightened louts" (5). Christiansen fails to recognise that it is Newson's portrayal of the male dancers as "frightened" that exposes the insidious and destructive nature of the hegemonic masculinity in operation (1996: 5). To question or revert from the dominant construction of masculinity entails pain, loss, victimisation and marginalisation for those who do not consent. There is a risk factor involved, not only in the movements executed, but in the deviation from the hegemonic masculinity that is operating at that particular historical moment. Raymond Burt (1995: 189) states that:

Overall the effects of denaturalizing 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.

When Lloyd Newson was interviewed in "Dance About Something" (1994:52) he stated:

My delight is that we made front-page news in two tabloids, one with *Dead Dreams* and one with *MSM*. It has shown and proven to me that movement and dance can be political, that it can have a force, it can affect people and can create change.

Dance offers itself as an artistic tool to question the constructions of masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is contested and is re-inscribed through the medium of dance. The discourse of the construction of masculinity does not exist in isolation, but intersects with the discourses of race, class, culture, and sexuality, and amongst these constructions of multiple masculinities exists a hierarchy and a relation of dominance and resistance concerning the masculinities. There are dance works that interrogate the constructions of masculinity and there are those who support the constructions. However, Burt (1995: 198) states that:

Nevertheless, there are sometimes glimpses of possible alternatives where the rules are ignored and conventions and traditions destabilized and denaturalized. Where these works challenge homophobic heterosexual conditioning, restrictive logocentric ways of thinking and communicating, or tightly bound aspects of male identity, they give glimpses of possible alternatives. They suggest that there are ways in which some men are, surely, albeit with great difficulty, and in slow motion, responding to recent debates about the nature of gendered identity, and dancing and working towards more acceptable ways of being masculine.

### c. Concluding Remarks

Marianne Goldberg argues that dance has three options. One option is:

To return to an instinctive body. The extreme contradiction: goddesses created by patriarchal myths. (1987/88: 19).

This seems to be the option that Isadora Duncan, one of the pioneers of modern dance opted for, though her historical specificity must be considered. The second option according to Goldberg (1987/88: 19) is:

To refuse the representation of the female body as image. The extreme contradiction: a refusal of the female body altogether. Eradicate sex, avert the eyes, abstract the body.

Yvonne Rainer and her dance work *Trio A* encapsulates this option as Rainer progressed through a series of simple movements whereby she always turned her head from the audience. Rainer viewed the body as a machine and attempted to de-sexualise the human form, stripping away the constructs of feminine and masculine movements. Like Rainer, Steve Paxton choreographed movement for both male and female and believing that sexual differentiated movements limited choreography. Both Rainer and Paxton perceived the body as a machine, and thus emphasised similarities and not differences between the sexes. There was an attempt to decode the body by the Judson Dance Theatre practitioners. However, the body's base, its physical flesh is not neutral as it is in the centre-point of numerous intersecting discourses such as the discourses of race, gender, and culture. The dance practitioners of The Judson Dance Theatre failed to realise that though the moving body is offered as a stage, where there can be experimentation and deconstruction of masculine and feminine movements, the actual physical form of the moving body on stage is read by the audience, decoded as belonging to a particular sex, gender, race, cultural group, age,

nationality..Therefore the attempts by dance practitioners of the 1960's might have broken the boundaries of gendered movements, but they failed to realise that the actual body signifies race, and sex, because of anatomy.

There is a need to interrogate dance, its conventional movement vocabulary, and its new and innovative counterpoint, because the body, through movement, does speak. The body can lie, and it can also interrogate the discourses that permeate it.

Third option: To explore the contradictions, to locate a source of pleasure that sets the female body in motion, to remake the meaning of the image from a position of pleasure. (And I do not mean the kind of visual "pleasure" that works against women.) A pleasure in moving, breathing, changing, improvising. (Goldberg, 1987/88: 19).

Though Goldberg is speaking of the female body, DV8 Physical Theatre Company can be considered as displaying in some circumstances elements of this third option, in that their dance works are about interrogating the discourses that construct the moving body. Their dance works acknowledge that the physical body is located in an interplay of discourses that construct it and permeate it. DV8 Physical Theatre Company show how the moving body can interrogate this interplay of discourses and invent new ways of moving that are able to defy these constructions. Lloyd Newson and his physical theatre company allow for the development of a new dance language that recognises the limitations of gendered movement, and experiments with this creating an innovative type of movement.

Steve Paxton and his contact improvisation works also reflect a 'pleasure in moving, breathing, changing, improvising' (1987/88: 19). However, both British and American choreographers are located in a different context to South African choreographers. The discourse of race has had a profound effect on South African contemporary theatre dance due to Apartheid. In

South Africa, oppressions have been systematically organised into a hierarchy with the discourse of race dominating the discourse of gender. Whereas the British and American choreographers concerned themselves with the discourse of gender and its effect on the moving body, (naively ignoring the interconnectedness of the discourse of gender and race), selected South African choreographers acknowledge the interconnectedness of the discourses of gender and race.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Interrogating the utilisation of the body in the following South African (Durban-based) choreographers' dance works: Jay Pather, Lliane Loots and David Gouldie**

The chapter will interrogate the specific use of the dancing (or moving) body in contemporary theatre dance as a contested site of struggle for meaning. This will be done by interrogating three KwaZulu-Natal choreographers' works in terms of race and gender. The first section will be an introduction to contemporary theatre dance in the South African context. The second section will be an analysis of Jay Pather and his dance work *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times* (March 1998). The third section will include an interrogation of Lliane Loots' dance work *on my journey i lost my voice to beauty* (August 1998) and her siting the dancing body as a political and personal landscape for meaning in the South African context. The final section will be an interrogation of David Gouldie's dance work *the last time i checked i thought i loved you* (March 1998) and his focus on the discourses of primarily gender (and race) that permeate and construct the moving body.

#### **a. Contemporary theatre dance in the South African context**

In South Africa the body has been profoundly affected by the discourses of race and gender. Apartheid laws segregated bodies of different races. The Group Areas Act of 1950 constructed geographical spaces in which only certain racial groups were allowed to live. The Sexual Immorality Act of 1950 prevented black and white men and women from conducting sexual relationships with each other, and as recently as 1985 The Prohibition of

Mixed Marriages Act prohibited men and women from different races from marrying each other. The South African body is one of the primary sites of social (and political) experience of South African life. The control and regimentation of the South African body is apparent in the surveying of Apartheid legislation.

In South Africa, the discourse of race has had a profound effect on the physical body. Due to Apartheid legislation, the pigmentation of a South African's body governed where it was allowed to live, work, and with whom it was allowed to conduct sexual relationship. The discourse of race dominated every aspect of a South African's life. The discourse of race has had an overriding affect (and effect) on the social, political, and cultural life of the South African body.<sup>31</sup> South African theatre and dance reflected the great impact the discourse of race has had on many South Africans.<sup>32</sup> However, bell hooks in *Talking Back: thinking feminist - thinking black* (1986) states that there needs to be a "calling attention to interlocking systems of domination - sex, race, and class" (21). hooks states (1986: 22) that:

sexism, racism, and class exploitation constitute interlocking systems of domination - that sex, race, and class, and not sex alone, determine the nature of any female's identity, status, and circumstance, the degree to which she will or will not be dominated, the extent to which she will have the power to dominate.

The Sexual Immorality Act of 1950 is one example of the interconnectedness of the discourses of race and gender where black and white bodies were not allowed to conduct sexual relationships with each other. Thus the race of a subject and their sexual identity affected (according to legislation) who they were allowed to conduct sexual relationships with. This legislation also

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<sup>31</sup> Though Apartheid legislation has been repelled, the legacy of the meta-discourse of race still affects many South Africans.

<sup>32</sup> See South African playwrights such as Athol Fugard and Zakes Mda.

disallowed or allowed South African bodies to inhabit and work in certain geographical spaces. South African politics was embodied in the body.

The most powerful discourses in our society have firm institutional bases, in the law, for example, or in medicine, social welfare, education and in the organization of the family and work. Yet these institutional locations are themselves sites of contest, and the dominant discourses governing the organization and practices of social institutions are under constant challenge. (Weedon, 1987: 109).

Whereas Kylie Stephen argues that:

A significant but, I argue overlooked element of Foucault's conception of power as it relates to subjectivity, is his premise that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault, 1986: 95). Thus, could not the body itself be a site of resistance? Even when Foucault contends that resistance should not be attributed to some unique locus of revolt, it can be argued that the 'body as discourse' can thwart power, because although 'discourse transmits and produces power...[it] also undermines and exposes it (Foucault, 1986: 101). (1997: 313).

Apartheid legislation sought to regulate the South African body, yet the body is also a site of resistance. It is through the body that many South Africans resisted the Apartheid government by refusing to obey the Apartheid laws that sought to regulate the South African body.

If bodies are traversed and infiltrated by knowledges, meanings, and power, they can also, under certain circumstances, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices. The activity of desiring, inscribing bodies that though marked by law, make their own inscriptions on the bodies of others, themselves, and the law in turn, must be counterposed against

the passivity of the inscribed body. (Grosz, 1993: 199).

In South African contemporary theatre dance, the body is affected (and effected) by the discourses of race and gender. Not only is the body a site of regulation, it is also a site of resistance.<sup>33</sup> Despite the fact that South African choreographers have choreographed dance works involving dancers of different races, it is still an act of resistance when dancers of different races and genders move together on stage. Added to this, dance as an art form projects moments when the body escapes the constructs of race and gender by deconstructing gender-defined and cultural (African and Indian) dance movement languages. The very nature of contemporary dance, that of the body in motion, might enable the body to limit the hold the constructions of gender and race have on the body. The movement languages choreographers use allow for these moments of subversion, such as white female dancers performing traditional African dance steps, black male dancers performing ballet steps, neo-classical ballet dancers rolling on the stage floor, and a black male dancer and his white female partner performing a *pas de deux*.

This thesis will now focus on the South African (Durban-based) choreographers who have interrogated the discourses of race and gender, and how they have attempted to deconstruct the dominant discourses of race and gender. This thesis will attempt to show how Jay Pather, Liane Loots, and David Gouldie have utilised the moving body as a site of resistance to the dominant discourses of gender and race.

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<sup>33</sup> Poststructuralism offers the notion that there are counter-discourses in operation. As argued in page 16 of this thesis.

**b. Jay Pather**

**Shifting Spaces Tilting Time**

(Performed at the "Back to Back" dance season at The Natal Playhouse at the end of March 1998)

**i. Programme Notes**

"Spaces merge and emerge, tainted and altered. Segments of Africa, India, Europe: exterior and interior landscapes; beshu, bells, ballet slippers shift and tilt; adapt and reveal surprising hybrids, constantly unsettling architecture, breathing new colours in personal and public spaces".

CHOREOGRAPHER

Jay Pather

COMPANY

Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre

MUSIC

Jurgen Brauningger

DESIGN

Sarah Roberts

SLIDES

Val Adamson

## DANCERS

Claire Bezuidenhout, Ntombi Gasa, Angela Lardant, Simpiwe Magazi, Thulabona Mzizi, Pravika Nandkishore, Khulekani Qwabe, Nelisiwa Rushulang, Eric Shabalala, and Thubani Sibisi.

### **ii. Review**

The stage reveals a slide of an Alwin Nikolais diagram of a body in space, and a circle of material in the centre of the stage. The first dancer, Simpiwe Magazi, appears on stage, and with his movements parallels the slide projected on the back of the stage. There is a sense of primitive man exploring his relationship with his spatial surroundings. The dance conveys the notion of the human body in structured spaces and how the development of architecture has shaped the human body's relationship with these structured spaces. The slides of the buildings seem to limit the growth of the expression of the human body, and certain types of buildings demand a particular movement and expression from the human body. Magazi lifts the material and wraps himself up with it. The material oscillates between a hindrance and limitation, and then becomes the wings that aid the dancer to fly.

The rest of the dancers then join Magazi on stage and various dance forms are explored. From African dance, Indian dance, and ballet, there emerged a hybrid of South African dance on stage. Slides are shown of different buildings in Durban. These buildings represent the different cultural groups that live in Durban. The use of slides allows the audience to not only watch the actual bodies on the stage, but to notice how the shadows on the slides, (the bodies), how they occupy the certain architectural spaces. A white ballet dancer moves in front of a slide of a traders' market. A black dancer performs traditional African steps in front of a mosque. Bodies clash, or fuse with the slides of the buildings. Bodies collide or fuse with the architectural spaces. Jay Pather costumes the dancers in a variety of cultural dress. The dancer's

costumes represent various cultural groupings. For example, there is a ballet dancer wearing a tutu, which is made out of the new South African flag, another dancer wears a Spanish dancer's costume, and there is an empowering image of Ntombi Gasa in a ballroom dress.

Pather subverts the notion of equality with his satire of the image of the 'Simunye' bus. He portrays, through the use of comedy, (whereby the dancers, each represent a particular cultural definition attempt to display their cultural forms in their own divided space), that, as a nation, South Africa is still divided. There exists no 'one' South African culture, rather a hybridity of cultures. Pather calls for the need to breakout of the isolated cultural definitions (as defined through dance language) and explore the hybrid nature of South African culture.

A burst of Acid Jazz music brought the dance piece to a local setting with the various slides of Durban being projected onto the back of the stage, thereby rooting the dance work into a real and local setting. The slides, combined with the movement language that Pather employs, results in an interrogation of how certain cultural definitions (and bodies) occupy geographical spaces in and around Durban and how sometimes the moving bodies clash with the geographical spaces.

The dancers wear costumes that represent cultural definitions, for example, Claire Bezuidenhout in a ballet tutu in the colours of the new South African flag, and Pravika Nandkishore dressed in full Kathak Indian costume. The piece works through various scenarios of cultures colliding and clashing represented by individual dancers. Pather's choreography became darker and darker exploring the limitations that cultural definitions impose by preventing interaction with other cultural definitions. Nandkishore appears with her hands bandaged. She no longer has use her of hands to dance with and speak with. Indian Kathak dance is defined by unique hand gestures. Pather argues that the limitations that cultural definitions impose on themselves can

prevent communication with other cultural groups, and limit the cultural definition's development. The audience is confronted with images of a gumboot dancer on crutches, bandaged hands and a ballet dancer without her pointe shoes.

The dancers are slowly brought together and a unity emerges in the dance. The sound of waves and the sea, the sounds of Durban, form the music for Simpiwe Magazi as he dances with the material, which he uses as a cloak. Pather shows how the dancing body has the ability to move freely through geographical spaces, cultural, racial, and gendered definitions.

### **iii. Jav Pather and the discourses of gender and race**

*Shifting Spaces Tilting Time* was performed at The Natal Playhouse, Durban, South Africa, in March 1998. Pather's intention of the piece was to explore how the human form responds to the architecture that surrounds it, specifically how the body responds to Durban architecture. Pather explores how the geographical space of Durban affects the human bodies that inhabit Durban. The dance work is about Durban; its peoples and its buildings and spaces. It explores the different groups of peoples that inhabit Durban, specifically the Indian community. It also explores the fusion that occurs in Durban. The slides that Pather uses are of the Durban landscape, the highway, the townships, the city centre, all recognisable landmarks of Durban. The dance language that Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre employs is a fusion of ballet, Khatak, Bharatha Natyam, gumboot, Pantsula, and contemporary dance.<sup>34</sup> These various dance languages signify the many types of cultural and gender constructions of movement that exist in the

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<sup>34</sup> Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre have evolved from a training dance company into a professional dance company. The dancers come from different historical and dance backgrounds. Their different dance languages provide a wealth of movement languages for Pather as a choreographer to employ in his dance works. At the "Back to Back" season (1998), Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre was based at The Natal Playhouse. In 1999, due to a lack of funding, they moved from The Natal Playhouse and now are based at The Natal Technikon.

dance environment, yet no particular dance form is allowed to dominate. This experimentation with the range of dance forms enables Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre to create a new dance language, thus not limiting the dancers in their movement expression. Pather is also aware that gendered movement limits the choreography.<sup>35</sup> Pather comments on these dance forms in the piece and thereby offers a social comment on the dance forms that are operating in South African society.

Jay Pather, in the 'Simunye' section where all the dancers are dressed in their respective cultural garments, interrogates the notion of the 'Rainbow nation'. Pather's *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times* located in the emerging multiculturalist ideology of the 'new' South Africa. Pather interrogates this notion and explores how the various traditional dance forms trap the dancers' bodies, limiting their expression. Physical behaviour is learnt from the subject's cultural background.<sup>36</sup> Jay Pather subverts and reinvents these traditional dance forms. Pather in an interview (Appendix A: 108) states that:

I wrote this paper once called "Culture is an Illusion" where I attempted to say there's no such thing as culture. It's a conglomerate of rituals and habits. Things that stick. It's an illusion and it's so powerful. Because of that it's been used by politicians, as it is completely identifiable: 'We know what your culture is'. I'm a bit radical. What is my culture? There are cultural formations, clusters of religious acts, familial, neighbourhood, community. They're all clusters, not rigid, solid form. I've never actually believed that culture exists. It's too fluid, and haphazard and arbitrary. There are encrusted rituals I like to take from. For me, what is real, is art. Art and culture are very separate. When making art, one takes from these various pieces of

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<sup>35</sup> This notion of experimenting with various dance forms is similar with The Judson Dance Theatre who felt, like Pather, that gendered dance forms limit choreography. See Page 26 of this thesis.

<sup>36</sup> The purpose of this thesis is to interrogate the discourses of race and gender, but cultural discourse is acknowledged due to the interconnectedness of gender, race, and culture.

clusters. From those so called cultural formations, that I do. I enjoy that. I like staying as close to these cultural formation as possible.

Pather shows through his satire on the 'rainbow nation' and 'Simunye' culture that politicians have employed the discourse of culture to govern many South African bodies. In South Africa, classical ballet has a legacy of representing a white culture definition, and this cultural and racial boundary is destroyed when a black dancer executes ballet steps. Pather choreographs Simpiwe Magazi to 'free' the dancers from their assigned spaces, and thereby allowing their cultural definitions to fuse. This highlights the need to share the hybridity of cultures that exist in South Africa. Contemporary theatre dance is a means to accomplish this. Pather uses the dancing body to break down the cultural constructs of the South African body. The moving body in Pather's dance work becomes the site where cultural, gender, and racial constructions are called into question. Pather's utilisation of these various cultural dance forms might (and does) result in a merging, or a 'fusion' of these forms into a distinctly South African form. It is this discovery of a South African movement language that seems to be Pather's main concern. South African politics permeate both the public and personal spheres of existence, and ultimately affects the dance work created. Pather's *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times* is a personal observation of cultures and people in their various surroundings. This personal observation becomes public through the medium of dance and the theatre. In South Africa, the discourse of culture is political, and Pather is making a definitive political statement through his piece *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times*.

The utilisation of the slides as a backdrop for the dance work explores the subversive nature of Pather's choreography. An example of this is when Pravika Nandkishore in her Indian costume dances the Kathak against the backdrop of a slide of a white Christian church. When the clear slide is shown, the dancers' shadows are seen. The dancers are not neutral. Rather, there is

an element of fear employed, in that they have no geographical or architectural space to define themselves against. Their respective cultural costumes are reflected in the shadows. The different cultural dress can also indicate (through stereotyping) the race and gender of the dancer's shadow. This exposes the notion that the body is not neutral. The network of discourses that operate and affect the exterior of the body are not the only factors that shape the body. The interior is also shaped by the discourses of race, and gender in terms of skin pigmentation and anatomical detail. The construction of the subject through the discourses of race and gender (and culture) is two-fold. The subject is identified as a particular sex and race because of their anatomy and biology, and they are constructed because of their surroundings and experiences, such as where they live.

The body can be regarded as a kind of hinge or threshold: it is placed between a psychic or lived interiority and a more sociopolitical exteriority that produces interiority through the inscription of the body's outer surface. (Grosz, 1993: 196).

In South Africa, oppressions have been systematically organised into a hierarchy with the discourse of race dominating the discourse of gender. The first slide in *Shifting Spaces Tilting Time* is of the Alwin Nikolais diagram of a body in space. There is no indication of the race of the figure. There is no anatomical detail that will mark the figure as a member of a particular gender. The figure is of a neutral body. Jay Pather (Artistic Director of Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre) subverts this idealist notion of a gender-less, culture-less, race-less body through his choreography. Simpiwe Magazi dances in front of this image moving through a variety of cultural dance forms; African Traditional dance, Bharatha Natyam, Kathak, and contemporary theatre dance. Pather choreographs Magazi, who is a black male dancer, to move 'freely' on the stage. Pather shows Magazi as not bound to his race, gender, or cultural grouping.

When moving images created by dancers violate expected male and female roles and their conventional expressions, the novel signs onstage charge the atmosphere and stimulate performers and observers to confront the possibility of altered life-styles. Dances are social acts that contribute to the continual emergence of culture. (Hanna, 1988: xiii).

Pather choreographs Sim pi we Magazi's role in *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times* as that of the interrogating body. Through Jay Pather's choreography, Magazi's body explores the paradigm that has constructed Magazi's body (a black male body) through the discourses of race and gender. Simpiwe Magazi, as a black South African, wears the history of South Africa on his body. He is affected by the discourse of masculinity hierarchy which positions that of the masculinity of the white heterosexual male as dominant.<sup>37</sup> The movement language that Pather choreographs for Magazi is one of a proud black maleness. Pather challenges the de-masculinisation of black men under Apartheid. Through Pather's choreography, the counter-discourse operating in opposition to hegemonic masculinity is exposed.<sup>38</sup> Pather shows that Magazi is more than simply a construction of these discourses. The discourses of race and gender that permeate Magazi's body are constructs that he has been impelled to take on, but not compelled by them.

This double status of the body in performance has become fundamental to its articulation in both modernist and post-modern practice. The body participates as a focus of experiment: as an experiential site - as presence, a dynamic, moving, transforming and resistant body; and as a site of representation - as reference, as object, as a complex of meanings. This oscillation of status resists any surety or fixity which might reduce the body in performance to either

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<sup>37</sup> A masculinity hierarchy exists in society whereby a variety of masculinities are constantly undergoing a process of domination and subordination. See Page 29 of this thesis.

<sup>38</sup> Unlike The Alvin Ailey Company, the movement language that Pather choreographs for Magazi is not overtly aggressive and virile. See page 37 of this thesis.

mere representation or simple biological presence. The body in twentieth century performance becomes an ambivalent site which offers modalities of presence and reference, of physical activity and image. (Allsopp and deLahunta, 1996: 6).

This is shown through Pather's choreography when Magazi moves freely through, in and out of, the discourses in operation. The Nikolais diagram is an example of the body in space. It has no history or context, and there is no evidence of the discursive field that the body is located in. Magazi is located in the discursive field of race, culture, and gender, and history of South Africa, that of Apartheid and the Liberation Struggle. Magazi's body, like all South African bodies, is marked by the discourses of gender and race. However, Magazi moves through the discourses with a certain amount of ease, as do his seamless transitions through the various cultural and gendered dance forms. This is profoundly subversive.

The body is always interrogative - always a question, an ambivalence about what is experienced in the body and how the body is represented and constructed in the social, cultural and physical worlds that it inhabits and participates in. (Allsopp and deLahunta, 1996: 6).

Jay Pather is conscious of the intersection of gender and race on both the female and male dancer's body. Pather extends this intersection of gender and race on the dancer's body to include cultural constructions on the physical form, that of traditional dance forms. The physical body in his dance works comment on and interrogate their existence as constructions that both permeate and affect the physical form.

A white female dancer dressed in a coloured tutu representing the New South African flag performs ballet steps. Pather states that "she's always represented the fragile new South Africa" (Appendix A: 107). This section of the piece also interrogates the South African cultural construction that ballet

is merely a white female's dance form. The female (and male) body in South Africa is entrapped by racial and cultural discourses whereby certain movements are constructed as particular for certain racial and cultural groups. The ballet dancer eventually performs gumboot steps so that she can survive the changing context. There is also the example of the gumboot dancer who is crippled due to Apartheid, and the Khatak dancer whose hands are bandaged thereby silencing her means to express. Pather in an interview (Appendix A: 106) speaks about the section when the Khatak dancer and Khulekani Qwabe are on stage and states that:

The more I figured this role out - it happened like that, and I thought there's a role here: he's a politician. A big beurocrat. He's the one who smokes the cigar. Then the big stomach came in. He stuffed himself with a pillow. When he did the dance with Pravika, it really began to make sense. He was the beurocrat. Whether it's an African Indian statement is one story, quite a profound story, about minorities and minority cultures. It's like a warning sign about it. The other thing is gender, and politicians, and art.

Pather and his dancers convey the need of the female (and male) body to question its cultural constructions and definitions and allow for an experimentation with other forms of movement. Pather in an interview (Appendix A: 108) states that:

I do encourage the lifting. All the regular stuff. The women lifting the men. Very often, I'm surprised how people's consciousness are quite backward concerning gender issues. People are very impressed. It's a bit tokenistic at this point.

However, Pather is aware that both cultural and racial inscriptions define the female (and male) body and a neutral South African female (and male) physical form is unlikely as the body is not a neutral site. Rather Pather

stresses the availability, especially in a heterogeneous society like South Africa, of the possibility for experimentation for the female (and male) dancer. This experimentation that he offers the audience allows for the breaking of fixed constructions of the South African female (and male) body which has been segregated because of its gender, race, and culture. Fluidity of the physical form, in terms of certain movements, involves the liberating of the body from specific constructions that limit the physical form. Pather's choreography heightens the audience's awareness of the different actual physical dance forms that are available in South Africa. Yet in these different dance forms there are brief moments of exchange, for example, when the dancers in the 'Simunye' section share their movement steps.

If bodies are traversed and infiltrated by knowledges, meanings, and power, they can also under certain circumstance, become sites of struggle and resistance, actively inscribing themselves on social practices. The activity of desiring, inscribing bodies that though marked by law, make their own inscriptions on the bodies of others, themselves, and the law in turn, must be counterposed against the passivity of the inscribed body. (Grosz, 1993: 199).

Pather interrogates gendered movements whereby the dancers engage with a dance language in which both male and female dancers execute identical movements. The movement language is not gender-based.<sup>39</sup> Pather is conscious of the dichotomy of the human body. The body is both a construct of difference between sexes and races, and sameness.

The gender relations between men and women in terms of issues of power and resistance are explored in *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times*, whereby the one male dancer forces a female dancer to tap to his rhythm. She attempts to

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<sup>39</sup> The Judson Dance Theatre maintained that sexual differentiated movements limited choreography. Therefore, both male and female dancers used the same movement language that was not based on gendered constructed movement. See Page 27 of this thesis.

break away and tap to her own rhythm, but is forced to tap to his aggressive rhythm, which he beats out with a stick. In the background, a pantsula dancer and a white ballerina applaud her performance. The choreography exposes the social hierarchy whereby the black female is situated at the bottom of the hierarchical structure.

Grosz argues that for Foucault's theory of the body to be relevant to feminist theory, feminists have to make it clear that there is no neutralised corporeality, but only sexed, specific bodies (Grosz, 1987: 10). Gatens contends further that different kind of bodies have different social value and significance that, in turn, has a marked effect on the way we perceive and make sense of our bodies (Gatens, 1983: 48). (Stephen, 1997: 314).

Pather works with a variety of different dancer's bodies. He is conscious that not all bodies are the same. He is aware that there exists a multiplicity of bodies, in all different forms, who come from different backgrounds. Pather (Appendix A: 105) states that:

I am consciously bringing issues of race, in so far as, where the different dance forms have come from. The very fact that I choose to work with a variety of different dancers. I try to work as much as possible with a variety of dancers, I enjoy that. I like working with various kinds of bodies. Different kinds of bodies as well. Different types of bodies so that the bodies aren't just black bodies. They aren't stereotypical. They're against the type. I think, that is as conscious as it gets. That's how conscious I choose to get. Assembling. It's like what I do when I bring them together. After that, it's almost that it goes into something quite unconscious. I deliberately don't want to put people together, but for race issues.

Pather explores and interrogates the effect the discourses of gender and race have on the body, but he leaves the dance work in a state of ambivalence whereby the audience can interpret and make their own conclusions about the effect of the discourses on the South African body.

Jay Pather believes that contemporary theatre dance (and its use of the moving body) can offer possible solutions or methods that allow the physical body to resist the dominant discourses of race and gender that constantly surround and permeate the body. However, it is not when the body is choreographed to resemble a gender-less, race-less, and culture-less body.<sup>40</sup> Pather states that this is a "flip-side", simply a reversal of the discourses in operation (Appendix A: 110). The body is defined so much by its history, its gender and race, (and culture). However, it can move beyond that. Pather choreographs a movement language that has the ability to resist the dominant discourses of race and gender through acts of subversion, whereby Pather choreographs Simpiwe Magazi as moving freely in front of the Alwin Nikolai slide. Pather (Appendix A: 111) states that:

when the person is there with all the passion, the stuff that makes us unique as human beings, but we go beyond that. I think the temptation to be sex-less and race-less is too great. It can be a trap. Problematic, because after all we are different races, different sexes. The body has received that, and received the roles. The choices we are faced with, is all determined. It is possible for dance to transcend.

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<sup>40</sup> The Judson Dance Theatre employed this notion of the gender-less body. However, Pather is aware that the body is not neutral. The body has been impelled to take on the respective discourses of gender and race, yet it is not compelled to take on these discourses. See Page 35 of this thesis.

### c. Liane Loots

#### *o/i my journey i lost my voice to beauty*

(Performed at the JOMBA! Dance Festival at The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in August 1998)

#### i. Programme Notes

"The journey towards the present moment has been about pathways taken and those dreamed of and not stepped upon. To map a journey is to look first at the feet and the way in which we have walked on the earth. Once we can speak of an understanding of this connection, we can only then begin to map the other journeys - those travelled inside the head and the heart. It is this process of mapping that has kept me going till this moment and made me understand that despite the horror and the violence that I have born physical witness to, on my journey I lost my voice to beauty. It was a gradual process and one which led me finally to silence. The silence that seems atomic in its magnitude to understand the connectedness of all things. Wars are fought the moment we choose sides. My journey, through a war, led me to the beauty and stillness of silence and an understanding never to define myself in relation to an unimagined other".

#### CHOREOGRAPHER

Liane Loots

#### COMPANY

Flatfoot Dance Company<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Flatfoot Dance Company is a dance company based at The University of Natal, Durban. Liane Loots is the Artistic Director of the company. Many students have had little or no official dance training, yet have experienced dance either in the form of traditional dance, or at social settings. Student dancers are trained in, and experience, many dance forms from Graham technique to Bharatha Nataym.

## MUSIC

Philip Glass and Foday Musa Suso

## TEXT

Liane Loots

## COSTUMES

Joyce Ahrens

## LIGHTING DESIGN

Julian August

## DANCERS

Deirdre Atkins, Mduduzi Fundam, Suhana Gordhan, Garth Naude, Delene Robson, Brink Scholtz, and Dave Wartski.

## **ii. Review**

The stage reveals a white male dancer wearing a pith helmet who moves through a series of movements as if exploring his surroundings. A white man in Africa who is going to explore, discover, define his surroundings, and as a colonial force, destroy his surroundings. An Indian female dancer proceeds to dress herself in her sari. At the back of the stage is a cloth on to which Apartheid laws such as '1913. Native Land Act (No. 27)/1950. Group Areas Act (No. 41)', and words such as 'navel', 'breast', are projected. A slide announces the date of many Indian South Africans' arrival at Durban, South Africa 01860. Indentured Labour Arrives In Natal'.<sup>42</sup> Loots interrogates the notion of the body, like the South African landscape, as territory to be explored, colonised, and liberated. Apartheid legislation governed the South

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<sup>42</sup> Many South African Indians were brought to Durban, Natal, South Africa, to work on the sugar farms. Due to the Indian diaspora, South Africa has one of the largest Indian population outside those living in India.

African body, permitting (and denying) certain bodies to inhabit certain spaces. The body and the South African landscape became intertwined. Loots shows the link between the mapping of the South African landscape by Apartheid legislation, and the mapping of the South African body through the utilisation of slides naming various body parts, for example, 'breast', 'thigh' and 'navel'. The South African body, like the land, has been constructed through the discourses of race and gender.

A black male dancer enters. He is followed by a white male dancer. All three male dancers execute similar steps, but there is a hint of a system of hierarchy that is present amongst the male dancers, with the black dancer finding himself situated at the bottom of the hierarchy. The pith helmet becomes a sign of leadership/dominance, and the black dancer, though tempted to put it on his head, is not able to try it on because the white dancers ensure that he never possesses it long enough. They disinherit him of his own land. The slides of the various Apartheid laws highlight this disinheritance of the land. Slides such as '1913. Native Land Act. No. 27' and 'Native Resettlement Act. No. 19'. Loots explores how the Apartheid legislation has mapped not only the South African land, but also the bodies that inhabit it. Added to this, how bodies from different races underwent different experiences due to the colour of their skin, and how Apartheid legislation mapped the land according to skin colour.

The female dancers enter, and join the piece. Same-sex partnering, and a fusion of African, Indian, and contemporary dance styles drive the piece. One of the female dancers moves in silence. The rest of the dancers move behind the cloth. Some are walking alone, some fast, and some together. This becomes a metaphor for the journey of the various races and genders who colour South African society. It is when they all form a group image in front of the cloth, that the audience (perhaps with the choice of music) sense something ominous about the journey.

A partnering between a male and female dancer portrays a relationship between the genders, and one has to notice the lack of support and trust that is made apparent through this *pas de deux*. This is in contrast to a same-sex partnering between two female dancers whereby there are elements of care, support, and nurturing implicit in the way the dancers move together.

Behind the cloth, through Loots' choreography, the metaphor of the journey is again explored, except at this moment all the dancers move together. They might not move at the same time, or at the same speed, but there is a sense of unity amongst the dancers. The Indian female dancer picks up her sari and begins to fold it neatly as if she is shedding her cultural definition. Maybe she is creating her own journey, mapping out her own existence, her own place in Africa, and not allowing the colonial power (or cultural definition) to do it for her.

### **iii. Lliane Loots and the discourses of gender and race**

Lliane Loots employs slides as a backdrop in her dance work *on my journey i lost my voice to beauty*. These slides display various South African legislative acts concerning Apartheid laws, such as '1913. The Native Land Act (No. 27)'. The slides become a backdrop of South African history. They reveal how the laws of South Africa governed the physical South African body. These slides also include words relating to the physical form. Loots is aware of how the history of South Africa has shaped the South African body. South Africans, due to history, are extremely conscious of the discourse of race, and by appropriation, the race of a dancer. Loots in an interview (Appendix B: 112) states that:

I think we have a heightened sense of race in this country. We are more sensitive, I think, than a lot of people are about what colour the dancer is on stage. I think that's partly because of our history.

The discourse of race is clearly interrogated in *on my journey i lost my voice to beauty*, and its interconnected relationship with the discourses of race and gender (and culture). In the beginning of the dance work, Suhana Gordon, an Indian female dancer, dresses herself in her sari. Loots uses the colour/race of the dancer to show how South African politics were (and are still) embodied in the visceral flesh. Lois McNay in *Foucault A Critical Introduction* (1994) states that "The human body is the most specific point at which the micro-strategies of power can be observed" (91). Suhana Gordon is located in the middle of a discursive field where the discourses of race (Indian) and gender (female) have greatly shaped and uniquely affected her.<sup>43</sup> bell hooks in *Talking Back: thinking feminist - thinking black*. (1986) maintains that the "Recognition of the inter-connectedness of sex, race, and class highlights the diversity of experience" (22). Loots choreographs and explores, using the dancer's gender and race, and the slides occurring behind the dancer, to show the effect that Apartheid had on an Indian woman's body. ^ Loots shows how Gordon as an Indian female is constructed into a specific subject position according to the dominant discourse that belongs to the Apartheid government. Loots explores how an Indian female was constructed as the 'other' and was forced to occupy a certain geographical space. However, there exist counter-discourses of race, gender, and culture, as the body has the ability to resist these constructions.

Reverse discourse has important implications for the power of the discourse which it seeks to subvert. As a first stage in challenging meaning and power, it enables the production of new, resistant discourses. (Weedon, 1987: 110).

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<sup>43</sup> This thesis does acknowledge that there are other discourses that are operating in this discursive field. However, this thesis is interrogating the discourses of race and gender.

<sup>44</sup> For example, '1860. Indentured Labour Arrives In Natal', '1950. Group Areas Act. (No. 41)', 'Women's Bodies', and 'To Be Owned'.

Loots subverts the dominant discourses at the end of the piece when she choreographs Gordon folding up the sari. Weedon (1987: 111) states that counter-discourses (or reverse discourses) are able to:

offer the discursive space from which the individual can resist dominant subject positions. The possibility of resistance is an effect of the processes whereby particular discourses became the instruments and effects of power.

Loots choreographs Suhana Gordon's role as that of resisting the history that the Apartheid government constructed for an Indian female. Loots choreographs Gordon's role as an Indian female who chooses to define herself (and her body), and create her own journey, (represented by the folding up of the sari) through the discursive landscape of South Africa. Through the use of gesture, Loots choreographs Gordon to indicate that she (as an Indian female) will discover her own voice. Loots creates an image of empowerment.

Loots interrogates the hierarchy that exists amongst the discourses of masculinities through her dance work.<sup>45</sup> Garth Naudé wears a pith helmet in the beginning of the dance piece. There is a sense that he is a colonising force that will explore the landscape to discover it and define it. His role enforces the colonisation effect on Suhana Gordon as an Indian woman. Naudé and another white male dancer seem to have a similar effect on Mduzi Fundam, as they prevent him from owning the pith helmet; the symbol of power. This is an example of racial hierarchy that existed in South Africa where the dominant racial group was denied the right to govern. It is also an example of how the dominant discourse of masculinity, that of the white heterosexual male, oppressed the discourse of black masculinity.

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<sup>45</sup> Masculinity is not a monolithic construction. In society, there exist multiple masculinities. See Page 28 of this thesis.

Loots acknowledges her identity and her background through her choreography. In an interview (Appendix B: 112) Loots states that:

in a sense that you also want to make work about that, work about racial identity, about gendered identity. I think in a way, it's a privilege to be in a country like South Africa, where race is so heightened. You are so profoundly aware of oppression, and by appropriation, other types of oppression, like gender.

The history of contemporary theatre dance has been constructed as neutral. The Judson Dance Theatre naively thought the body and dance could be utilised in a neutral manner by stripping the body of gendered movements. Contemporary theatre dance, like the body, is not a neutral form. It has been shaped by its context and its interaction with operating discourses. South African choreography exposes the myth of neutrality. Loots in *on my journey i lost my voice to beauty* is aware of the discourse of race. However, she does not interrogate the discourse to be 'politically correct'. Rather her South African context, and her relationship to her context, allows the audience to be made aware of the discourse of race in operation. Loots, in an interview (Appendix B: 113), states that:

I think that you can't pretend that race is not an issue when you make work. For me, the type of work that you make is work that speaks about identity. My own identity as a white woman confronting certain systems of oppression. Confronting my own historical legacy of growing up in an Afrikaans family, quite conservative. Coming to university, acknowledging and working with other systems of thinking. I think it's something that you can't pretend is not there, I think that it depends how you work with it. Some choreographers just choreograph and work with what's there. For me the kind of work I want to make requires an acknowledgement of racial identity, whether that's learnt

or something we deconstruct. I think you can wear blackness, whiteness.

Loots highlights the notion that the discourse of race infiltrates the physical form. It is both a physical pigmentation and an ideology with certain connotations. There is also a challenge to the dominant discourse of race. Loots, through the use of choreography, shows how a dancer can "wear blackness, whiteness" when Deirdre Atkins, a white female dancer, performs Ngoma (African traditional dance language) (Appendix B: 113). Another example of when the body subverts the dominant discourses of gender and race is when Loots choreographs Deirdre Atkins and Mduduzi Fundam dancing together using African traditional dance steps. Apartheid legislation such as The Group Areas Act 1950 and The Immorality Act 1950 had previously disallowed a black body and a white body to be in close physical contact. Even though South Africa presently has a democratic government, it is still necessary to break the boundaries that Apartheid created between the various racial groups. Repealing of Apartheid legislation cannot remove how subjects are constituted in particular ways. Loots, through her choreography, deconstructs racial, gender, and cultural stereotypes when Atkins performs traditional African dance steps. The sari in *on my journey i lost my voice to beautybezovaes* a metaphor for a particular history of South Africa, that of an Indian woman's history of South Africa. However, though this history has shaped the South African body, it does not have to limit the path taken by the South African body.

By drawing attention to the way in which bodies are not passive, neutral objects upon which discourses construct identity, the notion of the unproblematic body biological body as the factual base upon which sexuality<sup>46</sup> is ascribed is subverted. Drawing attention to the way in which bodies actively create and recreate themselves, also illustrates that bodies are lived and constituted within a network of bodies; the

action of one effects the actions and experiences of others. Thus, a conception of the body as a point of resistance to power and a means of subverting the deployment of sexuality, becomes available to the subject through their very lived existence. (Stephen, 1997: 314).

In terms of the discourse of gender, the movement language that is employed is the same for both male and female dancers. The partnering is shared by both genders. An example of this is when Delene Robson and Garth Naudé share the lifting and supporting in the *pas de deux*.<sup>47</sup> However, challenging gender stereotypes in dance is not simply about male and female dancers executing similar movements. There is also the importance of creating roles for female dancers that are empowering. Loots is concerned with the representation of the female form on stage.<sup>48</sup> Loots choreographs her female dancers in such a manner so as not to be considered objects of desire. The female dancers' bodies are not displayed in an 'erotic' manner as to seduce the spectator. Dance is about watching the body, yet it is important that the female body is not oppressed due to gendered spectatorship and stereotyping, but rather empowered. Loots (Appendix B: 114) states that:

With me, it's how the female body is represented on stage. A lot of dance has represented the female as spectacle, as sexual object, as object of desire, as object of unfulfilled love, all these kinds of narratives. It becomes quite important that we find languages for those dancers that break the pattern of: 'I am an object to be looked at'. Unless you are making a work about objectification, but then in itself you reclaim. We do read gender, because when a male walks on stage and then a female, there's a difference. Whether it's a difference

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<sup>46</sup> By appropriation, the discourses of gender and race.

<sup>47</sup> Loots, like DV8 Physical Theatre Company, also shifts the traditional *pas de deux* by having same-sex partners, or by both male and female dancers sharing the responsibility of lifting and supporting their partner.

<sup>48</sup> Loots' preoccupation with the representation of the female form on stage is similar to Yvonne Rainer's concern with the representation of the female form and the 'male gaze'. See Page 34 of this thesis.

in how they do the language. We visually read a difference before they dance. So part of the act of choreography, if you're going to be a choreographer that challenges gender stereotyping, is to shift the audience's way of looking at the flesh, which can be done on so many levels, superficial and deeper.

Loots' choreography and contact improvisation may be similar to DV8 Physical Theatre Company's due to her approach to partnering and deconstructing gendered movement languages, yet Loots (maybe due to her recognition of and interrogation of South African history, and its present) is far more aware of the interconnectedness of the discourses of gender and race.

Loots re-invents the traditional dance forms by utilising them as a vehicle to discover a new way in moving the physical body. Specific traditional dance forms access the body in a certain way, and it becomes interesting when a ballet-trained dancer such as Deidré Atkins executes an African traditional dance step (Ngoma). This re-invention is remarkably similar to the fusion of traditional dance forms that occurs in Jay Pather's choreography.

There are moments in *on my journey i lost my voice to beauty* where the dominant discourses of race and gender are subverted. The body has this ability to be subversive due to the counter-discourses that are in operation.<sup>49</sup> The dancers move freely through a variety of traditional dance forms. They are not limited by gendered movement languages, or gendered and racial partnerships. Apartheid legislation directly affected the South African body, yet it was the mass meetings and marches of the South African bodies that aided the arrival of a democratic government. However, the body must still rebel and subvert due to the insidious nature of the dominant discourses of gender and race in operation. Loots, like many of her peers, is discovering,

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<sup>49</sup> The discourses that construct the body are in a constant state of flux. This allows for the existence of counter-discourses that occur in opposition to the dominant discourses. See Page 4 of this thesis.

deconstructing, and re-inventing the South African body through the medium of contemporary theatre dance.

**d. David Gouldie**

***the last time i checked i thought I loved you***

(Performed at the "Back to Back" dance season at The Natal Playhouse at the end of March 1998)

**i. Programme Notes**

CHOREOGRAPHER

David Gouldie

COMPANY

The Playhouse Dance Company<sup>50</sup>

MUSIC

Grectjie Bijma, Bobbie Me Ferrin, David Laing, and Combustable Edison

DANCERS

Deborah de la Harpe, Mary-Ann de Wet, Farouk Irving, Manie Irving, Melvin Martinez, Itumeleng Mokgope, Catherine Moore, and Shion Unser.

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<sup>50</sup> The Playhouse Dance Company is a professional neo-classical ballet company funded by The Natal Playhouse. After the "Back to Back" dance season (1998), the Playhouse Dance Company was disbanded due to the lack of funding. David Gouldie now both dances and choreographs for The Fantastic Flying Fish dance company. Many of the dancers who were in

## ii. Review

On the one side of the stage on a revolving platform, two dancers, male and female, are positioned in a sculptural form. Both wear a colour-less and drab form of underwear. Another dancer pushes the platform slowly around. An image of a sexless couple is conveyed. On the remainder of the stage, the rest of the dancers execute crisp, sharp movements, interacting quickly and efficiently with each other. There is a repressive quality to their movements which are repetitive and slow. The female dancers are dressed in corsets and metal hoop skirts covered with a net material. The costumes hinder their movements and create a sense of discomfort. Their repeated gestures become frustrated and the audience expect them to break free from their repetitions and frustrations.

Instead the male dancers are to wear the hoop skirts as well, and are to become as frustrated and limited by their skirt restrictions like their female counterparts. The partnering becomes awkward and constrained. Added to this, is an underlying sense of risk, that maybe the dancers would not be able to successfully lift each other because of the hoop skirts, or maybe they would abandon the skirts, and choose freedom instead of confinement. However, the dance became increasingly frenetic, with desperate gestures and tricky partner-work becoming darker and darker. The confined and restricted bodies (and sexualities) become far more deviant.

Suddenly there is stillness, and then gestures and movements are calmly executed. The platform, which had stopped revolving earlier on, is pushed again. It is as if the cycle of the dance could be repeated. Gouldie leaves the audience with a brew of something dark and meaningful, and something light and fake; a feeling of ambivalence.

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The Playhouse Dance Company dance for him in his new dance works that he choreographs for The Fantastic Flying Fish dance company.

### iii. David Gouldie and the discourses of gender and race

Unlike Pather and Loots, David Gouldie is not concerned with interrogating how the discourse of race permeates and affects the moving body on stage. He rather interrogates the discourse of gender and subverts the conventions of neo-classical ballet. He is not primarily concerned with the interconnectedness of the discourses of gender and race. Gouldie focuses on the discourse of gender and challenges and subverts the roles neo-classical ballet offers to female and male dancers. However, whether conscious or not, the South African audience instantly recognise the dancer's body as belonging to a particular racial group. Gouldie's focus on gendered movement is similar to The Judson Dance Theatre who interrogated gendered movement and how it (gendered movement) can limit choreography. David Gouldie in an interview (Appendix C: 122) states that:

It wasn't a race issue at all. More about the bodies. They're still getting across your concept and your idea. Whether that be about race issues or what you have. As a choreographer it doesn't even get into my mind.

The body, however, is not neutral. It is marked by its gender and race. Bodies are unique physical subjects that are constructed through and exist in a network of interconnecting discourses. The choreographer might not interrogate the interconnectedness of the discourses of race and gender, but the audience, due to the historical context of South Africa, will classify a dancer's body as belonging to a particular race.

Nevertheless, Gouldie is concerned with the discourse of gender. He employs same-sex partnering to deconstruct the traditional *pas de deux*. Like Pather and Loots, he does not choreograph gendered movement. Gouldie (Appendix C: 122) states:

I really enjoy working with same-sex couples. Two females working together. Breaking the stereotype of the male lifting the female shifts the whole boundary and stereotype. It gives it a whole new meaning. It's not about lifting. It becomes more a relationship, more stuff to be developed than the normal classical duet.

*the last time i checked i thought i loved you* interrogates the discourse of sexuality and the gender roles the body performs.<sup>51</sup> Gouldie makes a profound political statement by challenging the form of neo-classical ballet. Both male and female dancers use a similar language and there is no differentiation between the dance language offered to male and female dancers. This is revolutionary as neo-classical ballet has gender defined movement. Gouldie allows for the experimentation and discovering of a new ballet language by his stripping away of gendered movement. He challenges the preconception that ballet partnerships (*pas de deux*) must be between male and female dancers. He challenges the form of these partnerships, whereby previously male dancer lifted female dancers, and in his dance works both male and female dancers share the lifting and supporting of their partner.<sup>52</sup>

In *the last time i checked i thought i loved you*, two dancers' bodies are displayed on a rotating platform. The bodies are displayed to the audience as a spectacle for the audience to gaze upon. Dance is about watching the body, and it could be construed that Gouldie is reinforcing the stereotype of the female dancer's body. However, he utilises both a male and female body on the platform, thereby making the audience gaze upon the male form as well.

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<sup>51</sup> As a white male choreographer, Gouldie actively chooses to work with female dancers and make work about gender, thus subverting the hegemonic masculinity in operation.

<sup>52</sup> David Gouldie's interrogation of gendered movement is similar to that of The Judson Dance Theatre. See Page 11 and 26 of this thesis.

This spectatorship of the male body is profoundly subversive, in that Gouidie is allowing the homoerotic viewing of the male body.<sup>53</sup>

Both male and female dancers wear corsets and skirts which would seem to restrict the body, yet they roll and jump adding an element of risk to the dance work. Gouidie challenges gender-defined movement languages and costuming of the moving body. Through Gouidie's choreography, the dancers rebel against and subvert the conventions of neo-classical ballet. Though the dancers wear the same costume and execute similar moves irrespective of their gender, the male dancers do, in some cases, move differently to their female counterparts, and vice versa. This is because there is a physical sense to being male or female. The discourse of gender not only affects the body, but has permeated the physical form, and in a sense, colours the movement of each dancer.

Gatens does not mean to 'imply any commitment to an essence of the social significance of bodily functions or experiences'. Her point is to indicate that 'the body can and does intervene, to conform or to deny, various social significances' (1983: 149). Gatens argues that the same behaviour has different social significance when acted out by the male subject on one hand and the female subject on the other. Masculine and feminine forms of behaviour are not arbitrary inscriptions on neutral and indifferent bodies. Rather it is biology as lived in particular social contexts that accounts for the construction of sexuality. (Stephen, 1997: 314).

Gouidie does not include traditional dance forms in his choreography as he is "trying to create" his own culture through his dance works (Appendix C: 123). However, neo-classical ballet in South Africa is considered a traditionally white

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<sup>53</sup> Narrative structure in classical ballet was employed to ensure that no homoerotic spectatorship occurred of the male dancer's body. See Page 31 of this thesis where the 'male gaze' and issues of masculinity are discussed in reference to Steve Paxton.

dance form. Gouldie shifts and challenges traditional neo-classical ballet by subverting partnerships. Though he may not interrogate the discourse of race and how it effects (and affects) the dancers' bodies, he does acknowledge their respective backgrounds. Gouldie (Appendix C: 124) states that:

My work's always moulded around the people I work with. My work with Siwela was incredibly different to what I usually do. They had different styles, different energies. They came from a different place - which is like a cultural issue. That is important in the process of choreographing. Not necessarily what the choreography is about, but it does come into play, the relationships. Because we are coming from a different place, relationships are important. Body types - we want real people, not skinny anorexic ballet girls anymore. Because that's what dance is about - real issues, real people.

David Gouldie believes that contemporary theatre dance can offer moments when the body can resist the discourses of race and gender "more than any other medium" (Appendix C: 124). Gouldie, like Loots, articulates that the body speaks a language that moves beyond the verbal act of communication. However, these acts of rebellion occur in fragmented moments in contemporary theatre dance, and the audience has to be perceptive to catch and read these moments of resistance.

We thus have no "direct", innocent, or unconstructed knowledge of our bodies; rather we are always "reading" our bodies through various interpretive schemes. (Bordo, 1992: 167).

## e. Concluding Remarks

We believe, in any event, that the body obeys the exclusive laws of physiology, and that it escapes the influence of history, but this too is false. The body is molded by a great many distinct regimes; it is broken down by the rhythms of work, rest, and holidays; it is poisoned by food or values, through eating habits or moral laws; it constructs resistance. (Foucault, 1994: 380).

South African contemporary theatre dance choreographers (specifically Loots, Gouldie and Pather) can (and do) offer moments of resistance to the dominant discourses of gender and race. They deconstruct the constructs of masculine and feminine movements and instead employ a movement language that is not gender-specific. Not only does this movement language offer new possibilities in moving, but the body itself becomes interrogative and questions the discourse of gender (and race).

All three choreographers reinvent traditional dance forms. Pather with his Khatak dancer with bandaged hands, Loots with her white dancer performing African traditional dance steps, and Gouldie whose dancers subvert neo-classical ballet by, for example, rolling on the ground. Partnerships are performed by male and male dancers, female and female dancers, and the traditional partnership of male and female dancer are subverted when the traditional roles of lifting and supporting are shared by both genders. By deconstructing the traditional roles offered to female (and male) dancers, the South African (specifically Durban) choreographers offer new and endless possibilities of movement. By questioning what is masculine and feminine, they offer the means for the body to momentarily move away from the dominant discourses permeating and affecting the body. They offer moments when the body can defy the constructions that surround and shape it in society.

bell hooks in *Talking Back: thinking feminist - thinking black* (1986) refers to the "Recognition of the inter-connectedness of sex, race..." (22). Both Pather and Loots are aware of the interconnectedness of the discourses of gender and race. Their respective dance works highlight the interconnection between the discourses, and how each subject (dancer) has a particular experience of South Africa due to their race and gender. Though Gouldie does not interrogate the relationship that exists between gender and race and how both discourses jointly affect (and effect) the South African body, he does interrogate the traditional roles that are offered to the genders. His work with a neo-classical ballet company (which is considered a white dance form) is subversive as he deconstructs and questions how white female ballet dancers should move.

Sexual differences, like class and race differences, are bodily differences, but these are not immutable or biologically pre-ordained. (Grosz, 1993: 195).

Through the utilisation of the dancer's bodies, South African choreographers deconstruct and re-define South African society through their dance works. They offer the body as both a site of struggle for meaning and resistance to the dominant discourses that are in operation. Adrienne Sichel at the opening night of the Jomba! Contemporary Dance Experience (1998) at The Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre in Durban, South Africa stated that "Dancing bodies not only reflect the way things are. They also have the potential to effect change" (1). Pather, Loots, and Gouldie employ their choreography not only to interrogate the effect the discourses of gender and race have on the body, but they offer the dancing body as a means to subvert the effect the discourses have on the physical body.

## **CONCLUSION**

A feminist poststructural examination of the moving body in contemporary theatre dance exposes the body as the primary site of interaction with the discourses of gender and race. The body is not neutral, rather it is a plural and fragmented form. It is marked in the physical sense in terms of biological detail (sex and race), and because of this, it finds itself socially and culturally positioned. This is reflected in the traditional codes and conventions of the discourses of gender and race whereby certain roles and movement vocabularies are gender or racially defined. Jay Pather, Liane Loots, and David Gouldie, working in the South African dance performance environment, seek to actively deconstruct the traditional codes and conventions of the discourses of gender and race and thus free the moving body from these limitations.

The body is the core and primary site of social experience. It is constructed through the discourses that it comes into contact with. The discourses of gender and race affect (and effect) the body constructing both its interior and exterior lived reality. These discourses shape the moving body on stage.

Gender itself may be understood on this model not as the effect of ideology or cultural values but as the way in which power takes hold and constructs bodies in particular ways. Significantly, the sexed body can no longer be conceived as the unproblematic biological and factual base upon which gender is inscribed, but must itself be recognized as constructed by discourses and practices that take the body both as target and as their vehicle of expression. Power is not then reducible to what is imposed, from above, on naturally differentiated male and female bodies, but is also constitutive of those bodies, in so far as they are constituted as male and female.<sup>54</sup> (Gatens, 1992: 132).

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<sup>54</sup> For the purpose of this thesis, also the discourse of race.

The moving body in dance is affected by and reflects the discourses of gender and race in operation. Jay Pather and Liane Loots utilise the moving body to reflect on and to interrogate the discourses of gender and race in society, whereas David Gouldie focuses on the discourse of gender. Due to the interconnectedness of the discourses in operation, there is a unique interplay of discourses and therefore, constructions of each subject's body. Pather and Loots are aware of the interconnectedness of the discourses of gender and race, and how each moving body is uniquely situated in the discursive field of gender and race. This interplay of discourses, and that the discourses of gender and race are in a constant state of flux, allows for the existence of counter-discourses which operate in opposition to the dominant discourses in society. This allows the body the potential to be subversive and resistant to the dominant discourses in operation.

Pather, Gouldie, and Loots believe that gendered definitions of movement limit the moving body, and thus deconstruct and strip the moving body of these gendered defined movement vocabularies. This allows for experimentation and the discovering of new and extensive movement vocabularies for the moving body.

However as the body is not a neutral site, the actual physical form of the body on stage is read by the audience, decoded as belonging to a particular gender (and by appropriation for this thesis, a particular race). Due to the legacy of Apartheid, South African audiences are aware of what race a dancer is. The body:

is a physical entity with given anatomical and physiological characteristics, and [as] it is constituted within particular discourses. The body, not disciplined to the enunciation of a singular discourse, is a multi-vocal and potentially disruptive force which undermines the unity of phallogentric discourse. Postmodern

dance<sup>55</sup> does not eschew the dance of the past but suggests tactical procedures by which the dancer might keep a hop, skip and a jump ahead and away from reductive and normalizing prescriptions. (Dempster, 1988: 51).

The existence of counter-discourses in opposition to the dominant discourses of gender and race allows the moving body to have the potential to subvert the dominant discourses of gender and race. Jay Pather, Liane Loots and David Gouldie, utilise the moving body as a site of resistance to the dominant discourses of gender and race. They interrogate conventional roles offered to particular genders and races and they experiment with movement vocabularies that are not defined according to gender and race. Pather, Loots, and Gouldie are aware (and make use) of the moving body's ability to subvert and interrogate the dominant discourses that affect (and effect) the body. They offer the body as a stage where moments occur when the body re-invents itself beyond the limitations of the dominant discourses of gender and race.

Meanings continually form and re-form over the surfaces of the body. The body is a stage which must re-invent itself: wings, curtains, action, space, bones, muscles, and flights of fantasy. If a woman is to make the meaning of her own image, her body must surpass itself through the very discourse in which it is embedded. Bedding, Budding, Butting. With the jolt of adrenalin that comes with the anticipation that desires can become reality, the sleeping princess awakens as she reconstructs her body in the friction between image and flesh.<sup>56</sup> (Goldberg, 1987/8: 28).

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<sup>55</sup> By appropriation for the purpose of this thesis, contemporary theatre dance practitioners such as Jay Pather, Liane Loots, and David Gouldie.

<sup>56</sup> By appropriation, for the purpose of this thesis, the male body.

Jay Pather in *Shifting Spaces Tilting Times* choreographs a movement language that allows Simpiwe Magazi the ability to move freely through, in and out of, the discourses of gender and race. Through Pather's choreography, Magazi is able to move through the discourses of gender and race with a certain amount of ease, as is his seamless transitions through the various cultural and gendered dance forms. Pather's choreography utilisation of the fluidity of the physical form allows for the liberation of the body from the specific constructions of gender and race that limit the physical form. Pather acknowledges that the body is defined by history, race, gender (and culture).

Liane Loots is aware of how the discourses of gender and race construct the physical form. Loots (like Pather), in *on my journey i lost my voice to beauty*, deconstructs traditional dance movement languages and gendered movement languages. Through the utilisation of the moving body, both Loots and Pather interrogate and deconstruct the discourses of gender and race.

David Gouldie in *the last time i checked i thought i loved you* subverts the conventions of neo-classical ballet. Gouldie challenges the traditional *pas de deux* by choreographing that both genders share the responsibility of lifting and supporting in the *pas de deux*. Gouldie subverts the codes and conventions of neo-classical ballet by choreographing a similar dance language for both male and female dancers. Through his choreography, Gouldie, allows for a homoerotic viewing of the male body and thereby challenges the hegemonic masculinity in operation.

Pather, Loots, and Gouldie realise that the body is not neutral and is shaped by the discourses of gender and race. However, the act of moving challenges the passivity and object status of the body. Pather, Loots, and Gouldie utilise the moving body's ability to defy the discourses of gender and race. Contemporary theatre dance is about the moving body, and because of this motion, the body has the ability to transgress the discourses of gender and

race. Contemporary dance choreographers, through the use of the body in motion, are able to challenge the body's constructions and highlight the operations of the discourses of gender and race. The moving body can challenge the hegemonic discourses of gender and race through the exposure (and employment) of the counter-discourses in operation. The moving body can offer (and does) new possibilities for the body through the medium of dance.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH JAY PATHER**

**AUGUST 1999**

**INTERVIEWED BY SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN**

**WORKS:** *Unclenching the fist* (1997)

*Shifting Spaces, Tilting Times* (1998)

*unt/ufed* (1998)

*Miracle* (1999)

**SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN: How does race intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this shape and affect both the content and the form of the mentioned works?**

**JAY PATHER:** The problem is that it's hard to find out to what extent it's conscious or to what extent it is not conscious. At the risk of sounding very quintessential^ Indian and ambiguous, it's both. I am consciously bringing in issues of race, in so far as, where the different dance forms have come from. The very fact that I choose to work with a variety of different dancers. I try to work as much as possible with a variety of dancers. I enjoy that. I like working with various kinds of bodies. Different kinds of bodies as well. Different types of bodies so that the bodies aren't just black bodies. They aren't stereotypical. They're against the type. I think, that is as conscious as it gets. That's how conscious as I choose to get. Assembling. It's like what I do when I bring them together. After that, it's almost that it goes into something quite unconscious. I deliberately don't want to put people together, but for race issues. Things happen by accident. In *Miracle*, we were trying to work out how to do partners, and Simpiwe and Nellie were doing a *pas de deux*. Suddenly, Simpiwe disappeared and went to Cape Town. Garth came in. Then it was Garth and Nellie. The choreography was quite similar, especially the

first section. We tried it. Garth did of course his own stuff. It was quite interesting. Lliane, and a few people pointed out that when Garth was there and Nellie's arms came out around him, it was black against white. It was completely accidental. The Judas and Jesus scene - what is he trying to say with a white Judas and a black Jesus? Simpiwe and Thulabona, that was completely accidental. I often get loaded with race and gender issues that I never intended. As I say, I don't think it is not conscious. It's maybe unconscious. Unconscious that it is operating. Maybe I'm just not conscious when it happens. I don't know to what extent. I know in *Unclenching the fist*, at one point it became very obvious to me, and it worried me. There were no white men in the company, so only the 'beasts' were black men. 'Like all black men are 'savages', and they beat women'. It was an interesting kind of problem. You really have to pull through it. I've always chosen not to be conscious of it, and just throw the die and see what happens. Even when you consciously try and figure it out - it's still a mess. Rather it's still rich in meaning, whether you do or you don't not consciously do it. You might as well not consciously do it because what comes out in the end is people see it as they wish, or as they please. In *Shifting Spaces*, there was a duet with Pravika and Khulekani. Now I was trying to figure out a dance form that was more complimentary with the Khatak dance form than just the gumboot, and Pantsula. Khulekani's a good Pantsula dancer. I put them together. They worked with it for a bit and things were happening. I work with the dance forms. What happened, is that Khulekani is also the person who brings Claire in, just because I needed someone at that point. He brings Claire in as a porcelain doll, and offered her to the isicathimiya dancers for the boot, et cetera, et cetera. She goes and then Khulekani goes out. The next time you see Khulekani is much later. The more I figured this role out - it happened like that, and I thought there's a role here: he's a politician. A big beurocrat. He's the one who smokes a cigar. Then the big stomach came in. He stuffed himself with a pillow. When he did the dance with Pravika, it really began to make sense. He was the beurocrat. Whether it's an African Indian statement is one story, quite a profound story, about minorities and minority cultures.

It's like a warning sign about it. The other thing is gender, and politicians, and art. She danced with her hands bandaged. Again it starts off about Pantsula and Kathak. It did start on its own thing until I consciously gave him a pillow for his stomach and so I made him the politician. I have a lot of fun with it. I find it. I try not to get bogged down with - I'm going to make this big statement. There was a time when I used to. Then I realised that invariably, it is because I've grown up in a very political conscious thing. I don't think that I'm going to pick up when something is really problematic politically. From that point, it's conscious. I largely like to leave it so. It's on some kind of edge. Not very obvious. Something like Claire on pointe. People have often interpreted as black men and white women. Ballet dancer dragged on. For me the layer that protects, what comforts me, is that it's not didactic. It is that on one layer. On the other, she's wearing the new South African flag. For me, she's always represented the fragile new South Africa. That's what she was. When people choose to see her as the last colonial outpost, or a white woman who has to throw away her shoes and become part of the new South Africa, that's what they choose. I saw it as the new South Africa that's teetering. Everyone's crippled, walking with crutches, torchsong dresses. It's quite a bleak environment. That's what I see, so I leave it quite open. I try and make it not too confusing. People can make race decisions depending on what side of the spectrum they are.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: How does gender intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this shape and affect both the content and form of the mentioned works?**

**JAY PATHER:** I make no bones about it, gender's been a big problem to me in so far as I'm not a woman. I'm very conscious of it, in terms of directing the company as opposed to choreographing. It's very important that Liane choreographed the work she did. You can see the difference in the women, in that they look different. They are different. They work in a different way. I'm very aware of my short comings as a man. Sure, there are some things that I

will as a choreographer deal with. I think that there is a woman's voice that is not being articulated as a result of choreography, as a result of the plethora of male choreographers that we've had. Having said that, I'm quite conscious of it. I do encourage the lifting. All the regular stuff. The women lifting the men. Very often, I'm surprised how people's consciousness are quite backward concerning gender issues. People are very impressed. It's a bit tokenistic at this point. Actually, the whole training system needs to change. The whole number of women we have. We had this school performance for *Miracle* and the students were: 'Why are there so few women in this thing?' I had to explain, that it's historical, and was never conscious, and they were equal. There were originally equal women and equal men, because we had Eli Shong and Claire Bezuidenhout. When Eli Shong left our funding stopped. From then on it became very hard financially. We couldn't employ someone else. Then we had a place, when Claire left. The number of women has been determined by history, design. I'm very conscious. I think that the work around gender can only be intensified with greater input. A greater number of women in the company. That's why I'm very grateful for Liane's works, and how she works with the women. I've tried to figure out a way I can do it. To a large extent I'm very conscious of that. I think women's bodies are very rich. I don't think I have any compulsions about attempting stuff. I would like to create spaces. Ultimately I think female choreographers must do it.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: How does culture intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this shape and affect both the content and form of the mentioned works?**

**JAY PATHER:** To a very large extent. I wrote this paper once called "Culture is an Illusion" where I attempted to say there's no such thing as culture. It's a conglomerate of rituals and habits. Things that stick. It's an illusion and it's so powerful. Because of that it's been used by politicians, as it is completely identifiable: 'We know what your culture is'. I'm a bit radical. What is my culture? There are cultural formations, clusters of religious acts, familial,

neighbourhood, community. They're all clusters, not rigid, solid forms. I've never actually believed that culture exists. It's too fluid, and haphazard and arbitrary. There are encrusted rituals I like to take from. Various dances that come from those rituals I like to take from. For me, what is real, is art. Art and culture are very separate. When making art, one takes from these various pieces of clusters. From those so called cultural formations, that I do. I enjoy doing that. I like staying as close to these cultural formations as possible.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: What is the relationship between the choreographer and the audience?**

**JAY PATHER:** Very different. I wish it was a situation of more dialogue. One could articulate it and settle it. I would like to think that it's a two-way audience. Audiences need to realise that I have a responsibility to them, and they have to me. I do a work like *Miracle* which is quite commercial, quite accessible, it's pretty, it has its choreographic problems. It's not difficult to figure out what's going on. By the same token, I want to create a work that is personal, that is a result of my own figuring it out where I don't really want to bother about what the audience thinks. I can't. I'm struggling with *Siddhartha* with that. You obviously don't want to create a work that nobody likes. Nobody wants that. Even the artists, Futurists and Dadaists artists art still wanted somebody to buy their art, and say something. Therein lies the responsibility for the audience to realise that there's a serious artist. I consider myself a serious artist. I'm not a commercial artist. When serious artists are at work, you've got to give them the benefit of the doubt unfortunately. Not unfortunately, rather fortunately. We don't have a tradition of that, especially in KwaZulu-Natal. I think dance needs an access point. It's finding those points. Quite interesting the response to *Miracle*, my friends were 'what are you doing?' Regular people, who don't go to theatre, couldn't believe their eyes. You win some, you lose some. I lost my friends. Some say you can do both, sometimes you can. Sometimes you can't. Sometimes I've

already compromised. My instinct is to deconstruct it. With *Miracle*, I want people to like it. I'm not sure I could make £/tf/f/etf accessible.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTE LYN: What is the relationship between the choreographer and the dancer?**

**JAY PATHER:** Most of it's through creating spaces, which they've become to hate and really despise. They having to work with something quite personal and it takes a lot of work. Then, what I do, is start choreographing. O.K. do this. O.K. You can't do that. O.K. Now find me something you can do. We go back and forth. Mostly, my goal is to create some kind of democratic structure. They have a strong input with what we are doing. There's a strong understanding between them and myself that I make the decisions, and I can take something further. I often have to figure out your take on something. O.K. We're doing a piece, you're finding something new. What is your colour? Texture? How does it affect your body? Where does it place itself in the body? How do you negotiate this? How does this occur in time for you? Then I create phrases of movement out of all that interrogation. Then take it a little bit further. I take it a bit further. Very long work process. I really like it because it's very...I don't think the dancers would admit it so much, but they often fell like they own the work, which is great.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: Can contemporary theatre dance offer possible solutions or methods for allowing the physical body to resist the dominant discourses of race, gender, and culture that constantly surround and permeate the body?**

**JAY PATHER:** I think it does happen. It can happen. I absolutely, totally agree with that. I hope it can manifest it as such. It's just also a lot to be said. One can do that. The flip-side of that is, that where everything looks the same. In some of the earlier works, works of Trisha Brown, where everyone looked gender-less, race-less, fat, thin, whatever, all looked one. That

experiment, in terms of me, is a bit of a flip-side. I wouldn't go too quickly to a place, where everyone is...I think we are defined so much by the history, and by the culture. Having said that, there's stuff that needs to be let go of, and I hope that I can get there quickly. I don't think the path, the journey is a simple one. I don't think it's as easy as put on a neutral costume. I think that when that happens, the piece lacks the passion cause the person isn't there. I think what you're talking about is when the person is there with all the passion, the stuff that makes us unique as human beings, but we go beyond that. I think the temptation to be sexless and race-less is too great. It can be a trap. Problematic, because after all we are different races, different sexes. The body has received that, and received the roles. The choices we are faced with, is all determined. It is possible for dance to transcend. That it has to go through the path, not mitigation cause then it's very clinical. Where does it go? The relation to my art? It's very interesting.

## **APPENDIX B**

### **TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH LLIANE LOOTS**

**AUGUST 1999**

**INTERVIEWED BY SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN**

**WORKS:** *Without fear of vertigo* (1997)

*If they torture you* (1997)

*on my journey i lost my voice to beauty* (1998)

*the earth has not forgotten us* (1999)

**SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN:** How does race intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this affect both the content and form of the mentioned works?

**LLIANE LOOTS:** O.K. It's a hard one to answer, because I think we have a heightened sense of race in this country. We are more sensitive, I think, than a lot of people are about what the colour the dancer is on stage. I think that's partly because of our history. In South Africa, our notions of performing culture of dance performance has always been ballet. That has been historically very much a white thing. I think that makes it quite hard. Contemporary has always been seen as the other, and what maybe black dancers do. There's always been that cut. I think that's changed. I think, maybe in the last five or six years, it's been challenged. I think that as a choreographer, you are always aware. Maybe it's a South African thing. I'm not sure of, well I am, of what colour the dancers are. Not in a hyper-politically correct way, but in a sense that you also want to make work about that, work about racial identity, about gendered identity. I think in a way, it's a privilege to be in a country like South Africa, where race is so heightened. You are so profoundly aware of oppression, and by appropriation, other types of oppression, like gender. I think dance's always historically been seen as

race neutral which is ironic. Like The Dance Theatre Of Harlem, in America, in the 1970s they made a school for black ballet dancers to break that stereotype. I'm talking around it, but I think that one is, that you are aware. You start from your own position, which, I know I am a white woman. I'm a white woman, and the work that I want to speak about is about my context. That doesn't mean that I only make work with white dancers or white people. My context is about my identity as well. It's about how I articulate my whiteness in the context of the country where I was born. The country that has a profound understanding of racial identity. Having lived through Apartheid and Post-Apartheid, part of what we do all the time, is to speak about our identity. To make work about the difficulties of our identity. I don't know if that's only a white girl thing. I think black choreographers are doing the same thing. I think that you can't pretend that race is not an issue when you make work. For me, the type of work that you make is work that speaks about identity. My own identity as a white woman confronting certain systems of oppression. Confronting my own historical legacy of growing up in an Afrikaans family, quite conservative. Coming to university, acknowledging and working with other systems of thinking. I think it's something that you can't pretend is not there, I think that it depends how you work with it. Some choreographers just choreograph and work with what's there. For me the kind of work I want to make requires an acknowledgement of racial identity, whether that's learnt or something we deconstruct. I think that you can wear blackness, whiteness. Then it becomes interesting when you can get white dancers to do what is considered traditional African dances. That is why it becomes interesting when you have black dancers doing ballet, and the audience in South Africa go 'Oh Wow'. It's profoundly racist, but it becomes quite interesting to play around with the stereotyping around race.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: How does gender intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this shape and affect both the content and form of the mentioned works?**

**LLIANE LOOTS:** I think it's the same thing. What I can also say about race, is that it's quite hard because there's this political correctness thing about having a black dancer, a white dancer, an Indian dancer in your company, like the 'Simunye' representative. I think it's deeper than that. I don't mean it in that way. I mean we can't pretend when we see a body we don't go white, black. Maybe we don't consciously, but sub-consciously we read the flesh. We read the colour of the flesh. If we want to make work that is about the South African context, we have to acknowledge the flesh. Dance is about the flesh, a flesh form. I think all the things I've said about race would go with gender, obviously a concern of mine. It's also about gendered identity. Also in the same way which dance history, performance dance history has had a very race bias. There's been a very strong tradition of what the male dancer can do and what the female dancer can do. Like when we look at ballet, ballet training, the male dancer is trained in one way, and the female dancer in another. There are very specific roles that they play. I think that one of the **great** things about **contemporary** dance obviously, is that they start to challenge these languages. Who has access to what dance language? With gender, obviously, if you put a female dancer on stage in a tutu, before that person's even moved, you've read something. If it's a white female, a black female. There's a whole story there but to deal with gender, not that one can separate them out, but you have to be careful how you **work**. With me, it's how the female body is represented on stage. A lot of dance has represented the female as spectacle, as sexual object, as object of desire, as object of unfulfilled love, all these kinds of narratives. It becomes quite important that we find languages for those dancers that break the pattern of: 'I am an object to be looked at'. Unless you are making a work about objectification, but then in itself you reclaim. We do read gender, because when a male walks on stage and then a female, there's a difference. Whether it's a difference in how they do the language. We visually read a difference before they dance. So part of the act of choreography, if you're going to be a choreographer that challenges gender stereotyping, is to shift the audience's way of looking at the flesh, which can be done on so many levels, superficial and deeper. The

obvious one, is to give women the language that has historically been for the men. That's on a superficial level. It can sometimes go into parody, those ballet parodies. The other thing that speaks about, that challenges, for example, DV8. They would do things like a *pas de deux*. You don't always have a man and a woman doing the *pas de deux*. You have the same-sex *pas de deux*. Or, if you do have a male and a female, depending on what the choreographic intention of the piece is, you shift the spatial relationships. It's also how you train the body. How I don't think men and women should be given different training. I feel that very strongly. I think that if you are training people in the same way, the sorts of languages that you use when you choreograph are going to shift. To see women do things they don't usually do. See men accessing different types of expression. Then I think at a subconscious level, you know something has shifted gender-wise, but you can't put your finger on it, unless you key into that.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: How does culture intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this shape and affect both the content and form of the mentioned works?**

**LLIANE LOOTS:** Well, the first thing I believe in, is that culture is a right wing concept. I believe that culture is...What's that Bob Dylan line: 'It's the last vestige that a scoundrel dings'. I think that we have lived in a society that has made culture the last vestige of breaking down Apartheid. We say: 'It's my culture therefore I'll have five wives'. We don't hear women saying it's my culture. It's also been used politically to get representation. For example, Inkatha Freedom Party uses the argument of Zuluness, which is a cultural argument. Of course culture is a fluid concept. There is no such thing as pure culture. We don't live in isolated worlds. I don't know what you mean when you say culture?

**SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN: On one level: do you have to have a gumboot section in your dance? Is it O.K. to subvert that? Change**

**that? On another level: it's working with dancers who come from a different backgrounds, different cultures which they have been brought up in. Do you work with what they bring to you? It's a minefield.**

**LLIANE LOOTS:** It's a hard thing. It's a huge political and artistic minefield, on many levels. The first level is that simply the language that people learn as dancers. For example, if we look at Flatfoot. I'll say eighty percent of the people coming into the company haven't had official dance training. It's usually the white girls who've had a little ballet. But everyone in the company has danced before. Maybe it's clubbing, that kind of dancing. Or maybe it's traditional dance. For example, you have a lot of Indian, classical Indian dance. There's a lot of people in the company that have done classical Indian dance. There's a lot of people in the company that have done the Ngoma, the Iscithimiya, maybe a little gumboot. How do you bring all those languages together and to find a common way of working, cause all of them access different types of the body. Classical Indian dancing is all in the upper torso, and African traditional dance is very much in the thighs, the quadriceps. Ballet is in the sternum. You don't want people to forget that because you also want to use that. You want people to abandon what is considered culturally specific. Simply find if there is such a thing, I say this in inverted commas, a "neutral place to begin". You find a way of training the body, for example, for a dancer. It's about the skeleton, the muscles. Obviously if you do an exercise, and you've had twelve years of classical Indian training, you're gonna access your pelvis differently. It's a minefield. The answer is that you have to work with what people can bring. The point is not to advantage or disadvantage one. Not to promote one above the other. We live in a society that has promoted ballet training, or a severe contemporary Martha Graham training, not that there are many classical Martha Graham trained dancers in this country. On that level, it becomes a minefield of training. I also think that there in lies the potential to make very interesting work. Work that is very specifically work that is about our context, KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. You

can use that kind of upper body torso of the classical Indian dancers. You can use the very strong pelvis and thigh of the African dance. Then to bring it into the contemporary language is to work with the contraction, getting alignment, making the body strong, and to put it into a "melting pot". I hate that phrase, but it is sort of that. To find a way through that. Also a way that embraces that. On one level you want the dancers to forget. When it comes time to choreograph, to re-invent it. The time has gone for that very early fusion when you would put a gumboot dancer with a ballet dancer, and you would say look how we are. There had been no swop-over. No new language forming so in that sense. Those cultural expressions of the body. Learnt culture. Interesting to see dancers, like someone like Thulabona from Siwela. He was an African traditional dancer. It's quite interesting. Through his contemporary training, and his ballet, primarily contemporary training, and with Jay, the Alexander technique, it's changed the way he actually does the African traditional dance. I think at the end of the day, that's the training issue. The choreographic issue is another thing. One can't speak generically, about specific works, like who you're gonna use. If we had the luxury of choosing who we needed for specific works: 'Like I need classical Indian dancers, I need a contemporary company'. I can only speak about that, but I do think this notion of culture is problematic. We are a multiculturalist society more so than any other country in the world. Many cultures in one space. It's also a richness. We mustn't see it only as an issue. It's about finding ways of...No such thing as a single identity. We have gendered identity, race identity, culture identity, modernity, total. Before you even start, you've got a whole set of stuff you have to go through.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: What is the relationship between the choreographer and audience?**

**LLIANE LOOTS:** It's a difficult one, especially in this climate. Sometimes you feel you have work you want to make and you know three people will like it. I think it would be wonderful if we could live in a society where we have the

freedom to do that. That's a kind of luxury and perhaps more indulgent than we can afford. I don't think it's a compromise, but you have to also make work that will tap into more than just your stuff. I don't know how you do that, but I know my way. I know some of the stuff I deal with isn't only me, many of us deal with issues of identity. I think the way of dealing with the relationship with the audience is how you deal with your dancers actually, if you're hoping to reach an audience. If you want the audience to listen to what people say, or just to go with what you say. They don't have to understand what you mean. Or if they want to have an art experience, or a profound performance experience, as a choreographer, you have to install. That work has to be owned by your dancers. I think there's two ways to do that. To work with dancers that are sympathetic and want to make work with the issues. The job as a choreographer is to take your cast with you. Your work is only as good as your dancers. You have to let it go. They're the ones who are the prime communicators at work. Your job as choreographer is not only to make sure the dancers own the work and go with you on the journey. Which means for me as a choreographer, I spend a lot of the time talking to the cast. We discuss the idea, the issues, and they feed into the process. Sometimes it's a workshop process. Sometimes it's not a workshop process, but they are there. The time for dancers who walk into the studio and are taught the steps, especially in contemporary work, doesn't exist, cause the language for each piece evolves with the process. Which means the dancers have to be trained and have to want to give you that when you make a work. You want the audience to feel something, the dancer have to be feeling it. It's the same with any performance, but with dance, it's more profoundly, because it's generally only with the body, so it's about taking the dancers with you. It's very important that they want to go with you in the work.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: Can contemporary theatre dance offer possible solutions or methods for allowing the physical body to resist the dominant discourses of race, gender, and culture that constantly surround and permeate the body?**

**LLIANE LOOTS:** It's the most profound form of theatre or performance, or discourse where we have the potential to completely challenge any kind of stereotyping. It's a moment of rebellion, and subversive. You can do that not necessarily in your face. We've had a whole history of in your face protest theatre. That was the time for it. There are other ways to do it, the subtle ways. Just shifting the way the body moves, how you use the weight, use gravity. We have a history of performance culture in this country that always has been in opposition to the government. We've had a theatre history that has been part of the struggle towards democracy. No-one in this country believed that theatre was a luxury. We've got this legacy behind us when we make theatre. It's not an indulgence. It's not a luxury. It's a moment of reflection. A moment of speaking against, in opposition to, being subversive. All those things. A chance of making something beautiful, however you define beauty. Making something that can lift someone's spirit, or make someone go on a journey, even if it's for twenty minutes. That is profoundly political. Yes, I think dance, physical theatre dance. I use the term dance very broadly. Where we have moment to because it's a flesh form. We have the time, the moment to resist narrow definitions of what is a beautiful body. Or you know the stereotype of thin anorexic girls the obvious one being the beautiful dancing body, completely challenged. It's nice to offer those stereotypes and to get men and women to work in many ways they might not have accessed. To get people working together that haven't worked together and to see what happens. Just for the cast itself, Flatfoot. Many of the students who come from very isolated racial groups, and suddenly they are forced to roll over one another. The moment you are physically in contact with someone's body, issues of race and gender shift completely. You realise that their flesh is like your flesh and if it's brown or white, it's liberating. It's nice to put that on stage, not only in the choreography, but in the intent of the work.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN:** What is contemporary theatre dance's role or place in South Africa?

**LLIANE LOOTS:** Why have it? Everyone's saying we can't fund the arts. We don't have water in our community. We don't have housing. How can you give money to a company? I would say, it's the same thing. All artists are the conscience of a nation. That's a two-way thing. As artists, we have to be careful that we don't forget that. We have a space to speak things that sometimes people don't want to hear. We also don't want to alienate an audience. It's perfectly O.K. to make work that is a night out, but there's also a space to make work that is challenging. Think differently, maybe shift your perceptions. All art needs funding to answer your question. A true fascist society is a society without artists. Art with only cultural expression. That's what Hitler did. The ministry of culture. He stopped funding all artistic expression, that culture became a method. Artists should be visionaries. People who can comment on and critique on society. That doesn't always have to be a bad thing like shoving doctrine down your throat. It's offering another way of looking. Another way of being. Another subject position. Another way of imagining the world and it can take you. There's always a place for that. That's the true test of democracy. How much a democratic government will allow to artists to say? Or give that artist freedom to say, and to be big enough to listen to them. I don't think that's just for dance. In this country especially dance is the most prime art form at the moment, cause we've got eleven official languages. How do we work around that? We go back to the body. We use the body. I was thinking about this the other day. We come from a country where the written and spoken word has been censored. It's like it's stayed in our conscious. So we're a little reticent to write plays and make meaning with the words, but we're not. There's this incredible burgeoning of dance theatre cause people are not scared to speak with their bodies, because it's not as easy to censor or silence. How do you censor someone's body? It's easier to censor the word. I think at this point where people are floundering for issues to make theatre about, not that there aren't cause there are many, but where does one go? People are finding that an access to the physical body, physical theatre, physical meaning is much easier. Not that it is an easier form, but that it's easier at this point in our

history. Dance and dance theatre is really growing, and I think that says something about the need for people to go back to a basic way of expressing themselves. When you watch two bodies collide on stage, you can't help but feel that, a gut visceral thing. Maybe we've had too much rhetoric. I'm sick of hearing words. I want to feel something. When you watch dance, physical performance, you feel. You either sit on the edge of your seat cause what they are doing is so incredibly dangerous, it's making you respond on that pure level. Or you empathise and go with them. Maybe that's what it's place is, to give people a prime reaction again. We are so full of rhetoric, of listening, of intellectualizing. Sometimes what we actually want to do is feel. You either hate it or love. For twenty minutes, to be alienated, so what. It's something to talk about. You might not know why. You want a reaction. You want people to feel again. You understand why we don't feel cause there's been this layer of stuff. In South Africa, we've been so silenced. We don't want to say what hurts us. So we do feel those things. Because dance is a physical medium, we empathise. The audience, I think with dance, there's a physical empathy. That's why dancers, choreographers, are careful with what they do.

## **APPENDIX C**

**TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW WITH DAVID GOULDIE**

**AUGUST 1999**

**INTERVIEWED BY SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN**

**WORKS:** *Bounce* (1997)

*the last time i looked i thought you loved me* (1998)

*risk free popular culture* (1998)

*unfinished (r)evolution* (1998)

*silent whispers never spoken* (1998)

**SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN:** How does race intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this shape and affect both the content and the form of the mentioned works?

**DAVID GOULDIE:** Not with race issues, not at all. With male and female I find it quite important. Often I land up working with the bodies which are more acceptable to my style. It actually isn't an issue to start off with. I really enjoy working with same-sex couples. Two females working together. Breaking the stereotype of the male lifting the female shifts the whole boundary and stereotype. It gives it a whole new meaning. It's not about lifting. It becomes more a relationship, more stuff to be developed than the normal classical duet.

**SARAHLEIGH CASTELYN:** So you focus more on breaking gender constructs than race. How would you compare it to when you worked with Siwela Sonke Dance Company for the 'Miracle' season?

**DAVID GOULDIE:** It wasn't a race issue at all. More about the bodies. They're still getting across your concept and your idea. Whether that be about

race issues or what have you. As a choreographer it doesn't even get into my mind.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: How does culture intersect, permeate and affect the moving body on stage, and how does this affect both the content and form of the mentioned works?**

**DAVID GOULDIE:** I think culture's very important. What I think my work's about is trying to create my own culture, my new religion. That's my focus. I always feel my works are one big work. They're all related. It's not about the cultures that are in existence, because I stay far away from that. 'Oh, I have to put a gumboot step in here so now it's culturally correct. Our piece is incorporating all cultures'. I think it's about creating a new culture. I'm a white male. I'm sorry. That's where I come from. I don't do gumboot.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: What is the relationship between the choreographer and the audience?**

**DAVID GOULDIE:** Very important question because why do you choreograph? It's for people to come and watch it. Very important issues because you want to make it real. Make it art. Believe in what you do. Also the danger is there of being self-indulgent. It's so easy to alienate the audience. I mean, that is my eternal question, is justification for the audience. It's a hard game to play because you've got to sacrifice what you really want to do in order to make it acceptable. It's very hard. Especially the work I do, which is contemporary. I think it's more real, honest. Not silly girls in tutus doing a silly little story. I mean that has its place, but it's not where I'm at. You can find a balance. You must always remember there are people paying to watch what you are doing. Ultimately that is the reason why you choreograph.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: What is the relationship between the choreographer and the dancer?**

**DAVID GOULDIE:** That is a very important relationship. It's about a relationship. I'm not autocratic. I do get like that sometimes - authoritative. It's not about giving them steps, and them doing them. Like you say, it's about the reaction. It's very important cause they make, they develop it. You give them a starting point and they make it. You mould it how it needs to be. They're incredibly gifted. My work's always molded around the people I work with. My work with Siwela was incredibly different to what I usually do. They had different styles, different energies. They came from a different place - which is like a cultural issue. That is important in the process of choreographing. Not necessarily what the choreography is about, but it does come into play, the relationships. Because we are coming from a different place, relationships are important. Body types - we want real people not skinny anorexic ballet girls anymore. Because that's what dance is about - real issues, real people.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: Can contemporary theatre dance offer possible solutions or methods for allowing the physical body to resist the dominant discourses of race, gender, and culture that constantly surround and permeate the body?**

**DAVID GOULDIE:** Absolutely. More than any other medium. I don't think it's utilised enough. It's body language. We all relate to it. We all subconsciously tell our own stories through our bodies. That's universal. No matter where you came from. How you grew up. You use actions all the time. Breaks the boundaries. I don't know if choreographers use it. They want to make you dance and look pretty.

**SARAH LEIGH CASTELYN: What is contemporary theatre dance's role or place in South Africa?**

DAVID GOULDIE: Doesn't have any role. Choreographers are the same as a cashier at Spar. Same level of respect. I think it's our own fault and not anyone else's. No, I mean that's not really true. It does play an important role. For education, if you just look at a project like 'Reachout'. A lot of educational based things are phenomenal. You can see what the kids are getting out of it. They're getting to know their bodies, their co-ordination, collective mind and soul. Breaking up barriers between people. Those kids get to relate with each other at a new level. No, it's very good, very healthy. They'll grow up as individuals. Intellectually as well. I would like my work to be more than just entertainment. I'd like it to change and shift people's minds. Challenge stereotypes, certain issues, lifestyles, questions. Thought processes, re-structure. Find something new.