

**EXPLORING THE EMBODIED BASIS OF BEING
THROUGH MERLEAU-PONTY AND DANCE:**

A CONVERSATION BETWEEN PHILOSOPHY AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

Merleau-Ponty suggests that a non-dualistic understanding of embodied being must start from a theory of embodied practice. This allows us to think in terms of a body-subject, rather than seeing the body as object, and thus to consider embodiment as the basis of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Further to this, I contend that if we are to truly move away from dualism in our understanding of human being, we need not only to conceptualise embodiment adequately in philosophical terms, but also to engage with lived embodied practice.

This thesis ‘fleshes out’ embodiment theory through an approach which brings Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy into conversation with the experiential accounts of professional contemporary dance practitioners, accessed through in-depth qualitative interviews. In bringing together a philosophy (Merleau-Ponty) which is rooted in the notion of embodied practice, and an embodied practice (contemporary dance) which both grounds and is grounded in philosophically interesting themes such as subjectivity, identity, intersubjectivity, expression and communication, this conversational method allows mutual illumination and opens up a new conceptual space for the exploration of the embodied basis of being. This project therefore emphasises the seeking out of links and common ground between the two interlocutors rather than offering a reductive critique.

The conversation between philosophy and practice covers four main areas where the dancers’ reflections on their (embodied capacities for) practical knowledge, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and representation are explored in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualisations of the corporeal schema, intercorporeality and flesh [*la chair*]. It is argued that this conversational approach functions to open up a space which lies in-between the traditional dualisms of mind and body, philosophy and practice, and theory and data, and allows me to develop and explore new ideas, connections, perspectives and understandings of the embodied basis of being that a different methodological approach would not have facilitated to the same extent.

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INTRODUCTION

Exploring the Embodied Basis of Being through Merleau-Ponty and Dance

This project evolves from an interest in the concept of embodiment as it is articulated within the field of the Sociology of the Body and some branches of Continental Philosophy. The focus of this thesis is, therefore, on the ‘lived-body’ or ‘body-subject’, rather than on the socially constructed (object) body which dominates much of socio-cultural body studies; and embodiment is understood, as I will discuss further in the following chapter, in non-dualist terms as a way of being or mode of subjective human existence.

This engagement with the notion of embodiment could be conceptualised as a purely theoretical exercise, as has been the case in the philosophical and much of the sociological literature (see ‘Contextualising the Conversation’). The theorising of embodiment is, however, notably reliant on concepts of the active, lived body and of bodily behaviour and practice. I therefore argue that if we are really to move away from dualism in our understanding of human being, then we need not only to conceptualise embodiment adequately in theoretical or philosophical terms, but also to engage directly with lived embodied practice. Thus the philosophy of embodiment, which I engage with through the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, is brought into conversation in this thesis, not with *theories* of practice, but with the actual *practice*

of practice, which I access through in-depth qualitative interviews with professional contemporary dancers about their experiences of dance and being dancers.

The thesis can therefore be understood as exploring the embodied basis of being through the dual lens of philosophy and practice. My approach brings together the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, which is rooted in the notion of embodied practice; and the embodied practice of professional contemporary dance, which both grounds and is grounded in philosophically interesting aspects of our existence such as subjectivity, identity, intersubjectivity, expression and communication. It is in bringing philosophy and practice together in this original way to see how they might ‘speak to’ each other – what common ground and potential for new understandings and mutual illumination emerges – that I suggest I am able to open up a new conceptual space for the understanding of embodiment in non-dualist terms.

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of embodiment begins from a focus on the primacy of pre-reflective embodied behaviour, as is exemplified in his writings on motility and perception. This entails notions of some kind of pre-reflective, practical, bodily knowledge and intentionality and allows us to think in terms of a body-subject, rather than seeing the body as an object. His work also extends to take in concepts of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, meaning and communication, where he again emphasises the importance of understanding these areas in terms of the embodied nature of human being.

This thesis recognises the possibility of bringing dancers’ accounts of the experience of dance to speak to these concepts. For example, philosophical ideas about tacit

bodily knowledge are brought together with dancers' accounts of their experiences of what they refer to as muscle memory and as remembering or having dance movements 'in the body'. Merleau-Ponty's contention that meaning and communication are fundamentally embodied practices or capacities is also echoed in consideration of the practice of dance, allowing me to suggest that Merleau-Ponty can help illuminate this aspect of dance and that dance can help illuminate Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas about intersubjectivity and language. It is also interesting to consider how self and the relationship with others are understood by the professional dancer as being closely related to a sense of being (embodied as) a dancer.

This type of detailed sustained attention to one embodied practice is not central to Merleau-Ponty's own work as he uses a number of different examples to illustrate ideas about perception and motility and then discusses language and art in different works with a different focus. In bringing Merleau-Ponty and dance together in this way, I therefore suggest that it is possible to add to the fields of both dance studies and Merleau-Ponty studies.

Engagement with contemporary dance also forces us beyond the dichotomy between materiality and representation as it is both a physical practice and an art-form. The focus on contemporary dance is therefore offered here as an approach which facilitates a non-dualist perspective through which I have been able to explore not only the embodied nature of self, but also embodiment as the grounds for intersubjective recognition and communication. Williams and Bendelow in fact suggest that embodied art-forms might be particularly interesting for engagement with

a non-dualistic notion of embodiment as these practices are argued to blur the traditional boundaries between art and theory (Williams and Bendelow, 1998: 8).

Dance is also particularly interesting and appropriate to take as an example of an embodied practice for this study because the (often pre-reflective or taken-for-granted in everyday life) sense of the body is phenomenologically foregrounded in dance. This is not unique to dance, with studies in the sociology of health and illness suggesting that this foregrounding can occur in instances of injury or illness. The importance of embodiment to our sense of self is also revealed at these moments when the body 'lets us down' in the disruption to sense of self that can accompany physical illness. What is different about taking dance as an example, rather than illness or injury, is however, that the body in dance is foregrounded, not because it is dysfunctional or imposes limitations on our normally pre-reflective movements and bodily existence (although this can be true for dancers as for anyone else), but because the dancing body facilitates or enhances the possibilities for embodied being in the world. Thus my research, in contrast to the vast majority of work in the sociology of health and illness, is able to focus not solely on intervals of disruption to sense of self, but on how that sense of self actually develops and functions in the practice of dance.

The Voices of Philosophy and Practice

While it is of fundamental importance to this project that Merleau-Ponty begins his philosophical speculation from thinking about practice rather than the reflective thought of the Cartesian *cogito*, the contribution of Merleau-Pontian philosophy to this thesis remains at the level of offering philosophical ideas or concepts. It is only in introducing interview accounts of the lived experience of contemporary dance to my discussion of these ideas, then, that I am able to actually move beyond the level of philosophical speculation, truly transcending dualism, to explore these theoretical concepts as they actually play out in practice.

When I refer to Merleau-Ponty's ideas I am therefore primarily engaging with his concepts at a broad level which I find useful for thinking about what they might actually feel like in practice, rather than offering a complex and in-depth discussion of how his ideas evolve in different individual texts. My understanding of these concepts grows out of my engagement both with Merleau-Ponty's own work, and with a number of commentaries on or readings of Merleau-Ponty's work by other scholars. Furthermore, my understanding of these concepts has developed in constantly evolving connection with my researching of dance.

It is also important to emphasise that my intention is not to situate or critique Merleau-Ponty's work in relation to other thinkers, so I have not aimed to locate Merleau-Ponty within or outside different intellectual traditions. In place of this type of analysis I have taken the approach of engaging with and relating his work to an embodied practice. There are places in this thesis where I have appealed to other

thinkers, notably Sartre, de Beauvoir, and Lacan in my discussion of mirrors and the gaze, but this is with the intention of clarifying Merleau-Ponty's position rather than setting out to contextualise or critique it; although where I have found it lacking, such as in the dimension of gender, I have needed to go beyond Merleau-Ponty's original concepts to fully engage with (female) dancers' experiences.

Socio-cultural body studies, and indeed Merleau-Ponty himself, often colour their work with examples of embodied practices, but the work presented here is an unusually extensive study of the interplay between these two manners – philosophy and practice – of engaging with embodiment. It is also true that many empirical studies on the body draw on the work of theorists such as Merleau-Ponty and especially the sociologist Pierre Bourdieu for their discussion of practice, but most of this theoretical engagement is limited to a few key concepts such as *habitus* or the corporeal schema, and, in the case of Merleau-Ponty, engagement is most commonly with his early work, ignoring later work on subjectivity, intersubjectivity, art and language. By contrast, although I do not set out in this thesis to cover and interpret every aspect of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, neither do I limit myself to those concepts that are most well-known or most straight-forwardly linked to empirical work on the body. Rather I have attempted to engage with the overall spirit of Merleau-Ponty's work, and, likewise, to take contemporary dance as a whole system of practice, being and meaning.

The voice of dance appears in this thesis in the form of qualitative interview data from interviews I conducted with professional contemporary dancers. It is not a theory of dance or aesthetics, then, but an engagement with accounts of the lived experience of

being a dance artist or dancing body-subject. Thus while cultural and dance studies have tended to focus on dance and the dancing body as cultural objects or texts for analysis, I have focussed in my interviews on the active ‘doing’ of dance; the embodied practice of dance; and the experiences of learning, remembering, performing and watching dance. This does not, however, limit my perspective on dance to seeing it as a physical (mechanical) activity. Indeed my work on dance is produced in reaction against both these trends towards reducing dance to either the textual or the mechanical.

I look, rather, to explore dance in non-dualist terms, emphasising both materiality and representation. In starting from or prioritising a notion of embodied practice I do not ignore subjective and representational aspects, then, but rather suggest that I am able to use practice as a starting point for a non-dualist exploration of dance as an expressive and communicative art-form related to aspects of our understanding of what it is to be human such as identity, expression, representation, and intersubjective communication.

Conceptualised in this non-dualistic manner, I therefore suggest that dance is particularly illuminating as a focus for an extended discussion of the experience of embodied practice in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical ideas about practice, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and the representational or meaningful capacities of language and art. In taking these broad, non-reductive approaches to Merleau-Ponty and dance, I attempt to draw out all the different ways these two perspectives on embodiment might speak to each other.

The Conversation

The notion of conversation refers to the relationship between philosophy and practice which I set up in the thesis, and, because of how I have approached and accessed Merleau-Ponty and dance, it can also be thought of as describing the relationship I establish between theory and data.

Neither party in the conversation is held to hold intellectual priority over the other. The project is therefore neither theory(philosophy)-driven nor data(practice)-driven, but is rather driven by the desire to open up a space where the connections and interaction between the two interlocutors can generate new depth and possibilities for our understanding of embodiment.

The conversation between philosophy and practice covers four main areas, as reflected in the chapter structure, where the dancers' reflections on their (embodied capacities for) 'Practical Knowledge', 'Subjectivity', 'Intersubjectivity', and 'Representation', are explored in relation to Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the corporeal schema, intercorporeality and the reversible flesh of the world. For example in the chapter 'Practical Knowledge', I discuss the dancers' experiential concepts of getting or having a movement 'in the body' in connection with Merleau-Ponty's theorising of the corporeal schema. This allows me both to explore a new understanding of this aspect of dance and to see how Merleau-Ponty's concept actually plays out in practice.

What happens when I bring this aspect of dance together with Merleau-Pontian theory is not that I am seeking to use the experience of dancers to prove, test or falsify (aspects of) Merleau-Ponty's theory. Neither do I wish to use dance for merely illustrative purposes, nor to use philosophical concepts to encase the experience of dance within a rigid theoretical framework. There are, of course, elements of these interrogative, illustrative and reductive processes going on in the thesis, but the aim is not to set up the voices of philosophy and practice in opposition to each other, nor to reduce one to the other.

Rather I suggest that Merleau-Ponty illuminates the practice of dance and the practice of dance illuminates Merleau-Ponty; and that in the process something new is generated. The conversational method not only allows me to offer different ways of understanding both Merleau-Ponty and dance, but this approach and the connections it produces open up a new, previously inaccessible and unexplored, space for understanding embodiment which lies in-between the traditional dualisms of philosophy and practice, theory and data, and mind and body. It is in this new space that interesting developments in our understanding of embodiment and human being can occur as new connections, ideas, perspectives and understandings are brought into play and developed through the course of the conversation.

Thus although this project is fundamentally based in a critical position towards dualist understandings of body/self, rather than using the embodied practice of dance to test and critique dualist theories, my approach seeks to move beyond a reductive critique of what does not work to open up a space to make new connections and explore other ways of understanding human being. For me this is a far more exciting and interesting

project than showing the inadequacies of dualism, where a lot of work has already been done before as I will briefly review in ‘Contextualising the Conversation’.

The purpose of this conversation between philosophy and practice is therefore to produce an understanding of embodiment which is able to move away from the dualist undercurrents of traditional academic approaches, disciplines and concepts. This method requires a certain interdisciplinarity as I would suggest that a truly non-dualist approach to embodiment cannot be bound to one tradition such as philosophy or social research’s grounded theory. The aim is not, however, to delineate or regulate this new in-between space, but rather to open it up and explore the possibilities that lie therein.

This notion of a space being opened up is perhaps increasingly clear as we move on through the later chapters of the thesis on ‘Subjectivity’, ‘Intersubjectivity’ and ‘Representation’. For example in ‘Subjectivity’ I discuss the sense of self entailed in the corporeal schema, exploring the constitution of this subjectivity through processes of engaging with reflections of the body from both mirrors and other people. This is theorised in Merleau-Ponty’s work primarily in terms of developmental stages, although he does emphasise that the corporeal schema is continually refined and developed throughout the life-course in processes of mirroring interaction. In my interviews with dancers it became apparent that not only is sense of self (as dancer) very closely bound up with a sense of one’s own dancing body (corporeal schema), but that mirrors and mirroring interaction with fellow dancers are hugely important to the development of this sense of one’s own dancing body and of one’s self as a dancing body. The conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance thus flows

between suggestive areas of connection between the two interlocutors, seeing what each has to say.

The notion of using two voices in writing and reasoning has a long history in philosophy, dating back at least as far as Plato's Socratic Dialogues. In suggesting that ideas can be produced by bringing together two different voices in order to see what they generate between them, I must also acknowledge a long tradition of dialectical reasoning, to which Merleau-Ponty was himself not a stranger (see Merleau-Ponty, 1974. *Adventures of the Dialectic*). The notion of conversation that I put forward here, however, perhaps differs from these traditions of dialogical and dialectical writing in that one of the voices in the conversation is derived from the accounts of the experience of practice rather than from an intellectual position.

What I am proposing with the notion of conversation here is not something radically new then, but it is, I would suggest, notably different the formal traditions of dialogical or dialectical reasoning in that it is not formally or rigidly constructed, but rather emphasises free flow and interplay between the two voices. Thus it does not rely on the two interlocutors speaking from opposing positions or replying directly to the details of what the other has said. Indeed it is the resonances between the two voices that are emphasised, rather than their ability to directly prove or contradict what the other is saying.

The reader can therefore expect this thesis to offer something exploratory and experimental which opens up a space rather than closing down our options through theoretical reduction or critique. In places the voice of philosophy is stronger, in other

places it is the voice of practice that we hear more clearly through engagement with the interview data, but overall the aim is to explore the new space for understanding embodiment that opens up when we bring philosophy and practice together to see what ideas and connections are produced.

It would also be possible to add to this field of enquiry through an approach that specifically sought out the differences and discrepancies between the theoretical and the practical perspectives on the embodiment. I do not, however, believe that it would be entirely consistent with my aim to establish a non-hierarchical, non-dualist conversation – setting the perspectives up in opposition to each other could easily serve to reify rather than blur the philosophy-practice and theory-data boundaries or dichotomies – so it is not a path I have purposely pursued here, although it is, of course, impossible to let theory and data speak to each other without exploring areas of disagreement in part of the process of exploring areas of overall agreement or resonance.

To summarise, in establishing my methodology for bringing together dance and Merleau-Ponty as a conversation, I emphasise that I do not intend to offer an exhaustive review of Merleau-Ponty's work or to explore every aspect of dance (issues beyond the scope of this work might include physiology, institutional aspects of dance companies, or differences between amateur and professional dance, or between different dance forms and their roles in different societies). Rather what I propose with the notion of conversation is a process which flows across different aspects of embodiment emphasising the seeking out of common ground between Merleau-Ponty and dance and the exploration of how bringing the two together in this

productive way can generate a new space for thinking about embodiment which is not confined by traditional academic disciplinary boundaries or dualist approaches to the body.

CONTEXTUALISING THE CONVERSATION

Before the conversation starts, I wish to discuss the academic context of this conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance, and both the academic and the practical conditions under which I orchestrate it. I will thus use this chapter to situate the conversation within recent developments in the academic field of body studies, examining the background to the conversation in relation firstly to problems with dualistic approaches to body and self, and then to the move in some areas of body studies towards an emphasis on practice, the lived-body and a non-dualist concept of embodiment.

In addition to this I will discuss the two voices in the conversation – Merleau-Ponty and dance – examining the contexts within which those voices are produced and accessed. This will involve contextualising Merleau-Ponty's concepts within his philosophical work, and contextualising dancers' concepts and experiences in relation to their everyday practice of dance and how this was explored in the interview process. This chapter therefore serves to contextualise the conversation in terms of existing academic ideas and literature, and to discuss the methods and methodological approach which underpin this thesis, thus giving a picture of the overall conditions under which these interlocutors are brought together to speak to each other.

Introducing the Academic Context

Academic attention to the relationship between body and self can lead to the questioning of traditional dualisms such as those between body and mind and between materiality and representation. Woodward suggests that the theorising of self or identity can be traced historically in Western thought through stages firstly characterised by the absent body, then by the recognition and exploration of the mind/body (subject/object) dichotomy, and finally by a contemporary emphasis on the interrelationship of these realms often denoted by the use of the term embodiment rather than ‘the body’ (Woodward, 2002:133). Embodiment is not, however, a straightforward or unproblematic concept (Leder, 1990:5), nor is it universally used as many theorists remain rooted in a dualist conceptualisation of mind and body. This exploratory conversation between philosophy and practice therefore emerges from a contested area of body studies which seeks to probe the relationship between body and self and to elucidate the notion of embodiment.

The following section briefly reviews some contemporary dualist understandings of the body’s role in self-identity before going on to explore some of the limitations or problems associated with this type of conceptualisation of the body and how these problems can perhaps be overcome through a shift to the notion of embodiment. I will then go on to discuss the central ideas and issues in the study of a non-dualistic concept of embodiment, before moving on to discuss how the conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance arises from this context and what the two interlocutors potentially have to say to each other. I will also discuss the context in which the

voices of Merleau-Ponty and dance were produced and accessed. Finally I will give a brief overview of the logic of the conversation and how it is structured into chapters.

Body and Self: Dualism and its Discontents

Concern with self-identity is not new. It is, however, argued in much contemporary sociological thought that identity formation in late or high modernity is characterised by an increased level of reflexivity (including, importantly, the extension of reflexivity to the body) and of individualisation of identity 'projects' (Woodward, 2002:118; Bailey, 1999:355). Theorists of late modernity therefore describe how, with the loss of trans-personal meaning structures such as those offered by religious authorities or grand political narratives which 'constructed and sustained existential and ontological certainties *outside* the individual' (Shilling, 2003:2, emphasis in the original), people have turned back on themselves in their search for meaning.

Thus the individual body has become an increasingly important site or foundation for the work of late modern identity projects, apparently offering some certainty in the context of detraditionalisation and the dissolution of older forms of identity based in, for example, class systems (Woodward, 2002:105; Shilling, 2003:2). The body is, indeed, 'the only tangible manifestation of the person' (Woodward, 2002:103), and it is argued that bodily appearance has been prioritised as a social and cultural sign of self in contemporary society.

The idea of the body as offering certainties about an individual's identity has, however, been undermined by the destabilisation of our knowledge about what bodies are, what they might become as new technologies have the potential to alter the boundaries of corporeality in the production of cyborgs (Haraway, 1991) and genetically modified organisms (Csordas, 1994:3; Shilling, 2003:3; Williams and

Bendelow, 1998:5). The proliferation and hence undetermining of meanings, values and possibilities associated with the body also raises a multiplicity of questions about how bodies should be controlled in the late modern context (Shilling, 2003:3; Williams and Bendelow, 1998:5).

This wealth of possibilities opening up around the body has, however, allowed it to take a key role in the reflexive formation of self-identity in late modernity and in those new systems of signification associated with contemporary consumerist society. The blurring of boundaries as to what is a natural or given aspect of the body and what is open to choice in the affluent West has meant a freeing of self from bodily determination so that the body becomes an 'object of human determination and responsibility' and, as such, increasingly important to the construction of self-identity. (Budgeon, 2003:36). The young, firm, sexy body thus becomes a (highly valued) commodity in contemporary society.

Reflexivity theorists suggest that self-identity is unfixed in late modernity and primarily constituted in constantly forming and reiterated narratives of self through processes of symbolic identification or the 'citation' (Bailey, 1999) of symbolically meaningful sources. Thus although the body is considered central to these processes of identity formation, the emphasis on reflexivity as the individual's primary mode of engagement with the body means that such theories implicitly reinforce a dichotomy between body and mind such that people are conceptualised as thinking minds working (reflexively) on body objects.

This privileging of the mind over the body, and of the socio-cultural realm over the material, also characterises contemporary social-constructivist accounts both of the discursive production or inscription of the body, as illuminated in the work of Foucault, and of contemporary self-identity as a performance. Sociological conceptualisations of the ‘performing self’ explore symbolic meanings associated with bodily comportment and appearance and, as with the concept of the reflexive body project, the body is understood as a ‘relatively flexible yet central aspect of people’s self-identities’ (Shilling, 2003:198).

It should be noted that performativity theories vary as to the degree of agency attributed to the self as a performer, and indeed do not always rely on there being a performer behind the performance. The key issue in the formation of gendered identity may, for example, be the social repetition of patterns or routines which serve to inscribe the surface of the body from birth onwards. This theoretical standpoint is exemplified in Judith Butler’s account of ‘girling the girl’, where, as described by Woodward:

The birth of a baby girl is heralded with cries of ‘it’s a girl’, a cry which initiates a plethora of practices, rights and customs including clothes, making physical contact, holding and ways of speaking to and about the child. (Woodward, 2002:112)

Here the performance of identity is not traced back to some original (agentic) self, but is rather based in ‘repeatable models of selfhood and identity which are already vested with social authority’ (Boyne, 1999:215).

In these accounts whether some pre-existing agency is implicated in the construction of identity in the social or discursive realm as in the reflexivity theorist accounts of the fashioning of identities in self-narratives, or not as in Butler's performativity account of the repetition of socially meaningful practices, the body itself is understood to be socially determined and made meaningful as part of these essentially disembodied discursive processes.

Those conceptualisations of the body which draw on the work of Foucault, himself primarily concerned with analysing the 'discursive conditions of possibility for the body as an object of domination' (Csordas, 1994:12), have also tended to focus on the mutable aspects of identity, chiefly through concepts of regulation and practices of the self (McNay, 1999:96). Such theories focus on the social construction and subjugation of the body, making them particularly useful for the examination of how the body is ordered or controlled and is therefore a location for the inscription of power relations, although arguably failing to adequately theorise those aspects of bodily identity which are determined materially as well as in the realm of discourse (McNay, 1999).

Sociology of the body has in fact been generally concerned to answer the questions of what the body means and how it becomes meaningful in social situations (Shilling, 2003:9). Thus sociological theorising has traditionally tended to distinguish between some original, essential self and the social self, prioritising the social self as a focus for enquiry and thus giving it priority within theories of self (Watson, 2002:510). The distinction between sex and gender has, for example, been central to and greatly facilitated much identity theorising, and social-constructivist theories have been very

useful for the critique of some essentialist notions which have cited women's bodies as making them more suitable for certain things such as low paid domestic labour (Woodward, 2002:110; Budgeon, 2003:8). The social-constructivist emphasis on theorising gender has, however, meant that the concept of sex has remained largely untheorised.

Indeed there are problems with understandings of identity, as a process of symbolic identification and thus wholly contained within the realm of representation, without consideration of its 'mediation in embodied practice' (McNay, 1999:98). These accounts fail to acknowledge how the material body can be experienced as both facilitating and limiting the extent and nature of our engagement with the world. As Woodward argues:

The body is not only represented and inscribed, it is also experienced and can present enormous restrictions to the range of that experience and to the ways in which we can negotiate our identities. (Woodward, 2002:133)

Those theories which understand identity to be constituted through the citation and performative repetition of socially available models of self-hood also fail to account for intra-group variability, for example among women or disabled people, or to adequately address questions about the possibility of escaping discursive determination, or of intentionally (consciously) deceitful performance of identity (Boyne, 1999; McNay, 1999; Watson, 2002).

Thus as Budgeon argues, the fact that:

... the body itself might have effects and modes of being that are not reducible to its status as an image ... is not to say that representation does not in some way work to constitute the body but that representation is only one space of negotiation among others. (Budgeon, 2003:50)

This embodied aspect of existence is perhaps particularly salient in the lived experience of people other than healthy white heterosexual males in their middle years and there have been a variety of critiques of dualist and representationalist concepts of identity including those from feminist scholarship, from the sociology of health and illness especially in the study of aspects such as chronic pain, and from phenomenology (Csordas, 1994:9; Williams and Bendelow, 1998:22). For example, from a phenomenological position Jackson argues that:

Subjugation of the bodily to the semantic is empirically untenable ... meaning should not be reduced to a sign which, as it were, lies on a separate plane outside the immediate domain of the act. (Jackson, 1989:123, quoted in Csordas, 1994:10)

Nevertheless, while the body is not solely determined within the realm of representation, neither is it reducible to a physical object, contained in the realm of materiality. The body is implicated in the negotiation of self-identity in ways that are not explained by understanding bodies as (signifying) objects. Indeed it is through the body that we both experience and act on the world; the body is the medium through which we present *ourselves* and make sense of our identities (Woodward, 2002:133). The body can, therefore, be understood as a border or borderline concept in that it straddles the subject/object, representation/materialism dichotomies, but it is also a

border where the material meets the socio-cultural, a site where these different realms come together in the negotiation of identity.

The body does not therefore belong, and is not containable, wholly within the objective realm nor in the subjective (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:3). As McNay argues:

The body is the threshold through which the subject's lived experience of the world is incorporated and realised and, as such, is neither pure object nor pure subject. It is neither pure object since it is the place of one's engagement with the world. Nor is it pure subject in that there is always a material residue that resists incorporation into dominant symbolic schema. (McNay, 1999:98)

Indeed there is a fundamental 'irreducibility between subject and object' which necessitates that we understand the body as neither determined in the realm of representation nor in the material realm, but rather as an indeterminate, 'transitional entity' (Grosz, 1994), poised between these realms.

Embodiment and Lived Experience

It therefore becomes necessary to find a way of conceptualising embodied identity that goes beyond the dichotomies between subject and object and representation and materialism (Budgeon, 2003:36; Williams and Bendelow, 1998:8). Indeed Csordas argues that a concern with 'embodiment as the existential basis of self and culture', as opposed to the more traditional aims of sociology/anthropology of the body to explore the social meanings of the (objectified) body, is in fact necessarily characterised by a methodological and epistemological problematisation of such dualisms (Csordas, 1994:6).

It thus becomes appropriate to move away from the term 'the body' which is heavily implicated in the body/mind, nature/culture (and indeed female/male) binaries to focus on a conceptual framework that allows us to transcend this dichotomous understanding of human existence. In exploring the nature of bodily being that is 'somewhere in between' (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:3) subject and object I therefore turn to the notion of embodiment, following Csordas in understanding it not as the incorporation of culture or mind 'into a body that is already objectified and thing-like' but as an existential condition (Csordas, 1994:15). A focus on embodiment thus becomes a focus on a way of being in the world, a focus on embodied selves.

This 'in between' or 'third way' between subject and object is also captured in the term 'body-subject', which denotes the body not as (pure) subject but as a concept that lies between the notions of subjectivity and the objectivity usually attributed to the body (Crossley, 2005:11). The overlapping nature and fluidity of these two realms

is further illustrated in Grosz's use of the *Möbius* strip (see Figure 1) to illustrate the inflection of mind into body and body into mind (Grosz, 1994). Embodiment can thus perhaps be most profitably conceptualised, not as a fixed aspect of existence which can be understood as separate from the mind, but as a fluid process of continual flux or reversibility between subjectivity and objectivity.

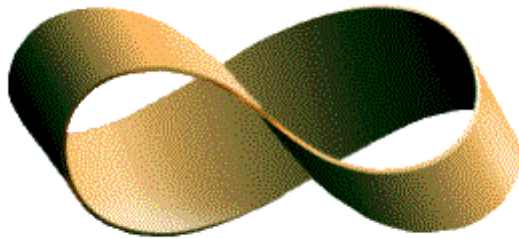


Figure 1: *Möbius* Strip

This understanding of an embodied way of being in the world is not only theoretically viable, but also, importantly, reflected in interview accounts such as, for example, those detailed in Salonstall's (1993) study 'Healthy bodies, social bodies: men and women's concepts and practices of health in everyday life'. Indeed Salonstall notes that:

When interviewees took stock of themselves as healthy, body and self were not experienced as divided into two parts; that is, as dichotomous 'mind' and 'body' in the Cartesian positivist sense. (Salonstall, 1993:9)

Salonstall also comments, revealing the importance of a notion of flux or reversibility, that:

When asked to describe health and being healthy, respondents moved back and forth between references to themselves as physical bodies and as sentient bodies. (Salonstall, 1993:8)

The sociology of the body has been criticised for being overly theorised and lacking empirical grounding (Monaghan, 2003:29) which has resulted in discrepancies between lived bodily experience and the positions presented in dominant, particularly social constructivist, body theories. Attention to embodiment, as opposed to the body, has, by contrast, been advocated by writers such as Csordas (1994) as affording the researcher a means of accessing and introducing to analysis precisely that lived experience of the body without reducing it either to the realm of materialism or to that of representation.

The important aspect here is thus the notion of the ‘lived-body’, and it is Edmund Husserl, the father of phenomenology who first makes use of the distinction in the German language between *Körper* (the physical or physicalist body) and *Leib* (the lived body) (Welton, 1999:39). In fact Husserl cannot be described as a philosopher of the body, but rather as a philosopher of consciousness, however, in seeking to ground reason he invoked a phenomenological notion of the body that had not been seen in philosophy hitherto (Welton, 1999:39). Thus while Cartesianism has tended to reduce the body to *Körper* (the corpse) and thus see it as an object among other physical things, the notion of *Leib* allows for a far richer understanding of the role of the body. Furthermore, within the phenomenological tradition, Martin Heidegger, himself the student of Husserl, engages with the ontological question of being (in the world), making use of a new concept: *Dasein* (literally ‘being-there’). In Heidegger’s work the focus is therefore shifted from the question of the body as object to the question of

embodied existence: ‘we do not ‘have’ a body, rather we ‘are’ bodily’ (Welton, 1999:4).

The shift to the concept of embodiment, understood in connection with the notion of the lived body or *Leib*, is not, however, unproblematic. Indeed Leder notes that in place of the mind/body dualism of Cartesianism, theorists of the lived-body are in danger of reifying the division between *Korper* and *Leib*, thus creating a new dualism (Leder, 1990:6). It is also important not to underestimate the extent to which dualist understandings of body and mind permeate Western thought and language, making it extremely difficult to move outside this framework.

I therefore suggest that it is important to find a new way of opening up a conceptual space in between traditional dualisms for the discussion and understanding of the embodied nature of being. The philosopher who has perhaps done the most to systematically challenge the Cartesian dualist legacy is French existentialist phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:51), and in the following section I will argue that it is possible to find in Merleau-Ponty’s work the makings of an alternative foundation for thinking about the body to that offered by the Cartesian tradition.

This thesis, however, looks not only to the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, but also to the lived experience of embodiment. It is, as I have argued in the introduction, through bringing the two voices of philosophy and embodied practice together in conversation that I suggest I am able to open up a new conceptual space between the traditional dualisms of mind and body, philosophy and practice, and theory and data.

Before exploring the notion of ‘the voice of embodied practice’, I will briefly introduce the body of Merleau-Ponty’s work from which I access and engage with ‘the voice’ of his philosophy.

Introducing Merleau-Ponty as Interlocutor

In bringing the voice of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy into conversation with the embodied practice of contemporary dance, this thesis does not aim to provide an exhaustive, systematic or critical review of Merleau-Ponty's work. I aim rather to draw on Merleau-Ponty's concepts in ways which I consider to be in-keeping with the overall spirit of his work in books and essays such as *The Structure of Behaviour* (1965), *The Phenomenology of Perception* (2002), *The Primacy of Perception* (1964), *Sense and Non-Sense* (1964), *Signs* (1964), 'The Child's Relations with Others' (1964), and 'Eye and Mind' (1964). I also draw on some of the insights from the abandoned work *The Prose of the World* (1973), and engage with a number of ideas and concepts from his final book *The Visible and the Invisible* (1969) which was left unfinished at the time of his death.

In this process I have engaged not only with Merleau-Ponty's own work, but also with a number of commentaries on and readings of his work and concepts which have been offered by other scholars from the fields of both Philosophy and Sociology. This has allowed me to engage with concepts emerging in unfinished work and to explore the practical utility of Merleau-Ponty's concepts without getting caught up in detailed textual exposition. This thesis does not purport to be a work on Merleau-Ponty's texts, rather it engages with Merleau-Ponty, as it engages with the embodied practice of dance, to explore embodied being in terms of how dancers, situated in the field of dance as a system of embodied social practice, understand themselves in relation to others, others in relation to themselves, and both themselves and others in relation to that system of embodied (artistic) practice.

A further reason why I do not offer a close textual reading of Merleau-Ponty, with quotes from his work to back up every assertion that I make, is because I am working within a non-dualist framework where meaning is argued to be produced *between* interlocutors rather than being rigidly defined within the head of one Cartesian subject. As I will discuss in the chapter on ‘Representation’ Merleau-Ponty did not believe that words and text carried pure meaning from inside the head of an isolated Cartesian subject, rather that the capacity of words or text to mean something is an interpersonal phenomenon where meaning is essentially negotiated between two subjects who are both able to use language as an intermundane space where they have access to each other. My interest in the philosophical ideas of Merleau-Ponty therefore also entails an interest in what other people have understood by and what uses they have put his concepts to, and in what these concepts are capable of bringing to a conversation with the embodied practice of dance. I therefore believe it often makes more sense to support my understandings of Merleau-Ponty’s concepts with reference to other academics’ readings and shared or collaborative understandings of Merleau-Ponty rather than reference to the exact wording of his texts in either English translation or the original French.

The voice of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy which appears in this thesis therefore arises from my reading of Merleau-Ponty’s work in a way that engages both with individual texts and with my sense of the overall spirit of his work. This reading has, however, always been produced in tandem both with my reading of other academic sources which explore and in places make use of and elaborate Merleau-Ponty’s ideas and,

perhaps most importantly, with my engagement with dancers' lived experiences of embodiment.

This section briefly introduces Merleau-Ponty as offering an alternative foundation for thinking about the body, giving a sense of what I have referred to as my understanding of the overall spirit of his work, and thus showing in what capacity the voice of his philosophy can be brought into and what it can offer to a conversation about the embodied nature of being.

Merleau-Ponty's challenge to dualism is, in fact, two-fold in that he not only mounts a powerful critique on both mechanist and intellectualist conceptions of the body, but also challenges the concept of the subject as traditionally found in the philosophy of consciousness (Crossley, 2001). He thus moves away from the conceptualisation of the body as object while also disregarding the traditional notion of the ethereal subject in favour of a conceptualisation of subjectivity as rooted in (embodied) behaviour and habit. Thus while Descartes' *cogito* – 'I think therefore I am' – conceptualises human subjectivity in terms of *res cogitans* (thinking substance) while rendering the body mere *res extensia* (extended or physical substance), Merleau-Ponty sees subjectivity and objectivity as constituted in the same realm.

For Merleau-Ponty then, rather than two distinct and incommensurable types of matter, there is only one element, which he terms 'flesh' [*la chair*]. Merleau-Ponty emphasises that it is intrinsic to lived embodiment that we are both subject and object (Leder, 1990:6). The notion of 'flesh' therefore functions to show that these two aspects of existence, while not the same thing as each other, are always overlapping in

actual embodied experience. One of the key characteristics of flesh is thus its reversibility. The flesh of the human body has characteristics of both subjectivity and objectivity: it is both sentient and sensible – it sees and can be seen, touches and can be touched.

Reversibility is illustrated by the example of one hand touching the other, where the hand that touches (subject) can become the hand that is touched (object). Merleau-Ponty also draws attention to the fact that the touching hand has to be part of the same realm as the touched in order to make contact with it, it has to itself be touchable. The touching and touched hands are not identical with each other, however, and Merleau-Ponty emphasises that a distinction between touching and touched remains, the two do not meld into each other to fill both roles simultaneously. The distinction between the touching and the touched is, however, contingent and arises in the process of touching rather than being pre-defined.

Merleau-Ponty also argues that, while the flesh of the human body is remarkable in that it is both sensible and also sentient, the flesh of the body is in fact also part of the flesh of the world. Interaction with the physical environment and other beings in the world can thus be understood by extension of the touching hands example. Perception is a ‘folding’ of the flesh of the world, out of which is constituted a perceiving subject and a perceived object. Both are materially situated in the world but at least one, both in the case of human interaction, has the capacity of sentience. Importantly, however, this sentience is possible by virtue of the perceiving subject’s embodied situation in the world rather than belonging to the realm of ethereal consciousness.

Thus for Merleau-Ponty, prior to Descartes' *cogito* – 'I think therefore I am' – there is the 'tacit *cogito*' – 'I can' – the feel we have of our body and how it connects us to the world. This tacit sense of our existence does not involve conscious reflection on the body and does not (therefore) render the body a mere physical object. The original or most fundamental sense of 'I' is not therefore the reflective thinking mind of the Cartesian tradition. Rather our most basic sense of self is a practical sense of the body's active possibilities (Burkitt, 1999:76). The original 'I' is the embodied 'I'.

The relationship I have with my body is, therefore, other than that of subject to (external) object. Indeed while moving an external object such as a book involves first locating it and reaching out my hand to grasp it, I do not, by contrast, need to do anything of this nature in order to move, for example, my arm. As Crossley describes:

One thing occurs: my arm moves. The act, we might say, is intentional; but it is a single and unified whole: an intentional-action rather than an action added to or caused by an intention. And, as such, the intention need not be formulated either linguistically or reflectively. (Crossley, 2001:121)

This pre-reflective sense of the body can also be extended to an individual's immediate environment so that action such as driving a car or typing on a keyboard does not (after some practice) require conscious reflection, but rather relies on a form of pre-reflective or tacit knowledge which is accessed in the embodied performance of the action.

This type of (usually) tacit, embodied knowledge, also known as knowledge-how or know-how (Crossley, 2001:52), can be differentiated from propositional knowledge or

knowledge-that which is 'represented in a series of propositions or sentences in the mind of the thinking subject' (Edwards, 1998:51). Thus I primarily relate to my body not through formulating propositional knowledge about it, although I can do this, but through a form of practical knowledge – the 'I can' – which consists of a usually tacit sense of my body's possibilities for active engagement with the world, and may also encompass a pre-reflective grasp on my immediate environment such as the car that I am driving or the steps that I am climbing.

Merleau-Ponty denotes this feel that we have for our body's positioning and possibilities for action with the term corporeal schema. My corporeal schema is thus my primary sense of self or 'I', in the sense of the 'I can'. Furthermore we are able to modify and expand our bodily sense or corporeal schema through the performance of habitual actions such as learning to swim or driving a car which are incorporated into our sense of our possibilities for action. The feeling that I have of myself may therefore include a tacit sense that if I get out of my depth in the swimming pool it should not be problem or that I don't have the acceleration capacity to overtake the vehicle in front.

For Merleau-Ponty, the self should therefore be understood in terms of engaged intentional action or behaviour, rather than as an isolated reflective consciousness. The consideration of habit and bodily knowledge further emphasises the need for a way of understanding the body that does not render it merely physical object but, equally, does not subsume it into a purely subjective (nonmaterial) consciousness. Indeed while it is valuable to emphasise that the body can function in many ways traditionally attributed to the mind, it is equally important to consider how these

aspects of bodily existence may be different to those attributed to the reflective subject. Thus while the body can now be understood as a site of knowledge in a way that was previously only attributed to the mind, it is equally important to emphasise that practical, bodily knowledge, or ‘knowledge-how’, is different to the propositional ‘knowledge-that’ of reflective thought.

In focussing on behaviour or practice, Merleau-Ponty is, therefore, able to move away from the traditional conceptualisations both of the body as object and of the Cartesian subject. The body actively and intentionally engaged with its environment defies categorisation as either material object or immaterial subject. In beginning his philosophy of embodiment from the concept of embodied practice, rather than the concept of the body in the role of the immobile (cultural) object in which it is so often cast by dominant body theories, Merleau-Ponty is thus able to offer an alternative foundation for thinking about the body which transcends the subject/object dualism that haunts socio-cultural body theory.

Merleau-Ponty suggests, then, that we begin our thinking about embodiment from a philosophical position that prioritises the concept of embodied behaviour or practice, and this approach is the starting point for my exploration of the embodied basis of being in this thesis. As I have argued above, I do not, however, believe that philosophical speculation about practice is enough in itself to produce a truly non-dualist understanding of embodiment. I therefore introduce the first-hand testimonies of the experience of doing an embodied practice into conversation with the voice of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy in order that this thesis can engage with embodied practice not only on a theoretical or conceptual level, but also as a lived experience. I

will now go on to discuss relevance and importance of taking professional contemporary dance as an example of embodied practice to be brought into conversation with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, before explaining the context or conditions under which I accessed 'the voice of practice' in the form of dancers' reflections on the lived embodied practice of dance through in-depth qualitative interviews.

Introducing Dance as Interlocutor

I have explored above the context for this conversation between philosophy and practice in terms of issues around body/self dualism and the shift to a non-dualist concept of embodiment which Merleau-Ponty suggests we approach through the notion of embodied practice. This section discusses how a focus on the lived experience of contemporary dance fits into this context and what it can potentially contribute to a conversation with Merleau-Ponty.

Dance, in fact, has a history of being neglected by the discipline of philosophy:

Plato and Aristotle ignored dance; Rousseau and Hegel dismissed it; Wittgenstein and Heidegger both lacked interest in it. Unlike other domains of human expression, such as music or visual art, dance has received very little philosophical attention, especially within the Western history of ideas. (Foster *et al.*, 2005:3)

The tradition of dance scholarship is also noted to have tended to lack integration with more mainstream academic concerns (Desmond, 2003:1). The dismissal of dance as ‘a subject not deserving of serious intellectual analysis’ (Foster *et al.*, 2005:3), has, however, recently begun to receive more critical attention with, for example, a themed issue publication of the philosophical journal *Topoi* (Vol. 24, 2005) being devoted entirely to dance.

My focus on contemporary dance as an embodied practice, and on the lived-experience and lived-body of the dancer is, however, different from the majority of

current work in this area which tends towards post-modern readings of dance as text (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:99). My work also differs from the strongly autobiographical approaches to the experience of dance in, for example, the work of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone – see, for example, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (1966) – or Sondra Fraleigh – see, for example, *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* (2004) which follows ‘Fraleigh's journey toward self-definition as informed by art, ritual, feminism, phenomenology, poetry, autobiography, and – always – dance’ (from the back cover) – because of my use of empirical data, as I will further detail in the following section. There have, in fact, been very few empirical sociological studies of Western theatre dance – despite a long tradition of anthropological work which engages with (ritualistic) dance – with contemporary dance being particularly neglected (Thomas, 2003).

Furthermore, despite the potential of dance as a field of research for body studies, it is common to both dance studies and socio-cultural engagement with dance that the bodily basis of dance has received little specific attention, with dance most commonly being analysed in terms of symbolic or textual meaning. This neglect of the body in socio-cultural studies of Western theatre dance has begun to be addressed in work such as Helen Thomas's *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory*, which makes an important contribution to bringing together dance studies and the sociology of the body (Thomas, 2003).

Dance has also, more recently, begun to be explored as a focus for more mainstream sociology of the body, for example in the 2005 special issue of *Body & Society* journal on ‘Dancing Bodies’ (Vol. 11(4)). It is also notable that Anna Aalten's paper

on pain, injury and disordered eating among professional dancers – ‘Listening to the dancer’s body’ – is included in *Embodying Sociology: Retrospect, Progress and Prospects*, published by the Sociological Review (Shilling (ed.), 2007). Bryan Turner and Steven Wainwright have also conducted empirical work with (mainly retired) dancers from the Royal Ballet (London) using the sociology of the body and the work of Pierre Bourdieu in particular (see for example, Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Wainwright and Turner, 2004b).

These authors, while acknowledging the critical power of social constructionism, contend that:

Constructionism can be properly applied to ‘the body’ but is less appropriate as an analysis of ‘embodiment’ (Turner and Wainwright, 2003:278-279)

Pointing to the fact that research on the body has been criticised for ‘privileging theorizing, bracketing out the individual, and for ignoring the practical experiences of embodiment’ (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:100), they turn, instead, to Bourdieu’s concepts of *habitus*, capital and field to explore ‘relationships between personal identity, the human body, and social practices’ (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:100).

Thus in place of the generalised, abstracted, socially-constructed body common to many contemporary socio-cultural body theories, there is a need to focus on bodies situated in and engaged with the world as they are lived and experienced. In acknowledgment of the importance of examining the lived experience of being embodied, rather than focusing on the abstracted, generalised body, I consider

dancers' accounts of their everyday experience of dance and their experiences and understandings of their dancing bodies to be particularly illuminating for this project.

This approach entails a move away from thinking about the 'static immobile body' (Thomas, 2003:68) towards thinking about what Csordas refers to 'somatic modes of attention', which are practical modes of awareness and being in the world such as the embodied practice of dance (Csordas, 1994). Indeed as Thomas points out, it is through a focus on the active, moving (dancing) body that we may

... generate an approach which could perhaps transcend the limits of the mind/body dichotomy inscribed in Cartesian philosophy and provide an antidote to the 'thing'-like character of the body in much social and cultural research.
(Thomas, 2003:78)

Professional dance can also be a particularly enlightening arena for the study of the relationship between embodiment and identity or self, as the mutual inherence between body and self appears to be heightened or more accessible in this context. Wainwright and Turner argue that the idea that the body has become a project in contemporary society that should be worked at and accomplished as part of an individual's self-identity is in fact 'too moderate' for a professional dancer,

... since to become a [professional] ballet dancer requires the body to be the very essence of self-identity. The discipline of ballet produces and maintains a particular type of body that cannot be separated from the identity of the dancer.
(Wainwright and Turner, 2004b: 102)

Indeed:

Professional ballet is in particular such an all-consuming and demanding career that it is inevitable that self-identity is essentially determined by it ... Obviously, dance is something that the ballet dancer's body can do, but being a ballet dancer is also embodied. In other words, being a ballet dancer is not just something that you do, it is something that you are. (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:108)

Turner and Wainwright (2003) find dancers' accounts of ageing and injury an important way to evidence their critique of those accounts of the body that understand it as socially constructed and thus reduce it to the realm of representation, ignoring its materiality. Similarly, Thomas notes that:

The professional dancer's body in western theatre dance, trained to be flexible and strong and to move in ways that 'ordinary' humans can only wonder at, can reveal the infinite possibilities of the body in movement and stillness. This could be the social constructionist's dream case study. At the same time, however, the mostly young, finely honed, fit dancer encounters physical limitations and bodily recalcitrance on a daily basis, which, in turn, throws a dark shadow over the social constructionist's standpoint.' (Thomas, 2003:214)

These accounts highlight the ways in which the physical body, whilst not usually the thematic object of our experience in everyday life, may become increasingly salient when it interrupts our focus on what we are doing through failure to serve our purposes. It is when the body does not function as we desire or expect it to function, then, that it becomes a focus of our attention, and the idea that the body is merely a

social or discursive construction can be called into question. The idea that our awareness of our body is somehow ‘latent’ in everyday experience when we are focussed on or engaged in action, is also central to Leder’s (1990) argument in ‘The Absent Body’, where it is suggested that the body, not normally the object of our attention, appears to us when it is dysfunctional in some way – the ‘dys-appearance’ of the body.

Turner and Wainwright, following Bourdieu, similarly suggest that the fit between bodily *habitus* and field for the professional ballet dancer is generally unreflected or ‘taken-for-granted’ as that of ‘a fish in water’ (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:101-103). The occurrence of injury, however, disrupts this state, forcing the dancer to think about their ballet *habitus* (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:103) and thus reveals aspects of the complexity of the connection between the dancer’s embodiment and his or her social context in the field of professional ballet.

It is suggested by these authors, then, that the body may in fact be phenomenologically absent for individuals while they are engaged in rational purposeful action, as Klemola describes:

When we handle objects, drive a car or perceive, for example, when we look out a window, we are seldom conscious of our bodies. We are only conscious of the object and we transcend our body. (Klemola, 1991:5)

Klemola, however, goes on to argue, *contra* Wainwright and Turner, that this is not the case ‘when our experience is tied to ‘body consciousness’ – for example, in dance’ (Klemola, 1991:5). In contrast to Wainwright and Turner’s suggestion that the

professional dancer's ballet *habitus* may be generally taken-for-granted, I would therefore argue that the embodied practice of dance (at a high level) in fact both facilitates and requires not only pre-reflective bodily-awareness but also some level of conscious awareness of or reflection on this pre-reflective aspect of embodiment.

I therefore look to contemporary dance as a focus which allows the researcher to explore an activity where the embodiment is in the phenomenological foreground of lived experience, not because of a dysfunctional state, but because it is central to and foregrounded in the everyday practice of dance at an advanced level. Dancers' accounts, as generated through qualitative interview, offer the researcher a perspective on embodied existence that is far more in-depth and sustained than is available from the glimpses we get through our own everyday lives where our bodies are not generally the thematic object of our experience. High-level contemporary dancers have, through their training, developed a heightened awareness of their own and other bodies, which means that they attend to those pre-reflective aspects of our embodiment that Merleau-Ponty argues must be considered primary if we are to understand the embodied basis of being in non-dualist terms.

It is not the theory of dance that I engage with then, but the lived experience of being a dancing body, and the ways in which dancers negotiate and make sense of their embodied interaction with others and the environment. I am thus interested in how dancers perform and understand dance through their embodied engagement with it as both a practice and an art-form, as they create, learn, remember, perform and watch dance. Dance is not, therefore, approached from a third person perspective, often associated with the objectification of the body as *Körper*, but from the first person

perspective of the dance practitioner. I use the social research method of in-depth qualitative interviews to hear ‘the voice of embodied practice’ by engaging with dancers’ accounts of the lived experience of doing dance and being a dancer.

In asking dancers to reflect during the interview process on their experiences of their own and other bodies engaged in the practice of dance, I am thus tapping into this heightened awareness, made available through the dancers’ training and practice, and also drawing out aspects of this awareness that may be, even for dancers, tacit and not generally reflected on. In asking my interviewees to describe their experiences of being a dancing body I am, in fact, provoking reflection in the same way that Wainwright and Turner suggest that injury or aging requires the dancer to reflect. Unlike these authors, I do not, however, seek to engage my interviewees in a discussion of the dysfunctional dancing body but rather to ask them to reflect on the everyday functioning of their dancing bodies, including both things they find easy and straightforward, and things they find difficult or problematic.

In this way I am able to engage dancers in discussions of aspects of dance such as identity, interpersonal interaction, meaning, understanding and communication, which are everyday aspects of the functioning of the high-level dancing body-subject. The pre-reflective elements of many of these features of dance means that at times Wainwright and Turner’s suggestion that it is when these things break down that they become most salient and require reflection is undeniably true, but I do not seek to start from this negative state although in the course of the interviews such negative events may be drawn upon by interviewer or interviewee to help with the reflective process. I do, however, reject the idea that the everyday experience of dance, even at a

professional level, is routinely unproblematic and unreflected and that it is only in times of ‘some traumatic event or radical change of circumstance’ (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:103) that dancers reflect on their embodiment and *habitus*.

The practice of dance as it is learned and performed by engaged, moving, dancing bodies is thus a particularly rich area for the exploration of how we can understand embodied existence in non-dualist terms, starting from a focus on intentional behaviour or practice:

Dance ... is, after all, a kind of living laboratory for the study of the body – its training, its stories, its way of being and being seen in the world. (Daly, 1991:2)

Dance functions well as an illustration of bodily knowledge or know-how in the same way that examples such as driving a car or tying one’s shoe laces can be used to challenge the traditional view that all knowledge is represented in the mind of the thinking subject in a series of propositions (Edwards, 1998:51). Extended attention to dance in the manner that Csordas calls for when he advocates the study of ‘somatic modes of attention’, however, allows me to attend to aspects of embodied competencies, modes of attention and our practical sense of the body’s active possibilities in a more in-depth and sustained way than examples such as tying shoe laces. Thus as Desmond argues:

The investigation of dance as an extremely under-analysed bodily practice may challenge or extend dominant formulations of work on “the body”. ... Dance, as an embodied social practice and highly visual aesthetic form, powerfully melds considerations of materiality and representation together. (Desmond, 2003:2)

Contemporary dance is not a disembodied text, nor is merely a set of mechanical physical movements. Rather it is a meaningful embodied practice which blurs the boundaries between the subjectivity and objectivity of the dancing body-subject and between the realms of representation and materiality. Further to this there is a particularly well developed individual and interpersonal awareness of the body available to very experienced practitioners. As Block and Kissell suggest:

The analysis of movement, and particularly dance, helps us to see in an extraordinarily effective way the meaning of embodiment ... It provides a uniquely powerful insight into what it means for us to be 'body-subjects' – body-knowers and body-expressers – wholly human. (Block and Kissell, 2001:5)

It is in the consideration of the everyday experience of the embodied activity of high-level dance, then, that I suggest we can fully explore how Merleau-Ponty's foundation for thinking about the body might play out in practice. Thus for example, the priority of pre-reflective 'I can' over the reflective 'I think' is highlighted in dance where much of the dancer's spontaneous engagement with his or her practice is at a pre-reflective or tacit level. Dance, for the professional dancer, is a situated, practical orientation towards or way of being in the world which primarily consists not of reflecting on the body as an object or thing, but of exploring and being aware of – tacitly and, because of the requirements of being a high-level dancer, often to some extent explicitly – their embodied possibilities for action.

In contrast to Wainwright and Turner, I have chosen to focus on contemporary dance rather than classical ballet because while the rigours and bodily discipline of training

and practice are still apparent, contemporary dance has more of an emphasis on emotional expressionism through movement and often allows dancers more choreographic input and opportunity for improvisation than in classical ballet. This suggests that dancers in contemporary traditions may have more awareness of the links between communication and embodiment, the huge range of movement and meaning that the human body can perform, and the limitations to this ability.

Accessing ‘the Voice of Practice’

The ‘voice’ of the embodied practice of dance which appears in the thesis is drawn from qualitative interview data from interviews conducted with sixteen professional contemporary dancers. Interviewees were recruited through their places of employment in the dance companies and were all interviewed at their place of work during the working day. The interviews were, however, conducted individually in a private room with the informed consent of the interviewees and assurance of confidentiality and anonymity. In one case, two of the dancers (Suzi and Michaela) requested that I interview them together during a thirty minute lunch break, which I agreed to. The character of the data produced in this joint interview showed no significant differences to that produced through the individual interviews and I have therefore included these data in my data analysis.

All access negotiations were conducted through the rehearsal director of the dance company who notified dancers in advance that they had been asked to take part in the interviews on a certain day and that they would leave rehearsals for a period during which they were requested to spend about thirty minutes with the interviewer should they consent to do so. Interviews with all the dancers lasted between thirty and forty-five minutes and followed the same semi-structured format where I, as interviewer, allowed conversation to flow while guiding the interviewee towards topic areas related to my interests in how dancers understand and experience the practice of dance and their own (and other) dancing bodies.

The interviewees were not given a list of questions in advance as it was felt that the emphasis should not be on answering questions but on taking time to reflect at length on certain aspects of dance. I also felt that while giving my interviewees advance warning of a list of questions or topics would have given them a chance to begin this reflective process prior to the interview, it was likely that the practice of dance at a professional level itself already required reflection on many of these topics as I have suggested above. In addition to this, I was interested in the possibility of hearing the dancers go through the process of reflection during the interview, finding what they were aware of and what they had not previously thought about or found difficult to express, rather than looking for them to articulate a previously rehearsed reflective statement.

The sample of dancers with whom I conducted the interviews was composed entirely of individuals who were members of professional contemporary dance repertory companies. The sample was recruited from two different companies, one where I was able to interview all the dancers in the company (twelve) and one where I was able to interview a small number of dancers (four) whose availability was dictated by the rehearsal schedule. The sample was mixed in terms of gender (eight male: eight female), and the age range (approximately eighteen to forty-five years old) was as extensive as could be hoped for in a profession where training can last up to twenty years and many retire in their thirties. The sample was also mixed in terms of ethnicity, comprising eight white British and four black/Asian or mixed race British members, as well as a Scandinavian, a South American and two dancers from African countries, one of whom was black, the other white.

In-keeping with my aim to engage with the lived experience of dance as an embodied practice, the interviews encouraged dancers to reflect on aspects of doing dance and being a dancer that were integral to their daily lives as professional contemporary dancers. This focus influenced both my approach to the interviews, including what I initially told my interviewees about my interests and the purpose of the interview, and my analysis of the resulting data.

The interview study should also be understood as having evolved through a series of overlapping stages of talking and reading where I was engaged in the processes both of a number of rounds of pilot interviewing and of reading Merleau-Ponty and related work. These processes were considered mutually informative and both fed back into my approaches to producing and reading the final interview data. Thus, for example, in the early stages of pilot interviewing I was actually interested in accounts of the lived experience of dance as a way of questioning and critiquing dualist theories of body and identity. As I read more Merleau-Ponty and conducted further pilot interviews, however, this interest evolved into a recognition that there was something more interesting to be said through bringing dance and philosophy together if I didn't limit myself to a reductive critique. Rather than seeking to test or falsify theory through empirical work, my project therefore took form as a generative process which brought Merleau-Ponty and dance together to see how each could illuminate the other. It is through this process that I suggest that I am able not only to contribute to our understanding of dance and Merleau-Ponty, but also to open up a new conceptual space for the discussion and understanding of embodied being.

It was initially through the process of pilot interviewing, then, that I developed and refined my approach to accessing and analysing dancers' experiences and understandings of the embodied practice of dance in iterative relation to my on-going reading and evolving understanding of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. The pilot interview stage of my project in fact evolved through three phases (detailed below) where I was able to speak to a number (eighteen in total) of different interviewees about their experiences of dance.

This extensive pilot interviewing stage was considered necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, the nature of the project was such that I aimed to give neither philosophy nor practice intellectual priority at any stage. This meant that I considered it important that both preliminary readings of Merleau-Ponty and preliminary data from dancers influenced my evolving understanding of embodiment and the development of my conceptualisation of the project.

There were also a number of pragmatic reasons for pilot interviewing throughout the early stages of the project. Although I was primarily interested in interviewing professional contemporary dancers for reasons explored above including their highly developed awareness of their own and other bodies and the importance of dance in their daily lives and as part of their identities, it became increasingly clear that gaining access to professional dancers was going to be difficult. I was aware from early access negotiations with a number of dance companies who did not feel that their dancers had time to talk to me and with a number of other professional dance organisations who were unable to offer me any viable method of contacting their members, that any access I would be able to have to professional dancers as interviewees would probably

be limited in terms of both number of participants and time spent with each. This limitation on the availability of professional dancers as interviewees for my project meant that I considered it necessary to have developed and refined both my research questions and my interview technique as much as possible before I spoke to the professional dancers.

Existing empirical research relating to the context of Western theatre dance is almost exclusively framed in terms of a medical or physiological approach to the dancing body and does not, therefore, include qualitative data about the dancer's experience. The production of data about the experience of dance at a very early exploratory phase was thus important for the development of my research through iteration between theory and data. During this first of the three phases of pilot interviewing I conducted seven exploratory pilot interviews, including transcription and primary thematic coding, with six members of a university dance society and one retired amateur dancer and professional choreographer.

The second phase of pilot interviewing was conducted with five experienced, although non-professional, dancers who I contacted through a city dance agency, and had a narrower focus than the first phase of pilot work. The interviews in this phase were more specifically focussed on the practice of dance, the relationship between dance and identity and, in particular, on the relationship between body and mind in dance. The tradition of qualitative research, and semi-structures in-depth interviewing in particular, thus allowed me to explore these connections and aspects of interviewees' experiences with them and to develop an understanding of the contextualised meanings they attribute to these experiences. This enabled me to

elaborate a picture of what it is to dance and be a dancing body from the perspective of the dancer by attending to how they articulate this experience in their own words.

The interview process was also, however, particularly important to this project because of the need to elicit individuals' experiences and understandings of what are often pre-reflective aspects of embodiment. As I have suggested above, the problem of finding a way to get interviewees to reflect on the pre-reflective is in part solved by the use of (professional) dancers as interviewees for this research because their everyday practice of dance allows and requires certain levels of reflection and awareness. It was, however, also necessary to use the interview process to guide the conversation towards this reflection on the pre-reflective. This second phase of pilot interviews were therefore particularly important as pre-cursors to my interviews with professional dancers as they allowed me to spend an extended length of time with individual dancers – pilot interviews lasted between forty-five and ninety minutes – during which I was able to explore different strategies for engaging with these pre-reflective aspects of dance and thus to refine my approach before I interviewed the professional dancers within the shorter time-frame. In particular I developed an approach of asking a number of questions about the practical details of learning and performing dance; asking for clarification or expansion where dancers seemed to fall back on tacit or 'taken-for-granted' understandings of experience (often signalled by the use of the phrases "you know" or "do you know what I mean?"); and questioning my interviewees not only about those aspects they were able to articulate but also about why they found it so difficult to articulate certain aspects of their experiences.

The pilot interviewees were all made aware that the research was at an exploratory stage when I conducted the interviews with them, and that I was interested in taking the research forward by interviewing professional dancers, although it was, at that stage, uncertain if I would be able to gain access to this elite group. Pilot interviewees were also aware that I was not an experienced dancer myself and that I was therefore asking for their help in understanding what it was like to dance and how I might or might not be able to understand that experience in terms of the body and mind. Thus I was not only asking my interviewees to describe their experiences to me, but also inviting them at certain points to take on the role of analyst by reflecting on both the role of the body (and mind) in knowing and remembering dance and the connection between dancing and a sense of who you are, in ways that they might not otherwise have explicitly thought about or addressed in their descriptions.

When I later came to interview the professional dancers I continued to use this approach of presenting myself as a non-dancer asking for help understanding what it was like to dance in relation to some broader themes around the role of the body (and mind) and identity. While I did wish dancers to reflect on, for example, the processes that were in play when they remembered a piece of choreography and how this might or might not be different from what a non-dancer would understand by ‘remembering’, I was, however, careful not to influence my interviewees into talking in terms of a mind-body dichotomy. Thus while I mentioned the role of the body and the mind in the initial phases of many of the interviews I was careful always to leave room for descriptions that suggested dance relied on aspects of both body and mind and to attend to the dancers’ own concepts, including how they might fail to fit with

the traditional subject/object dualism and thus open up a space, in conjunction with Merleau-Ponty's ideas, for a non-dualist understanding of embodiment.

Given this interest in exploring individual dancers' own understandings and concepts, and the potential differences between my dance-professional interviewees and the amateur dancers I interviewed during the pilot work, I did not take my pilot interview data as a guide to what the professional dancers were likely to offer in terms of descriptions and understandings of dance. The pilot work rather allowed me to develop ways of approaching topics with my interviewees in ways that left the conversation open for these individual understandings and concepts to emerge.

My third phase of pilot interviewing in fact occurred – due to difficult access negotiations – during the period when I was already involved in speaking to the professional dancer sample. This work with a company of mature (over forty-five) dancers from a range of different professional backgrounds including retired ballet and contemporary dancers, a choreographer, a vocal artist and a movement therapist, did not therefore lead to major changes in my approach to the interviews with the professional dancers (which were already underway). The experience of doing these interviews and the data derived from them did, however, feed into my overall understanding of the experience of dance and into my analysis of the professional dancer data. The interviews from this third phase of pilot work all lasted over an hour and, influenced by the interviewees' specific interests and concerns, produced a range of interesting data including ideas regarding the relationship between music and dance, and understandings of self-identity and self-expression in relation to movement and aging. Although at least three of the members of the group had been professional

dancers before retiring, the character of these interviewees and the interviews conducted with them were sufficiently different to those conducted with my main sample of dancers from the contemporary dance companies that I did not feel it appropriate to analyse data from these interviews alongside that of the sixteen professional contemporary dancers in the production of this thesis.

In the same way that I have not sought to produce an exhaustive review of Merleau-Ponty, I have not, then, sought to produce an exhaustive account of dance from all possible perspectives. I have focussed specifically on professional contemporary dance with the aim of being able to engage with *a* ‘voice of dance’ which can be productively brought into conversation with Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. This means that I do not engage with the theory of dance or aesthetics, nor with the difference between different dance styles or between amateur and professional dance, nor with the different role of dance in different cultures or the relationship between dance and music.

In place of these broad concerns I have chosen to focus on one particular field of dance, chosen because I consider it to be particularly interesting and illuminating in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy. In using in-depth qualitative interviews to engage with this ‘voice of dance’ I have engaged with dancers from a particular field and sought to produce detailed rich data about the experience of being a professional contemporary dancer for these individuals. It is, however, important for the depth and richness of this description of dancers’ experiences to have conducted and analysed qualitative interviews with sixteen different professional dancers, as some individuals

offer variation or are able to articulate or clarify aspects that others were unable to or did not choose to discuss.

The ‘voice of dance’ is thus drawn from the transcripts of the interviews from all sixteen professional contemporary dancers through a process of thematic coding and analysis. In this process I identified common or recurring themes across the dataset with the intention of producing an account or ‘voice’ of dance in accordance with these themes as articulated in the dancers’ own words. This does not mean, however, that I have assumed that the experience of the practice of dance is the same for all dancers, even within this relatively narrow sample. Indeed in seeking to engage with both similarities and areas of difference across the dataset, I was able to explore common aspects of the experience of dance, but also to highlight differences along such lines as gender, thus refining the picture of the experience of dance I have been able to produce.

At the early stage of thematic coding I was primarily interested in working with the data to identify emerging themes rather than seeking to impose a theoretical framework on the data. The process of coding data did, however, require that I began to think about how the different themes fitted together, particularly with reference to whether some themes could be understood as sub-themes of others. I therefore worked towards the production of a tree or branching diagram which showed both how broader themes might be broken down to allow more precision in the coding process, and how smaller themes might be grouped together under one broader heading. This involved consideration of the logic of how the different aspects of the dancers’ accounts could fit together to build up a picture of dance, but it was also influenced by

my research aims and interests as they had evolved in my pilot work and my reading of Merleau-Ponty.

Having established this primary coding framework, I used the computer software package NVivo which allowed me to highlight and produce a report of those parts of the transcripts which related to individual themes. The production of these coding reports and subsequent production of further tree or branching diagrams then allowed me to consider how the emerging account or 'voice' of dance might be brought into conversation with Merleau-Ponty's philosophical concepts. Thus while I have used the thematic coding of qualitative interview data to elicit an account of dance that is sensitive to the dancers' own words and experiences, the way I have gone on to structure my understanding of how these themes might fit together has also been influenced by the intention that this voice of dance should enter into conversation with the voice of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. This is mirrored in the way I have approached Merleau-Ponty with particular interest in those aspects of his philosophy that might be profitably brought into conversation with dance.

It is also acknowledged that the interview process itself produces data that are necessarily influenced by the specific social situation of the interview and by the background and expectations of interviewer and interviewee. Thus while qualitative research is recognised as being particularly good for in-depth engagement with people's experiences, it is nevertheless a form of active engagement which shapes the data produced and it is not possible to conceive of this access to experience as a straight-forward process (Gray, 2003: chps1,2 & 5).

Merleau-Ponty suggests that we should actively try to reflect on the pre-reflective to further philosophical understanding of embodied being in the world, and I have often sought to engage my interviewees in this process during the course of the interviews by asking them to describe in detail processes that are normally pre-reflective. The capacity of these interviewees to reflect on and articulate pre-reflective processes is argued to be enhanced by their training and practice in dance and by the types of questions asked in the interview. Again, however, we obviously cannot assume that reflective statements made during interview will give the researcher directed unmediated access to pre-reflective experience. In particular I have been very aware during the analysis of interview data of pervasiveness of mind/body dualism in our reflective thought and language. This means that both interviewer and interviewees have at times articulated ideas in terms of mind and body, although most often these terms are invoked as being inadequate in the speaker's struggle to find a way of describing the interconnection between mind and body or the idea of 'a bit of both' (which we do not necessarily have the words for in our language).

Despite these limitations, I suggest that qualitative interviewing remains appropriate to the aim of exploring the experience of dance and being a dancer. The most persuasive argument I offer for this is the richness of the data that was produced in my interviews with the professional contemporary dancers. The dancers I interviewed varied in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, age, and the different institutions and groups where they had trained and performed. Although these factors (and others) all created personal variations in the accounts offered of the experience of dance, the interview data from the sixteen professional dancers when taken as a whole did, nevertheless, have common ground which suggests that there is something common to

be said about the experience of dance for all these different dancers, or at least for identifiable sub-sets of them. Indeed after sixteen interviews and in light of my extensive pilot interviewing I considered that I had reached saturation with the interview data in terms of the themes I was interested in exploring in relation to Merleau-Ponty.

In addition to my choice of topics or questions for the interviews, the thematic content analysis of the data also contributed to the process of evoking and exploring the voice of dance as it is related to the voice of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. Interview data was thus produced and analysed alongside my reading of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy, although it was not intended that Merleau-Ponty's concepts should take intellectual priority over the dancers' own concepts and experiences. I read the two together as a way of exploring common ground between them where conversation could take place, rather than seeking to reduce one to the other. The aim is not, then, to produce a systematic comparative review of different aspects and forms of dance, but rather to allow the conversation between philosophy and practice to take place in a way that generates interesting new ideas, connections and understandings of embodiment.

Structure of the Thesis

In exploring the embodied basis of being in this thesis, I follow Merleau-Ponty in taking pre-reflective, practical engagement as primary, allowing it to stand as my starting point for the exploration, conceptualisation and analysis of dance and being a dancer, rather than seeking to reduce dance to dualist components of thinking mind and mechanical body. Merleau-Ponty focuses our attention on the pre-objective relation we have to our bodies, meaning that while we can reflect on our bodies as objects, this should not be taken as the original or natural form of this relation. Rather there is a more fundamental sense of the embodied self which is prior to this conscious reflection on the body and requires our attention if we are to properly understand the nature of our embodiment and embodied being in the world. This does not mean that I cannot engage with reflective thought or with dualist renderings of the dancers' relationships to their bodies, but it is the pre-reflective, pre-objective relationship to the body that I take to be primary. I therefore begin my analysis through consideration of the engaged, embodied practice of dance, focusing on how professional contemporary dancers learn and remember dance in terms of tacit, practical knowledge or 'know-how' and the pre-reflective sense of the dancing body's active possibilities.

From this starting point of pre-reflective, practical engagement, Merleau-Ponty theorises the active sentient body (rather than the mind) as the basis of sense of self, meaning, understanding and communication. The structure of this thesis follows this line of thought in building on a conceptualisation of contemporary dance and the dancing body in terms of habit and pre-reflective embodied practical knowledge to

explore contemporary dance as a mode of subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and meaning, understanding and communication. From this foundation I am therefore able to consider the role of the practical and the pre-reflective in dancers' engagement with world, self and others, engaging with dancers' experiences of being thinking, feeling dancing bodies rather than starting from a conceptualisation that forces me to understand them as thinking minds that control their bodies like external objects.

The conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance opens with a chapter on 'Practical Knowledge' and then proceeds through chapters on 'Subjectivity' and 'Intersubjectivity'. It is through this route, then, that the conversation arrives at 'Representation'. Thus although dance is conceived throughout the thesis as a meaningful, expressive and communicative art-form as well as a physical practice, I have allowed language, art and meaning to arise as topics for discussion only after the conversation has already opened up new ways of conceptualising the embodied basis of practice, subjectivity and communication. The conversation is thus set up structurally as well as in terms of the choice of interlocutors to suggest that an embodied basis is fundamental, not just to dance as a physical practice, but also to dance as a meaningful way of being (self) and understanding (others).

PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE:

HOW MOVEMENT IS ‘IN’ THE DANCER’S BODY

Introduction

The above discussion of the possibilities for and context of this conversation between philosophy and practice establishes a link between the embodied practice of dance and Merleau-Ponty’s notion of pre-reflective, habit-based tacit bodily knowledge theorised in terms of the corporeal schema. Work within the Sociology of the Body which uses Merleau-Ponty, and, indeed, Merleau-Ponty’s own work, typically uses dance as one of many examples, such as riding a bike, to illustrate the importance of tacit bodily knowledge and pre-reflective habitual action. In this opening chapter of the conversation I go beyond using dance as an anecdotal illustration to engage in an extended exploration of dance and the dancing body in terms of tacit bodily knowledge and habit, establishing the full potential for mutual illumination between dance and Merleau-Ponty.

Merleau-Ponty’s idea that we must take embodied, intentional, engaged action or practice to be primary in our understanding of our being in the world is the starting point for the idea of a conversation between philosophy and practice and it strongly underlies the logic of this chapter on ‘Practical Knowledge’, and the fact that this chapter opens the conversation. In addition to being a starting point, Merleau-Ponty’s

conceptualisation of the corporeal schema is also a constant reference point throughout the chapter, which I aim to speak to or address through my writing and analysis of the dancers' accounts of how movement is 'in' their bodies.

The aim of this chapter is thus to explore the physical practice of dance, including learning, remembering and performing movements, in relation to the corporeal schema. I start here – with practical knowledge and the corporeal schema – not only because it makes logical sense if we are to root our understanding of embodiment in practice as Merleau-Ponty suggests, but also because the connections, common ground and capacity for mutual illumination between Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the practice of dance as it is experienced by professional dancers, are particularly clear here, thus making it a good starting point from which the conversation can begin to roam into notions of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and representation.

It is in establishing the strong link between Merleau-Ponty and dance in the discussion of tacit practical knowledge, then, that I am able to justify going further with the conversation and exploring less obvious links in the later chapters. This opening chapter of the conversation works to show that there is sufficient common ground and potential for productive dialogue between the interlocutors to justify taking the conversation to other more speculative realms such as the discussion of 'Subjectivity' and 'Intersubjectivity'. It also establishes a firm connection between the Merleau-Ponty and dance in terms of the corporeal schema which will then underpin further connections made later in the conversation.

I: Practical Knowledge and the Corporeal Schema in Brief

A notable problem with the Cartesian view of the body is its failure to account for the phenomenon of bodily knowledge. This is the usually tacit form of ‘know-how’ or practical knowledge which is evident in such (well-practised) motor activities as tying shoelaces or riding a bike, in contrast to propositional knowledge or ‘knowing-that’ which is characterised as:

... a kind of knowledge which is represented in a series of propositions or sentences in the mind of the thinking subject. (Edwards, 1998:51)

Indeed it is argued that the body cannot in fact be an object, as the Cartesian thesis holds, given that it is the site of this form of knowledge (Edwards, 1998:51).

Following Heidegger in the rejection of the idea of the (purely mental) Cartesian subject, Merleau-Ponty situates us as beings in the world, constituted by the links we have with that world. He uses the concept of the corporeal schema to explore this practical grasp that we have on our environment. Thus instead of the Cartesian ‘I think’ there is ‘I can’:

...a practical *cogito* which structures not only our relationship to the world, but also the ways in which we think about it. (Burkitt, 1999:74)

Shilling describes the concept of body schema as originally developed to ‘address the problem of how it is we are able to co-ordinate our bodies to perform actions without

having complete sight of them or consciously monitoring our every movement’ (Shilling, 2003:200) with the effect that it:

... unifies and co-ordinates postural, tactile, kinaesthetic, and visual sensations so that these are experienced as the sensations of a subject in a single space.
(Grosz, 1994:83)

The body schema develops as a result of the physical interaction that we have with the world as we learn to navigate around objects in our environment and is thus related to our proprioceptive capacities. It should, however, be noted that the body schema does not exactly map the topography of the physical body and can, for example, include aspects such as phantom limbs which are not physically present, and extensions of the physical body such as the blind man’s stick, or indeed the driver’s car or the typist’s keyboard. In addition to this the body schema is developed through social interaction and is in part derived from the image we have of other people’s bodies and through their reactions to our body.

For Merleau-Ponty the corporeal schema is integral to intentional movement, for example, I wave my arm to draw someone’s attention, rather than having to do something in order to wave my arm, having first had the (purely mental) intention to do so. Thus my action and the intention to attract attention occur as a unified whole, in contrast to the process of locating an object – say I want to attract attention with a coloured flag – and then having to do something – grasp it – in order to move it. We do not, therefore, generally relate to our bodies as external objects, rather we *are* our bodies and have pre-reflective knowledge of them in the form of the corporeal schema.

Further to this, the corporeal schema entails a pre-reflective sense or grasp of my environment, relative to my body, so that I can navigate it without having to consciously think about how to do so. This feature of the corporeal schema further extends to objects of habitual use such as the computer keyboard or the controls of a car so that I can have practical knowledge of the layout of the keyboard which allows me to type without consciously seeking out the correct keys.

The concept of the corporeal schema thus allows Merleau-Ponty to explore human behaviour without subscribing to either the intellectualist picture of the body directed by a rational subject, or the mechanist (behaviourist) picture of habitual bodily action being purely a matter of conditioned stimulus-response reflex. Through his focus on tacit bodily knowledge and the corporeal schema, Merleau-Ponty is able to ‘reflect’ upon the ‘unreflected’, bringing ‘the pre-objective, primordial relationship we have with our bodies’ to the centre of our attention and awareness (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:52).

I will now examine dancers’ experiences of learning and remembering a new choreography or new choreographic style to show what it is that dance can bring to this conversation about practical knowledge. My intention in analysing the data from my dance interviews is to draw out and elaborate certain aspects of the dancers’ accounts that I believe can fruitfully be read alongside Merleau-Ponty’s concepts of pre-reflective knowledge and the corporeal schema which I have briefly outlined here and in the previous chapter.

In this chapter it is the dancers' accounts that are foregrounded and receive the most explicit attention, but Merleau-Ponty's concepts are always the position in relation to which I discuss the dancers' accounts of the experience of dance. Thus although Merleau-Ponty's philosophy does not speak at length in this chapter, it is the idea that the chapter speaks *to* Merleau-Ponty (rather than speaks *of* Merleau-Ponty) which shapes how I understand and analyse the accounts of the dancers, allowing those accounts and the dancer's concepts to give me access to aspects of Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of practical knowledge and the corporeal schema that I would not otherwise have had such a clear perspective on if I had only used my own everyday experience or worked through a process of rational argument to insist on the primacy of the pre-reflective.

II: Learning Dance: “Getting it into the Body”

In this section I explore aspects of the dance as an embodied practice that I would like to suggest can clearly illuminate and be illuminated by Merleau-Ponty’s theorising of habit and the corporeal schema. I am particularly interested in the notions evoked by dancers of ‘getting’ or ‘having’ a movement ‘in the body’ and in exploring how this term is related to aspects of learning and remembering dance that are based on repetition and the establishment of a kind of bodily memory or awareness which is generally tacit or pre-reflective. I will therefore use this section to explore how the dancers’ notion of ‘getting it into the body’ is discussed in terms of repetition, memory, the possibility of correction, and in relation or contrast to the related notion of ‘picking up’.

My interviewees employed two different phrases to talk about learning in dance: that of ‘picking up’ and that of ‘getting it into the body’. These were used by dancers from a range of backgrounds across both professional companies, but the uses of the different terms were not necessarily clear cut. This fluidity of the terms reflects the variety of ways in which learning occurs in dance. Dancers may, for example, in their daily work be learning discrete movements from a rehearsal director or choreographer; learning a new choreography or set of movements as they are created in the course of the rehearsal; learning a new style or way of moving which will enable them to improvise and create new movements or choreographies from a choreographer; learning a choreography that has already been created in some other context from a video; learning pre-choreographed movements from fellow dancers;

learning to dance with and perhaps in unison with other dancers; or learning to dance a solo.

Thus there is no 'normal' learning situation for the professional dancer as each new situation has different elements. The dancers do not in fact use the term 'learning' to refer to these processes, instead making use of the terms 'picking up', which generally refers to taking a movement such as that performed by a choreographer and recreating it their own body, and 'getting it into the body', which generally refers to processes which achieve a kind of bodily memory of the movements such that the dancers do not have to think through the steps in their heads before they perform them. This state was usually associated with the idea of 'muscle memory' in the dancers' descriptions. 'Getting it into the body' is thus somehow a deeper process than 'picking up' as dancers suggested that it takes more time to achieve and that the result is a more durable memory of the movements. In contrast, the notion of 'picking up' was generally used to refer to a more superficial process where dancers concentrated on watching a movement and copying it, but did not necessarily build up the same level of expertise or comfort with the movement as the process of 'getting the movement in the body' afforded.

There was also a suggestion in the way that dancers used the terms, that 'picking up' could be understood as an initial stage which needs to occur before the process of 'getting it into the body' can be undertaken. Clear divisions between these two processes were not, however, emphasised by the dancers as they did not generally set up the categories as definite sequential stages or in opposition to each other. The categories were thus closely related and sometimes overlapping in the accounts of

learning dance, although the dancers generally drew on the different notions to emphasise some distinction between the superficiality or depth of their knowledge of the movement.

My own use of the terms ‘picking up’ and ‘getting it into the body’ during the interviews was very much guided by that of the dancers, and I waited for my interviewee to introduce the terms before using them myself. Thus I continued to use the term ‘learn’ to refer to one or more of the activities listed above, and was interested in asking dancers to reflect how they learned a new choreography. It should be noted that a number of dancers emphasised the fact that where possible a choreographer would take up residence at the contemporary dance company for a number of weeks or months and would in fact create the work *in situ* and based on the qualities of the individual dancers with dancers actively involved in generating the new movements that would eventually be set in the piece. Nevertheless, as my sample was drawn from repertory companies, all my interviewees had experience of learning choreographies which had been created in a different context and thus came to them as ‘ready-made’. It was these experiences which were the main focus of many of the interview discussions around learning dance, but as I have suggested above many of the distinctions between learning, remembering and creating movements were quite fluid.

In order to find different ways of making the question of learning meaningful to my interviewees I would sometimes approach the issue from the reverse perspective, asking what it entailed for them to have ‘learnt’ or to ‘know’ a certain piece, and how

it was that they got to this stage. Reflecting on what it meant to her to say that she had learnt a sequence of movement Carrie described how:

Your body really knows it after a while and then to really know a choreography you don't have to think about it. [Carrie]

Knowing a choreography is thus characterised by the movements being available to the dancer as he or she performs the sequence without need for reflective thought. The knowledge here is not propositional 'knowledge-that' which requires mental reflection, rather it is tacit bodily knowledge or 'know-how'.

As a way of further clarifying that my interest was in the very basic processes of their everyday learning experiences, I would also sometimes supplement questions of 'how do you learn something?' by generating alternatives such as 'is it about seeing it, or doing it, or...?' Replies to this question usually emphasised that a movement had to be done in order to establish this sort of memory:

I think I would have to do it, and really get it into the body... you can watch it as many times as you like but it's completely different when you're doing it, it's such a physical thing and the only way you can really do it is to actually physically go and keep doing it and keep doing it and that's basically the only way it's going to get it into the body. [Anthony]

New competencies in dance thus get 'into the body' through an active process of practice or repetition of a certain movement or set of movements. This phenomenon was frequently associated with the idea of 'muscle memory'.

The existence, and indeed the strength and durability, of muscle memory was not questioned by any of the dancers and it was often evoked when I asked the dancers to reflect on how exactly what it was to have learnt or to know a certain choreography or movement. Interestingly, however, the concept of muscle memory and the acknowledgement of its central role in learning dance, did not appear to remove the need for or to wholly encompass the concept of having or getting a pattern of movement ‘in the body’.

In general terms, muscle memory was thus given as a narrower and more matter-of-fact explanation of how the dancer’s body could get used to performing certain movements or sequences of movements so that they could be easily reproduced in the same form without need for conscious thought about how the different positions were achieved or what came next. Thus, for example, Carrie, quoted above describing how the steps became available without conscious reflection (*‘you don’t have to think about it’ [Carrie]*), gave an explanation of this phenomenon in terms of muscle memory and how such memory is formed or laid down through the repetition of certain movements:

There’s different types of memory and one of them is muscle memory – I think the repetition – your body really knows it after a while. [Carrie]

The dancers’ concept of ‘getting it into the body’ covered this aspect of learning dance, but also alluded to something less mechanical which allowed variation in learnt movement and gave the dancer, for example, a pre-reflective feeling or inclination

about the appropriateness of a certain movement to a certain style (see below). ‘Getting it into the body’ was, however, like muscle memory, considered to occur through the repeated performance or practising of a certain pattern of movement. As Steven expressed:

It takes repetition to get into the body – to get the sensation clean, if that makes sense. [Steven]

I suggest, then, that the dancers’ experiences of ‘getting it into the body’ can be fruitfully explored in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s concept of habit and the process of the ‘incorporation’ of a behaviour, action or movement into the corporeal schema. Indeed the dancers’ concept of ‘in the body’ can be seen to parallel those aspects of the concept of the corporeal schema highlighted in the above brief discussion of knowledge of a well practised motor skill as pre-reflective and based in the body.

Merleau-Ponty considers all our actions to have a habitual aspect, meaning that they are a residue or sediment of previous action. This applies equally across the range of actions we perform in daily life from our basic bodily comportment, through the simple actions involved in, say, making a cup of coffee, and right through to the highly complex actions which characterise involvement in, for example, a game such as football or in contemporary dance. Merleau-Ponty’s interest was in the development and adoption of habits in the course of our daily activities where such habits are argued to be dialectically related to our ongoing activities so that they are shaped *by* action as much as they are shaping *of* it. As Crossley explains:

If our present actions are shaped by habits it is only because our previous actions have given rise to those habits; and insofar as our present actions mutate into new patterns they can give rise to new habits which will shape our future action. The improvised and innovative nature of action, in other words, is such that, on occasion, it gives rise to new and novel habits and dispositions. (Crossley, 2001:120)

Dancers' ability to establish a pre-reflective knowledge of new movements or styles of movement when they learn dance can thus be considered habit formation in this sense. Previous ways of moving are here being shaped or changed in accordance with the dancers' exposure to new types of behaviour and their repetition of such behaviours until they are 'in the body'.

The habitual and pre-reflective nature of learnt movements in dance is also highlighted by discussion of the processes involved when a dancer tries to change or correct a movement. As dancers described the strength of bodily or muscle-memory and the reinforcement of this learning through repetition, I frequently asked if it was, given these factors, difficult to 'unlearn' something. This question was often received with an exclamation such as 'phew' or 'wow' affirming that it was indeed very difficult to 'take correction' on a movement that was already 'in the body'.

A number of dancers thus expressed the frustration experienced when a choreographer changed his or her mind about a movement after the dancers had spent time learning it. One dancer described a situation that she had experienced repeatedly:

When choreographers come here and they'll do something and you're like "ok", you work I don't know how many days – a week or whatever – and then they turn round and they change it – wah! – even that process itself, trying to change it into your, from your body again, that's just a nightmare because like I said, your body's automatically going to do a certain thing. [Michaela]

The idea that a certain pattern of movement becomes 'set' in the body as a repeating or habitual pattern of action is further illustrated by another dancer's comment about a choreographer's use of a certain phrase of movement:

It was one of the initial phrases that he got us to change and then go back to the initial phrase again and there was lots of the same – similar – movement, but because we had changed it you kept wanting to go into the original. [Jamie]

The idea of 'wanting' to follow the learnt or habitual pattern of movement was further explained by Jamie in terms of bodily memory:

The problem ... is muscle memory – you know what you're doing and then you think it's going into something else. [Jamie]

It is interesting that this description is phrased in terms of wanting, knowing and thinking – activities which would traditionally be considered to be based in the mind rather than the body. Yet the dancer's evocation of muscle memory as 'the problem' and his clear frustration at the difficulties of changing a pattern of movement once it is 'in the body' reveal that 'wanting to go into the original' is not a mental desire – quite the opposite, he is consciously trying to follow the new directions given by the

choreographer – but a pre-reflective bodily phenomenon which guides his movement despite his efforts to change it. To ‘know what you’re doing’ in this case is thus an example of pre-reflective know-how or practical bodily knowledge which has been shaped by the formation of muscle memory of the pattern of movement which originally followed the initial phrase.

The problem of trying to change a pattern of movement once it is ‘in the body’ suggest that these movements are incorporated into the corporeal schema as durable patterns or habits of movement which can remain ‘in the body’ or in the corporeal schema despite the fact that the dancer is consciously mentally aware that a different pattern of movement is required. This again suggests that knowledge and memory of movement for dancers cannot be thought of in traditional terms as a purely mental or intellectual capacity.

Interested in the different, often incongruous or contradictory, forms of knowledge, awareness and intention that dancers described in relation to attempting to correct a learnt pattern of movement, I went on to ask a number of the dancers to help me to try to understand this in terms of mind and body. As I have outlined in my discussion of the interviews in the previous chapter, I had opened each interview by telling my interviewee that I was interested in the roles of and connections between mind and body in dance. This use of the traditional dualist terms was deemed necessary as I was advised that attempting to evoke my research interests in non-dualist terms such as embodiment was not appropriate to everyday conversation and interaction with non-academics. Many of my interviewees therefore replied in terms of differential

functions of body and mind, trying to clarify for me what processes they felt were going on when they ‘took correction’.

Again the power and durability of muscle (bodily) memory was emphasised in these accounts, but there was also a clear sense of conscious mental involvement in the correcting movements. In this account Louisa describes these different aspects as working almost in opposition to each other:

... because muscle memory is really powerful and, and my head will – if we’re doing corrections and things – I say “don’t do that with your leg” and your leg’s doing it because it’s muscle memory and it’s very powerful so it takes a wee while for that muscle memory to settle down and quite often we’ll give notes and we’ll say “you’re doing it again” – “oh just leave it will you”- because there’s an understanding that it’s muscle memory and it’ll take a wee while to, to let your body learn it another way so that is interesting as well because we all just say “oh, it’s muscle memory – it’ll do it when it wants” because your brain is going “don’t do that”, you know? – but you, your body just automatically does it because it’s – the information you give your body before the movement – it knows so it does the thing it’s used to, so you’ve got to train it a little bit.
[Louisa]

This notion of the dancer (mind) having to train their body could be consistent with the way some sociologists of the body conceptualise thinking selves as working reflexively on their bodies as projects (Shilling, 2003:188-189). What is interesting about Louisa’s description, however, is that she again uses the idea of the body knowing the sequence of movement, suggesting that although she is trying to clarify

the difference between the mind and the body for me and seems to describe a situation where her head or brain is telling her body what to do, her account is essentially ambiguous with relation to the location of those traditionally mental faculties of knowledge, intention and subjectivity, as she uses the idea of knowing to refer to a capacity of the body which works against and is stronger than what her 'head' or 'brain' knows or is 'telling' her body.

Other dancers also tried to explain correction for me in terms of body and mind. Steven, for example, described his experience of taking correction in terms of conscious mental intervention into pre-reflective movement memory or bodily knowledge:

Sometimes you have to put like a little tag, like a little mental tag where you have to go – “OK it’s this, not what you were doing before” and that’s kind of how rehearsals work like when you rehearse someone will give you a correction and I’ll almost put like a little flag or mental checkpoint in my mind which is a very intellectual thing rather than a sensory thing – it’s like I’m going to put the sensation and before I have to recreate that sensation I have a checkpoint in my mind to go “OK it’s this, not that” while I’m moving. [Steven]

This account again emphasises the difficulty of correcting a pattern movement once it has been incorporated into the corporeal schema of the dancer. Furthermore, correction here is seen to be a rather disjointed, uncomfortable or artificial process that interrupts the normal flow of the dance for the dancer. In contrast to the philosophical tradition of relating immanence to the body and transcendence to the mental realm, Merleau-Ponty argues that the body engaged in intentional action is a

site of transcendence (Weiss, 1999:45). Steven's description suggests that the process of correction (which can be linked to immanence) interrupts or intrudes on what would normally be a transcendent state of bodily movement. I will further explore Merleau-Ponty's notions of transcendence and immanence in relation to the dancing body in my discussion of 'Subjectivity' in the following chapter.

From Steven's description it would seem that the dancer taking correction must not only have conscious awareness of the required changes to the pattern of movement, but also some form of conscious access to the pre-reflective bodily knowledge which is currently guiding them through the movement so that they can interrupt this flow of movement and implement the correction at the appropriate location in their performance of the choreography. Conscious thought is therefore an important aspect of learning dance, and indeed it should be remembered that even the basic picking up of movements through repetition involves a conscious, reflective desire to repeat and learn the pattern of movement – dancers do not find themselves helplessly copying every action that occurs in their presence, although they might be better at doing so than most if they chose to.

'Getting it into the body' or into the corporeal schema is thus in most situations consciously initiated for the dancers. There is, then, an interplay between reflective and pre-reflective knowledge of the movement in the context of correction as is further illustrated in another dancer's description:

Usually I take correction straight away, em, I take it quite straight away and then I try and I do it a couple of times the way they want it and try and get it into

my body. Some corrections are really, really hard to get, like so if you get something really difficult it's more about my mind I think – it's my mind that takes the correction rather than – it gets into my body, I've just got to keep – the best way's repetition, that's I – it's got to stick in there because otherwise it's gone. That takes a while, it does take a while. [Michaela]

Having emphasised a role for conscious thought in the process of getting a movement into the body or into the corporeal schema it is important to distinguish the descriptions above from an intellectualist account of learning dance. This is not to say that it is not possible to reflect on and share propositional knowledge about the nuances of various movements, but rather to assert that what is contained in this propositional knowledge (knowledge-that) about dance is not sufficient for someone to be able to physically do the dance. Sheets-Johnstone is thus able to compare two different ways in which a person can think actions in the context of dance: '... thinking in movement and thoughts of movement are two quite different experiences'. (Sheets-Johnstone, 1981:400) The know-how of dance – that which actually enables a practitioner to perform a certain movement or choreography, or, as Sheets-Johnstone emphasises, to improvise within a certain learnt style of movement – is a form of tacit bodily knowledge passed on through (copied and repeated) action.

The dancers' repeated copying of a movement also highlights those aspects of our practical sense or pre-reflective knowledge developed through social interaction. Indeed the corporeal schema is formed in part through the imitation or mimicking of the behaviour of others (Shilling, 2003:200-201) (further discussed in my chapter on 'Subjectivity'), and it is evident that the primary means of learning in dance is from

copying someone else's movement. One dancer thus described the learning process as one where:

It's a kind of kinaesthetic learning – you watch, you repeat, you repeat again, you practice and repeat again and then eventually when it's in your body...[Daniel]

Again this quote highlights the need for active learning as, *contra* the intellectualist account, neither talk nor observation of a movement are sufficient for a dancer to pick it up – it is always necessary to physically do the movement in order to 'get it into the body'.

In addition to this it is noted that this transfer of knowledge, the 'picking up' of a new habit or dance occurs not as a series of separate images or propositions, but as a whole or *Gestalt*. This was evidenced by the way that learning a movement, or rather getting that movement right, was described by some of the dancers as having a sudden or 'all-or-nothing' character:

Sometimes you just click, you think to yourself – you'll be doing it and all of a sudden you'll just go "oh right – this is how they do it" and then you've got it.
[Michaela]

This is also echoed in Rhianna's description of her first encounter with a contemporary dance technique named after its originator Martha Graham:

In my first year at [Dance School] that was like a whole year of Graham, and I'd never done Graham before, I'd hardly done any contemporary and I was like, I felt like I literally could not do anything, for the first two terms I just felt like I couldn't dance anymore, you know, I couldn't move, just utterly, and then in the third term things just started to click and my body just started to understand things without me having to mentally apply and it just started to, everything started to work. [Rhianna]

In describing her frustration when choreographers changed their minds about a sequence of movements (quoted above), Michaela also described taking correction on a movement pattern that she had worked hard to 'get in the body' as '*just throwing it all away*' [Michaela]. Similarly another dancer remarked that after taking correction of this sort '*you feel like you're back to square one*' [Suzi]. Patterns of movement are not assumed into the corporeal schema, then, in a 'piece by piece' fashion but rather as an overall impression. I will further explore the notion of *Gestalt* in dance in my discussion of 'Representation'.

It was also apparent, however, from the dancers' comments that there is some leeway to adapt those movement patterns that are being learnt. Indeed dancers emphasise that getting a movement into the body is not characterised purely by a focus on the dance steps themselves. Merely copying the outer physical form or shape of the movement is not in fact considered to be sufficient in the context of learning and performing dance. In describing her experience of watching other dancers perform, one interviewee explained that there was more to dance than the steps alone:

A dance step that's just a dance step doesn't really say anything on stage. For me dancing, and if I watch a performance, if it's just dance steps – they can be really beautiful dance steps – but if there's no reason behind them or feeling or passion or something else coming through from the dancers then it – five minutes of dance steps is kind of enough. [Tara]

This is related to the negative concept of 'making shapes' evoked by a number of dancers to describe a way of dancing that emphasised the lines and shape of the body at the expense of meaning or emotion in the performance. One dancer therefore commented:

I think if you think too much about what things look like from the outside you start making shapes and I don't think that's – I mean anyone can make shapes. [Rhianna]

The dancer's ability to learn dance with all its nuances and complexity was thus contrasted against 'making shapes' which it is suggested does not take any particular talent or feel for dance. It was, however, understood that it does take a certain amount of training – 'anyone' was here considered to refer to those people who have been trained in dance but are not actually dancers in a fuller sense of the word: they do not have what might be thought of as a natural vocation for dance. Indeed Rhianna, quoted above, went on to describe the inadequacy of training alone to make an artist:

I think you could have a very, you could have an amazing trained dancer – very technical, could do amazing things – but I think you'd see the training, you'd see

– which is, it's fine, it's fine – in my own personal opinion I'd rather just see someone dance. [Rhianna]

In relation to her own dancing, Louisa explains:

I get to a physical point – the steps – where they become secondary almost, so for me dance is not really so much physical, it's about the space you create in and around your body, so then I think it communicates ... for me it lies in going beyond the steps ... I mean the most amazing ballet dancers do that – you forget that they're doing beautiful arabesques because they can go beyond that vocabulary. [Louisa]

Similar notions of the communicative aspect of dance as something that comes from going beyond or transcending the steps or shapes of the choreography are apparent in this quote from Marco:

Dance is not about steps – you have the steps to make parts and then you give everything but it's not about the steps, you know, as a dancer ... the steps just link so I guess I talk through my body. [Marco]

Rhianna also describes an 'emptiness' or meaninglessness in dance where the performers focus seems to be on 'making shapes':

Sometimes you go and you watch a piece and the dancers are amazing and you come out and you think "wow" you know they're stunning but then you feel a bit

empty inside – d’you know what I mean? – almost, it’s just been like shells of technicians that have been putting the piece across. [Rhianna]

The notion of ‘making shapes’ where the focus is on the outer shell or shape of the dancer rather than meaning and intentionality behind the movement can therefore be linked, like the process of taking correction, to an interruption of the transcendent activity of dance. In the following chapter on ‘Subjectivity’ I will further explore how dancers experience the interruption of transcendence when they focus on mirror images of their movement rather than their internal sense of their own moving bodies. The distinction between transcendence and immanence for the dancer, and that between focussing on the outer shape and the inner sense of the movement, is however ambiguous or fluid for the dancers as they rely heavily on mirrors and other images during their training and the processes of learning a choreography, and both must feed into each other, as I will discuss further in the next chapter.

Nevertheless it was clear that on the whole ‘making shapes’ was seen as a negative or at least insufficient state for the dancer, while getting a movement ‘into the body’ was a clear goal for all the dancers interviewed. The process of actually getting a movement ‘into the body’ was, however, different for the different dancers as is illustrated in this quote from Christina:

I find it quite easy to look at someone dance and interpret what they’re – I can look at what they’re doing and do it quite easily myself whereas some dancers find it a little bit more difficult to pick up – you know – exactly what they’re doing. But on the other hand it’s not always a good thing because the choreographer’s wanting you to do it in your own way whereas I find it easy to

copy a body, but not necessarily to copy a movement and put it into my own – my own way of moving. I think that comes afterwards – like I find it easy to watch someone dance and think “that foot goes there, the hand goes there”, and I can quite easily do that, and then after I’ve done it a few times and got the movement pattern then I can concentrate on making it my own. [Christina]

Here Christina refers to picking up as an initial stage where there is more emphasis on copying the steps or shapes, after which she can begin to work on getting the movement into her body in the fuller sense through a process of incorporating this new pattern of movement into her ‘own way of moving’ or into her corporeal schema.

In contrast to the process that Christina describes, most of the dancers considered their learning process to be more ‘organic’, meaning that they were able to adapt the movement to fit their bodies at the same time as adapting their bodies to perform the new movement. Christina herself signals that this is in fact the preferred way of working with respect to what the choreographer wants the dancer to do, and my interviewees emphasised that the more organic approach was generally thought of as the best way for a dancer to learn a movement in such a way that would ‘get it into the body’, rather than the dancer merely learning to ‘make shapes’.

Most of my interviewees were, therefore, resistant to the idea that there were clearly defined stages in the learning process where steps were learnt first in isolation and then the feeling or meaning was somehow ‘put on top’. This resistance might have, in part, been due to a wish to distance themselves from characterisation as the type of dancer who just ‘made shapes’, and those dancers like Christina who did suggest that there was a stage in the learning that was just about copying rather than adapting the

movement were always keen to emphasise that this was only an initial stage in the learning process or that it was only appropriate for particular choreographies where the choreographer was felt to have more of an architectural approach to constructing shapes with the dancers' bodies than a focus on the meaning and intention behind the movements. Rhianna describes how in such pieces:

It's a lot about form so in that sense I do think: "How high's my leg?" "Is my leg high enough?" "What's the line that people are seeing?" "Is my leg on that line?" [Rhianna]

She makes it clear that this is not, however, normally her primary focus.

After asking questions about learning movement that were primarily focussed on the physical and practical aspects of seeing and doing – copying and repeating – movement, I was interested in going on from talk about 'picking up' and 'getting the movement into the body' to ask my interviewees about 'how the meaning got into the movements'. In reaction to my asking whether this aspect was something that occurred after the movement had been learnt, most of the dancers expressed a level of surprise and told me that the processes of coming to know and understand the movement physically and coming to understand the meaning of the movement were, if not simultaneous, very closely related and necessarily intertwined.

The surprise that the dancers expressed in relation to the idea that one could learn a movement physically without thinking at all about its meaning suggests that the 'organic' model of learning is closer to their experiences than a model which clearly

distinguishes between learning steps or shapes and afterwards adding some additional sense of what they mean or why you are doing them. As Marco says:

You can be asked “throw yourself to your knees now” – you must give me a reason for throwing myself to my knees – you know what I mean? – you can’t simply be asked – you know – “spin on your head and then blink your left eye” – why am I doing that? [Marco]

Anna is representative of most of the dancers interviewed when she describes her experience of learning a new pattern of movement in terms of a gradual assimilation of all the different aspects ‘everything together’:

For me it happens kind of slowly – everything together – I mean obviously I don’t think a piece can mean much from the very first time when I, when somebody shows me the steps but I still, I do still like to start – let’s say we have a first day – I go home and when I think of the steps I kind of start, kind of – you know – just to start this thinking process: “well what’s the quality?” – that’s a good word – “what’s the quality here for the, for the steps?” [Anna]

Indeed even where the choreographer did not prioritise or perhaps was not explicit about the meaning of a particular sequence of movement, dancers emphasised that if they were to perform a movement it would have to have some meaning for them, even if it was not a meaning that the choreographer had intended. Michaela describes how with one work where the choreographer’s intention was not available to her she

... found some other way of finding out what it was about and just from like the movement and stuff, what was going on, I found like, with me and Steven we do a little duet and we decided that we're stags, battling each other, because there's a linking thing and we decided we're stags, we're just stags and that was my story for the whole thing ... and it makes sense to me and it brings an atmosphere to the stage. [Michaela]

When a dancer learns a pattern of movement, then, part of that process (although it may not be prioritised for all dancers in the very early stages of learning) is about the mutual adaptation of the movement to the body and the body to the movement which is described as an organic learning process. Without this it is possible to 'pick up' dance steps but not to get the movements 'into the body' or into the corporeal schema which is the final goal in learning dance. I will discuss this process of mutual adaptation further in the following section, but for now would like to emphasise the fact that learning is not simply about the steps for the dancers. Rather the process of learning a pattern of movement requires adopting and adapting the movement in a way which goes beyond the mechanical copying of shapes to include a sense of the quality or feel of the movement and a sense of the meaning of movement.

Furthermore, it was noted that once a pattern of movement has been incorporated into the corporeal schema it becomes possible for the dancer to adapt the movement or improvise in the same style without the need for conscious reflection on the nature of the style and the types of movements it encompasses. Thus one dancer described how being able to pick up movements quickly from a choreographer becomes easier over time as he incorporated more of the teacher's patterns of movement into his corporeal

schema and thus developed a feel for the style that allowed him to understand how new movements might arise and how they would be connected to each other:

The more you work with somebody, the easier that becomes because you understand their style, you can almost second guess what it is they're going to be doing next. [Daniel]

'Getting a movement into the body' or corporeal schema thus included something more than the pattern of the steps so that the dancer has a practical sense of the movement which allows them to anticipate or 'second guess' what will come next while they are in the process of working with a choreographer. This practical sense is also experienced by dancers as an inclination about whether something is wrong or right – whether the movement they have improvised or recalled is in the appropriate style or not, for example – but this judgement does not necessarily correspond with a conscious awareness or reflective process, rather it is available at a pre-reflective level becoming available as a tacit sense of appropriateness as the movement is actually being performed.

Learning dance, for these professionals, does not, therefore, fit with the mechanist picture of habit formation which postulates a stimulus-response reflex without allowing for notions of meaningfulness or intention. Dance is not understood by its practitioners as mechanical physical movements, but rather as phrases of meaning and any account of learning dance movements needs to allow for the intentionality and meaningfulness which is integral to the movements themselves as the dancers learn them and incorporate them 'into the body' or corporeal schema.

Dance movements, once ‘in the body’ or corporeal schema, are inherently intentional and meaningful (aspects that would traditionally be associated with the mental rather than the physical, the mind rather than the body), then, but, contrary to the intellectualist picture of propositional learning and knowledge, the dancer’s knowledge of these movements is considered to be ‘in the body’ and often appears to be pre-reflective.

Knowledge of dance is pre-reflective not only in the sense that the dancers do not need to or have time to think about the steps in a learnt choreography:

... some parts of it are very fast and unless it’s in the body – once you start having to think about the next step – you’re going to be behind. [Anthony]

But also in the sense that often they actually don’t know them in a reflective sense:

I just remember points as in I remember the leg going there and then that will link with what’s coming next which wouldn’t directly mean the next step but just something in the next phrase. [Adam]

Thus the dancer cannot actually say what the next step is, this knowledge is purely ‘in the body’:

It is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. (from Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, quoted in Crossley, 2001:127)

Dancers must therefore perform the dance in order to access their bodily knowledge of the sequence.

Additionally it may be that other contextual elements such as music are required to prompt the bodily memory in ways that cannot be achieved by simply trying to reflect mentally on what comes next. With these contextual cues dancers described how it was often possible to perform patterns or phrases of movement which they had learnt a long time ago and where they no longer had any conscious memory of the sequence of steps. Anna describes this phenomenon in the following quote:

I think the muscle memory takes over, like, em, let's say that we're doing some pieces from last year and it's really quite hard to do without – if you put the music on you almost go into a different world and you start dancing it – but without the music, if somebody asks you “well what happens after this?” – no idea – you stop kind of – so I think it is in your body, it's kind of as a whole and the music is, well for me personally, is quite an important part of it – the rhythm of it and I mean the music gives a certain atmosphere so it's, it somehow clicks into your kind of brain in a certain way – em, yeah, I would say that it comes back to you as a whole – there might be some blanks, but the parts that come to you, they kind of come whole. [Anna]

Learning dance is thus about the formation of bodily know-how or a practical sense which can be understood to give the dancer ‘a perspectival grasp on the world from the point of view of the body’ (Crossley, 2001:120). This tacit knowledge is therefore accessed not through conscious reflection but rather through bodily engagement with a situation or environment such as hearing a phrase of music or beginning a

previously learnt sequence of movement which signals in some way that the learnt pattern of movement is a suitable action for that situation.

Bodily knowledge thus guides the dancer on to what comes next in the pattern of movement through immediate pre-reflective bodily engagement or interaction with the current environment or situation rather than relying on the dancer reflecting on the situation. This pre-reflective immediacy is captured by the notion used by a number of the dancers of 'being in the moment'. Dancers seemed to struggle to explain exactly what they meant by this or what it was like to 'be in the moment', presumably because it was not a state normally associated with reflective thought. Louisa describes it as:

Instead of trying to think of the whole piece, if I live in that moment and it's – the first thing I have to do is step on stage and if I do that one hundred percent in the moment then it gives it full value ... and that's not always easy, I mean you might have part of the piece that you're particularly concerned about, but I think whenever I've done – and it's worked – just to be in that moment, don't overdo it, don't think about what's coming next, just do the thing. [Louisa]

III: Stylistic Variation, or How Movement is Different in Different Bodies

Practical know-how, then, is necessarily perspectival in that it is situated in and accessed through the individual dancer's body and cannot be conceptualised abstracted from the position and interaction of that particular body in the world. Thus while it is possible to transfer certain aspects of bodily knowledge between bodies, the knowledge, or rather the practice or movement that that knowledge entails does not have a form other than its manifestation in bodily action. Movement is thus not something that takes form in *a* dancer's body, it is something that takes form in *this particular* dancer's body. This movement can then be copied by another dancer who must go through a learning process in order to get the movement 'into the body' or corporeal schema which involves adapting it to their body. Thus as Louisa explains in relation to learning a choreography that has been developed or made with other dancers:

If it's made on somebody else and they have a whole history of why they made those movements you kind of get it second hand and I think it takes... longer to sit on your body. [Louisa]

It has been seen above that new actions or behaviours such as working with a different choreographer can shape the actions and habits of a dancer allowing them to pick up new choreographies or styles and incorporate them into the corporeal schema so that they become second nature to perform. It should not, however, be assumed that the transmission of these habits of movement between dancers involves the perpetual reproduction of some kind of 'original' form of the movement across the different dancers. The embodied nature of dance and the transfer of practical knowledge

discussed above mean that the learning of movements in dance is a process of learning a bodily way of being or bodily attitude towards the world from another dancer.

In learning a movement the dancer is therefore required to deal with and perhaps take on aspects of another dancer's embodiment. This can add another layer of difficulty to the problem of picking up movement from another moving body, particularly where the differences between the two bodies are in some way extreme or insurmountable. This is illustrated in the following quote from a male dancer discussing the Graham technique, created by Martha Graham:

... especially for a lot of guys, especially Graham because it was created by a women, maybe a lot of males don't really appreciate it or understand it, because it is very, quite feminine, because obviously the feminine body is quite different to the male so it's going to be open to certain exercises a bit different. [Anthony]

It was noted, then, that the dancers placed a great deal of importance on the actual process of how a movement had been made. Choreographers do not generally produce movements in the abstract – this is particularly true in contemporary dance where the style and range of movements is far less defined than, for example, classical ballet and thus cannot be evoked in the classical vocabulary of *pirouette*, *arabesque*, *pas de chat*, etc– but create movements while they are working with particular dancers in particular companies. It was understood, then, that these movements would reflect something of the dancer, or the body, the movement had been created 'on'.

The majority of my interviewees stated a strong preference for having the choreographer come in to the company and make the work on their bodies as they generally felt that trying to get movements created on other dancers into their bodies was a difficult and time-consuming and often boring exercise which rarely produced results of a quality comparable to works produced *in situ*. This is seen in the following quote from Suzi who describes one of the reasons she prefers to have the choreographer come to the company to create a piece:

When the choreographer comes in and we're starting from afresh then you can put your own ideas and then have the movement to your body rather than trying to pick it up from someone else's movement because they've obviously made it up previously so it sometimes may be awkward, especially if you're working with partners and they're different heights and stuff like that. [Suzi]

The only exceptions to this general trend of preferring to be present during the creative process and have the movement made on the dancer's own body came from those dancers who found improvisation difficult and preferred to be told exactly what to do. This quote from Carrie suggests a link between this preference and her training in classical ballet which will be further explored below in my discussion of the lasting effects of training on a dancer's corporeal schema:

I find it very hard to improvise – maybe because of the background – I've mainly been told what to do. [Carrie]

It is important, then, not to consider a dancer's body as a tabula rasa. For each dancer some things are harder to learn than others, as one dancer expressed:

There will be some things that you just can't get, you know, maybe because of how your body is. [Adam]

In contrast to theories of bodily inscription such as that of Foucault, the concept of the corporeal schema does allow for the materiality of the body citing our physical 'bumping into' objects in our environment as formative. Indeed the notion that there were some things about the body that did not or could not be changed was pervasive, although not unqualified among the dancers' accounts. Thus, for example, one dancer who had taken a complete break from dance for ten years had been able to re-join a professional company at an age beyond the usual retirement age for dancers and effectively 'pick up where he left off'. This was widely regarded as quite amazing within the company as it is very easy to 'lose your form' as a professional dancer when you are away from the company environment or not training on a daily basis. It was not unusual that this dancer explained the relative ease with which he had been able to retake his role in the company in terms of his body's natural facilities for dance:

I was quite flexible as a kid and what have you so it's not something that I particularly will lose – I think I will always be quite flexible with my body ... I'm quite fortunate that I've got a body that I can easily just go back into it. [Anthony]

Being aware from my pilot interviews of various sayings such as that being a dancer is ten percent talent and ninety percent hard work, I was therefore interested in the extent to which my interviewees considered that the dancing body was 'born' or

‘made’. The questions that I asked in connection with this were generally formulated around issues of whether some people were ‘more naturally dancers’ than others and of whether training was enough to make a good dancer or if there was something else necessary. Interestingly, because of the elite nature of the group I was interviewing there was a general scepticism about whether training could really make a good dancer in the fuller sense – the dancers commonly cited examples of people they had trained with who had been technically excellent but lacked some kind of personal quality which gave the very best dancers their appeal. For example, Rhianna described how she didn’t feel technique alone was enough:

No, I think there’s something extra, I think you see a lot of people with the body for dancing, and the technique, but that’s like all there was, technique and the body and that’s all there was, just thinking about one girl, there was quite a few girls, there was no like, to watch them was like watching an empty vessel, nothing behind the eyes there’s no spark, there’s no anger, there’s no, I definitely think it takes something special. [Rhianna]

There was also talk of performances that the dancers had seen as audience members where the cast had displayed this ‘empty’ technical brilliance and were thus not considered natural dancers by my elite interviewees.

The question of being a natural dancer was thus often answered in terms of the person – evidence of a particular connection with the audience, the music, and the meaning of the movement, for example – rather than in physical terms alone. It was, however, widely acknowledged that bodies had natural facilities and limitations:

There's things that some people are always stuck with ... I really, really struggle with flexibility – I mean I'm a lot more flexible than I used to be but still I really struggle – ... I always pull my hamstrings. [Rhianna]

These different natural abilities were linked by Carrie to a notion of being better at certain movements in her description of a non-professional classical ballet class she had recently attended:

The ones who really stood out at the adage – the slow extensions of the leg – the ones that were better had the natural facility in the hips which you're born with and the mobility of the back is genetic et cetera so that's a lot to do with it as well. [Carrie]

Interestingly, however, most of the dancers' understandings of the different natural facilities for movement of different bodies were not necessarily linked to notions of being better or worse at executing pre-defined movements, but rather to ideas about how movements were necessarily different on different people's bodies. Thus one dancer described how

... different people's bodies ... will want to do something slightly different, again because maybe that feels better or maybe they have a clearer pathway to a certain area of the body which they'll accentuate, or the accent will be in a slightly different place depending on their own interpretation of the form. [Steven]

It was not, however, considered that a dancer's individual style of movement could be wholly explained by such (innate) physical aspects as body shape and flexibility. The concept of the corporeal schema allows not only that movements carry the histories of their (re)production with them, but that the history of the body is also manifest in the way that new movements are perceived, learned and carried out.

In the course of my conversations with the dancers about how movements were different on different bodies or how different people had different natural facilities for movement, I questioned my interviewees about whether some movements or styles of movement 'felt better than others', and, with those who were interested in taking up this theme, why they thought this was. A number of the dancers answered these questions in terms of commenting on which types of movement felt more 'natural' to them, for example, Carrie describes how

... because I'm mainly classically trained – so I've done a lot of ballet – the lyrical graceful stuff is more suited to me than some styles of contemporary ... I'm more natural with the flowing stuff than with the staccato stuff. [Carrie]

Carrie thus evokes a notion that some styles of movement are more 'naturally suited' to her as a classically trained dancer than others. Her dancing body is experienced by her as a 'classically trained' dancing body and thus as a body with certain 'natural' tendencies (towards flowing graceful movement, for example). Her classical training has been incorporated into her corporeal schema and affects how she experiences dance –in terms of whether something is suited to or natural for her or not – and how she experiences her body.

Thomas comments that ‘the individual styles and techniques of modern dance choreographers [e.g. the Graham or Cunningham techniques] do not necessarily look right on ballet dancers, whose bodies are so deeply marked by their training.’ (Thomas, 2003:112). This appears to resonate with a trend for those of my interviewees who were classically trained to experience their dancing bodies as classical trained bodies. Daniel, for example, describes his experience of an aspect of contemporary dance – lowering his centre of gravity – that he believes his classical training leads him to experience as problematic:

... because I trained in ballet I find it quite hard to let go of my body – ballet’s quite a rigid technique, it has quite a lot of line in it, it has quite a lot of clarity in it, but sometimes it’s hard to drop the weight. [Daniel]

It should not be imagined, however, that the difficulties experienced by the classically trained dancer are unique. Indeed Thomas draws attention to the fact that while contemporary dancers are ‘increasingly required to have “flexible” bodies that can adapt to the demands of different choreographic styles’ (Thomas, 2003:112), it is also true that:

...until recently modern dancers tended to be trained in a particular choreographer’s style or technique [and that] ... specific modern techniques [e.g. the Graham or Cunningham techniques] ... can also mark the bodies of dancers so thoroughly that they might not be able to adapt to another modern dance style. (Thomas, 2003:112)

Thus contemporary dance training can also lead a dancer to find particular styles or patterns of movement more or less ‘natural’.

I was therefore interested in the extent to which all my interviewees considered that personal style was the product of training background. I asked the dancers where they thought personal style ‘came from’, in most cases qualifying the question in terms of whether they thought it was to do with body shape or training, or perhaps something else. These suggestions – training and body shape – were either subsumed into a wider understanding: *‘I think it’s everything you’ve had along the way’ [Daniel]*, or dismissed as not sufficient to account for variation in style:

I think it’s personal to the individual – like say if two people came from the same college who had the same training – they could be completely different styles – it’s not something that’s trained or anything, it’s just something that’s comes from you, without you thinking about it, it’ll come through. [Tara]

Another dancer offered some suggestions of the factors that she considered had contributed to her own particular style or bodily way of being, explaining:

I think mine comes from my actual personality and what I’ve done in the past – not necessarily dance – but I think with all the net-ball training and gymnastics and athletics and all that kind of thing plus other things that have gone on in my life as well – that’s all become part of me and that’s contributed to the way that I have my own individual presence on stage. [Michaela]

In contrast to this, however, one dancer remarked, although perhaps rather flippantly as he goes on to describe his own individual patterns of movement based around a reliance on strength work later in the conversation: *'I think my natural rhythm has been beaten out of me with technique'* [Jamie]. Thus there seem to be range of factors, including training, which interact to influence the styles of these dancers.

In the following interview excerpt, I try to understand these how the influence of these different factors is experienced by the dancers during their everyday practice of dance by asking Rhianna about what it feels like to do different techniques. She evokes a number of different factors that she considers determine which techniques or styles of movement are preferred by herself and others:

AP: D'you think some of the techniques just suit your body better?

Rhianna: Yeah, definitely, I mean I used to, oh God – I used to be awful at Graham [contemporary dance technique], I'm still not good but I can manage now, I can get through the exercises, I can sort of, I understand but oh God – I used to be terrible, and on a Friday sometimes we used to do like a standing class – we wouldn't do any floor work – and that was so much easier, so much, but that's because of the lack of flexibility. But yeah, I think certain people suit certain, but also I think it's habit that makes, that sort of sets that, habit of what you do. There's also, I mean naturally some people move faster and some move slower and some prefer like, like I think Cunningham [technique] is quite sort of unnatural, I think it's sort of quite robotic and really funny co-ordination and I think you have to fight, for me I have to fight against naturally what I feel is – you know – movement, not movement but you have to, I have to really

concentrate on the co-ordination of those, whereas Graham I really understand the co-ordination in that, I really feel it in my body, I feel that easy – the patterns and the way things fit together I don't, I really struggle with an exercise sometimes, especially the floor-work, but then I've done more Graham than Cunningham, I don't know, yeah, I think certain people just – different types of action.

AP: Yeah, and is that just to do with sort of body shape and flexibility?

Rhianna: I think it's a bit of both – like for me the co-ordination thing isn't really about body shape or flexibility, it's just about like – I find the actual probably executing the movements in Cunningham easier but I prefer Graham now, I never used to, but I do now because I feel like it works me more deeply than the Cunningham. I think, I think a lot of people like, I think it's quite mental what people like and what they don't like, I mean I know a lot of people hate what we do in class and I know sometimes I get really sick of it as well, you just want something loose, something softer, something more released and it depends on your state of mind as well.

Thus there is a question here about whether some patterns of movement are more 'naturally suited' to an individual's dancing body than others. Rhianna responds to this by citing her own problems with the Graham technique in terms of a lack of flexibility, something she has earlier remarked that she is 'stuck with' and 'will always struggle with', however, she also emphasises the role of habit in a way that suggests she is unsure which of these two factors – natural facility for and familiarity with a technique – to prioritise in her explanation.

Interestingly, Rhianna also explains her relationship to Graham technique, having spent a considerable amount of time learning it, in terms of preference and understanding. She goes on, in a later part of the conversation, to relate her ‘understanding’ of Graham technique better than Cunningham technique to the fact that the Graham technique was created by a woman on a woman’s body while the Cunningham technique was created by a man. This type of reasoning was echoed by a male dancer, Anthony, who described Graham technique as more difficult to ‘appreciate’ or ‘understand’ for male dancers because it was created by a woman on a woman’s body. He then goes on to describe his own relationship with this technique based on aspects of his physical build:

I’m quite fortunate in that way because I’ve got quite a slim body and it’s like I’ve got more of a kind of like a female slim body and quite loose in that kind of way – I can probably do certain movements probably a bit better than another male who’s quite, you know, a very male build, so to speak. [Anthony]

In an effort to make a distinction between the physical capacity that she has for the different techniques and what she refers to as preference for or greater understanding of Graham technique, Rhianna suggests that in addition to the physical aspects of body flexibility there are also ‘mental’ factors at play. Interestingly, however, she links the ‘mental’ factor of preference to the notion that she understands the Graham technique better because it was created by and on a woman’s body. The traditionally mental notion of understanding is obviously very important here, then, but it seems in fact to be related corporeal capacity to naturally understand some movements better than others because of the similarity of two female bodies. The notion of

‘understanding’ in dance as linked to a form of physical empathy or transference will be further discussed in the chapters on ‘Intersubjectivity’ and ‘Representation’.

Rhianna thus finds Graham more difficult than Cunningham in terms of her physical limitations on flexibility. Yet in other ways she finds it easier to get Graham ‘into her body’ – perhaps because it was created on a body more similar to her own in that it was female rather than male which allows her to have a greater ‘understanding’ of it. In addition to this she cites the fact that she is more familiar with Graham and that this may influence the fact that she finds Graham less unnatural than Cunningham. Indeed she describes how habit – of moving in a certain way or in the style of a certain technique – has made the Graham technique feel slightly easier.

Both Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu consider habitual action to be the basis of our bodily orientation towards the world, with Bourdieu using the term ‘*habitus*’ in place of ‘habit’ (Burkitt, 1999:85) signalling that his concept goes beyond the behaviourist notion of habit (as does Merleau-Ponty’s). Steven Wainwright and Bryan Turner have published a series of papers (2004a; 2004b; 2006; Turner and Wainwright, 2003; Wainwright *et al.*, 2005; 2006; 2007) based on empirical data from interviews conducted with a number of members and retired members of a classical ballet company (The Royal Ballet, London). In a number of these papers the authors make use of Bourdieu’s concept of *habitus* to explore ideas around ballet dancers’ different styles and the effect of, for example, training on the way a dancer is disposed to move and understand their body.

Crossley describes an individual’s *habitus* as:

An active residue or sediment of their past experiences which functions within their present, shaping their perception, thought and action and thereby shaping social practice in a regular way. It consists in dispositions, schemas, forms of know-how and competence, all of which function below the threshold of consciousness, shaping it in particular ways. (Crossley, 2001:93)

Wainwright and Turner further explain their use of the term thus:

Ballet in Bourdieu's sociology can be described as a specific social field of cultural practice ... The field is the context within which the *habitus* of individuals is formed. We define "*habitus*" loosely as the attitudes, dispositions, and taste that individuals share as members of a field. (Wainwright and Turner, 2004b:100-102)

In thinking about the individual's style of dance Wainwright *et al.* (2006; 2007) emphasise that they are paying particular attention to 'bodily *habitus*' in the sense of bodily comportment and movement. This focus on 'bodily *habitus*' specifically in fact brings the conceptual framework that Wainwright *et al.* work with incredibly close to Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the corporeal schema. Indeed Crossley suggests that:

Though the intellectual genealogy is unclear, it is commonly held that Bourdieu builds upon the work of Merleau-Ponty and presupposes it in much that he argues. (Crossley, 2001:91)

The notion of bodily *habitus* as composed of sedimented patterns of movement and competence is therefore very close to the notion of corporeal schema that I have used so far to illuminate the embodied practice of contemporary dance. What is different, however, about the aim of Wainwright *et al.* in using the concept of *habitus* to examine dancers' bodily being and my own reasons for using Merleau-Ponty, is that the Bourdieusian framework is more suited to an examination of social institutions and how the practices associated with these different social institutions mark the individual bodies of those involved with them. Wainwright *et al.* use Bourdieu's sociological framework which situates *habitus* not only within a network of social divisions such as those of a class system but, more importantly they suggest for this analysis, within a distinct field (or fields) of cultural practice, in this case professional classical ballet. This offers us an understanding of how the different practices associated with the institution of professional classical ballet in different countries are somehow 'written' on or engrained in the individual dancer's body, influencing how they move.

This focus makes sense for the discipline of classical ballet because of the relatively distinct different schools of ballet associated (primarily) with different countries. Thus although the discipline of ballet has been around for a long time and is internationally recognisable because of its core movements such as the *pirouette* or *arabesque* and its emphasis on the aesthetics of length, gracefulness and weightlessness, Thomas points to differences in this bodily *habitus* in relation to different ballet styles which have emerged and been institutionalised in different countries at different points over the course of the history of the discipline:

Dance forms, of course, do change over time and dancers' bodies, in their idealised and realised form, are also subject to change over time. For example, although ballet as a form may display certain core movement values, there are differences in positions of the arms (*ports de bras*) and the shoulder movements (*epaulement*) in the Russian, French and Italian Schools of ballet technique and training. (Thomas, 2003:111)

In contrast to this approach, I do not intend in my work here with Merleau-Ponty to focus on how institutionalised social practices are imprinted on dancing bodies to create a specific (national) type of dancing subject, but rather to explore how dancers experience their own dancing bodies as the seat of the sense of self and how the continuous formation and development of the dancers' corporeal schema – particularly in relation to interaction with mirrors and other dancers as I will discuss in the next chapter – is related to and underpins the development of subjectivity, intersubjectivity and indeed the very capacity for representation in these individuals.

This is not to say, however, that there are not major overlaps between the domain of Merleau-Ponty's ideas and those of Bourdieu, and indeed there may be very interesting things to say about dance and the dancing body from a Bourdieusian perspective. I therefore want to briefly examine Wainwright *et al.*'s Bourdieusian framework in relation to the 'field' of classical ballet to highlight some interesting points around the theorisation of the imprinting of institutionalised social practices on the body, although I argue that this framework is less adequate for contemporary dance than it is for classical ballet.

I would also emphasise here that the shaping of my own project, including the choices I made to study contemporary dance rather than classical and to use Merleau-Ponty exclusively rather than a number of body theorists, while growing primarily out of my pilot interview work with ballet and contemporary dancers and my reading of Merleau-Ponty during this process, was also influenced by my engagement with and critique of Wainwright *et al.*'s study. That is to say that Wainwright *et al.*'s work inspired me to look closer at dance and body theory, but it was also the inadequacies of their work and the Bourdieusian framework that inspired me to look beyond this to explore how Merleau-Ponty and contemporary dance had things to say to each other that opened up new ways of understanding embodied being that could not otherwise be accessed.

Wainwright *et al.* propose analysing classical ballet dancers in terms of three distinct but interrelated *habitus* which interact to influence dance style. They use these three types of *habitus* to explore:

... the relationship between ... individual dancers, the institution of the ballet company, and the dominant forms of choreography within this institutional setting.' (Wainwright *et al.*, 2007: 309-310)

Thus they propose a notion of 'institutional *habitus*' which is considered to be rooted in the company in which the dancer works and has been trained, and in addition to this a notion 'choreographic *habitus*' which refers to the influence that dancing ballets which have been choreographed in a certain style by a certain choreographer or select group of choreographers has on how a dancer moves. The third *habitus* is named 'individual *habitus*' and may refer to aspects such as the individual dancer's height,

weight or speed. This ‘tripartite distinction’ is exemplified in a description of the British ballet dancer Wayne Sleep:

[His] stature [5’2”], speed and his remarkable ability to turn, or his ‘individual *habitus*’ was accentuated by his schooling (Royal Ballet School) and training (Royal Ballet) which together formed his ‘institutional *habitus*’. This was further reinforced in the roles created for him at the Royal Ballet (via his ‘choreographic *habitus*’ e.g. as Koyola in Ashton’s ‘Month in the Country’). (Wainwright *et al.*, 2007: 310)

In the field of classical ballet it is well recognised that an elite dancer will have a certain style which is generally denoted either in terms of their country or company, or the choreographical style in which they have been trained. Thus it is possible to distinguish between the styles of, for example, a Russian dancer and an English dancer, or, for example, an Ashton dancer and a Balanchine dancer. Within the Royal Ballet, then, Wainwright *et al.* quote one interviewee as describing how someone who dances in the Russian style would not be considered suitable for the corps de ballet:

“If anybody, I mean however fabulous a dancer they were, if they had come straight from the Kirov or the Bolshoi and they were excessively, you know, Russian, in training then it’s sort of pointless ... they’d stick out like a sore thumb”. (Wainwright *et al.*, 2007:311)

Past action – that is, training in and experience of certain styles – is therefore sedimented in or written on the dancing body in such a way that those who have sufficient knowledge of dance forms and techniques can recognise. Thus if a Russian

ballerina goes to an audition for the Royal Ballet corps de ballet, those making the selection will recognise her as Russian in style and training despite the fact that she will be asked to perform the same movements as all the other dancers at the audition. Furthermore it is considered that such stylistic sediments are deeply ingrained – the Russian ballerina will not be selected for the corps de ballet because her style is too different and cannot be moulded to what is required.

It is also noted that the ‘institutional *habitus*’ and the ‘choreographical *habitus*’ can be very closely linked:

Many of the world’s great dance companies are associated with the style of dance of great choreographers, for example, New York City Ballet (NYCB) with Balanchine, the Royal Ballet with Ashton and MacMillan. The strong choreographic *habitus* within the individual dance company has been, perhaps the major factor in molding a dance company’s institutional *habitus*.
(Wainwright *et al.*, 2007:313)

The English dancer, from the point of view of these Royal Ballet interviewees, is therefore the Ashton or Macmillan dancer, and the American or the NYCB dancer is the Balanchine dancer.

Wainwright *et al.* do not fully explain the physical manifestations of these differences in style, although some of the interviewees quoted allude to such as aspects as a difference in the stiffness or looseness of the upper body, or a different use of the arms. One interviewee also describes the problems he had coaching a Russian guest soloist to dance in a MacMillan piece, explaining:

“It’s quite hard to get rid of all that Kirov heroicism ... he kept throwing all these kind of heroic poses”. (Wainwright *et al.*, 2007:315)

Such differences are described in more detail in Thomas’s discussion of changes in the technique and aesthetic of ballet. Thomas details how:

Developments in dance techniques and/or training can contribute to shifts in the aesthetics of given genres and alterations in the physical appearance of the dancing body, and vice versa. Consider, for example, the soft shoulder line and subtle flexibility of the upper body that marked the Ashton dancer of the 1950s and the early 1960s, or the speed, flexibility and hyper leg extensions which have become the marker of the female Balanchine dancer. (Thomas, 2003:111)

Thomas further emphasises that the actual physicality of the dancing body – its shape and capacities – is intimately related to the aesthetics and the technique of the dance style in which the dancer has been trained (Thomas, 2003:111). She quotes Melissa Hayden, for example, a former principle dancer in Balanchine’s company as saying:

“You make yourself a Balanchine ballerina by dancing his ballets ... Your legs change, your body changes, you become a *filly*”. (Thomas, 2003:111)

Thomas also notes that what is experienced as a limitation – stiffness, for example, – in one style, will be seen as beneficial in another, and that this may determine not only whether a dancer is suited to a particular style or not, but also how their training proceeds and how their body is shaped by that training (Thomas, 2003:111).

The experience of dancing when the *habitus* is perfectly fitted to the field – an Ashton (trained) dancer performing an Ashton work, for example – will be that of a ‘fish in water’:

When *habitus* encounters a social world of which it is the product, it is like a ‘fish in water’ ... it takes the world about it for granted. (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992:127).

In contrast to this, the non-Ashton (trained) dancer will find the demands placed upon them by this particular choreographic field – the looseness of the upper body – difficult and the movements will most likely be experienced as unnatural – they are not in the habit of moving in this way.

In beginning to explore the actual physical manifestations of these different styles we reveal the complexities of analysing a dancer’s movement style using Wainwright *et al.*’s tripartite framework. Note, for example, that flexibility and speed are both characteristics of certain styles of ballet which dancers will have been trained to exhibit, but they have also been related by Wainwright *et al.* to certain individual characteristics such as height in the example of the dancer Wayne Sleep. The distinction between what is to be thought of as individual *habitus* and what is to be thought of as institutional and/or choreographic *habitus* is not, then, clear-cut even for classical ballet where the institutional and choreographic styles are well-defined.

Wainwright *et al.* describe their tripartite structuring of the dancer’s *habitus* as ‘a corrective’ to one of the common criticisms of Bourdieu, namely that:

The concept of *habitus* has a lot of work to do in Bourdieu's conceptual scheme.

It is something of an overburdened concept whose meaning tends to slip, slide and even disappear, as it is deployed in different contexts. (Wainwright *et al.*, 2007:310, quoting Shilling, 1993:149)

I would suggest, however, that they are in danger of making this mistake again with the concept of individual *habitus* as it becomes merely a catch-all category for those aspects of a ballet dancer's style that cannot be explained in terms of institutional or choreographical *habitus*.

The identification of and distinctions between the three types of *habitus* are even further confused if we consider applying this framework to contemporary dance. Contemporary dance companies rarely have their own schools (although Rambert Dance Company is a notable exception), which means that the notion of dancers having an institutional *habitus* derived from schooling and professional development of technique all within the same company cannot be applied to the majority of contemporary dancers. In contrast with the Royal Ballet dancers interviewed by Wainwright *et al.*, my interviewees had a wide range of backgrounds, many having been to contemporary dance schools, but others having been schooled in classical ballet.

The companies from which I drew my sample of dancers also negated any notion of a recognisable institutional stylistic *habitus* as, being repertory companies, they were characterised by their willingness to take on a variety of works in different styles. This is not to say that certain contemporary dance companies do not have recognisable

styles related to the influence of a particular artistic director or even rehearsal director, but in the companies that I interviewed, people did not tend to stay in these roles for more than a few years and it was also extremely common for dancers to move on to other companies after a few years, meaning that it was highly unlikely that any one dancer would find themselves working with the same artistic director for any length of time. Even more notably it is generally the case that dancing in a contemporary repertory company means that the style of the different works you perform will be dictated by a range of different choreographers who take up residence in the company only for a matter of months or sometimes even weeks.

Wainwright *et al.*'s framework of three types of *habitus* is therefore unsuitable for the analysis of contemporary dance because it is too rigid, both in the sense that it relies on the assumption that a dancer will have been consistently exposed to the same stylistic elements throughout his or her training and career, and that it suggests that these patterns, once laid down will have a distinct influence on how that dancer dances in the future. This is exemplified in the example given above of a when Russian ballerina wished to be considered for the Royal Ballet corps de ballet and it was considered that the Russian style was too different from the English and too engrained so that the dancer would 'stick out like a sore thumb'.

The idea that each individual dancer can be thought of as having not just one *habitus*, but a collection of different stylistic patterns and dispositions which all interact with each other and allow us to read the background of the dancer from examining their bodily comportment and movement is, nevertheless, an important insight for the consideration of contemporary dance. It may also be that some of these patterns of

movement come to the fore more in certain situations – for example when a dancer is asked to perform movements that require a style similar to one they learned for a different work produced by the same choreographer. Indeed in moving away from considering dance in terms of just one *habitus* – and thus filing it away as one of a list of examples such as driving a car, riding a bike, typing on a keyboard or tying one's shoelaces – to seeing it as having a number of different components and stylistic variations, the example of dance becomes less one dimensional and we start to see the potential of thinking about dance as a way of opening up a range of possibilities for thinking about bodily habit and knowledge.

For the contemporary dancers I interviewed, then, training and the experience of having performed works by certain choreographers do interact with more individual aspects of a dancer's style of movement, but it is not possible to identify and label one type of institutional or choreographic *habitus* for any one dancer as they will all have experienced a diverse mixture of influences. The concept of institutional *habitus* is, however, suggestive of a need to attend to the institutional elements of a dancer's training. Although all my interviewees had been through professional dance training, the different institutions that they had attended and the styles that they encountered there had impacted differentially on the way that they both perceived and embodied patterns of movement. Further to this, it was noted that the style of the artistic director of a contemporary dance company may instil certain stylistic elements in the dancers as they become used to performing the artistic director's works. This is, however, a far more complex picture than that of the institutional *habitus* for the classical dancer evoked by Wainwright *et al.*, as there are a large number of competing or intertwining

elements, even if we confine ourselves to thinking about institutional backgrounds, which can influence the *habitus* of a contemporary repertory company dancer.

The concept of choreographic *habitus* might also be adapted to the context of the contemporary repertory company to allow us to consider the ways in which the range of different choreographers encountered might impact (in a durable, transposable fashion) on the style of a dancer. One dancer therefore attributed personal style to

All of the things you've had along the way ... every new work that we do you pick up new skills and new ideas and when you move onto another choreographer you take all that sort of baggage with you ... so it's everything.
[Daniel]

This quote and others do, however, suggest that there is more to a dancer's style than can be accounted for by training and contact with different choreographies alone, bringing us to the discussion of the other factor in Wainwright *et al.*'s threefold division of the classical dancer's *habitus*: the individual *habitus*. This notion of there being something individual about style resonates strongly with many of the comments made by my interviewees about how style is personal to the individual. One dancer, for example, is able to describe his experience of

... an experiment once with a choreographer where she set us all a task, an individual task to dance like someone else in the group, in the style of that person, and that was really interesting because you did see it immediately – who they were trying to be – just because everybody has their habits and their own

sort of foibles and ways of moving so you get to know them when you dance together. [Daniel]

All of my interviewees did, then, emphasise that movements were different in different bodies – that is that each dancer has a form of bodily comportment and style of movement that influences how they ‘pick up’ a new pattern of movement. The tripartite distinction between well-defined institutional, choreographic and individual *habitus* for the classical ballet dancer was not, however, transposable onto the field of contemporary dance repertory companies. Indeed it was notable that the only dancers who applied some kind of label to their own style were those who described themselves as classically trained.

Classical ballet training in fact seemed to be one of the most obvious influences which dancers were aware of and able to use by way of explanation for why they moved the way they did or had trouble with particular movements. The experience of the classically trained dancer in the contemporary dance context can therefore be seen as that of ‘a fish out of water’ as the way in which his or her body is trained to react and execute certain movements is at odds with the requirements of contemporary dance. It seems that for these individuals the nature of the institution in which they were trained has indeed had a distinct identifiable influence on the way they experience and pick up new movements.

It is, however, important to note that classically trained dancers do not experience all aspects of contemporary dance as equally ‘unnatural’. Furthermore, those who had trained at contemporary dance schools also reported finding certain patterns of

movement particularly difficult to ‘get into the body’, showing that sedimented patterns of movement are not only a product of classical training. The notion of fitting in with a certain company’s style was, in fact, an issue for both classically and contemporary trained dancers, although because of the emphasis on variety in a repertory company this became important only where an artistic director had a particularly strong aesthetic vision for the company. Some dancers did, however, make reference to these factors in discussion of auditioning for certain contemporary dance companies, suggesting that there were certain companies that they just wouldn’t bother to go for because the style was too different from their own.

Thus all the dancers were able to identify certain enduring aspects or patterns to their own movement but were less clear than the classical dancers in Wainwright *et al.*’s study about where these patterns originated from, many citing ‘everything’, including training, personality, all the works ever performed, and for example sports or other dance forms they had done when they were younger. Having explored the possibilities offered by Wainwright *et al.*’s notions of multiple *habitus*, I welcome their attempt to break down the complexities of style in terms of past action, but I would argue that the particular and rather rigid tripartite division they suggest with its emphasis on institutional *habitus* derived from a company with a recognised style and its associated school, and choreographical *habitus* derived from the company’s close relationship with a particular choreographer, is of little utility for the study of contemporary dance repertory companies in which my research consists.

There are, however, other interesting insights which can be gleaned from engagement with Bourdieu. The Bourdieusian concept of *habitus*, for example, emphasises that

dancers' dispositions towards certain styles of movement are not only physical tendencies to move in certain ways, but also function at the level of (aesthetic) preferences for certain styles of movement. Thus for the dancer aesthetic dispositions are incorporated into the *habitus* along with more physical dispositions as the dancer learns, with such aesthetic preferences or dispositions then functioning at a level 'below the threshold of consciousness' (Crossley, 2001:93). This was experienced by my contemporary dance interviewees as a natural inclination for certain types of movement which they described as not quite accountable for in terms of bodily capability but also related to habit and something that they tried to express in notions of preference, appreciation and greater understanding for certain movements, although these concepts seemed to be difficult for them to pin-point and/or define.

This 'natural' inclination, or preference which cannot be fully articulated, for certain movements fits with an understanding of Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* as a pre-reflective 'feel for the game'. In exploring this, I would, however, like to return to Merleau-Ponty's work as Crossley suggests that much of Bourdieu's definition of *habitus* as a 'feel for the game', and of *illusio* as an 'unconscious belief in the game', is arguably pre-figured in Merleau-Ponty's work *The Structure of Behaviour* (Crossley, 2001:78).

In *The Structure of Behaviour*, Merleau-Ponty gives an account of the perceptions and actions of a footballer involved in a game of football:

For the player in action, the football field is not an 'object', that is, an ideal term which can give rise to an indefinite multiplicity of perspectival views and remain

equivalent under its apparent transformations. It is pervaded with lines of force (the 'yard lines'; those which demarcate the 'penalty area') and articulated in sectors (for example, the 'openings' between adversaries) which call for a certain mode of action and which initiate and guide the action as if the player were unaware of it. (Merleau-Ponty, 1965:168)

I wish to draw here on Crossley's (2001) analysis of this passage of Merleau-Ponty's work which emphasises a number of points. The first of these consists in the perspectival and 'interested' nature of the player's perception of the football pitch (Crossley, 2001:75). In order for the footballer to perceive an 'opening' he or she must both be positioned in a certain place on the pitch and have a certain level of skill with the football which will allow him or her to take advantage of the space between other players as an opening.

Furthermore, Crossley notes that the player's perceptions of the pitch and of openings for play call forth appropriate action without recourse to conscious deliberation. Merleau-Ponty adds that:

Each manoeuvre undertaken by the player modifies the character of the field and establishes in it new lines of force in which the action in turn unfolds and is accomplished, again altering the phenomenal field' (Merleau-Ponty, 1965:169).

Perceptions thus inform actions which themselves inform or alter the player's perceptual field.

The final point concerns the way in which the meaning and purpose of such perceptions and actions are related to the historical and cultural construct that is the football game. As Crossley muses:

No one could doubt the agency of the player or the urgency which invests her every move. If she is good then she is spontaneous. She is tactical and strategic 'in her bones', without having to give the matter a thought. And yet the sense of everything she sees and does derives from the game, a contingent historical construction which is one among hundreds and which means nothing to many.
(Crossley, 2001:76)

This sense of the player being completely invested in the game for Merleau-Ponty (despite its historical and cultural contingency) is further drawn out by Crossley:

The player does not think about the game; that they are 'tuned in' to it in such a way that their every perception and action embodies its structure and logic... To be a player is to be 'at one' with the field; seeing, thinking and acting in accordance with its structure and form. (Crossley, 2001:78-111)

Thus Merleau-Ponty is able to introduce notions akin to a pre-reflective 'feel for the game' and 'belief in the game' into the conversation here without my needing to turn to Bourdieu to speak to this aspect of dance. Moreover, why I prefer Merleau-Ponty to Bourdieu for this project is that while he perhaps offers less analysis of the social institutions which maintain and shape (and are shaped by) the practices of individual agents, Merleau-Ponty allows me to think more specifically about the agent's relation both to themselves as body-subject – what is their sense of self and how is it formed?

– and to others primarily as body-subjects rather than as social actors. Thus my chapter on ‘Subjectivity’ focuses on the notion of the primary sense of self being one which is derived from or constituted by a sense of the body’s possibilities for action – ‘I can’ rather than ‘I think therefore I am’ – and my chapter on ‘Intersubjectivity’ focuses on the Merleau-Pontian concepts of intercorporeality and transference of the corporeal schema. The notions of intercorporeality and mutual inherence of interlocutors in the reversible flesh of the world also underpin my chapter on ‘Representation’.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

This chapter on ‘Practical Knowledge: How Movement is ‘in’ the Dancer’s Body’ has taken Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the concepts of habit and the corporeal schema as a point of departure and a constant point of reference for the exploration of how dance is learned, remembered and performed. I have suggested, then, that there are certain aspects of the dancers’ experiences that give me an opening to discuss and a way of understanding aspects of corporeal schema theory, while, equally, there are certain aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s theorising of the corporeal schema that give me an opening onto or understanding of certain aspects of the embodied practice of dance. This final section of the chapter acts to summarise these connections and thus display the groundwork that has been done in this opening chapter in terms of connecting an analysis of dance to an analysis of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the corporeal schema. The following chapters will then build on this link to explore both Merleau-Ponty and dance more thoroughly and to seek out areas of common ground where they can be brought together in such a way that generates new understandings of embodied being.

Section II of this chapter discusses learning dance in terms of the dancers’ concept of ‘getting it into the body’. I suggest here that this concept can be usefully related to the Merleau-Pontian idea of the incorporation of action or behaviour into the corporeal schema in relation to a number of aspects of the dancers’ accounts. I emphasise, for example, that these practitioners report learning a new pattern of movement primarily by doing it (repeatedly), not by seeing it or thinking about it. ‘Getting into the body’ can take some time then as it requires repetition, but it is a durable form of memory. It is not, however, always available to conscious reflection, meaning that to get dance

‘into the body’ implies the establishment of some pre-reflective, practical knowledge, as is posited in the concept of the corporeal schema.

The failure of the intellectualist account of learning, by contrast, to account for ‘getting it into the body’ was highlighted in the discussion of the problems experienced by dancers when correction was needed to a movement that was already ‘in the body’. Once it is ‘in the body’, dancers perform the movement (as part of a sequence) without thinking about it and in fact find it difficult to change or correct the sequence of movements once it is ‘in the body’. Here dancers reported that they found it very difficult to change a pattern of movement in the body despite the fact they knew in their minds what change was required. This helps us understand such patterns of movement as pre-reflective habits that are incorporated into the corporeal schema through processes of repetition and sedimentation and are thus hard to ‘kick’. Examining the embodied practice of dance therefore allows us to see how the pre-reflective aspect of the corporeal schema actually plays out in practice.

The issue of correction also suggested that such habits of movement were assimilated or incorporated as a whole or *Gestalt*, albeit in sections or phrases rather than an entire work at once. Thus dancers described correction to a phrase as resulting in having to ‘throw it all away’ or feel like one is ‘back to square one’. Others described the process of correction as having to repeatedly enforce the change in the movement through conscious effort in order to get to a stage where the phrase was assimilated into the corporeal schema in its corrected form.

It was also noted that although dancers made reference to the existence and importance of muscle memory they continued to use the concept of 'in the body' which suggested that something additional was being evoked by this notion. Further to this, dancers also described how merely learning the physical form of the dance – just the steps or shapes – was insufficient, and it was noted that having a habit of movement 'in the body' allowed the dancers a freedom to improvise or adapt the movement under the right conditions without need for conscious reflection on the style.

Such practical knowledge was, in fact, generally unavailable to (immediate) conscious reflection, as was evidenced by the dancers' need to do the dance in order to 'find out' what the series of steps was. This coincides with understandings of the corporeal schema that state that our practical knowledge is available to us during action and from the point of view of the body (Crossley, 2001:122) – knowledge of the next step is available only when the dancer begins to dance the previous one, its position is 'known' only relative to where the body has just been.

Dancers' accounts also highlight the importance of training and previous experience of different styles of dance in shaping how you perform movements. Again this illustrates and illuminates the role of sedimentation of patterns of action in the formation of the corporeal schema, while at the same time the notions of sedimentation and habit add a new dimension to our understanding of this aspect of dance.

Section III of the chapter is then based around the notion that the movements of contemporary dance are necessarily embodied rather than abstract forms: they are always different in different bodies. Dancers learn patterns of movements from the observation of other dancing bodies and ‘getting it into the body’ is understood as a process of translation of the movement which is in someone else’s body into your own body. My interviewees therefore described how patterns of movement brought with them their own histories – who they were ‘made on’ and how they have been passed between dancing bodies – which necessarily impacted on the process of learning for the dancers.

This suggests that the laying down of new habits or patterns of movement in the corporeal schema is a complex process that involves modification of and interaction with established patterns. Dance movements transferred from one dancer to another in fact always carry aspects of the individual’s corporeal schema, but also get changed when adopted by another dancer in accordance with his or her corporeal schema. Thus movements or habits of movement are embodied by specific embodied individuals. Patterns of movement do not exist in the abstract, they are necessarily recognised and understood as embodied by the dancers. The embodiment of the movement by a particular dancer would then also be passed on to those who learned the movement from them, further colouring the movement and adding to its history. Importantly for my interviewees, this meant that learning a movement from, or a movement which had been made on, a body very different from their own was experienced as particularly difficult.

The way a dancer performs a movement is therefore a function of his or her corporeal schema which is unique to the individual and constantly being refined and modified through the learning of new movements. Dancing bodies also necessarily bring histories which impact on the learning of new patterns of movement where the movement must be adapted to the new body just as the body must be adapted to the new movement. This meant that dancers learning new movements perceived and embodied the movements differently depending on, for example, their body shape, their training or their familiarity with this particular style of movement.

It was also noted that this difficulty in getting certain types of movement into the body was described by a number of the dancers in terms of certain movements feeling more ‘natural’ than others, or of certain bodies (for example the female body) being more ‘naturally’ suited to certain movements (for example, the Graham technique). The notion of being naturally suited to certain types of movement was, however, also evoked by a number of interviewees in relation to their background and training, particularly for those who had been trained in classical ballet. These dancers, for example, reported that movements which were reminiscent of the grace of classical ballet felt more natural whereas those patterns of movement which were jerky or had a low centre of gravity were difficult to do and felt unnatural to them. Thus some movements can feel more ‘natural’ to a dancer because of the way that their corporeal schema has been shaped through training.

Wainwright *et al.* (2006; 2007) also recognise that dancers move differently from each other, in accordance with certain previously sedimented habits of movement that they carry with them when they learn or perform something new. These authors use

Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* to explore the different aspects of how a ballet dancer moves. They suggest there are three different elements to a ballet dancer's style of movement – institutional (from the company environment where they have been trained and perform); choreographic (determined by the choreographer of the works they perform); and individual (influenced by such things as height and personality of the dancer). Wainwright *et al.* suggest these aspects can be understood to constitute three separate *habitus* which interact to produce the dancer's overall style of movement.

The suggestion of three different *habitus* has, however, been shown to be difficult to maintain in relation to contemporary repertory company dancers like those I have interviewed. Unlike the ballet dancers that Wainwright *et al.* interview, my contemporary dance interviewees were not trained in a dance school attached to the company they are now part of. Also in contrast to Wainwright *et al.*'s Royal Ballet interviewees, contemporary dance repertory companies do not specialise in the performance of works in one specific style or by one (or a select few) specific choreographers. This means that while institutional and choreographic *habitus* can perhaps be clearly defined for the ballet dancers, these notions can certainly not be clearly defined and thus do not have the same utility for contemporary dance as aspects of institutional and choreographic style were far more fragmented and changeable for the contemporary repertory company dancers I interviewed.

I have, however, identified different aspects which my interviewees refer to as key elements in shaping how they adopt and adapt patterns of movement. In particular those dancers whose main training had been in classical ballet rather than

contemporary dance frequently described this as affecting their approach to new movements and how movements ‘sat in their bodies’. Most dancers also suggested that all the experiences they had of different dance styles had an effect on how they adopted new movements and some also mentioned the fact that their movement was influenced by sports they had done. In contrast to thinking about three relatively fixed *habitus* influencing how a dancer moves, then, I suggest that it is more appropriate for the analysis of contemporary dance to think about different elements coming together and interacting to form a more fluid corporeal schema which is constantly changing, evolving, developing, or being refined.

The idea of sedimentation of habit is therefore clearly very important, and dancers put a lot of emphasis on the idea of movements being ‘in the body’, but there is also a strong sense from my contemporary dance interviewees that the corporeal schemas of these dancers are not rigidly set but continually evolving as they interact with the world and others and with each new patterns of movement they learn. In the next chapter I go on to explore aspects of how the corporeal schema is developed and refined as dancers interact with the mirrors that line the walls of every dance studio and with the other dancing body-subjects who they learn from and dance with.

SUBJECTIVITY:

THE ROLE OF MIRRORS AND OTHERS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CORPOREAL SCHEMA AS SENSE OF SELF

Introduction

The previous chapter on ‘Practical Knowledge’ suggests that the mechanism for laying down elements of the corporeal schema is based on the sedimentation of habit, and I have focussed on the importance of repetition and familiarity for building up ‘bodily knowledge’ or ‘know-how’. Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the corporeal schema allows us to conceive of knowledge, learning and understanding as practical and bodily rather than intellectual and ephemeral.

This is familiar territory for the Sociology of the Body where a lot of the work which uses Merleau-Ponty focuses on notions of the habit-body, likening the notions of habit and the corporeal schema to Bourdieu’s conceptualisation of *habitus*. Merleau-Ponty’s model of the corporeal schema is, however, more useful to my exploration of the evolving body-subject in dance than Bourdieu’s rather rigid conceptualisation of *habitus* as I have begun to show in the previous chapter. Indeed Crossley argues that:

The phenomenologists generally have a more dynamic and fluid notion of the *habitus* as a lived-through structure-in-process, constantly evolving as an effect of the interactions of the agent or group with both others and the physical environment. (Crossley, 2004:39)

Thus while Wainwright *et al.*, in a series of papers with which I engaged in the previous chapter, make interesting use of Bourdieu to think through certain fairly fixed aspects of a dancer's *habitus* and particularly the way in which moving company or severe injury, for example, can 'shatter' this *habitus*, I turn back to Merleau-Ponty to explore the more everyday aspects of developing and refining the corporeal schema as the dancer learns new patterns of movement and interacts with the mirrors and others in their physical and social environment.

As I have shown in the previous chapter, a sophisticated account of habit and its role in the formation of the corporeal schema allows us to explore the notion of the thinking, knowing body-subject in dance. There is, however, a need to further explore the corporeal schema, moving on from this discussion of habit to think in terms of having some kind of sense of ourselves as having a certain embodied potential or certain possibilities for action. In 'Contextualising the Conversation' I suggested that for Merleau-Ponty the original sense of self, or 'I', is that of 'I can' rather than 'I think therefore I am'. Having a coherent sense of what we can do or the possibilities we have for action is thus central to having a coherent sense of self, although this sense of 'I can' may of course remain tacit.

In thinking about our sense of self and in terms of the corporeal schema and the tacit *cogito* or sense of 'I can', Merleau-Ponty considered various developmental stages

that occur in early childhood. In the early months, Merleau-Ponty, following a number of influential accounts in the field of developmental psychology, considers that children do not differentiate between self and other, or indeed self and the world. The formation of subjectivity during the child's development can then be understood as the development of a sense of self as a coherent unified entity which is separate from others. The emergence of a differentiated sense of self is, therefore, for Merleau-Ponty, very much tied to establishment of an individual, differentiated corporeal schema.

The corporeal schema, although individual and differentiated from others, is not, however, developed in isolation. Its formation is, rather, interactional, and it is built up both through interaction with physical objects, and also through social interaction with other embodied beings. Physical interaction with our environment develops the corporeal schema as we encounter and learn to manipulate aspects of our physical surroundings and thus build up a proprioceptive picture of our bodies. The proprioceptive body image or schema is not, however, a replica of the topography of the human body (Shilling, 2003:200). This is revealed by phenomena such as phantom limbs, which are physically absent yet sensationally present in the body schema, and the way in which the corporeal schema can also incorporate physical objects such as the blind man's stick, the typist's keyboard or the driver's car.

The second source for the formation of the corporeal schema is social interaction, whereby the body schema is derived from both the experiences we have of other people's bodies, and also the way in which they respond to and reflect back aspects of our body to us. The individual corporeal schema that emerges during childhood is

thus built up from introceptive (or proprioceptive) experience but also relies on the child forming a sense of its body as (seen) from the outside, from the perspective of others. It is through social interaction and processes of reflection and mirroring that the child is able to gain this ‘external’ perspective on its body, which it must then reconcile with the ‘inner’ picture formed through introceptive experience in order to develop an individual, differentiated corporeal schema.

While these interactive processes of mirroring and reflection from reflective surfaces and others first occur in the formation of the corporeal schema in childhood, they continue to contribute to the development of the body schema throughout the individual’s lifetime. In the previous chapter, I have discussed how dancers integrate new patterns of behaviour into their corporeal schemas as they learn and remember new patterns of movement. Throughout these processes of training and rehearsal, dancers continually develop and refine their proprioceptive functions as they constantly explore aspects of balance and how their body can be positioned in space, creating an ever more nuanced proprioceptive picture of the body.

Dancers make a lot of use of mirrors and mirroring interaction with other dancers in the embodied practice of dance, meaning that dance is an interesting area to explore if we want to understand the development of the corporeal schema in terms of the ‘I can’. Looking at dance in relation to Merleau-Ponty’s theorising of the formation and development of the corporeal schema through mirroring helps us to understand what it is that is going on in dance in a new way and also sheds light on how Merleau-Ponty’s ideas can actually be seen to play out in practice.

This chapter builds on the discussion of ‘Practical Knowledge’ to continue to stress the importance of the corporeal schema and the pre-reflective. In seeking to explore a truly non-dualist understanding of the embodied basis of being, however, the conversation in this chapter must necessarily also engage with aspects of reflective thought and with images or representations of the body (which is to be understood as neither wholly subject nor wholly object, but something in-between). In the same way that I have established in the discussion of ‘Practical Knowledge’ that neither the mechanistic nor the intellectualist picture of learning can account for what is going on in dance, the conversation here opens up a new space for the discussion of the embodied subjectivity in between traditional dualist terms: the body is neither purely object nor purely (Cartesian) subject; neither purely a source of immanence nor purely a source of transcendence.

In this chapter the voice of Merleau-Ponty leads the conversation towards talking about the corporeal schema as the ‘I can’ – the most fundamental sense of ‘I’ – and the voice of dance replies in Section II by engaging with what Merleau-Ponty has to say about infantile development and replying in terms of the everyday experience of the embodied practice of dance. Sections III and IV then go on to explore notions of immediacy and of vulnerability – feeling exposed and defenceless – in dance. These comments open up a space for discussion of issues around (or in-between) transcendence and immanence in relation to the body, and, in particular in relation to gendered embodiment.

I: Recognising Self in Relation to Others

The corporeal schema, or sense of self as ‘I can’, is continually developed and refined throughout life course, but the principle aspects of these processes of formation and modification of the corporeal schema can be usefully discussed in terms of developmental stages. In this section I would like to allow the voice of Merleau-Ponty to be heard and see what it can tell us about the formation of the corporeal schema in terms of developmental stages before we see what dance has to say in reply to this. Having drawn out some of the key aspects of Merleau-Ponty’s ideas in terms of infantile development in this section, I will then move on in Section II to discuss them in relation to the experiences of the adult dancer.

This is really the first time in the thesis when the voice of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy is heard at length, and I have used a lot of quotation in this opening section to evoke this voice in a similar way to how I have evoked the voice of dance. Importantly for my evocation of the voice of dance, I was able not only to draw on the individual voices of sixteen different interviewees, but I was also present at the interviews and able to guide the discussion; make reference to other ideas that I had heard expressed; and ask for expansion and clarification of the interviewee’s ideas where necessary. It is thus a collaborative understanding of dance that I offer through the voice of dance in this thesis. In attempting to produce a similar range and depth of collaborative engagement with the voice Merleau-Ponty throughout the thesis, I have sought to work both with a range of his philosophical texts, and with a range of secondary literature on Merleau-Ponty’s ideas, where recognised, shared understandings have been established. The voice of Merleau-Ponty can therefore also

be understood as collaborative in that I work with an integrated picture of his philosophy which engages with how Merleau-Ponty's ideas have been received and explored by others.

In 'The Child's Relations with Others' (1964c) Merleau-Ponty identifies a number of stages or moments in the child's development of importance to the formation of a stable, unified corporeal schema. One such aspect is the phenomenon of imitation where the child copies the bodily gestures of, in the first instance, the primary caregiver. For Merleau-Ponty this process of imitation, which he refers to as 'postural impregnation' following the psychologist Henri Wallon, consists in a pairing of the child's body with the bodies of others. Thus the infant returns the smile of the mother by smiling back, and it can be observed that children will cry when others cry. Merleau-Ponty also notes that children can frequently be observed 'attributing to others what belongs to the subject themselves' (Merleau-Ponty, 1964c:148) and appropriating the actions of others to themselves.

It is, however, important to distinguish this process of pairing from notions of analogy or simulation as such understandings assume an already constituted, fixed subjectivity which can employ such strategies (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:144). By contrast, Merleau-Ponty's formulation of postural impregnation suggests that the formation of such subjectivity is only made possible by this process of pairing. Indeed David Michael Levin identifies the key concern in Merleau-Ponty's discussion as

... the argument that human beings are not self-contained, self-sufficient subjects contingently and externally related to one another, but beings who are formed

from the very beginning in and through their social interactions. (Levin, 1991:62-63)

As Levin describes:

Close or intimate relations with others involve the child in a process of mirroring: the child sees herself reflected in and through the gaze, gestures, and postures of the other; the other, whom she sees, sees her and reflects back how she is being seen. Generally, if the mirroring is not for some reason distorted or disturbed (e.g. because one of the parents is schizophrenic or does not really love the child), the child will develop a firm sense of her body as a coherent whole and an originating centre of action: she will develop a stable 'corporeal schema'. (Levin, 1991:63)

For Merleau-Ponty:

The consciousness of one's own body is thus fragmentary [*lacunaire*] at first and gradually becomes integrated; the corporeal schema becomes precise, restructured, and mature little by little. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964:123)

The child's corporeal schema is thus built up gradually through a process of 'mirroring'. Indeed, drawing on Lacan's concept of 'the mirror stage' (2001), Merleau-Ponty explores the child's relationship to its specular image as presented in the mirror. There is a paradox here in that while the visual image of the body presented in the mirror cannot be equated with the child's experience of its body,

... the perception of the specular image as a *discrete, unified* image of the child's body is precisely what facilitates the necessary restructuring and maturation of the child's bodily awareness into a unified postural schema. (Weiss, 1999:12, emphasis in the original)

For Lacan, there is an 'identification' between the infant and its reflection

... in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image. It is this reflected image of itself with which the infant identifies, that Lacan understands by the 'I'. (Levin, 1991:59-60)

This process is, however, problematic as the reflection (prototypically for Lacan the image seen in a mirror) is an external form, and identification of such an external form as 'I' or ego means that the foundation of the child's identity or sense of self is characterised by a separation, splitting or 'alienation'. Levin describes how, for Lacan:

These alienations and distortions are extremely significant, because their operation within the process through which the structure of the ego is constituted means that the ego will always be predisposed to experience and relate to others in a pathologically narcissistic way; that is, with a certain paranoia, exaggerated defensiveness, and unprovoked aggressivity – with an attitude of closure, rather than an attitude of trust and openness. (Levin, 1991:61)

Merleau-Ponty also refers to alienation here, however, *contra* Lacan, he suggests that this alienation need not be understood as necessarily negative. Indeed it is the

... necessarily alienating acceptance of the spectacular image as an image of oneself, [that] somehow facilitates rather than disrupts the development of a coherent body image out of two, seemingly disparate experiences: seeing one's body 'from the outside' in the mirror, and being introceptively aware of one's body 'from the inside'. (Weiss, 1999:12)

This paradox calls for the resolution of certain spatial problems whereby the child eventually recognises the specular image as being *of* oneself but not identical *to* oneself (Weiss, 1999:13). Merleau-Ponty explains:

It is a problem first of understanding that the visual image of his body which he sees over there in the mirror is not himself; and second, he must understand that, not being located there, in the mirror, but rather where he feels himself introceptively, he can nonetheless be seen by an external witness at the very point at which he feels himself to be and with the same visual appearance that he has from the mirror. In short he must displace the mirror image, bringing it back from the apparent or virtual place it occupies in the depth of the mirror back to himself, whom he identifies at a distance with his introceptive body. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964c:129)

The schism between the 'of oneself' and the 'to oneself' cannot be overcome and remains a source of alienation throughout the individual's life. As Weiss notes, however:

Both Lacan and Merleau-Ponty emphasise that it is this very schism that makes it possible for the child to project and extend her/his own bodily awareness beyond the immediacy of her/his introceptive experiences by incorporating the perspective of the other toward one's own body – a perspective one actively participates in – rather than having it thrust on one from the outside. (Weiss, 1999:13)

Merleau-Ponty's unique contribution to the discussion of alienation here, is, however, his emphasis on the positive aspects of such alienation as (potentially)

... a way of awakening and eliciting the social, indeed prosocial, foundations of the child's identity. (Levin, 1991:60)

Indeed while Lacan assumes that the primary mirroring of the child's embodied self involves a real mirror, Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, assumes that the primary mirroring will be interpersonal. Thus for Lacan mirroring is always objectifying and alienating, even when he situates it in an interpersonal relationship, because he conceptualises it as a variation on the prototypical moment of reflection in the mirror (an external object which reduces the body to an image or object) and thus frames the experience of the gaze in terms of objective third-person observation (Levin, 1991:61). Merleau-Ponty, however, conceptualises the gaze differently, seeing it as based in a model of inter-human relations that is 'intersubjective, communicative and embodied in reciprocities' (Levin, 1991:61):

The Lacanian alienation argument sees only the moment of negative sociality in the dialectics of narcissism and overlooks the radically transfigurative moment, the moment of redemption that Merleau-Ponty brings to light in his hermeneutical phenomenology of reciprocating gazes: visions gathered through their intertwinings, transpositions and reversibilities, into the communicativeness – the communion – of the flesh. (Levin, 1991:61-62)

While both Lacan and Merleau-Ponty, then, discern a process of alienation as socialisation occurs and the child is drawn out of itself, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the interpersonal basis of this alienation in social mirroring gives it the positive effect of making the child aware of the fundamentally social character of its being. Subjectivity, in this formulation, is thus always already intersubjectivity. This recognition of being always already a social being, in turn, encourages and enables further steps towards mature individuation, ‘integrating and balancing strong needs for autonomy and equally strong needs for solidarity’ (Levin, 1991:66).

For Merleau-Ponty then, individuation or ‘the recognition of the ‘I’ as distinct from both the objects which surround it and from the ‘we’ (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:145) is a moment of self-constitution which necessarily involves other subjects. Prior to the age of about three years, others are not a problem for the child because, it is argued, the child does not distinguish between self and other. From about three years, however, the gaze of others can be experienced by the child as irritating or disturbing, and it is this recognition that the ‘I’ is ‘something on which a view can be taken’ which allows the differentiation of the self (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:145).

As Gilbert and Lennon describe:

The view which others have of us is not one we can have ourselves, yet it is a view that needs to be negotiated if we are to recognise ourselves both as an object among objects and one subject among many. ... In encountering the look of the other we become aware of ourselves as 'something to be looked at'. Our body is an object in a common space which can be observed. As 'something to be looked at' an image is reflected back to us distinct from the pre-reflective corporeal schema informing our engagement with the world. The availability of such an image and the possibility of our reflecting back to others such an image of themselves, yields a recognition of different points of view on the world. It enables a view of ours as one viewpoint among others, by means of the very process in which we are also given a recognition of ourselves as an inter-subjective object.' (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:145-147).

As Weiss suggests, for Merleau-Ponty:

The specular image offers the child a new perspective not only on her/his body and being-for-others (what we might call an 'outside-in' perspective), but also simultaneously allows the child to project her/himself outside of her/his body into the specular image and, correspondingly, into the bodies of others (an 'inside-out' perspective). Although the former may indeed be a source of profound alienation, it is the latter, especially, that provides the ground for strong identification with others, identifications that expand the body to a social *Gestalt*. (Weiss, 1999:13)

Weiss stresses, however, that these identifications should not be understood to offer an alternative to alienation as they are in fact themselves made possible only on the basis of the self-alienation produced by the specular image (Weiss, 1999:13-14).

Thus there remains an important process of separation or necessary alienation wherein the child comes to experience itself from without, as a specular body, as well as from within through intro- or proprioception. The corporeal schema is derived from both this introceptive experience and from the child coming to view itself from the outside as is revealed in the specular image and through mirroring interaction with others. It is important to note, however, that this process does not normally consist, for Merleau-Ponty, in the separation or alienation of an introceptive subject from an objectified image, rather the process of separation is one of ‘the body-subject turning back upon itself to experience itself: a carnal reflexivity’ (Crossley, 1995:49).

Furthermore, objectification and alienation in the negative sense through the look or gaze of the other are not inevitable in Merleau-Ponty’s framework. Intersubjective relations, for Merleau-Ponty, are rather communicative and reciprocal, involving mutual recognition, and thus do not, as a matter of course, involve the other objectifying or ‘capturing’ us with the gaze (Crossley, 1993:415). The negative – objectifying or alienating – effect of the gaze is, however, possible when this mutual recognition does not occur so that we feel our actions and expressions are ‘not taken up and understood, but observed as if they were an insect’s’ (from Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, quoted in Crossley, 1993:415). Thus Levin understands Merleau-Ponty to be suggesting that:

If the body (the embodied subject) is inherently interactional, oriented from the very beginning toward the engagement and development of its sociability, then the child's initiation into social relationships cannot be an alienation; nor the presence of others an encroachment or transgression. These words do not narrate the inherent nature of the situation. What they describe is possible as pathology: distortions in the structures of mutual recognition; disruptions and disturbances in the processes of communication within which children may find themselves bound.' (Levin, 1991:65-66)

In the following sections of this chapter I turn back to the voice of dance to see what it has to say to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas about the constitution of subjectivity in relation to mirrors and others. In particular I am interested in exploring how dancers experience differences between internal and external pictures of themselves or their movements, or the difference between and relative importance to the dancer of what a movement feels like (from the inside) and what it looks like from the outside. I also bring dance to speak to Merleau-Ponty in order to open up a space for exploration of how Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the positive effects of intersubjective mirroring and the negative potential for objectification, alienation and disruption play out in practice for adult dancers.

II: The Image, the Other, and the Dancer's Corporeal Schema

The corporeal schema is continually developed and refined throughout the lifetime, with both sources – the internal sensation and the external image – remaining important. In ‘Contextualising the Conversation’ I have noted that in moving away from a notion of the (abstract, generalised) body towards a notion of embodiment or embodied being, my intention is to move away from thinking about the body as text, image or symbol to focus instead on the lived-body. In the context of the following discussion, it is, however, important to note that the image can also be understood as part of lived experience – without the image I do not have a thematic experience of myself and I do not even have a pre-reflective experience of a differentiated corporeal schema. Being able to do (dance), here, relies on the corporeal schema which is formed from different sources including the external image of the body.

I therefore suggest that we must think not in terms of rejecting the ideas of the body as image, but of exploring what happens at the blurred boundaries between image and materiality in active embodied experience. Thus we cannot fully separate out lived experience from representation in dance, a theme that I will return to more fully in my chapter on ‘Representation’. This chapter on ‘Subjectivity’, importantly, emphasises a blurring of traditional dualist boundaries. I do not wish to look at materiality and representation, or the internal and external senses of the body, and suggest that we should reject one half of the binary in favour of the other. Rather in attempting to produce a truly non-dualist account of human being, my interest lies in exploring the how these traditionally dichotomous categories actually overlap and interact in the lived-experience of the embodied practice of dance.

This difficulty in distinguishing between lived experience and representation also has a bearing on how we understand the notion of language in dance (or a language of dance) and the role of language in learning dance. Language is obviously important for learning dance as dancers do talk to each other and give direction on occasion verbally as well as physically, but it is arguably not primary in dancers' learning processes as a lot of what goes on is tacit and pre-reflective and is not therefore fully contained in the symbolic realm. I therefore reach my discussion of 'Representation' at the end of this conversation between philosophy and practice, having first discussed dance in these earlier chapters with a primary emphasis on the tacit and pre-reflective.

In approaching 'Representation' through this route I consider that I am better equipped to explore the role of language in dance without necessarily falling into the dualist trap of assuming that language originates in the isolated mind of a Cartesian subject and is to be associated with reflection and the necessarily solipsistic 'I think therefore I am'. Rather my understanding of representation in dance is built upon the insights gleaned from preceding discussion of the corporeal schema in terms of 'Practical Knowledge', 'Subjectivity' and 'Intersubjectivity', which focus on the importance of the pre-reflective and posit a non-dualist understanding of embodied being. I therefore proceed here with a discussion of the role of mirrors and others in the formation of the dancer's corporeal schema or sense of self, which I believe serves as a necessary foundation for the later discussion of representation in non-dualist terms.

The mirror is not the only source for development and refinement of the corporeal schema, but it may be an important one. Crossley notes in particular that:

In the modern context the existence of mirrors and other reflecting surfaces adds to this basic mirroring from others and potentially intensifies the relationship which an agent may enjoy to their self qua embodied being. The mirror is a crucial mechanism for ‘self work’ in the modern context – we use the mirror to style the self we want to be, to create the image that will make others see us as we want to be seen, thus allowing us to be that self for ourselves. (Crossley, 2001:144)

Furthermore the mirror is certainly very prominent in the dance studio, making it a good place to take up this discussion. I will therefore open this section with an exploration of how dancers both make use of and relate to their mirror images with reference to the development of their corporeal schemas as theorised by Merleau-Ponty.

The principle use which dancers make of the mirrors lining the walls of the rehearsal studios is related to how they form and hold certain positions of the body. Thus, for example, it may be important that the leg extended behind the dancer in an *arabesque* is at a right-angle to the vertical line of the body, and dancers will refer to the mirrors to check that they are correctly aligned when they assume this position. Carrie describes how she makes frequent use of the mirrors

... just to check a position – I look and then I remember it in my body – how it looks – so I can reproduce that without having to look in the mirror. [Carrie]

This use of the mirror image means that dancers are able to learn that certain proprioceptive experiences of, for example, an extension of the leg, correspond with certain external images such as the right-angle between leg and body. As the above quote suggests, the dancer will, after this process, then be able to be able to perform the *arabesque* at the correct angle without relying on the mirror.

The sense of how the position looks from the outside is thus integrated into the dancer's corporeal schema so that when the dancer performs an *arabesque* he or she knows that the fact that it feels a certain way (introceptively) means that it also looks a certain way from an external perspective. In response to my further questions about what exactly the mirror was used for and whether it was always a necessary part of performing a movement or perhaps became less important at different stages in the learning process, Carrie goes on to say:

From that way I can see sort of how I look – if I look bad I don't do it, if I look alright then I do it again. So yes if I do that a lot then obviously I can turn away from the mirror. [Carrie]

The importance of learning through the process of repetition in dance was highlighted in the previous chapter, but it is important to note here that it is again through repetition that the dancers learn how their internal sensations of body position correspond with their external image. Repeatedly extending the leg into a right-angle seen in the mirror means that the *arabesque* is incorporated into the dancer's corporeal schema with the appropriate angle, so that it is then possible for the dancer to assume the position without looking in the mirror and to know, without the mirror,

what the position looks like from the external perspective. It is this sense of the *arabesque* as both an internal sensation and as a right-angle between the leg and my body (an external image) which characterises how such positions are incorporated into the dancer's corporeal schema.

A lot of the time for a dancer, then, the introceptive sensation of assuming a position is effectively the sensation of assuming a form which corresponds to an external image. The image of the right-angle is part of the sensation of the *arabesque* for the experienced dancer who has learned this position through repetition in front of the mirror. The dancer's corporeal schema is, however, constantly evolving and a number of the interviewees commented on the occurrence of discrepancies between how the position looks from the outside and how the dancer feels it to look from this internal perspective. As one dancer describes:

Sometimes I get the image in my mind of what I think I look like and then it's completely different, like today we were doing some attitude [name of position] leg thing and I could have sworn my leg was like – you know – really turned out but ... [Suzi]

In situations like these dancers described having to 'go back to the mirrors' to try to re-learn the position, again through repetition of assuming the position in the mirror until they have a sensation of the position that corresponds with the correct external image. This process is related to the discussion of 'correction' in the previous chapter where dancers had learned one pattern of movement and were then asked to correct what they had learnt either because they were not performing the sequence as the choreographer wished or because some change had been made to the sequence. As

with this previous discussion, dancers noted the difficulty of adjusting the way they assumed positions such as the *arabesque* which they generally performed without conscious reflection.

The mirrors that line the studio walls are therefore important to the continuing development of the dancer's corporeal schema as they are vital to the establishment of the correspondence between how a position feels and how it looks. It is this integration of the internal and external 'pictures' of a position that characterises how it is incorporated into the dancer's corporeal schema when a dancer is learning a new position. Repetition in front of the mirror then allows the position to be established in the corporeal schema so that the dancer can assume the correct position without recourse to the mirror and without conscious reflection. The mirrors are not only important for learning new positions, however, they are also used by dancers to correct the way they assume positions where there is a discrepancy between how they feel they look and how they look from an external perspective as seen in the mirror. This involves the same process of repetition until the dancer has learned a new internal sensation that corresponds with the correct external image and can assume this without reflection or need of the mirror.

This emphasis on the integral importance of the relationship with the mirrors was, however, limited to discussion of (static) positions such as the *arabesque*. The dancers did not prioritise the mirror image or the use of mirrors in discussion of sequences of movement. This meant that while mirrors might be helpful during 'class' when the dancers were going through a series of exercises, they were in fact considered to be unhelpful in most cases where an actual choreography was being rehearsed as they did

not allow attention to ‘*other things such as quality of movement and moving*’ [Carrie]. At a simple level, as Louisa comments, ‘*when I move I can’t be watching the mirror all the time*’ [Louisa].

In these situations the mirrors were seen by the dancers to focus too much attention on the positions so that, as Christina comments:

It sort of takes away the realness if you’re looking at just like positions and shapes – then when you’re actually dancing it can also just look like you’re doing a shape or position. [Christina]

Focussing on the external image was also related in this way to the negative concept of ‘making shapes’ discussed in the previous chapter:

I think if you think too much about what things look like from the outside you start making shapes. [Rhianna]

We can use Louisa’s comments on the use of mirrors to explore how the mirror might be understood to be unhelpful and ‘take away the realness’ of the movement for the dancers:

The mirror does lie, it’s not a good thing to look in the mirror, because when you learn a movement, like when we’re in class we probably face the mirror, but that can be problematic as well ‘cos if you’re working on something and I’m standing in front of the mirror and I’m looking at my feet then my neck’s down and my line is out of place so you’ve got to be careful with the mirrors as well and not

always be looking in the mirror – you can see it every now and again to check but I think generally it's better for me not to have a mirror because then I'm feeling the movement and that's always more correct than looking at it because nobody sees the movement from here so if I'm trying to correct myself from here I'm probably not correcting it, I'm probably making it worse maybe, and I see it a lot and I do it myself sometimes – you're coming across the floor doing a jété and you do that [look round] to check and as soon as you do that you're distorting it, unless it's the choreography and they say "do this and as you do it just look that way and spiral" but I think it's, it can make it worse, so you've got to be very careful. [Louisa]

There is a very strong sense, then, in which the mirror is understood to give a false or distorted picture of the movement. The very act of looking in the mirror interrupts the movement and distorts the line of the dancer's body meaning that the image of the movement that is reflected back to the dancer is not faithful to the character of the movement as it is normally performed when the dancer is not looking in the mirror.

In the course of my interview with Louisa I questioned her further about whether it was possible and if so how she established a picture of what she looked like from the outside when she was moving. There are other images available to dancers such as photographs which do not require the dancer to change the pattern of movement or line of the body, but as Louisa explains:

You can maybe look at a photograph of you doing it, but you can't, it's about movement, you're not going to be standing like a photograph, I mean you might

do but it's part of a movement, it's part of a thing that's going on, it's live.

[Louisa]

Thus the dancer does not seem to be able to use the mirror or photographic image to help develop the corporeal schema where the emphasis is on movement rather than (static) position. In the extended quote above, Louisa also evokes the notion of 'feeling the movement' being 'more correct' than trying to look at the movement in the mirror. This distinction was echoed by all the dancers, particularly when it came to the issue of giving a certain stylistic quality to a movement, thus as the interviews progressed I was able to ask Anthony, for example:

AP: When you're trying to get a certain quality in your movement, is that – do you have a picture of what you look like from the outside, or is it more about how it feels, or is that not even a distinction you'd make?

Anthony: Maybe for me personally it's more about a physical inside feeling.

Anthony went on to give an example of this, describing himself as having naturally light movements and explaining that the normal flow of his dance did not generate enough energy or force to lift another dancer. When required to do lifts, Anthony explained that if he focussed on his image in the mirror he would perhaps follow the right patterns of movement but would fail to generate the enough power to raise the other dancer in the air. Instead of this, then, he would have to focus on the internal sensations associated with the lift so that while still following the correct pattern of movement he was able to supply the extra force needed for the lift.

Marco also echoed this emphasis on the internal feeling of a movement:

You feel it because it's very difficult to see yourself from the outside – every time I see pictures I get depressed, I hate it – so the image, you know, is not the dance – it's definitely inside. So that is interesting, that movement can be inside of my body – you know? – and of course you have all the pattern – you know? – my legs, how my legs go, but more interesting is the feel for me. [Marco]

Here Marco asserts that 'the image' is emphatically 'not the dance'; that dancing is about some inner sensation for the dancer not about the pattern of the leg movements. It is, however, important that he qualifies this comment by acknowledging that it is possible to think about the movement in terms of an external image or pattern, but that the idea that the dancer's movement is 'inside' the body is for him, as a dance practitioner, far more interesting.

This was made more explicit when I questioned Suzi and Michaela about what I'd heard from other dancers:

AP: A lot of people I've spoken to have said that kind of the way you sort of think you look like something and its feeling – they said that's more important than what it looks like from the outside.

Suzi: For you personally, but not choreographically. Choreographically it can be way off the mark!

Michaela: The feeling's great like you've got to try and find that feeling but also you've got to try and get that, you have to try and get that right, otherwise you'll be doing your own thing and you're feeling something and that feeling that you've got isn't right – it's a difficult one, it is a difficult one – that's my point of view personally – it's nice to just go with the flow and find your own way, personally, but... '.

Thus there is a definite tension for the dancers between the internal and external pictures of the movement and which is more 'real' and 'correct'. I have noted above that dancers will make use of mirrors to check and correct positions and thus to adjust the internal feel of a particular movement so that when they feel they are assuming the *arabesque* position this corresponds with the appropriate external image. It is, however, clear that this use of the mirror to help the dancers correct their movements is not always possible or indeed appropriate in the context of a choreography. In addition to the logistical difficulties of trying to look in the mirror while in motion, the dancers were also resistant to the use of any medium such as the mirror or the photographic image which focussed the attention on 'making shapes' and positions rather than the flow and essence of 'the dance'. Nevertheless dancers were aware of the need, on occasion, to correct or refine sequences of movements by using mirrors or other images in order to create the required external effect for the audience as well as producing this effect by concentrating on the internal sensation – happiness, for example, might be communicated to the audience most effectively when the dancer concentrates on internal sensations of happiness and lightness, but if the dancer feels that they are moving lightly when in fact the movement looks heavy to the audience and thus evokes feelings of sadness, then correction will be necessary.

One area where mirrors were regarded as sometimes necessary was where a number of dancers were required for a choreography to move in unison (or canon):

Sometimes later on in the process we have to go back to the mirrors but that's only really for unison work to make sure that we're all moving as one unit.
[Steven]

The emphasis here is on making sure that all the dancers are doing the same movement at the same time, that the positions they adopt during the sequence are uniform and co-ordinated.

It is not, however, possible to clearly define when mirrors should be referred to and when the internal feeling of the movement should be definitive. Louisa, for example suggests that even unison work should be based on the internal feeling of where the movement comes from rather than a primary focus on the external shape of the movement, although the end result will be that it looks identical:

If you have a group of people in contemporary dance doing the same movement, if it's coming from the right place, whether it's here or here or wherever, whatever point on the body, it will look exactly the same on each person although that, those two bodies are completely different, and I've seen it happen once. [Louisa]

As Michaela suggests in the above quote, then, the exact emphasis placed on the internal and the external picture of the movement may finally come down to the individual dancer. It is also clear that the importance of the mirrors in the rehearsal

process will be, to some extent, dependent on the nature of the piece, for example, if there is a lot of emphasis on shape and unison work.

There is also a need to make use of images where dancers have to learn new works from video. All the dancers reported dissatisfaction and problems with this process of learning from video, as exemplified by Marco's comments comparing learning from a video with the process of a choreographer coming to the company to create the work:

For me it's really hard – it's kind of a dry process – you look at the tape, you know, and then you copy – and “no it's not there” – and then you copy and it never, I tell you, it never is the same thing because maybe some details on the body I can't see on the tape. [Marco]

As Louisa further explains, when trying to copy from video:

... you can see flat what the movement is but you don't know where it comes from, you don't know whether they, in order to lift their arm did they move their elbow first to do the movement. [Louisa]

Thus although the video images are moving, unlike mirror or photographic images, there is still some sense in which the video image reduces the dance to a series of shapes without fully capturing the essence of how the movement is embodied and lived by the dancer.

As identified in the previous chapter, copying and repetition are the key elements in the learning process whereby dancers incorporate new movements or patterns of

movement into the corporeal schema. Interacting with and copying other bodies is therefore central to the dancer's practice. All the dancers, however, make a clear distinction between the imitation process where they are in front of a real person and the imitation process when they are learning from video images of a dancing body. In this case the presence of an actual person is far preferable to the image. This was expressed by Michaela and Suzi in the course of our conversation about the process of learning a piece from video:

Michaela: it's watching and picking up, picking up moves, picking up steps, timing, arms, everything – it's more like a watch and learn and then go away and I don't like it, it's really hard actually, I find that really hard, I'd rather have someone come in – like the choreographer comes in and works with you whereas learning stuff of a video I find really hard.

Suzi: Because when a choreographer comes in and we're starting something from afresh then you can put in your own ideas and then have the movement to your body rather than trying to pick up someone else's movement because they've obviously made it up previously so it sometimes may be awkward, especially if you're working with partners and they're different heights and stuff like that so you have to get choreographers to come in for stuff like that.

Michaela: Especially to work with style – like you say – the style that they want and you can't see it properly on a video.

Suzi: And it gets diluted, it changes and they put their own thing.

Michaela: That's right, I mean when they say make the piece your own it's true you do make the piece your own but sometimes you lose the what the quality was in the first place so when watching a video especially I find it difficult – you could be doing something and the choreographer comes in and says “what's that?”.

Suzi: And also see when we're trying to see everything – they're going this way and so you're following them but actually it's this way – what a nightmare!

These dancers again highlight that it is particularly difficult to make out the style or quality of movement when they are learning dance from an image rather than from real people.

Thus although these contemporary repertory company dancers are proficient at 'picking up' from video images and do learn many of the works they perform in this way, they identified a number of problems with this process. One of the simplest issues was the direction of the movement. When learning from a person, dancers are used to mirroring the movement of that person, that is, facing them and moving in the same direction as them – when the choreographer or rehearsal director moves to his or her left, the dancers who are facing him or her move to their right. This may be adapted so that the choreographer is in front of the dancers facing away from them and the dancers follow the choreographer from behind, perhaps also making use of the reflection of the choreographer in the mirror. With the video, however, the images of dancers on the screen move in the opposite direction to that in which the dancers must move if they are to copy the movement and produce the same pattern as the figures on the screen. Echoing Suzi's comment above, Louisa explains:

Everyone picks up differently off the video – some people are really good at it and some people not so good – I tend to get everything back to front. [Louisa]

Similarly it was noted by a number of the dancers that the image on the screen was very small and 2-dimensional which meant that it was impossible to see some of the details of how the figure in the image was managing to achieve certain movements and positions. The most salient problem with the use of images was, however, as I have noted above, related to style and quality of movement. This could perhaps be explained in terms of the lack of detail in small images, the lack of movement in static images, and the fact that trying to learn a choreography from the performance tape of another dancer means that you get the movements ‘second-hand’ or in a ‘diluted’ form because the other dancer has adapted the choreographer’s movements in certain ways.

There was, however, a very marked difference for dancers when they were interacting with real people rather images of others. All the dancers emphasised the importance of having the choreographer or a member of the original cast come to the company and the important role the rehearsal director has in correcting their movements. The fact that the images of the other cannot properly fulfil these roles suggests that when a dancer interacts with and copies another dancer they doing more than simply reproducing an image. No matter how good the image was, then, it would never be a substitute for having a real person in front of them.

Importantly when the dancers interact with a real person demonstrating a movement, not only does the dancer reflect that movement back to the other, but the other then reflects the dancer's movement back to the dancer. This can either be physical reflection where the other shows the dancer what it is that the dancer is doing, or verbal reflection where the other tells the dancer what it is that they are doing right and how they are failing to achieve the correct movement. Where the process of reflection is intersubjective, there is also the possibility of negotiation of the movement where, for example, the movement can be adapted to the dancer's body.

The dancers, therefore, report a very positive experience of this intersubjective and communicative process of reflection with a responsive other. The problems thus seem to arise where reflection does not have this communicative, intersubjective element. The introduction of an image form of the body can be understood to render the dancing body static and objectified rather than allowing it to be recognised as a communicative subjectivity.

This is not to say that dancers do not make any use of image forms of the body. On the contrary, mirror and video images play a key role in the dancer's learning process and allow the dancers to have an internal sensation of certain positions and movements which incorporates a sense of how the position looks from an external perspective. It is through identifying with their own specular images that dancers are able to incorporate this external perspective into their corporeal schemas. The knowledge that certain internal sensations are related to certain external images of the body is also central to the dancer's ability to understand and copy the very complex movements seen on the body of the other.

Nevertheless dancers do report problems with image forms of the body which seem to take away from the ‘realness’ or immediacy of the dance. Thus while identification with the specular image is vital to the development of the dancer’s corporeal schema, the specular image can also become problematic where it involves a separation or alienation from the lived experience of the dancing body.

These ambiguities and paradoxes are theorised in Merleau-Ponty’s discussion of infantile development in ‘The Child’s Relation with Others’ (1964c), but it is in examining the experience of the embodied practice of dance that we can really see how they play out in practice during adult life. The external image can produce the problems of objectification and alienation, but it is also, paradoxically, seen to be necessary to the establishment of the dancer’s corporeal schema or sense of body-subjectivity. Thus dancers spoke at length about the problems with using mirrors and how they did not like the relationships they had with their bodies mediated by mirror images, but they also all made use of the mirrors that line the walls of dance studios, recognising that the internal sense they had of the movements they were performing relied to some extent on interaction with these mirror images.

Merleau-Ponty also opens up a new way of understanding intersubjective mirroring and the gaze which we have been able to explore in relation to dance. Here it was seen that intersubjective mirroring had the potential to contribute to the refinement of the dancer’s corporeal schema in the same way that mirror images can but, because of the potential for mutual subjective recognition and communication, the objectifying effects were potentially removed and dancers tended to report these experiences in

positive terms without reference to separation or alienation. This was not, however, always the case, and dancers noted that paying too much attention to the technique of a dance performer rather than trying to engage with what that performer is trying to communicate could easily have the negative effect of focussing attention on the body as object and closing yourself off to the meaning of the dance. I will discuss this point further in my chapter on 'Representation'.

Thus the gaze and intersubjective mirroring interaction have positive and negative aspects for the dancer, just as the mirror image does. The point here is not, then, to arrive at an understanding of mirroring or the gaze as either negative or positive, objectifying or necessary, but rather to explore how dance and Merleau-Ponty open up a space for discussion that lies in-between these divisions. In the next section I will continue to explore this in-between space through a discussion of the dancing body which emphasises the importance of thinking about both transcendence and immanence in relation to the body rather than trying to arrive at an understanding which places the body on one side of this traditional dichotomy.

III: Immediacy and Transcendence

The idea that the dancer should have an immediate, pre-reflective, relationship with his or her movement and with his or her body was taken up by a number of my interviewees, as I have briefly discussed in my chapter on ‘Practical Knowledge’. In this section I wish to further explore notions of immanence and transcendence in relation to the dancing body, discussing how the emphasis on immediacy and body-awareness in dance fits or fails to fit with understandings of (the interruption of) transcendence.

As I will explain in more detail below, Merleau-Ponty, *contra* both Sartre and de Beauvoir, suggests that the body for the task focussed body-subject is a source of transcendence, although the body can become a source of immanence when it becomes the explicit focus of attention: as soon as we focus on and become reflectively aware of our own body we objectify it and this means interruption of transcendence. This makes a lot of sense in terms of dance when we consider the dancer’s experience of dance and how the objectification of the body, for example in the mirror image, interrupts the immediacy and flow of the dancer’s movement.

In this section, however, I wish to focus more closely on two concepts evoked by the dancers: that of ‘being in your body’ and that of ‘being in the moment’. These concepts help us to see how Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body as a source of transcendence plays out in practice, but they also emphasise the problems associated with any attempt to make a dualist dichotomy between transcendence and immanence, even in the way that Merleau-Ponty does with the distinction between task-focussed

and body-focussed action. Indeed I suggest later not only that the distinction between task-focus and body-focus is often impossible to make in dance, but also that this distinction does not fit with dancers' own evocations of transcendence. In Section IV I then move on to discuss the differences between male and female descriptions of transcendence, immediacy, openness and vulnerability.

In the course of the interview I conducted with Louisa, this dancer was able to speak at some length about two notions of what she called 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment'. As a dancer, Louisa explains:

You have to get to a point where you, you're in your own body and you're, you're not doing shapes, you're finding out where it comes from. [Louisa]

'Being in your body' is thus not about 'making shapes' or images but about locating the appropriate inner sensation for the movement: 'finding out where it comes from'. This is noted to be particularly difficult where dancers are required to learn from an image of the dance rather than from a real person:

If you're learning it off the video then it's going to take longer to find out where the movement comes from in a true way. [Louisa]

Louisa was more consistently articulate about these aspects of her experience of dance than many of my other interviewees so there is an emphasis on quotes from this interview in the material below. I have, however, also tried to show that her ideas were supported by what other dancers said (although maybe not so articulately) and I have made a point of engaging with the interview data to explore where other dancers

diverge from what Louisa says. This is, in fact, particularly relevant for the discussion of gender in the following section as, while Louisa's comments about being 'in your body' and 'in the moment' are representative of both female and male dancers' understandings of these aspects of dance, she does not work through how this emphasis on immediacy and openness in the performance of dance can be quite exposing for the dancer, leading to feelings of vulnerability which were experienced particularly by female dancers. I will therefore move away from Louisa in order to discuss these elements in more detail in Section IV.

Louisa describes 'being in your body' in terms of feeling comfortably situated or grounded in her body:

'So that's kind of to be in your body – how it sits – that I'm comfortably there and that I'm correct within my presence there. [Louisa]

This notion of comfort or harmony is further echoed in Marco's description of how it feels to be 'in harmony with your body':

It's peaceful and em, it's peaceful, it's comfortable, you know, it's pleasurable so it's like a, mmm, it's really very difficult to explain, it's just there, it's in your body and you know it's good and everything's working, you know?... em, it's quite hard to explain. [Marco]

This sense of 'being in your body' fits with the emphasis I have noted above on the feeling of the movement rather than focussing on the external image of how the movement looks, and the idea that the (internal) feeling is more correct or 'true'.

Louisa does, however, identify two situations in which a dancer will not be in his or her body. Firstly she acknowledges that:

There might be a point when you first learn a piece when you're not in your body because it takes time because it takes to let the movement settle in your body.

[Louisa]

The second situation which she identifies as calling for the dancer to be out of his or her body is when something goes wrong or correction to a movement is required. As Louisa describes, this may mean that the dancer needs to temporarily be out of his or her body in order to correct something before returning to a state of 'being in your body'. Thus Louisa describes a situation

... when you're trying to be in your body but your brain's going "what am I going to do? What am I going to do? How am I going to fix this?"- so I mean that's different – that's OK to be out of your body at that point because you're trying to deal with stuff. [Louisa]

The harmony of 'being in your body' is thus something that is possible once the dancer has incorporated the movement into the corporeal schema and can rely on feeling the movement rather than focussing on the external image. In contrast to this the dancer may have to be 'out of the body' during correction and the initial process of learning a position or pattern of movement. The focus at this stage is more on the image as the dancer may be using mirrors to make sure that the internal sensations correspond with the correct external image. At these times it is therefore appropriate

and indeed desirable to be ‘out of the body’ as it is through taking the distancing external perspective on the body that dancers can further develop and refine the corporeal schema. This is, however, only a temporary situation as all the dancers insisted that it is necessary to be fully ‘in your body’ in order to perform dance in a proper and meaningful way.

Louisa also goes on to evoke a notion of ‘being in the moment’ that captures a sense of a need for the dancer to focus on the here and now when performing:

... just to be in that moment – don’t over-do it, don’t think about what’s coming next, just do the thing ... instead of trying to think of the whole piece, if I live in the moment and it’s, the first thing I have to do is step on stage, and if I do that one hundred percent in that moment then it gives it full value, but if I step on stage and I’m half way through the piece in my head already then I’m not really in it, I’m somewhere else. [Louisa]

This idea of not letting the mind focus on something ahead of the here and now of bodily movement is also echoed by Marco’s description of how being in harmony with your body requires that you do not think about other things but simply have an internal awareness of the body: ‘*your brain is inside [in your body] and you know everything that’s going on*’ [Marco].

Other dancers similarly expressed the importance of not over-doing a performance to the extent that it somehow removes the dancer from the immediate context of the work that they are performing and thus somehow distracts or detracts from the ‘true’ movement. Ben thus commented:

I think if a work is made very, very well you can see the essence and then the performer becomes immersed in the work and then it works, then you get dancers who comment on the work while – the work is made but not necessarily to a very high standard and they try and fix it or they comment on it while they're doing it and they add their little touch which sometimes is OK but sometimes doesn't necessarily give the work its chance to communicate. [Ben]

Another dancer further describes his reaction to watching performers who do not stay true to this immediate context of the work:

If they're not committed in the detail then it's like you watch somebody else because it's, it's distracting, but often that's about them trying to show off and trying to put themselves forward rather than be sincere to what the movement was. [Daniel]

This notion of immediacy or 'being in the moment' was thus related to ideas of sincerity and also to a sense of openness and honesty in both physical and mental/emotional terms. At the physical level, then, Louisa describes how 'being in the moment' allows the dancer to

... open up a void where you're a bit more free to respond very quickly when things don't go the way it's supposed to ... if I'm in the moment and I'm true to that moment then it is what it is so if I went on and I lifted my leg and I did a little judder then I go with it, rather than fight it. [Louisa]

This physical openness or responsiveness of the dancer who is in his or her body and ‘in the moment’ is thus quick and pre-reflective and related to the sense of being in harmony with the body and focussed on the internal feeling of the movement incorporated in the corporeal schema.

In contrast to this, not being ‘in the moment’ and ‘in your body’ would entail the dancer failing to attend to the immediacy of the dance and the internal experience but rather looking outside of this immediate situation. This echoes Christina’s comment, which I have quoted above, that focussing on the mirror image ‘takes away the realness’ – the mirror in this case takes away the immediacy of the dancer’s (pre-reflective) relationship to the dance and the body so that the body is seen as an object rather than internally sensed in that moment as an integral aspect of the dancing body-subject.

I now wish to return to the voice of philosophy to discuss dancers’ comments about ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’ in relations to the notions of transcendence and immanence. The philosophy of Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir examines existence in terms of different modes of being, some more associated with the body and some more with the mind. In the case of de Beauvoir it is also notable that some modes of being are more associated in our society with men and some with women, and I will return to this issue of gender difference in Section IV in relation to female dancers’ comments about vulnerability and the gaze.

Two such modes of existence in Sartrean/Beauvoirian thought are those of transcendence and immanence where we can understand transcendence as ‘a sense of

openness to future projects as an existence for-itself', and immanence as 'a sense of rootedness to the past stemming from one's objectification as a being-for-others' (Weiss, 1999:45). Both Sartre and de Beauvoir understand the mind to be our primary source of transcendence and the body to be our primary source of immanence. Under this framework the body is in the negative position of holding us back and imprisoning us in materiality and objecthood, while the mind has the privileged position of affording us transcendence from this material prison and a form of freedom and self-determination. Importantly for de Beauvoir it is woman in our society who is mainly associated with the body and thus with immanence meaning that she is denied the transcendence afforded to men.

Merleau-Ponty, however, suggests that the body can be a source of transcendence rather than immanence. For Merleau-Ponty, the body has intentionality and can thus be understood as having qualities that might be more traditionally associated with the Cartesian mind or subject and thus with freedom as a being-for-itself. This notion of experiencing a kind of freedom and self-determination through the body, rather than it only being something attainable through the mind and in spite of the body (which is experienced as a limitation on this freedom in the Sartrian/Beauvoirian framework) seems to fit with dancers' positive experiences of dance. Thus when they are not focussing too much on the mirror image, but are rather 'in' their own bodies, dancers do not experience the body as a material prison but as a source of expression and freedom. Similarly, when they do not think too far ahead in the piece but concentrate on the here and now of the dance movement, they do not experience the dance and their dancing bodies as things, rather they live through the dance as it happens,

experiencing their dancing bodies not as a limitation on their freedom, but as the very means of their existence and self-expression.

Merleau-Ponty does, however, concede that the body may in fact be a source of immanence under certain circumstances. For Merleau-Ponty the important distinction is in relation to whether the embodied agent's focus is on the task that they are performing –on the intention of the action, such as to drive a nail into the wall – or on the body itself – the hand wielding the hammer. The body can be a source of transcendence when the focus is on the task, but this transcendence is interrupted by immanence when we focus on our bodies as this focus renders the body an object to us.

The assumption that focussing on the body automatically objectifies and interrupts transcendence can, however, be questioned (Weiss, 1999:46). This is worth looking at more carefully as for dancers those experiences which might be described as transcendent are very closely related to focusing on the immediacy of the dance and the dancing body – ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’. An important distinction for Merleau-Ponty concerns whether the relationship with the body here is pre-reflective or reflective, as he suggests that pre-reflective awareness of the body while the main focus is on the task allows transcendence, while conscious reflective focus on the body interrupts transcendence. At many levels this seems to fit with dancers’ descriptions of notions of ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’ as something you should not think about too much, which would suggest that these are primarily pre-reflective phenomena and that like Merleau-Ponty, dancers’ experiences

seem to suggest that it is when this awareness of the body and ‘the moment’ remain tacit and pre-reflective that they are most conducive to facilitating transcendence.

Nevertheless I would like to suggest that the notions of ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’ do not necessarily fit with Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on being task-focussed rather than body-focussed. Indeed dancers specifically say that the best dance is achieved when you do not think about what is coming next but focus entirely on your body and the movement in the here and now. To link this back to the example above, *contra* Merleau-Ponty, it would seem that transcendence for the dancer might well be better achieved through focussing on the hand wielding the hammer than through focussing on the over-all task of getting the nail into the wall.

Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualisation suggests that this awareness does not interrupt transcendence when it is tacit and pre-reflective and the conscious focus is on the task rather than the corporeal schema. This distinction does not, however, necessarily make sense for dance where the conscious focus on the task may in fact be a conscious focus on the dancer’s own body and those of others. Indeed the dancers I interviewed suggested that thinking ahead in a choreography or not taking each movement as it comes and as it is in your body at that particular moment actually interferes with the dance.

I would therefore argue that Weiss’ suggestion, *contra* Merleau-Ponty, that paying close attention to one’s body before or during action need not take away from the transcendence of one’s intentional activity (Weiss, 1999:46) fits with the dancers positive concepts of ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’. While the

dancers' use of these phrases might be considered suggestive of immanence and interruption under Merleau-Ponty's framework, the phenomena are in fact experienced as facilitating transcendence.

Merleau-Ponty radically challenged understandings of transcendence/immanence and bodily being by suggesting that the body was not always associated with immanence, although it could still be sometimes, as we will see in the case of the female dancers discussed below. In exploring dance, however, we can go further than Merleau-Ponty to say that even direct focus on the body need not necessarily interrupt transcendence for the dancers, as awareness of the immediate physicality of the dance and the dancing body does not always mean objectification for the dancer. The clear distinction between the body as site of transcendence or immanence in relation to whether body-awareness is tacit and secondary or the primary conscious focus does not therefore work for dancers and I would suggest that we need to leave behind this remnant of dualism if we are to truly understand embodied being.

In place of this we might focus instead on how the dancers' concepts of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' open up a space in-between traditional divisions between subject and object and transcendence and immanence. 'Being in your body', for example, emphasises both a notion of 'being' which can be associated with subjectivity and 'in the body' which we can associate with materiality, and perhaps immanence. This state was however valued by all the dancers as facilitating the kind of freedom and self-expression that we would associate with transcendence. Thus the dancers have particular notions of groundedness and immediacy which perhaps imply immanence or the interruption or inhibition of transcendence under the traditional

framework, yet in the practice of dance are actually understood as the opposite to interruption or inhibition of dance suggesting that they in fact facilitate transcendence.

I therefore argue that it is impossible to understand dance within the traditional framework which separates out transcendence and immanence into binary categories. Rather than understanding groundedness and immediacy as contributing to an interrupted or inhibited transcendence, then, I wish to suggest that they can be understood as contributing to an in-between category which I will refer to as '*inhabited*' transcendence.

IV: Gendered Embodiment

In this final section of the discussion of ‘Subjectivity’ I wish to use dancers’ experiences of immediacy, openness and vulnerability to further explore aspects around the gaze and the interruption of transcendence, drawing particular attention to gender differences between my interviewees.

The notion of immediacy that accompanies the states of ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’ can also be seen in Louisa’s discussion of an openness and pre-reflective responsiveness to fellow performers:

When you’re, if you’re in the moment and you’re on stage and you’re aware – you’re in the moment and you’re in your body, you’re in that part of the piece, but you also have to be super-aware in the way that you’re ready to accept anything, and that’s like that communication that happens which is not, you don’t talk you just know, you, you even feel it in, you feel inside of your head and you just react – that’s the strange thing and that’s really exciting when you just have that, when it’s in sync like that. [Louisa]

Being open and responsive is thus a physical thing but also consists of some kind of mental or emotional openness or honesty which allows intersubjective communication. This phenomenon will be further discussed in the following chapters on ‘Intersubjectivity’ and ‘Representation’. In this section, however, I wish to look at this notion of openness in relation to how dancers experience themselves as exposed to the gaze of the other when they dance, discussing the marked differences between male and female dancers in the interview accounts of this aspect of dance.

In response to a question about the level of trust required between dancers doing partner-work, Steven expressed the idea that

... to trust someone you have to let your guard down, you have to, and I think that's what makes a great performance and a great performer is when all that is just dropped, you know, it's just dropped and the honesty to go "this is me, now, now, here". [Steven]

He also described his understanding of the essence dance in terms of the importance of:

... having a go and having the courage to go "I'm actually being in the now and being in the moment and being vulnerable to what happens". [Steven]

Again the openness evoked here is characterised by its immediacy. The dancer has to be constantly ready for this kind of open and honest encounter and, as Louisa emphasises, to 'take it for what it is' rather than stand back and reflect on it or judge it.

Honesty and openness in fact appeared in the accounts of all of the dancers, and particularly, although not exclusively, in the accounts of my female interviewees these ideas were evoked in terms of or alongside notions of vulnerability, exposure and 'having to bare all'. Questioning the dancers about whether and then how much they felt they had to be personally invested in a piece to dance it, I found that all of my

interviewees made reference to having to ‘dig deep’ and call upon personal emotional resources in their dancing.

The dancers in fact expressed the view that the need to invest something of themselves in a piece was necessary not only to a good performance but also to the creation and rehearsal of dance works and movements, although many gave examples of bad practice where this was sometimes lacking. In response to this I often asked dancers how it felt to open themselves up and pour themselves into a work in this way, suggesting, where I had found in their comments unequivocal advocacy of this type of personal investment, that it might be quite demanding. The following excerpt shows the continuation of one such conversation with a female dancer:

Tara: it's very exposing, and some of the tasks that we're asked to do like when a new choreographer comes in are very exposing because they want to get, they want to, they don't want to just see the same thing as, they want to get something else out of you so you really just have to bare everything.

AP: Also presumably they have to get it quite quickly? – they can't get to know you?

Tara: Yeah, they've got like four or five weeks to make a piece with that – they just have to like rip you apart, get to what they want.

AP: I suppose you must learn a lot about yourself, as well as about your body?

Tara: Yes, it's very challenging from that point of view – you cry lots of tears and tantrums and “why do I put myself through this?”

This sense of vulnerability was echoed in the accounts of the majority of the female dancers that I interviewed, although it should be noted that throughout these accounts this kind of openness was asserted to be absolutely necessary to the creative, rehearsal and performance processes. None of the female dancers questioned that they had to be open in this way then, but they acknowledged that this could – although it did not have to – give rise to feelings of personal or emotional vulnerability.

In contrast to this, while a number of the male dancers did make use of or identify with the notion of vulnerability (Steven's above description of '*being in the now and being in the moment and being vulnerable to what happens*' is an example of a male dancer using the term), none of the male dancers described experiences of personal or emotional vulnerability in the way that female dancers did, tending instead to focus on other ideas such as having the courage to be open and in relation to the trust needed because of physical vulnerability in dance. This would suggest that they are using the notion of vulnerability in a different way to describe something less personal and emotionally difficult than that which is experienced by the female dancers. Moreover a number of the male dancers that I interviewed did not identify with the notion of vulnerability in these accounts. This lack of identification was commonly expressed in terms of vulnerability not being an appropriate consideration because being open in this way was the nature of dance and thus unproblematic:

Marco: ... one hundred percent you put yourself, you know, and if you even if you're learning a choreography already made then you must find yourself there and then you, yeah, yeah, put yourself.

AP: Is that, does it feel good to do that all the time, or is it sometimes a bit?

Marco: I think it's natural, it's not if it feels good, it's natural because you must do it.

AP: Mmm, what else would you do?

Marco: Yeah, you must do it so...

It should be noted that this individual came from a country which he described as having a culture more based on openness and expressiveness than he had found British or European culture to be, which might account for his unquestioning acceptance of the need to be open in dance. There were, however, other examples of male dancers rejecting the notion of vulnerability, for example:

I wouldn't say I have to give myself, and I don't see it in that sense of 'put myself on the line' – it's exciting, it's dangerous, that's what it is, that's the only reason I do it. [Ben]

Here Ben responds to my questions about personal investment in a dance work or performance by emphasising notions of danger and bravery, echoing Steven's use of the word 'courage'. Ben goes on to say:

I wouldn't say I put myself on the line, I think as a dancer or any performer you have to brave all the time, you have to be brave and honest, and I think, I don't think it's putting yourself on the line, I think that's just what you have to be to access those places as a performer – you have to be that open – the difficulty comes in how your environment maybe manipulates you and I think that's where the, the understanding of the companies and the understanding of the choreographers is very important and it's vital that the support mechanisms are there for you to lay yourself on the line and then when you've laid yourself on the line that they're there to pick up the pieces. [Ben]

Thus while the accounts of the female dancers tended to focus on the vulnerability of laying themselves open to the (potentially negative) judgement of others, male dancers tended to emphasise the courageous nature of the act of baring themselves in this way.

Although it is possible to attribute differences in the accounts of vulnerability given by male and female dancers to the readiness with which the males and females were prepared to go into detail about experiences of personal or emotional vulnerability with a (young, female) interviewer, I do not believe that the distinct difference between male and female accounts could be solely attributed to comfort with the interview situation, especially given the range of experience, age, race, nationalities and sexualities of my male and female interviewees. I therefore wish to use this last section of the chapter to explore ideas around gendered embodiment in relation to the concepts of transcendence and immanence. In doing this I explore how Merleau-Ponty's account of body-subjectivity has been made use of by feminist thinkers Iris Young and Gail Weiss.

Iris Young's phenomenological study 'Throwing Like a Girl' (1990) explores differences between bodily comportment and movement, as exemplified by throwing styles, of males and females. In this account Young suggests, following Merleau-Ponty:

... that it is the ordinary purposive orientation of the body as a whole towards things and its environment that initially defines the relation of the subject to its world' (Young, 1990:261).

In examining what is specific about female bodily orientation or comportment, Young therefore seeks to illuminate something of feminine subjectivity.

Young begins her analysis by noting de Beauvoir's comments about how:

Women experience the body as a burden ... [which] weigh[s] down the women's existence by tying her to nature, immanence and the requirements of the species at the expense of her own individuality. (Young, 1990:260)

In bringing in the insights of Merleau-Ponty, however, Young is able to move away from de Beauvoir's focus on the woman's physiology, in particular the hormone changes associated with pregnancy and the menstrual cycle, to think about feminine comportment and orientation towards the world as defining of feminine existence.

The importance of de Beauvoir for Young's account is, however, the insight that, while human beings are both transcendent and immanent –

We are simultaneously beings-for-ourselves and beings-for-others, and are comprised of both minds (our primary source of transcendence) and bodies (our primary source of immanence). (Weiss, 1999:45)

– transcendence is associated in our society with males and immanence with females.

Young follows de Beauvoir in noting that the young girl is associated more with immanence than transcendence in a way that is not true for the young boy. In particular, the young boy is often encouraged to engage in physically active play where the young girl is more likely to be warned of the threat of physical injury, the danger of appearing ‘unfeminine’, or reminded not to get her clothes (especially dress) dirty (Weiss, 1999:45):

Young girls are socialised to focus so heavily on their bodies, to treat their bodies as objects to be ‘pruned’, ‘shaped’, ‘moulded’, and ‘decorated’. (Weiss, 1999:45)

Young suggests, then that:

The three contradictory modalities of feminine existence – ambiguous transcendence, inhibited intentionality, and discontinuous unity – have their root ... in the fact that for feminine existence the body frequently is both subject and object for itself at the same time and in reference to the same act. Feminine bodily existence is frequently not a pure presence to the world because it is referred onto itself as well as onto possibilities in the world. (Young, 1990:266)

The physical – for example, throwing – action of the girl can therefore be understood to be inhibited by a focus on, or reference to, the body before and/or during engaging in physical activity. This would be

... a move away from ‘pure’ transcendence ... because one’s intentional movement towards one’s goal would be interrupted and ... being-for-others would threaten to supersede being-for-oneself. (Weiss, 1999:46)

In drawing together the insights of de Beauvoir and Merleau-Ponty, Young is able to counter Merleau-Ponty’s ‘gender-blind’ account of bodily action, while at the same time using Merleau-Ponty’s conception of the body as transcendent to counter de Beauvoir’s more negative understanding of the body as immanent. Young’s account of self-referral is, however, argued by Weiss to be unsatisfactory on a number of levels, not least because it suggests that masculine existence is the model against which feminine existence is to be compared and found deficient.

Weiss also questions the assertion that explicit reference to one’s body while one is engaged in an action ‘necessarily take[s] away from the ‘transcendence’ of one’s intentional activity’ (Weiss, 1999:46). This is a particularly important point for the discussion of dance where bodily awareness is often foregrounded, arguably without interrupting transcendence, as I have noted above in my suggestion of a concept of ‘inhabited’ transcendence. Indeed Weiss argues that there are in fact many tasks which require paying close attention to one’s body prior to and even during acting. She therefore suggests that:

The contradictory modalities of ‘feminine’ bodily existence identified by Young occur not because women focus on their bodies before, during, or even after their action, transforming their bodies into objects in the process, but because many women mediate their relationship with their bodies by seeing their bodies as they are seen by others and by worrying about what they and these (largely invisible) others are seeing as they are acting. (Weiss, 1999:47)

Thus Weiss sees Young’s emphasis on self-reference by the individual woman rather than ‘the socially-referred character of bodily existence’ as problematic (Weiss, 1999:46). While Weiss acknowledges that the actions of both men and women ‘have a socially-referred character insofar as they arise in response to a social situation’ (Weiss, 1999:46), she suggests that Young’s analysis does not sufficiently attend to those societal attitudes towards women which Young herself identifies as the source of the woman’s objectified relationship to her body. As Weiss continues to argue:

What makes social reference of ‘feminine’ existence so problematic, is that the imaginary perspective of these often imaginary others can come to dominate and even supersede a woman’s own experience of her bodily capabilities so that the latter becomes conflated with the former ... to call this self-reference does not acknowledge or do justice to the very real effects of this imaginary other on my action. (Weiss, 1999:47)

There is, of course, abundant evidence from watching contemporary dance that female dancers do not in fact ‘throw like a girl’, but are rather extremely physically capable and appear to be without any self-consciousness about exploring their physical potential. Furthermore, I have suggested above through the concept of ‘inhabited’

transcendence that close attention to the body does not necessarily, as Weiss also argues, inhibit or interrupt movement for the dancer in the way that Young's analysis suggests. Nevertheless there is a tension evident in the interview accounts for the majority of the female dancers between the positive desire for openness and immediacy in dance and a worry about how others are seeing and judging their movement which can be experienced as negative and limiting. It is this potential interruption of transcendence for the female in dance that I wish to explore in the rest of this section.

Anna, like Tara quoted above, gives the following account of the stage when a new choreographer first comes to a company in which she evokes a notion of vulnerability related to personal or emotional exposure:

Sometimes you are asked to do things whatever – they might ask you to just, on the spot, you don't know them, and they might ask you to just give your all, make an impression of sad women or – yeah – give us a little story, and – you know? – you just have to go for it and – yeah – I find that sort of – I don't find the physical side so vulnerable – I don't mind kind of dancing or doing movement – but when you involve emotions it becomes quite vulnerable. [Anna]

Anna, emphasises here that it not 'the physical side' of dance – being asked to perform a difficult jump or movement in front of everyone – that makes her feel exposed and vulnerable or uncomfortable. Rather it is the way that a new choreographer might ask her to perform something more 'personal' and which requires her to make visible aspects of her own experience and her own emotions that she feels exposes her in an uncomfortable way in front of an unknown audience in the

dance studio. The potential to feel uncomfortable, exposed, and thus awkwardly self-conscious and inhibited (as Young describes) therefore seems to affect female dancers despite the fact that they report feeling no awkwardness or self-consciousness about their physical abilities.

While there was evidence of female dancers, most notably Louisa, who did not take up the theme of vulnerability in this way, there did appear to be broad differences between the male and female accounts. Indeed it was only female dancers who reported a tendency to experience the dropping of (emotional) defences in dance as making them vulnerable to judgement. By contrast, males tended to experience this state of openness and honesty as liberating and exciting, although they also evoked notions of ‘danger’ and the need for great ‘courage’.

These differences might be characterised as a difference of emphasis between the talk of the male dancers emphasising heroic action and that of the females emphasising passive vulnerability. It should be noted, however, that the male dancers distanced themselves from notions of egoism and showing off in dance. Thus Steven describes:

For me it's not about how good I look or how great I am, it's about the work and about putting myself in that honest, courageous place where something special can happen because in putting myself out there, you know, something can happen between myself and the other performers and the audience. [Steven]

The concept of openness expressed by the majority of the male dancers was, therefore, while courageous and active, ideally characterised by a sense of humility rather than by the kind of showing-off that distances the dancer from the immediacy

of the dance. I therefore suggest that the differences between male and female accounts do not stem straightforwardly from the male dancers wishing to emphasise their position as the centre of the action – as they did not in fact endorse this as an appropriate approach to dance – and thus that there may be differences between the male and female experience of dance that are not reducible to talk.

Characteristically, then, while the powerfulness of the male dancer is tempered by humility, he is, by virtue of this, afforded an immediate and uninhibited relationship with the movements he performs, meaning that the transcendence of his action is not interrupted. The female dancer, by contrast, in worrying about how others may see or judge her movement, interrupts the pre-reflective movement and may therefore experience inhibition. Thus although the typical notion of ‘throwing like a girl’ does not apply to the female dancer, I would suggest that Weiss’s conceptualisation of socially-mediated self-referral is useful for understanding how transcendence can be interrupted for the female dancer. Importantly, it is not the dancer’s own focus on her body or corporeal schema as entailed by ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’ that inhibits her movement, rather it is the effect of the (imaginary) other watching and (potentially) judging her.

Both male and female dancers were, however, equally committed to a notion of being open, even where it was acknowledged that the creative process has the potential to be difficult, as one female dancer explains:

It’s nice to come through the end – “I went through that and it was horrible, but look what we’ve got at the end of it”, it’s that kind of – if you never go through,

if you never open yourself up and go to those places then you're never going to get anything out of it. [Tara]

Despite differences in the way they experienced and conceptualised it, then, both male and female dancers considered opening themselves up in this way to be an integral part of their art. Male and female dancers also both evoked the notion of using the creative process of openness to 'get to places' they wouldn't otherwise be able to access. Thus Tara's description of this artistic process as opening up and 'going to those places', echoes Steven's notion (above) of 'putting myself in that honest courageous place where something special can happen'. Similarly, Anna describes:

I know – when I'm like dancing – I can feel it, it's a feeling thing, when it does happen – and when it doesn't happen – it kind of it gets you to another place which I guess that's the kind of artistic place. [Anna]

It is this openness, then, that allows the dancer (male or female) to access 'another', 'artistic' place which I would suggest that we should understand as transcendence of a type that occurs through the dancing body rather than in spite of the body, as I have discussed in Section III. Nevertheless it was also that same openness that left female dancers aware of feeling vulnerable and exposed to negative judgements by others, thus potentially introducing feelings of awkwardness and self-awareness that interrupted their relationships with their bodies and movement and thus interrupted transcendence. Once again then, we are left with a paradox where openness, like looking at yourself in the mirror, is both necessary (to transcendence) and a major source of alienation (or interruption of that transcendence).

It could be argued from reading this section that male dancers have an easier and less often interrupted route to achieving transcendence in dance than females and that prevailing social attitudes to women have a negative and limiting effect on female dancers' capacity for and enjoyment of dance. I would, however, like to emphasise that I do not agree with de Beauvoir's understanding of woman in our society as fundamentally denied access to transcendence. Nor do I follow Young in understanding the female mode of bodily comportment and thus dancing to be somehow inferior to the male mode because it includes limitations that male dancers do not experience.

Rather what I wish to suggest through this conversation between philosophy and dance is that the types of positive state achieved in dance such as 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' cannot be understood in terms of the traditional divisions between transcendence and immanence along lines of either mind and body, male and female, or task-focused and body-focused action. The importance of immediacy, openness and transcendence was emphasised just as much by my female interviewees as by my male interviewees and none of the female dancers I spoke to suggested that they felt they could not achieve these goals. These aspects of dance, were, however, perhaps more of an issue for my female interviewees and they tended to spend a lot more time in conversation talking about the difficulties they had to overcome on occasion to achieve these states. The difficulties that female dancers had to overcome were, however, understood by them as valuable part of the process of coming to know more about themselves as dancing body-subjects, thus enhancing the potential for immediacy, openness and transcendence in their performance.

Thus although there was a difficult element of vulnerability mentioned by female dancers that male dancers did not report experiencing, I would argue that this does not make the female mode of dance and of achieving transcendence through the dancing body inferior to the male mode, indeed it is arguably in some ways more fulfilling. Such differences and ambiguities between male and female experience again blur boundaries between positive and negative aspects of the experience of dance, helping us to think about that space in-between transcendence and immanence in a more nuanced way.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

This chapter explores the notion of subjectivity, not in terms of the Cartesian dualist formulation ‘I think therefore I am’, but in terms of the Merleau-Pontian body-subject and the tacit *cogito* ‘I can’. Moving on from the discussion of ‘Practical Knowledge’ in the previous chapter, this discussion of ‘Subjectivity’ revolves around the idea that mirroring or reflection from mirrors and others are central to the formation, development and refinement of our corporeal schema as sense of self: the ‘I can’. This is what begins to happen at the mirror stage of infantile development, but it is also played out in the dance studio as the corporeal schema is constantly being modified throughout life and in mirroring interaction with the environment and others.

In seeking to understand how the individual corporeal schema is constituted, Merleau-Ponty, like many other theorists of self and identity, turns to childhood to explore certain key moments in the child’s development which have a bearing on the formation of self and the individualised corporeal schema. These processes are not, however, limited to childhood and our sense of our corporeal schema is continually refined and modified through adult life. It is at this stage that I introduce dance back into the conversation to see what the experiences of dancers in relation to reflection from mirrors and others have to say to Merleau-Ponty’s theorising of infantile development.

Merleau-Ponty suggests that it is only by attending to both the ‘specular’ (external) and the ‘introceptive’ (internal) picture or sense of our bodies that we are able to develop a distinct unified corporeal schema or sense of self. This can be explored in

dance where dancers report processes of trying to reconcile discrepancies between their internal feel for the movement they are performing and the look of the movement in the mirror or when other dancers show them what they are doing (wrong). For example a leg that the dancer thinks is at a right-angle to the body may in fact be at a different angle as shown by the mirror image.

In interacting with the mirror or another dancer showing them “you’re actually doing this, not this”, the corporeal schema is modified through processes of repetition and habit-formation as discussed in ‘Practical Knowledge’, so that the dancer develops a different sense of what it feels like (internally) to have the leg at a right-angle. Thus we can begin to understand what is going on when a dancer uses a mirror to correct a movement, and we can begin to understand the role of the internal and the external images in theorising the corporeal schema, and to appreciate how they are separate from each other but always interacting with each other in practice.

Furthermore there is a paradox whereby Merleau-Ponty suggests that we actually need the alienating experience of seeing the specular (external) image of self – separation – in order to develop unified corporeal schema – unity. This is why a coherent, unified sense of self as distinct from others develops at the mirror stage of infantile development and not before. This separation or alienation is also played out in the dance studio where dancers attending to mirror images of themselves describe feelings of being somehow distanced from the immediacy of the movement.

Thus while dancers do make use of mirrors for refining their corporeal schemas, they also emphasise the importance of the introceptive image or sense of the movement

and described not wanting to get too focussed on the mirror image as it has the effect of drawing them out of themselves and out of the immediacy of their movement. Dancers in fact often described the specular image in the mirror as false or distorted and reported that too much focus on the mirror image in dance appeared to interrupt the dancer's sense of self as a dancing body-subject by rendering the body thing-like or objectified. The concepts of objectification, alienation and splitting, related to the mirror stage of development, can be seen to both shed light on and be illuminated by this discussion of dancers' relationships to mirror images.

Intersubjective mirroring or reflective interaction with others is also seen in dance and dancers did not generally describe the negative feelings of objectification and alienation in connection with mirroring interaction with other dancers. For Merleau-Ponty (*contra* Sartre) the gaze of the other can be less objectifying than the mirror because of the communicative aspect of looking at someone – you see them as a subject expressing something rather than as an object. Thus there is potential for mutual recognition, communication and negotiation in interpersonal mirroring interaction. Again this can be seen and explored in the context of the embodied practice of dance. It is also, obviously, very important to be seen or watched for a dancer if they wish to communicate something. As Merleau-Ponty emphasises the gaze need not necessarily be objectifying and alienating.

There is, however, potential for objectification in Merleau-Ponty's theorising of the gaze, which, when it occurs, precludes intersubjective communication. This phenomenon was recognised by both male and female dancers who described how examining dancers' techniques too much (seeing them as physical shapes rather than

as people) when watching a performance meant that you were not able to be open to what they were communicating. This notion of objectification, related to mirror images and less frequently to the gaze of another dancer, can be related to Merleau-Ponty's discussion of how the body can be understood as a site of transcendence rather than immanence, but that this transcendence can be interrupted when the body becomes the explicit focus of reflective conscious awareness.

The move towards seeing the body as a source of transcendence rather than immanence, while still acknowledging that this transcendence may be interrupted, is important for thinking about dancers' experiences. There are, however, problems for the analysis of dance with Merleau-Ponty's assertion that any focus on the body as opposed to a task-related focus – thinking about the hand wielding the hammer rather than driving the nail into the wall, for example – necessarily interrupts transcendence. This point needs to be reassessed in relation to dance where bodily-awareness is central to performing the 'task' of dance well and the in fact the distinction between conscious body-awareness and conscious task-awareness becomes blurred beyond the point where it is conceptually useful.

In place of this formulation, then, it can be argued that attending to one's body (rather than the action you're performing) does not necessarily imply objectification, alienation and interruption. Indeed for dancers, I suggest that awareness of the moving body is often foregrounded as part of their body-subjectivity. This is evidenced by the way dancers evoke the notions of uninterrupted transcendence or immediacy with the concepts of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment', which imply a focus on the dancing body itself and the movement currently being performed. Rather than

understanding ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’ as inhibiting transcendence for dancers, then, I propose a new concept of ‘inhabited’ transcendence which blurs the boundaries between elements previously associated with both transcendence and immanence.

Some dancers did, however, describe feelings of being exposed, vulnerable or overly self-conscious when they were observed by others, making it hard for them to dance freely. This was common among the female dancers – whereas males tended to emphasise the courageousness of putting themselves on display or exposing themselves (physically and emotionally), females emphasised feelings of vulnerability and focussed on the potential for negative judgements being made about them by others rather than on their own active part in the process. This vulnerability was often experienced as increased self-awareness and thus awkwardness in front of unknown observers when something particularly exposing (usually emotionally rather than physically) was called for.

This experience of awkwardness and self-awareness (awareness of yourself from the perspective of someone who is watching you) is reminiscent of the description Iris Young offers of ‘throwing like a girl’. Indeed although female dancers are very physically competent and do not ‘throw like girls’, there is still a sense in which Young’s analysis might illuminate something of the female dancers’ experience.

Weiss, building on Young’s analysis, suggests that societal attitudes towards women tend to objectify them and that women’s own experiences of their bodies or selves in action are mediated through these objectifying attitudes, meaning that transcendence

is interrupted. There was a definite sense of this potential for interruption or alienation in the female dancers' accounts of exposure and vulnerability that was not apparent in the accounts of the male dancers who emphasised exposing themselves as part of their heroic action.

This did not mean, however, that female dancers tried to avoid opening themselves up or exposing aspects of themselves, nor that they felt limited in their ability to dance because of these feelings of vulnerability. Indeed they all emphasised the importance of being vulnerable and exposed in this way as part of the creative, expressive, communicative process. The negative aspects of these feelings were, however, a constant underlying issue for the female dancers which they described as the most difficult, although also the most rewarding, aspect of dancing. This vulnerability thus both limits and facilitates the female dancer's potential for achieving (inhabited) transcendence in/through her dancing body.

In this chapter I have begun to develop a more sophisticated notion of a non-dualist concept of body-subjectivity through the conversation between Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the practice of contemporary dance. This cannot be simply about rejecting the notion of the body as material object in favour of thinking about it as occupying the symbolic realm; nor about rejecting all the ideas and concepts that have come out of the Cartesian focus on subjectivity and reflective thought. Rather I would suggest it must be about exploring an in-between space where all these distinctions become hazy. It is about a blurring of traditional dualist boundaries which need not necessarily entail an out-right rejection of some or all of the components of the traditional Western thought on subjectivity and the body, although it does require that

all of them should be de-centred or re-assessed, particularly in terms of the relations between terms.

What I have tried to do through this chapter of the conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance, then, is not to reject concepts such as those of internal and external, subject and object, and transcendence and immanence, out-right, but to show the difficulty of understanding these as binary terms. I suggest that it is not possible to dichotomise or separate these terms out from each other. Rather they are overlapping and mutually reliant. For example, the internal and the external senses or pictures of the body must interact in order to produce a unified corporeal schema. My argument is not, therefore, that we should reject the external image because it is related to the objectification of the body, but that we must attempt to understand, through Merleau-Ponty and the experience of the embodied practice of dance, how the body as object is incorporated into and an integral part of embodied being.

Similarly I do not seek to reject the notion of the body as a potential source of immanence, but to show how this cannot be fully separated out from the body as a source of transcendence. Focus on the body for the dancer does not limit potential for transcendent action in dance. Rather it seems to facilitate a certain kind of transcendence – which I have termed ‘inhabited’ transcendence – that is related to the concepts of ‘being in your body’ and ‘being in the moment’, and is highly valued by the dancers.

Merleau-Ponty’s re-theorisation of the body as a potential source of transcendence while still being a potential source of immanence is a very important one, particularly,

it would seem, for female dancers when vulnerability makes them feel awkward and self-aware. I would, however, suggest that thinking in terms of a new dichotomy between task-focused and body-focused is not helpful for understanding transcendence in the embodied practice of dance as it is in danger of producing a new rigid dualism in our use of terms which does not play out in practice.

Thus while the concepts of internal and external, and transcendence and immanence, are not considered completely redundant, the rigid dualist formulation by which they have been traditionally framed is rejected in favour of an approach that explores what happens at the boundaries where the different terms flow into each other. Again I am reminded of Elizabeth Grosz's use of the *Möbius* strip as metaphor for understanding body and mind as in flux. It is this fluidity of the dancing body-subject – neither fully Cartesian subject nor fully object – that helps me to explore spaces that open up at the boundaries between internal and external, subject and object, communication and objectification, and transcendence and immanence.

In the next chapter I will build on the understanding established here of the corporeal schema as (the basis of) body-subjectivity or embodied being, conceptualised in non-dualist terms, to explore the bodily basis of intersubjective recognition and communication between dancers.

INTERSUBJECTIVITY:

INTERCORPOREALITY AS THE BASIS FOR

INTERSUBJECTIVE SYNCHRONY AND

UNDERSTANDING

Introduction

The preceding two chapters have focussed on the corporeal schema and the use of this concept for exploring dancers' accounts of themselves, their bodies and dance. 'Practical Knowledge' discussed dancers' accounts of learning, knowing and performing patterns of movement in terms of tacit, practical 'know-how', habit and the corporeal schema. The chapter on 'Subjectivity' then went on to discuss the role of mirroring and reflection in the formation and continued development of the corporeal schema.

'Subjectivity' suggested that the formation of corporeal schema does not occur in isolation. Indeed our sense of self – as separate from others – relies on interaction with others (originally the primary caregiver but this includes a wider range of people throughout our lives). The discussion of 'Subjectivity' therefore pointed to the

importance of intersubjective mirroring interaction in the formation of the corporeal schema, suggesting that it is through seeing ourselves reflected back by others that we come to have a coherent sense of ourselves.

The formation of a sense of self is therefore always already a sense of self in relation to others, it is intersubjective. This chapter continues my exploration of the embodied basis of being by turning attention to the embodied basis of intersubjectivity as conceptualised in Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and experienced in the practice of dance. In Section I of this chapter I will explore Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality, before moving on in Section II to listen to the voice of dance and explore the different ideas and concepts that dancers evoke in their discussion of experiences of dancing with others.

The philosophical discussion of intercorporeality in Section I draws on ideas from Merleau-Ponty's last unfinished work *The Visible and the Invisible* (1969). As with the rest of this conversation, rather than offering my own novel reading of these dense unfinished parts of Merleau-Ponty's work, I have sought to engage with shared or collaborative understandings from the scholarly community that works on Merleau-Ponty, and to use these ideas as starting points for bringing Merleau-Ponty into conversation with dance.

In this discussion of 'Intersubjectivity', I will explore how it is intercorporeality – theorised by Merleau-Ponty in terms of 'transfer of corporeal schema' – that allows me to recognise the other as another subject like me, rather than as an object in the world; and how this form of physical empathy between subjects, which is the basis of

intersubjectivity, can allow for moments of understanding, synchrony or communion between two individuals. What is important here is that this does occur *between* two differentiated (adult) individuals; the subjects do not merge into one, failing to distinguish between self and other as the infant does. Rather they are able to recognise the other as other while still attaining some kind of connection, empathy or communion with him or her through transfer of corporeal schema. It is this particular facet of intersubjective relations that I wish to explore in depth in relation to the embodied practice of dance, where I suggest that the dancers' enhanced abilities to read the corporeal schema of the other allows them access to this intercorporeal communion or synchrony through dance more readily than we may generally experience it in everyday life.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy suggests a new way of thinking about intersubjectivity with his conceptualisation of intercorporeality or carnal intersubjectivity. I am interested here not only in exploring how this works conceptually then, but more importantly in bringing these ideas together with dancers' accounts of dancing with others to see how intercorporeality plays out in practice for the dancers.

In-keeping with the notion of a conversation between philosophy and dance in this thesis, I do not intend that Merleau-Ponty's framework should be used to rigidly capture the dancers' concepts and experiences, nor that the dancers' ways of evoking their experiences of intersubjective synchrony and understanding should be used to evidence or refute Merleau-Ponty's theoretical claims in a reductive sense. Rather I offer these two voices to the reader, suggesting that by engaging with both them alongside each other, we are able to open up new areas where their ideas overlap, and

thus that I am able to explore new aspects of intercorporeality as it is played out in practice, learning new things about both Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the practice of dance in the process.

I: Intersubjectivity as Intercorporeality

Western Cartesian philosophy has traditionally struggled with the problem of intersubjectivity, also known as the problem of ‘other minds’. Descartes’ *cogito* sets up both what it is to be a conscious subject and what it is to know a conscious subject so that the only way to know a conscious subject is to be that conscious subject reflecting on itself: ‘I think therefore I am’. Thus where human being is defined, as per Descartes, as *res cogitans*, I can only have access to myself and can never be sure of the existence of other human beings. This situation of solipsism – the isolation of the subject from others – is arguably intrinsic to and insoluble within Cartesian thought.

Merleau-Ponty can, however, give us an answer to this question of how we can know about others, in shifting the focus from the private, invisible experience of thought to the lived body and a redefinition of human being in terms of embodiment and behaviour, which are visible and publicly available. If self or subjectivity is not non-material consciousness but is rather manifest in my animate embodiment then we do not have transparent access to self through introspection as Descartes suggests, but rather achieve self-knowledge through action. The Cartesian problem of solipsism is thus dissolved in Merleau-Ponty’s framework as ‘my existence as a self is on exactly the same footing as the existence of other selves’ (Matthews, 2002:97). I do not have complete, transparent access to myself, but neither is my knowledge and surety confined to an inner realm of consciousness: if to be human is to be a human body and exhibit human behaviour then ‘I can see your humanity and you can see mine’

(Dillon, 1997:113). Intersubjectivity, for Merleau-Ponty, therefore relies on a reciprocity of perception.

This reciprocity is encapsulated in the concept of reversibility that Merleau-Ponty elaborates in *The Visible and the Invisible* (1969). Reversibility is primarily conceptualised through the basic model of one hand touching another where the hand that touches can also be touched by the hand that was originally touched but is now touching. Indeed being able to touch anything requires that the toucher is also touchable, as to touch a thing is to feel the thing touching me:

It is the contact of two bodies (one or both of which may be sentient) and not the (inconceivable) encounter of immaterial, non-extended consciousness with a material extended thing. (Dillon, 1997:163)

This dissolves any clear distinction between touching and touched, sentient and sensible, and thus between the body as subject and the body as object, and Merleau-Ponty further extends the notion of reversibility to encompass vision, perception in general, intersubjectivity and language.

In extending the model beyond the reversible touching of my own hands, it is revealed, however, that reversibility is not completely symmetrical. Thus when I touch an object in the world, such as a table, there is reversibility but, while I can touch the table and feel myself touched by the table, I cannot feel the table touching me in the same way that I can internally sense my left hand as it touches my right. The table is not part of my body, nor is it sentient in the way that my body is. This asymmetry is further evident when we turn to the modality of vision.

In *Eye and Mind* (1964a) Merleau-Ponty quotes a painter's comment that

In a forest, I have felt many times over that it was not I who looked at the forest.

Some days I felt that the trees were looking at me. (Merleau-Ponty, 1964a:167)

This discussion then turns to the role of the mirror in reversibility between the seeing and the seen. The trees, like the mirror, situate the painter as an object among objects in the world, make him visible. In being separate from him, the trees, like the mirror, define a perspective on the painter that allows him to be seen from the outside. In this sense, both the trees and the mirror function as the other then, although trees do not have reflective surfaces and mirrors do not see in the way the painter sees (Dillon, 1997:162).

Reversibility of this seeing-seen kind is important at the level of perception because it suggests how we can have access to the world. Just as immaterial, non-extended *res cogitans* cannot touch material *res extensa*, neither can we explain how transcendental consciousness can see an object in the world, without reducing that perception to pure thought. It is my tangibility and visibility – my embodiment – that allows me to touch and see things in the world. Here Merleau-Ponty introduces the concept of 'flesh' which is to be understood as neither mind nor matter, but rather to be constitutive of both subject and object (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:32). The reversibility of the seer and the seen can therefore be understood in terms of their mutual constitution in the flesh of the world with perception to be understood as the flesh of the world folding back upon itself. The flesh of my body is thus essentially

part of the flesh of the world, although the flesh of my body is a particular variant of flesh in that it is sentient as well as sensible.

Merleau-Ponty conceives of perception not as an inner representation or thought of an outer world then, but as an ‘openness’; and, as a similarly embodied being, the other is open to the world as I am. Thus perceptual subjects are open to, or perceive, a shared world – although having different perspectives they do not perceive exactly the same thing – wherein they are both objects among objects and subjects among subjects. For Merleau-Ponty:

Against the notion of multiple subjective realities then, we have a notion of an ‘intermundane space’ in relation to which all perceptual subjectivities are decentred. (Crossley, 1995:57)

As embodied, sentient and sensible, beings open to a shared world, we experience each other in what Merleau-Ponty terms carnal intersubjectivity or intercorporeality:

My body is the ground of my identity for myself, hence it can function as the ground of my identity for others, and your body plays the same role for you, me, and the others who dwell in our world. Furthermore, the isomorphism of our bodies provides a basis for mutual understanding: I understand the behaviour of your hands as I see them from the outside because my hands are similar to yours and I know them from the inside. (Dillon, 1997:113-114)

Thus there is a reversibility to intersubjective (or intercorporeal) relations which again relies on my own sensibility as well as my sentience. From infancy, the child

experiences its body as neither wholly Cartesian subject – in which case it would be invisible – nor as wholly object – in which case it would not be able to serve the child's intentions. Indeed object manipulation requires that the child both sees its hand in relation to the object it wishes to grasp, and that this wish or intention to grasp is lived through the hand. Thus the child both sees its hand as object and lives through it as subject in what Merleau-Ponty calls corporeal reflexivity (Dillon, 1997:122).

This corporeal reflexivity also allows that there is overlap, not only between my body as subject and my body as object, but also between my experience of my (visible) body and my experience of other bodies. The corporeal schema is not a private, inner realm, but rather is visibly manifest in my embodied behaviour, and it is possible to see the other doing what I am doing and vice versa. It is this further dimension of intercorporeality that explains the phenomenon of imitation or mirroring discussed in the previous chapter. The visibility of the corporeal schema and the overlap or isomorphism between my experience of my own body and my experience of the body of the other explains the possibility of imitating the behaviour of the other despite the fact that the outer look of the behaviour is not the same as the inner feel of the behaviour.

This intercorporeal connection with the other is referred to as transfer of corporeal schema, and it is through this process that we recognise other human beings as like ourselves, making it the grounds of intersubjectivity. The reversibility (between self and other) inherent in intercorporeality and the transfer of corporeal schema is not, however, symmetrical. Indeed the asymmetry of reversibility is fundamental to the concept and, even in the case of reversibility between my right hand touching my left

and my left touching my right, Merleau-Ponty stresses that the events of touching and being touched do not coincide. The right hand is always either touching or being touched, never both at the same time, and the touching hand does not coincide with the hand touched but rather there is a separation between the two that allows perception to occur. Perceiving something is not the same as coinciding with or being that thing and requires some form of non-coincidence or difference which Merleau-Ponty refers to as dehiscence, fission, or *écart* (Dillon, 1997:159):

There is an identity of the touching and the touched (the touching is the being touched) but there is also the difference Merleau-Ponty calls dehiscence/divergence/*écart* (the touched thing is separate from, independent of, more than the touching that reveals its presence). (Dillon, 1997:163)

Furthermore shaking hands with the other is not like the touching of my own hands in that the experience the other has of my right hand as object is inaccessible to me where the experience of my left hand touching my right was accessible. There is, therefore, an asymmetry to intercorporeal relations, a dehiscence or fission, so that while the transfer of corporeal schema means that there can be identification with the other, it does not mean that I am identical to the other. I cannot live the other's body while at the same time being my own. Transfer of corporeal schema is therefore just that, a transfer, not an identity.

As was seen in 'Subjectivity', however, Merleau-Ponty traces the development of the child's relations with others from early infancy where there is no distinction between self and others. This early stage is characterised by what Merleau-Ponty refers to as syncretism or syncretic sociability, where babies can be seen to, for example, start to

cry when others cry. Merleau-Ponty suggests that at this stage of development there is no distinction between the different perspectives of self and other. Contrary to more traditional accounts of early ego-centrism, Merleau-Ponty does not, however, see the child as locked in a solipsistic private realm from which it has to somehow recognise others as other consciousnesses, but rather as having to learn to distinguish the experience of self from the (originally undifferentiated) experience of others (Dillon, 1997:121).

The possibility of this primordial undifferentiated, syncretic state does not, however, imply that the distinction between self and other is false or ungrounded. Rather,

The fact is that the world transcends us and cognitive development is required to accommodate phenomenal realities, such as the reality that human bodies are separate and distinct from one another. The infant must learn to distinguish himself from others; he must develop a sense of his own identity as distinct from those around him; he must suffer through the experience of alienation that will lead him into the adult world where it is true both that we identify with others and that each of us is alone. (Dillon, 1997:123)

For Merleau-Ponty, this distinction between self and other is achieved through the mirror stage discussed in the previous chapter where the child develops a sense of self based around a stable, unified corporeal schema or body image.

Thus as the cognitive development associated with the mirror stage progresses,

The significance of the Other will reside in a continuum of ‘like-me-but-not-me’ which will develop to include the full range of experience from interpersonal solidarity to alienation’ (Dillon, 1997:167).

The child, then,

... has left the realm of syncretic sociability. He can witness another infant’s crying without being drawn into it. Subsequent experiences of syncretism (orgiastic unification, team spirit, class consciousness, etc.) will be qualitatively different and episodic rather than abiding. However, the sense of fundamental human community, based on the enduring phenomenon of transfer of corporeal schema, will remain as a permanent experiential possibility (unless it is interrupted or distorted by some intervening pathology). (Dillon, 1997:124)

Outwith the realm of infantile syncretic sociability then, transfer of corporeal schema takes on its true sense as a transfer across some kind of separation or fission between self and other. In adulthood, transfer of corporeal schema operates at an immediate, pre-reflective level allowing me to recognise the other as a human being like me and open to the same shared world, but crucially, even at this immediate, pre-reflective level I recognise the other as having a different perspective to my own. Thus the otherness of the other, the difference of the other from me is part of the immediate, pre-reflective meaning that the other has for me within this process of identification (Dillon, 1997:168). There is then, as noted above, an asymmetry in the reversibility of self-other relations: I perceive the other and the other perceives me, but we do not merge into one another – the other’s perception of me remains inaccessible to me and vice versa.

Intersubjective or intercorporeal relations are, while relying on the overlap or reversibility between my embodiment and that of the other, therefore rooted in this fundamental separation or difference between self and other for Merleau-Ponty. I can recognise you as the same kind of being as I am, but I do not experience your body exactly as you experience it:

I may suffer your pain by witnessing it in your behaviour, but it is your pain, the pain of another body separate from mine, and there are both qualitative and physiological differences between your pathos and my response to it. Here is the basic truth obscured by the polemics of solipsism: I live my body as you live yours, but they are separate bodies; if one dies the other may still live for a while longer; one may eat while the other goes hungry. The transfer of corporeal schema which is the ground for our communion remains a transfer, an exchange across the space that separates us. We may be close in physical or in psychic space, or we may be removed or estranged from each other – harmonious attunement is a human possibility, and, at the other end of the spectrum, so is brutalization and dehumanization – but, although we must dwell in the same world, we cannot occupy the same space at the same time. (Dillon, 1997:129)

Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity is therefore able to account for both privacy of experience and communion between human beings. Furthermore both these elements are required for an adequate account of communication between selves:

The very possibility of communication clearly implies a link between one self and another; it expresses a sense of connectedness with others that I have even

before I begin to speak, and without which the whole project of communication or dialogue would be meaningless. But for that very reason the communication occurs in the space between us; communication implies the existence of two distinct selves between whom it takes place – I cannot ‘communicate with’ myself. (Matthews, 2002:98)

In order to communicate then, we must be both separate from each other and able to overcome that separation in intermundane space where our perceptual fields and perceptibility intertwine with those of others. Communication therefore rests on a notion of openness to a shared interworld where:

Our thoughts, feelings, intentions, understanding, etc., assume an embodied and therefore visible form: i.e. in speech and other cultured actions. This allows for a genuine human interworld by defining subjectivity as publicly available. Thoughts, feelings and intentions, even when hidden in practice, do not belong to an inner realm which is only accessible to a solitary subject. They manifest in conduct in intermundane space and are therefore perceptible to all. (Crossley, 1995:57-58)

Intercorporeality therefore denotes an intersubjectivity based on carnal bonds between beings and the world, all part of the same reversible flesh. Access to the world and to others is to be understood as flesh folding back on itself so that our perceptual fields and perceptibility intertwine with each other in intermundane space where each of us is decentred as a perceptual subject but still remains a separate being. This understanding of how we can know and communicate with each other is therefore based on ideas about reciprocity, reversibility and openness.

I will now move on to explore how dancers' accounts of dancing with others revolve around similar notions of openness, awareness, sharing and responsiveness, thus re-introducing the voice of dance to the conversation to see how it can speak to Merleau-Ponty's concepts of intercorporeality and transfer of corporeal schema.

II: Synchrony and Understanding in Dance

Merleau-Ponty's account of intersubjectivity includes the possibility of alienation, particularly through the objectifying gaze as was explored in 'Subjectivity', but it also allows for human beings to come together in moments of syncretism and communion through the mechanism of transfer of corporeal schema. It is this pre-reflective connection between dancers to which I now turn.

Communication between dancers when they are moving together is interesting for the discussion of intercorporeality because it is often achieved without words and through the medium of (pre-reflective) bodily contact. As Louisa suggests, openness to such bodily communication is often part of an overall awareness that dancer has of their embodiment and situation within the immediate context of the dance:

If you're in the moment and you're on stage and you're aware – you're in the moment and you're in your body, you're in that part of the piece, but you also have to be super-aware in the way that you're ready to accept anything, and that's like that communication that happens which is not, you don't talk you just know, you, you even feel it in, you feel inside and you just react – that's the strange thing and that's really exciting when you just have that, when it's in sync like that, and you don't even have to see the person to feel what they want to do, you can feel if you have to go a bit quicker, you can feel if you have to slow down. [Louisa]

In this case then, the dancers are not consciously formulating thoughts or reflecting on the situation but are reacting to each other – to each other's bodies – at a pre-

reflective level. Louisa also emphasises that much of dance occurs at too fast a pace to allow for reflection, meaning that there is not sufficient time to think about what steps come next – hence the importance of habit and the corporeal schema as discussed in ‘Practical Knowledge’ – or to tell another dancer what you or they should be doing.

Putting things into words is thus not always possible during dance because it simply takes too long to formulate what you wish to say and to say it. Furthermore many (if not all) aspects of dance such as, for example, force, balance, and weight-bearing, require dancers to physically engage with each other and feel and adjust their embodied interaction. Many dancers in fact used the idea of a conversation as an analogy for this process of negotiation and understanding between dancing bodies, but emphasised that it was not possible to conduct the process in words:

There's this like different kind of awareness that you have to have, just because you have to be able to move together, in a small space, and big space, so em, you definitely have to have that self-awareness and knowing kind of, kind of not just being taking care of yourself but I think what is the nicest part as well when you do get to dance actually with someone, it's not just, definitely then you can't just do steps, and, it's like meeting someone, a new person, but you just can't talk you have to talk with your bodies so you have to kind of listen to each other – you can't always do it your way, you have to find the way. [Anna]

The awareness of and connection with other dancers achieved in this way is not, therefore, limited to understanding the materiality of their bodies in terms of weight and position in space, but also includes an understanding of them as intentional beings who want to do things in certain ways that may be different to what you want. Thus

there was a sense that it is possible to get to know a dancer through dancing with them, not just in terms of their size and shape but as an animate embodied human being. The dancers are able to recognise each other through their bodily interaction not only as other physical objects in the world but also as other body-subjects. Tara, again here makes reference to the notion of talking and listening through the body when working with a new partner:

You can tell a lot without, even just working closely with them, just from the look or the way they, their body works with yours, and how they, you can kind of listen to each other through your bodies. You can become quite close to people – you have to be prepared to work very closely with people physically, but because you're so close physically you, it opens up something mentally as well, there's some connection there. [Tara]

Tara's comments about the link between physical closeness and mental closeness resonates with the notion of transfer of corporeal schema where we can come to know people's thoughts, feelings and intentions through identifying with them at the level of the corporeal schema. It is through this pre-reflective intercorporeal identification that I can immediately sense, for example, sadness or anger in the other, but this facility is perhaps heightened in the case of dancers working closely with each other.

In 'Subjectivity' I have discussed how dancers make a lot of use of mirroring or pairing interaction when they learn dance. I would suggest here that 'picking up' or taking correction on a movement having seen it demonstrated can be understood as involving intercorporeal overlap between how the dancer experiences his or her own body and how the dancer experiences the body of the person demonstrating the

movement. Tara's comments therefore suggest that the intercorporeal identification involved in learning dance also makes the dancer more open to those dimensions of the other's existence that she describes as mental. Intercorporeality and transfer of corporeal schema are crucial to the practice of learning dance as I have described it in the preceding chapters, and dancers' accounts of this process suggest that not only do they come to understand other dancers physically in terms of how they move, but also that there can be a sense of closeness, connection or communion at a human, mental or emotional level when dancing with someone.

In the following extended quote Steven struggles to find the appropriate words and analogies to explore this connection between dancers:

I think that you get to know people incredibly well through dancing – incredibly, incredibly well in a way which is really quite beautiful actually, really quite beautiful because it, because, because it, because of the context of it, it allows space for you to – I don't want to sound really cheesy here – but almost for like your, when it, for your souls to interconnect in many senses because there isn't the em, sexuality or ego or all these other kind of things placed on top of it, it's just simply about being with someone in the space and connecting with someone and that is such a beautiful sensation. I mean, I've chatted to my friends who are not dancers about this and I think the only way that I often explain to them about how wonderful it is to dance and so on is like imagine, making love to someone but you're not – d'you know what I mean? – that totally doesn't make no sense – You're as intimate with, you're as connected with that person, you know, and obviously it doesn't always get to that level but when it does that's when not only do you feel it but the audience feels it as well – it gets to a place where you're

communicating, you're operating on a level of sensation and connection and it's almost like you're, you're having a conversation of sensation but there's no attachments or connotations of anything else really – it's really quite beautiful, really something quite special and then yeah you do get to know somebody then because you get to see em, – it's really difficult to explain, but you get to see them for who they are, you know because people have a lot of barriers and a lot of masks upon themselves a lot of the time and if you're really invested into the moment and invested in this connection then you have to let those masks and those barriers fall down so that you can feel one another, be with one another and experience this thing with one another and I mean, when it gets to that point you know that person whether they're feeling sad or whether they're feeling happy and they don't even have to even say anything so you know, you have a sense of how they are that day and you take that into account - there's not a judgement on that it's just this is how the person is today, this is how I am today and this what it is today and that's why it's beautiful. [Steven]

This is not to say that dancers do not communicate with each other verbally. There was, however, a clear suggestion from all my interviewees that being physically close, 'in tune', or synchronised with another dancer allowed some access to the thoughts and feelings of the other without anything being reflected on or said. In the above quote Steven therefore emphasises that knowing whether another dancer is happy or sad is not something that you work out by reflecting on or judging the person's movement as good or bad, but rather something that is intuited or sensed and somehow absorbed into the character of the movement on any particular day.

Steven describes this, somewhat hesitantly, then, as an interconnection or communion of the two dancers' souls as well as their bodies which he likens to intimacy of the

experience of making love. The comparison he makes with sexual intimacy is interesting, not only because shared sexual or orgasmic experience has been suggested above as one of the most recognisable examples in adult life of a sense of connection or communion through transfer of corporeal schema, but also because Steven further qualifies his use of this example. Steven in fact suggests that dance is an even better example of this kind of interconnection than sex because he associates sex with notions of egoism and sexuality which I take to mean that there are more issues around one person having and showing off their power over the other in sex, whereas dance, for Steven, ideally seems to allow for something without these power relations and thus more akin to communion of the souls. This is unlikely to be true of all sexual encounters and all dancing encounters, and the experience of completely entering into a state of communion with someone where all egoism is dissolved may be not really be possible, especially in an encounter between two dancers who are both professional performers. Nevertheless, I consider that it is interesting that Steven voices these ideas about the dissolution of egoism and power relations when dancing with someone as this sense of interconnection in dance fits with and illuminates the synchrony and communion that Merleau-Ponty's philosophy suggests should be available, although only episodically, in adult life through transfer of corporeal schema.

It was not the case, however, that a connection or intimacy of this kind was always established between dancers working together. Anna, for example, mentioned that there were certain dancers she had been in companies with that she had felt uncomfortable working with, while Carrie, again using conversation as an analogy for dancing with someone commented of forming a connection with another dancer that:

You just naturally gel with another person like you would, you know, having coffee, sometimes you do, sometimes you don't. [Carrie]

Furthermore it appeared that this type of intimacy or syncretism between dancers was more usually established in a company where the dancers worked together closely over long periods of time. Thus Adam who, in contrast to the majority of my interviewees, had spent his career moving between companies in quick succession did not refer to this intimate connection between dancers. Adam makes a distinction between getting to know someone as a dancer – how they move – and getting to know someone as a person. For Adam, dancing with someone allowed you to get to know him or her as a dancer but was not sufficient to get to know the other dancer as a person:

You're working with three different girls with three different bodies and personalities and everything so you get to maybe a little bit but I don't think that dancing can actually make you know each other – you know – I think as dancers and understanding their bodies maybe yeah. [Adam]

This was also echoed by Jamie, who was new to the company and to professional dance as a whole, who considered that although he knew people from, for example, his dance school very well in terms of how they danced he did not necessarily know much about their lives outside dance and thus would not say that he knew them as people, only as dancers.

The rest of my interviewees did, however, suggest that dance allowed for a particular type of intimate personal connection. In a continuation of the passage quoted above Steven further explains:

You do get to know a lot about people when you dance with them because you're working with them all the time and you sweat – you sweat with one another for goodness sake – you know when you sweat with someone you get to know everything about them ... it kind of is so, such a close-knit thing and you have to be so co-dependent, you know, it's so, you know, it's impossible for you not to get to know someone really well. [Steven]

Thus in many of these accounts there is in fact an overlap between the notions of dancing with someone and the social bonds that were formed within 'close-knit' companies where dancers worked with each other for long periods of time, spent a lot of time together when touring and socialised with each other outside of work. Thus Toby suggests it might be easier to work closely and develop a connection with someone you have a social bond with:

If you know them outside that probably helps because you've already got the trust. [Toby]

Outwith the realm of infantile syncretic sociability then, transfer of corporeal schema is not an automatic guarantee of connection or communion with others. Indeed it is very rare for adults to achieve these feelings of communion or synchrony for any extended period of time, although Merleau-Ponty does argue that it is the very

possibility of this connection that allows for our recognition and understanding of the other as a human body-subject like me, rather than as a object in the world.

This does not mean, however, that adults will only be aware of understanding each other through some form of immediate, pre-reflective physical empathy. Indeed while there may be immediate recognition of humanity and certain basic expressions of anger or fear for example; learning to understand someone as an adult does, generally, take time and involves sharing and openness of a kind that is achieved through verbal social interaction and not just through dance.

My intention in bringing dance to speak to the notion of transfer of corporeal schema, then, is not to rule out other notions of social interaction, but to explore the importance of this form of physical empathy and show that the kind of synchronised connection between individuals which Merleau-Ponty talks about does actually play out in dance; this being an arena where individuals are particularly adept at focussing on and reading each others' bodies or corporeal schemas and often do not have the same reliance on talk that most people have in daily social interaction. Having established this I will then go on the next chapter to explore linguistic communication more fully, although still in relation to the primacy of embodiment and practice rather than assuming that language is primary to human existence and understandings of self and other. I therefore return here to my discussion of how dancers moving (physically) closely with each other establish bonds of trust, connection and intimacy to fully explore this intercorporeal relationship before letting the conversation between philosophy and practice turn to questions of language.

Dancers in fact often work with others that they do not have prior social bonds with, meaning that we can explore how trust can be established between dancers without this prior connection. Indeed Tara suggests that trusting other dancers is so central to being able to dance with them that she feels it comes naturally to dancers as a result of their training:

There's a lot of trust involved definitely, but the kind of, I think that's through training you just know to trust people, like it's often, if you're dancing with a new person I think the trust would instantly be there but it's just that you don't know each other's bodies so that's where the difficulty arises, it's just you don't know how they might respond to this or how they might respond to that but you always trust them I think, I think that's something in our contemporary training that is kind of inherent. [Tara]

Adam similarly emphasises the importance of quickly establishing trust or feeling safe with a partner in suggesting that failure to do this can result in movements not being performed properly and perhaps in injury:

If the girl doesn't feel safe for one then you know she's not going to take that risk ... because basically that's what she needs to know if she's going to be jumping and like landing on my shoulder she needs to just do it and take that risk that, you know, she's going to get there and if she kind of half does it then that's when how people can get hurt as well because, you know, you're not really committed to the movement and then something happens. [Adam]

Thus for a dancer if you are asked to jump into another dancer's arms, it is necessary to trust that that person will catch you. When working with a new partner then, it is possible to feel this level of trust and safety because you know that this person is a dancer and therefore that they are trained to interact with others in a way that you understand as safe. This sense that they are a dancer may be gleaned instantly from the social situation (in the dance studio) or, perhaps, from the physical impression you have of them and how they position themselves physically towards you (you have the impression they know what they are doing).

There is, however, a (non-instantaneous) process of getting to know the other dancer's body that Tara alludes to above when she comments that although trust may be established instantaneously there may still be difficulty working with someone – a lack of syncretism – where you do not know the body-subject of the other dancer and therefore cannot intuit how they may respond to different situations. Rhianna describes this process as the development of an 'unspoken relationship' between dancers where:

After you work with someone for a while you get to like, you feel their body, you feel like where they're going to take you, you just, you know if you're working on a duet together you just develop that understanding of how much a risk you can take within that and each other. [Rhianna]

She further describes this relationship as something that is negotiated through working physically closely together:

As you start to like get comfortable with it and start to explore the connection, you develop your own story I think without speaking to each other – you know, you don't say “oh when I'm dancing with you I feel like you're this and this that and the other” – you just sort of, you don't even know yourself exactly what, necessarily what the relationship is between you but you do definitely develop something that's like both of you understand physically but don't necessarily put into words – I think it's quite special. [Rhianna]

The process of getting to know a dancer's body, for my interviewees, was therefore a matter of establishing some kind of unspoken relationship with the other dancer and of establishing an understanding of how that person moves and how it is possible for you to move with them safely and meaningfully. Thus there is a bond established between dancers through this process of getting to know the other dancer's body which lets dancers feel comfortable and confident working together and allows them to sense the mood and responses of a partner. Building this unspoken relationship when dancers work physically closely with each other is therefore a process of reciprocal recognition of the other dancer as another subject or human being who is similarly embodied: it is intersubjectivity as intercorporeality.

The concept of the corporeal schema, as discussed in 'Practical Knowledge' suggests that the movement of any particular dancer is coloured by many aspects of his or her history as a dancer and as a person including gender, race, social class, sports played, relationship history, experiences of childbirth or parenthood, or experiences of loss or grief, for example.

Thus dancers come to a new pattern of movement with a new partner already individuated and with certain qualities and aspects to their movement that reveal many things about their history including, for example, their training, their performance history and apprehensions they may have about injury. As Louisa describes, working physically closely with someone means that it is possible to sense nervousness or injuries from the way the other dancer moves:

You just key into what it is, whether you, you can always tell when you've got a partner who's nervous so you, as I said before if you're in the moment you use whatever's there, you won't fight it, there's no point in fighting that so you just do, well I do, just do what you have to do, or if you've got a dancer maybe who's got a, who's carrying a slight niggle or injury then you have to be careful with that so there's that allowance there. [Louisa]

Here Louisa emphasises that she does not attempt to fight against the other dancer where she senses that they are tense with nerves or injury, but that she makes an allowance or adapts to this aspect of the other dancer's movement. This echoes Steven's comments above that his understanding of another dancer's mood does not entail making a judgement, rather it is something that is sensed and adapted to.

This notion of accepting the interaction for what it is and not trying to force something or pretend something is linked to what dancers described as the importance of being open or honest in dance, of allowing yourself to be exposed or possibly vulnerable (see 'Subjectivity', Section IV). It was considered by many of my interviewees that dance as an art-form and as a physical practice called for you to drop

any 'barriers' or 'masks' and that this aspect made it particularly special in terms of the way that you got to know the people you dance with.

Thus there was something about the physical encounter, the intercorporeality, in dance that was understood as particularly 'honest' and 'open'. Dancers, as I have discussed in 'Subjectivity', felt that they had to make themselves completely physically available and open for the choreographer and that they were also called upon to be mentally and emotionally open and pliable during the creative process so that they could draw on their personal experiences in order to 'source the movement from the inside'. This physical and mental or emotional openness or honesty was thus also considered to characterise the interaction between dancers when they moved together, meaning that, because neither party was holding anything back or pretending anything, it was possible to have an (unspoken) relationship characterised by mutual recognition, acceptance and understanding.

Dancers therefore recognise and adapt to aspects of the corporeal schema of another dancer which are related to past experiences in life and dance. Through moving with each other and experiencing each other in this way, they can therefore come to understand and experience a kind of physical and emotional or mental synchrony or empathy with the dancer with whom they are moving. In exploring the experience of dance in these terms we are therefore able to make productive use of and also shed new light on Merleau-Ponty's understanding of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

The corporeal schema is not developed in isolation, rather, our sense of self is derived at least in part from (mirroring) interaction with others as I have explored in the previous chapter. The corporeal schema is thus a social phenomenon rather than a private one – differentiation of self requires recognition of the other as other; subjectivity is always already intersubjective – and we continue to develop our corporeal schemas through social interaction throughout our lives.

This chapter has discussed how transfer of corporeal schema as conceptualised by Merleau-Ponty is the basic mechanism by which we are all able to recognise others – immediately and pre-reflectively – as human beings like ourselves characterised by human embodiment and human behaviour. We identify with the embodiment and behaviour of the other and thus recognise the humanity of the other.

The problem of ‘other minds’ highlighted at the beginning of the chapter is thus seen to a misnomer. It is other active embodied beings that I perceive, recognise and understand, and Merleau-Ponty offers us understanding of intersubjectivity based on mutual perception and mutual constitution in shared world. The problem of intersubjectivity is therefore resolved by Merleau-Ponty through a redefinition of human being in terms of embodiment and behaviour, which are *visible* and *publicly available*.

The human body thus has characteristics of both subjectivity and objectivity for Merleau-Ponty. It is both sentient and sensible – it sees and can be seen, touches and

can be touched. Merleau-Ponty uses the idea of reversibility to show that these two aspects of existence, while not the same thing as each other, are always overlapping in actual embodied experience.

Reversibility is illustrated by the example of one of my hands touching the other, where the hand that touches (subject) can become the hand that is touched (object). Merleau-Ponty also draws attention to the fact that the touching hand has to be part of the same realm as the touched in order to make contact with it – it has to itself be touchable. The touching and touched hands are not, however, identical with each other, and Merleau-Ponty emphasises that a distinction between touching and touched remains – a hand cannot fill both roles simultaneously. But the distinction between the touching and the touched is *contingent* and arises in the process of touching rather than being pre-defined.

This example of the reversibility of the touching hands can also be extended to account for interaction with others. Thus there is a reversibility to intersubjective relations which relies on my own sensibility as well as my sentience. There is overlap, not only between my body as subject and my body as object, but also between my experience of my body and my experience of other bodies. The corporeal schema is not a private, inner realm, but rather is visibly manifest in my embodied behaviour, and it is possible to see the other doing what I am doing and vice versa. This *intercorporeal* connection with the other is referred to as a pairing or transfer of corporeal schema, and it is through this process that we recognise other human beings as like ourselves, making it the grounds of intersubjectivity. Intersubjectivity is thus to be understood as *intercorporeality*.

It is the isomorphism of our bodies, then, that provides basis for mutual understanding. Transfer of the corporeal schema operates at a pre-reflective level where I make an immediate identification of the other as a human like myself and as open to same shared world. This mutual recognition of our inherence in a shared world can be experienced – although only episodically in adulthood – as syncretism or communion between individuals such as in team spirit or orgasmic unification.

Furthermore this theorisation of intersubjective relations also accounts for the recognition in adulthood that the other is not me – transfer of corporeal schema is a transfer across space between two separate individuals. Thus it is also the grounds for the experience of privacy that we have in adulthood, as the reversibility inherent in the transfer of corporeal schema is not symmetrical and we do not coincide with the other but rather remain separate although both decentred in relation to intermundane space of the shared world.

Transfer of corporeal schema is thus important for all of us, not just for dancers. It is how we sense when someone is angry or when they want to get passed us on a busy street, and equally how we are able to understand that the anger we sense belongs to the other person and not to us. I suggest, however, that dancers allow us to study the bodily basis of intersubjectivity in a far more in-depth and sustained way than we can from the glimpses we get from our own everyday experiences. Dancers have, through their training, developed a heightened awareness and are particularly adept at ‘reading’ the body, particularly that of another dancer.

Dancers in fact recognise each other not only as fellow human beings but also as fellow dancers through this identification with the embodiment and behaviour of the other. Dance is, in fact, learnt primarily through imitation, meaning that dancers are particularly skilled at observing movement in other people's bodies and translating that movement into their own bodies. I would argue that this makes dancers particularly open to the transfer of corporeal schema mechanism as they have a heightened awareness of other people's embodied behaviours and bodily attitudes and are highly trained in the process of translating or transferring the movement of the body of the other into their own body.

This does not mean that they necessarily perform the same movements or behaviours as the other, nor that they have similar bodies – they may be different of heights, gender, or ages, for example. The mechanism of transfer of corporeal schema does, however, imply that dancers are able to identify at a pre-reflective level with the embodied situation or orientation towards the world and the behaviour of another dancer. They are able to pre-reflectively sense and understand the embodiment of the other because as they perceive it in the other they understand it through their own bodies and tacitly recognise it as that of a dancer. I have suggested above that this immediate recognition of someone as a fellow dancer allows dancers to work successfully with and trust a new partner.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of transfer of corporeal schema suggests that this mechanism not only allows instant identification of the other as human, but can also function as the basis for experiences of communion or syncretism between adult human beings. Experiences of this kind were, in fact, reported by the majority of my

interviewees and were described by the dancers as a special kind of connection or unspoken relationship that was established as dancers moved together and got to know each other's bodies. Thus it was based in moving with someone and learning about the particular embodiment of the other dancer but, like the notion of transfer of corporeal schema, the experience went beyond this physical understanding leading one dancer to describe it as the interconnection of dancers' souls.

The syncretism or communion achieved by dancers moving together and coming to know each other's bodies is not the only model of this kind of connectedness between humans, with other examples including team spirit or experiences of unification during the sex act. It is, however, an interesting example for a number of reasons. Firstly, in comparison to a number of other human activities where the primary medium for communication and understanding appears to be language, dancers are very aware of and emphasise the fact that the connection they have with each other has a strong tacit element which they suggest is understood and communicated between dancers physically as they move together but cannot be put into words. This is very suggestive of the notion of a pre-reflective transfer or communication of something between embodied beings which is central to the concept of transfer of corporeal schema. Mutual understanding is not an intellectual thing here, it is an unspoken bodily phenomenon of reversibility.

Communion in dance is also interesting because it was reported by my interviewees as occurring in particular where dancers learn to move with each other, rather than, for example, performing unconnected solo choreographies within a work. Physical syncretism, then, went hand in hand with this fuller notion of connection between the

dancers. Communion between dancers was achieved when dancers developed a tacit understanding each other's bodies and how they moved and could thus intuit how they would respond to different situations. Alongside this came an understanding of the other dancer's movement in terms of the dancer's history and current mood and concerns. At this stage then, dancers reported that it was possible to sense small changes in attention or mood of a partner because they were so 'in sync' or 'in tune' with that person physically but also – as a consequence of that physical closeness – at a level that they described as mental. This gives us a very clear illustration of the transfer of corporeal schema – a bodily or intercorporeal phenomenon – as the basis for intersubjective communication or communion.

My interviewees also emphasised that dance is characterised by openness in the sense of both awareness and honesty. It is such openness to others and to a shared world that characterises Merleau-Ponty's concept of intersubjectivity or intercorporeality and allows us to commune with the other. The unspoken relationship between dancers is described as being characterised by openness to each other and tacit mutual understanding in a way that resonates with and illuminates the pre-reflective reciprocity of intersubjective/intercorporeal relations described by Merleau-Ponty.

It should also be noted that communion in dance is more usually something that has been developed over time as the result of working together and getting to know the other person's body and movement. Thus although the moment of syncretism itself will be a distinct occurrence, most usually during a certain part of a performance on a particular occasion, and not something that is continuously felt between two dancers, dancers' accounts suggest that the possibility of this kind of connection is enhanced

by attending to the corporeal schema of the other over an extended period of time and learning (and perhaps imitating or mirroring) many of the details of the other dancer's movement. I would therefore suggest that while transfer of corporeal schema can work instantaneously and pre-reflectively, it can also be enhanced by some of the reflective elements of conscious copying, repetition and correction that characterise learning dance. Just as it can take time to get a movement 'in the body' when learning dance, then, intercorporeality and transfer of corporeal schema at very detailed level can also involve time and practice.

Merleau-Ponty's concept of intercorporeality and transfer of corporeal schema allows us the possibility that we can recognise the other as like ourselves and have access to the thoughts, feelings and intentions of the other. In exploring how dancers come to develop connections with each other through moving together and working closely with each other physically, I have shown how this mechanism can be seen to play out in practice in this context.

In focusing on those aspects of this communion that dancers describe as unspoken or something that cannot be put into words I do not, however, intend to deny the important role of language but rather to show that it can be fitted into a broader model of mutual recognition and communication: a model of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality. In the next chapter on 'Representation' I will build on notions of the primacy of embodiment and the corporeal schema to explore how we can understand language, art and meaning through the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and the practice of contemporary dance.

REPRESENTATION:

LANGUAGE, ART AND MEANING

Introduction

The conversation between philosophy and dance thus far has primarily focussed on the notion of the corporeal schema. Habitual actions such as in dance require neither explicit instruction (they often come from copying others) nor deliberation before they are performed. Neither, however, are such actions mechanistic as they occur and can be modified in response to various different situations thus requiring recognition of a common significance of such situations. It is through the corporeal schema, then, as a mode of awareness of body and world that we grasp the significance of situations we encounter and the potential for actions in such situations.

It has therefore been argued that linguistic models of propositional knowledge and learning are unsatisfactory for the study of dance and that by rejecting those models we can explore a far richer picture of what is going on in terms of a sophisticated notion of habit and the concept of the corporeal schema. The corporeal schema can be understood as our pre-reflective awareness of unified body and world, informing our interaction with our environment. Thus it does not require explicit conceptualisation or linguistic expression:

It is not an inner representation but a mode of awareness of our corporeal entity. This schema is not simply a reflection of present position but is open to future possibilities. Our body image, or corporeal schema, is framed in terms of potentialities for engagement, and thereby is independently a mode of awareness of our world. (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:120)

It has also been shown in the previous chapter that mutual understanding between dancers need not be understood in terms of a linguistic phenomenon and that by focussing on the tacit aspects of mutual understanding we can again open up an area for the exploration of the mechanism of (transfer of) corporeal schema which underlies our capacity for intersubjective or intercorporeal awareness and communication. Having opened up and explored these areas it is now possible for the conversation between philosophy and practice to come to the discussion of language while retaining the underlying notions of the importance of the pre-reflective, tacit elements of our embodied subjectivity.

Sociology of the body using Merleau-Ponty to talk about language has tended to draw on his early work – principally *The Phenomenology of Perception* – and thus to treat language as *habitus*, to use Bourdieu's term, or an acquired use of the body. This is important but does not do full justice to Merleau-Ponty's work on language or to the complexities of language that can be explored through the focus on dance.

In thinking of language as a shared *habitus* we can see that language and therefore meaning is embodied, public and shared (rather than private, inner and ethereal). We can explore this further through consideration of communication through dance and

the dancing body and can use these ideas to further theorise how dance is (not) like a language.

Interrogating the notion evoked by the dancers that dance is (like) language also takes us beyond the picture of language as *habitus* and opens up an area for exploration of the connections between language, perception, philosophy and art in Merleau-Ponty's writing in connection with ideas about the meaningfulness of dance.

Indeed in his later works Merleau-Ponty begins to treat language as a subject in its own right rather than just an aspect of his analysis of the lived body. Thus he begins to explore reversibilities within language such as that between the realm of ideas and the realm of things. Merleau-Ponty argues that the impulse to express something, the significative intention, arises from the things of the silent perceptual world, already tacitly meaningful, demanding expression.

Language does not all work in this way – giving voice to the silent perceptual world – as much of it is formulaic and institutionalised and does not express anything new. What is interesting about language is, however, its creative capacity to give voice to the silent perceptual world, a facility that it shares with other non-verbal art-forms such as painting (and dance). Indeed Merleau-Ponty conceptualised painting and language as analogous to each other in the way they express the silent meaning of the perceptual world.

This chapter brings together these ideas about language and art from Merleau-Ponty with an exploration of dancers' understandings of dance as (like) a language. In doing

so I am able to make sense of how dance both is and is not (like) a language in a way that both illuminates the communicative dimension of dance with this theoretical framework and gives us a particularly rich experiential field for examining how Merleau-Ponty's concepts might play out in practice.

As in previous chapters I do not set out here to locate Merleau-Ponty within an intellectual tradition, but rather to hear what his philosophy has to say to dance. Reference made to thinkers such as Saussure and Derrida in this chapter are therefore included to help clarify Merleau-Ponty's ideas, but the intention is not to explicitly locate Merleau-Ponty within the framework(s) of structuralist or post-structuralist thought. There are also moments where, as in previous chapters, my contemporary dance interviewees make reference to classical ballet. Again my intention in using these comparisons is to help illuminate contemporary dance, rather than to position contemporary dance in relation to other dance forms.

In Section I of this chapter I wish to explore elements of Merleau-Ponty's philosophical conceptualisation of language, attending to both his early and his later work. Although I occasionally turn to my dance interview data to give examples of how dancers' experiences fit with and illustrate Merleau-Ponty's ideas, Section I is about listening to what Merleau-Ponty has to say (or what scholars working on his texts have taken him to be saying) about language and meaningful expression.

The parallel that Merleau-Ponty suggests between art and language (and the importance he places on art as performing a similar function to phenomenological philosophy) then opens up Section II of the chapter where the voice of dance is re-

introduced to see how it can speak to and illuminate Merleau-Ponty's theorisation of this parallel. Section I also notes a further parallel that Merleau-Ponty presents between the function of art and the function of non-Cartesian philosophy which I will return to more fully in the thesis 'Conclusion'.

I: Speech, Dialogue and Meaning

Merleau-Ponty had a continued and indeed growing interest in language throughout his philosophical career. In his early work language appears as an important aspect of his theorisation of the lived body in works such as *The Phenomenology of Perception*, while in his later works such as *Signs* and *The Prose of the World* (later abandoned), language becomes the central focus of interest in its own right. In his final (unfinished) work, *The Visible and the Invisible*, language is then again subsumed into the wider reaching ontology of reversible flesh which I have begun to explore in relation to intersubjective relations in the previous chapter.

In this section I do not intend to focus exclusively on any of these stages, and indeed do not aim to cast them as wholly distinct from each other. My engagement with Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language thus takes a chronological approach which is sensitive to the changes in his position, but seeks to understand these shifts as evolution of a theory of language rather than complete breaks with or rejection of previous ideas. As with previous chapters, I therefore seek to give a picture which fits with the overall spirit of Merleau-Ponty's work as understood from my own reading of a range of his texts and from shared and established understandings of Merleau-Ponty's approach to language which I access through engagement with the work of other scholars working on his philosophy.

To help take the reader through this engagement with Merleau-Ponty's work I have broken this section down into five different sub-sections that explore particular aspects of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy of language. I consider these thematic

divisions to be more helpful than dividing his work up into different time periods because they show how the different elements fit together and can be seen to build on earlier work, thus establishing a coherent ‘voice’ of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy of language, rather than seeking to chart contrasting directions in the different published accounts of language.

This does not mean that I consider an appreciation of the differences between Merleau-Ponty’s early and later works to be unimportant, and indeed I criticise the *Sociology of the Body* for often failing to acknowledge and engage with Merleau-Ponty’s more difficult later work and thus operating as if all that Merleau-Ponty had to say about language can be gleaned from *The Phenomenology of Perception*. I have, however, chosen to focus on developments in Merleau-Ponty’s ideas about language in terms of understanding an overall voice or ‘spirit’ to his work. This emphasis is guided not only by my reading of Merleau-Ponty and his commentators, but also by the aim of bringing Merleau-Ponty into conversation with dance. I find that both Merleau-Ponty’s early and later work have interesting things to say to dance, allowing me to build up a coherent picture of dance and language. It is, however, notable that while my engagement with Merleau-Ponty’s early work on language (as *habitus*) helps me to fit an understanding of the role of verbal communication in dance into the picture that has already been produced of dance in terms of the corporeal schema, it is his later work that really allows me to explore the notion of dance itself functioning as language, and its relation to non-Cartesian philosophy.

Language as engagement not representation

It is the corporeal schema that orients us within and gives us a pre-reflective grasp on the world and in dance. The focus on the pre-reflective does not, however, mean that language does not have an important role within the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and within the context of dance. Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, ‘language is a primary vehicle by which we are initiated into having a world’ (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:121).

The primary function of language as conceptualised in Merleau-Ponty’s early work is not, however, representation. The world is not to be understood as the subject matter of shared representations (as might be expressed by a set of assertions), but rather as a place in which we live. Words are therefore uttered as part of our interaction with the world and others. Rather than belonging to an internal realm of intellectual thought and contemplation they have a basis in gestural communication between humans living in social groups and engaged in common action (Burkitt, 1999:81). Language therefore primarily serves to extend the possibility of engaged agency in everyday communal life.

Words should not, then, be thought of as ‘concepts, whose meaning is explained by further concepts *ad infinitum*’, then, but as ‘tools whose meaning consists in the effects they achieve and use to which they are put in concrete interaction context’ (Crossley, 2001:80). In dance, for example, we can see verbal articulation can sometimes be a necessary part of the physical understanding and synchrony that dancers rely on to dance together. As Louisa comments, ‘*sometimes you have to talk, you just say “let’s go over there now” and you kind of go*’ [Louisa]. This can be understood as similar to utterances such as ‘pass the hammer’, or ‘pass me the ball’ in

the context of playing football, for example, where language can be seen as another manner in which we extend the possibilities for our intentional bodily interaction with the world:

Linguistic articulation makes visible new possibilities, shapes the world in different ways and consequently suggests new possibilities of response. (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:121-122)

It helps us drive the nail into the wall or score the goal.

Louisa further draws attention to the value of language in addition to physical communication between dancers in describing how in addition to being able to adapt her movement to an overly powerful partner she could also say something to the other dancer which would allow a different range of possibilities for the performance of the movement in the future:

You can feel if somebody's giving you a movement too hard so you just adapt slightly with that, or you'll go with it and then say when you come off stage.
[Louisa]

She also goes on to give an example of how it is possible to 'misread' the movement of another dancer, describing working with a partner who repeatedly shifted his weight and pushed against her during the performance of a choreography when they were standing back to back with her facing the audience. The physical communication here was confusing as she did not understand if he wanted her to move in a certain way or if he was just 'pumped up' with high levels of adrenaline. It wasn't until they

came off the stage and were able to speak about what had happened that she discovered that he had dislocated two toes during the preceding sequence and had been trying to rectify this.

Action and reflection

In addition to immediate uses of language to enhance or alter characteristics of current interaction with the world and others, then, there also may be a need for us to explicitly conceptualise or articulate aspects of a situation where our pre-reflective grasp on the world is interrupted or meets with obstacles (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:122). This need to articulate something in words or reflective thought was also seen in the discussion of dancers' accounts of correction of movements in 'Practical Knowledge'. Here a dancer has a certain movement 'in the body' that is performed without call for reflection, but encounters problems with this in that the choreographer changes his or her mind or the movement of the dancer does not appear to fit with that of other dancers. It is at this point, when the dancer needs to correct the movement to bring it in line with what the choreographer or the other dancers require, that it becomes necessary to reflect on the movement in thought and probably speech. Language is therefore central to this process although it is used by the dancers in conjunction with other modes of 'reflection' or interaction such as the physical negotiation of movement described in the previous chapter.

It is important to note, then, that practical (pre-reflective) activities and meanings cannot be separated entirely from conceptualised, articulated or theoretical (reflective) activities and meanings:

Theoretical [conceptualised] activity requires and only makes sense in the context of practical know-how, informed by situated experiences and background [and] ... pre-reflective meanings informing our bodily engagements often derive from the more explicit theoretical beliefs of current or past communities. (Gilbert and Lennon, 2005:122)

Thus while it is in language that reflective thought is achieved, Merleau-Ponty does not understand this as an entirely separate realm from our practical engagement with the world. Language does not re-present or copy the world in a separate domain but is rather in and of the world while at the same time reflecting the world back to itself just as a physically present mirror reflects the physical world of which it is itself part (Dillon, 1997:171).

Furthermore, reflective thought is only possible through speech, which is itself a bodily phenomenon and, in the final instance, pre-reflective. As Crossley describes, for Merleau-Ponty, speech brings individuals into a relationship with themselves:

They think and equally hear their own thoughts, such that they may inspect those thoughts. Their reflectiveness is a relation to and dialogue with their self made possible by way of speech. But speech itself cannot, in the final instance, be the result of a reflective act. I may plan what to say but I can only do so in words and those words themselves cannot be planned. I cannot think or plan an act of

speech without speaking and thus speech must be regarded, like perception, as an originary, pre-reflective act which brings the subject and object of speech, the speaking subject, into being. Furthermore, speech is an embodied activity and language, like perception, is a body technique. To acquire language is to acquire a new way of using one's body. (Crossley, 2001:79-80)

As has been suggested in the previous chapter, then, thoughts, feelings and intentions are not located in an inner realm which we have transparent access to through introspection as Descartes' *cogito* suggests. Rather they are part of our embodied orientation towards the world and available in the social realm of a shared interworld. Merleau-Ponty thus emphasises 'the active body as the expressive basis of meaning and ideas' (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:53):

Meaning for Merleau-Ponty is not the product of some inner mental state. Rather, it resides in the actual concrete behaviour of the sentient body-subject: embodied gestures which are, so to speak, 'publicly available' through our participation in a common visible world of intermundane space and shared understandings. (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:53)

Language as public, collaborative and intersubjective

Language is not, therefore, confined to an inner realm of consciousness or *res cogitans*, for Merleau-Ponty, but is a shared interworld that we are open to by virtue of our embodiment as hearing, speaking, reading and writing beings constituted both in and of the (flesh of the) world. Indeed, as Crossley argues:

It is sometimes supposed that listening to or reading the words of another involves us thinking about their words ... but this false. We may, of course, think about their words but, as in perception, this presupposes a prior phase of grasping the significance of those words. In the first instance we must 'think along with them', as it were, allowing their words to form our thoughts for us. It is in this way that they can make us think things we have not thought before, as, for example, we enter the magical world of a novel or find ourselves for the first time thinking in the fashion of a new philosophical or scientific school. We are not forced to agree with what they make us think, of course. In Merleau-Ponty's dialogical conception of speech and language, utterances provoke responses, both for speaker and for listener, and neither need agree with what is said. But they cannot disagree if they have not first followed the thought and allowed their self to be possessed by it. When such sharing of thoughts takes place, an interworld or common ground is formed between the interlocutors. They are 'woven into a single fabric' and the actions of each can be understood only by way of this common whole. ... Each thinks through the other and makes the other think. (Crossley, 2001:83)

In communication I am not, therefore, launching forth words which the other as isolated solipsistic subject must somehow independently take up and make meaningful. Rather:

As I speak, write, or gesture, I do not choose my words in isolation of the other for we are of the same flesh. The other leads me towards an utterance and partially determines its propriety. My words are always already interaction; my expression is never mine alone. (Davis, 1991:35)

Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, language is a shared interworld of linguistic codes and resources through which speaking subjects come in to relation with themselves and with others (Crossley, 1993:412).

There is also a relationship of reversibility that characterises communication for Merleau-Ponty. In the visual realm reversibility consists in my being both seeing and visible: to see an object does not necessarily entail that that object sees me, but it requires that I am visible from the perspective of the object or other and that I could take up the perspective of the object/other. Thus I must be mobile, sentient and of worldly flesh. Similarly in communication reversibility consists in my being able to take up the (figurative) perspective of the other. Again we are both in and of a single unitary worldly flesh, not isolated Cartesian subjects. As with vision, however, I do not coincide with my interlocutor, rather that we remain separate beings although we must, at the same time, be able to overcome that separation in intermundane space.

Thus even where I do not voice my thoughts out loud or in the presence of another it is the possibility of my taking up the position or perspective of the other, our separation and reversibility, which makes my own thoughts more visible to me:

In reflection I become other to myself: this is the familiar specular relation where the terms are asymmetrically reversible. The reflecting role is exchangeable with the reflected (when I speak silently to myself I can take up either of the dehiscent roles: the erstwhile spoken-to can currently speak) but some role, some persona, is always momentarily alienated, perceived from the outside. (Dillon, 1997: 172)

Thought and expression are therefore always dialogical or social in character (Crossley, 1993:412). Furthermore Merleau-Ponty notes that our spoken words can surprise us and teach us our thoughts just as our behaviour can teach us our emotional state.

Thus I come to know my own thoughts in the social context of communication:

I discover my truths by seeing them mirrored in others. A thought, a way of seeing things, a truth – as Saussure says – is nebulous until it is formulated in language; now it is clearer why this so: when my groping words awaken a recognition in others, when words come to fill my significative intention and communicate it to another, something is established which has a life of its own and becomes more visible to me. A cultural object is born which mirrors my existence in the eyes of another and allows that inchoate existence to realise itself for itself. (Dillon, 1997:207)

Language as founded on the perceptual world

Language does not, therefore, simply clothe or encode a thought already formulated. Often it may take the form of repeating something that has been said already either by the speaker or by the other, but Merleau-Ponty does not see this notion of endlessly repeating what has been already said as capturing the full potential of language and communication. He is rather interested in the capacity for what he understands as genuine communication, where, rather than repeating something that has already been

formulated in words or thought, speech is to be understood as an act of formulation or a process of discovering what it is that I think:

I am drawn toward signification by something that needs to be said and which imposes on me the task of finding words for it in order to learn, myself what it is that I want to say. (Dillon, 1997:199)

There is, therefore, for Merleau-Ponty an impulse or intention to signify that exists prior to my speech. There is something that needs or demands to be said, a silent gap that needs to be filled with words and thus given voice. It is this notion of something prior to language that demands to be said and suggests or calls forth the words to me that distinguishes Merleau-Ponty from those of his (and our) contemporaries who suggest, based on a certain reading of Saussure, that language is a system that only refers to itself. For Merleau-Ponty, although language does exhibit infra-referentiality where signs are meaningful by virtue of their place in the system of language and their relation to each other within that system, speech is in fact called forth by the silence of the perceptual world.

Merleau-Ponty was in fact very much influenced by the emergence of Saussurian semiotics, and became increasingly interested in language as a topic in its own right, rather than as a part of his theory of the lived body, towards the end of his career. He began work on a book entitled *The Prose of the World*, later abandoning this project as he turned his attention instead to *The Visible and the Invisible*. Although this book – *The Visible and the Invisible* – also remained unfinished at the time of his death, it was the ontology of reversible flesh which he began to explicate in this work that

Merleau-Ponty appears to have hoped would act as a basis not only for his concepts of humanity and the world, but also for his theory of language.

He does not, therefore, in this later work, seek to produce an account of language based on the notion of intersubjectivity, but rather bases both his theory of language and his theory of intersubjectivity on the concept of an anonymous or pre-personal reversible flesh. Language, for Merleau-Ponty, therefore becomes the (pre-personal or pre-objective) voice of the world, the folding of the flesh of the world back on itself to illuminate itself in, once again, a relationship of reversibility. Reversibility for Merleau-Ponty, however, involves a divergence or fission and here it is seen that linguistically articulated meanings have a detachability from the world into the realm of ideas. The innate, pre-reflective meanings of the perceptual world are thus the same as but also different to or separated from the meanings articulated in language in a way that is characteristic of Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of asymmetrical reversibility (Dillon, 1997:215). Again there is identification but not identity between the two – they are reversible but they do not coincide.

As with vision, it is also important to note that not all flesh is sentient, capable of seeing or capable of speaking. Language is the world articulating itself through us, the flesh that speaks. The concept of the pre-personal or anonymous flesh does, however, mean that it is possible to move away from the notion of consciousness as a starting point for a theory of language (Dillon, 1997:207), just as in the case of vision the concept of flesh allows that seeing need not be conceived of as the impossible contact of *res cogitans* with *res extensa* (see 'Intersubjectivity').

Merleau-Ponty was not, of course the only thinker to turn away from a focus on consciousness and human subjectivity as the basis of philosophical understanding to focus on language. Indeed contemporaries such as Foucault and Derrida, influenced by a Saussurian understanding of meaning as determined not by the relation of signs to the world, but by the difference between one sign and another within the system of signs, were also notably anti-humanist in their post-structuralist theories. As Dillon argues, however, Merleau-Ponty differs from these philosophers ‘in his execution of ‘the linguistic turn’’ (Dillon, 1997:175).

Indeed Dillon suggests that in taking language rather than consciousness as the origin of all meaning, philosophers such as Derrida are, in fact, merely displacing the problem which haunts philosophies based on consciousness. Neither approach is able to account for the origin of their own originary term, be it language or consciousness (Dillon, 1997:175). For these philosophers then, it is not possible to address the question of the origin of language, and thus they cannot account for the evolution of language from a pre- or non-linguistic phase in human history. All cognition is mediated in language in this account, so that we cannot know of anything beyond or outside language and cannot conceive of a pre- or non-linguistic form of life ever learning to use signs (Dillon, 1997:186).

Merleau-Ponty differs from this stance in that he conceives of language as having a foundation or origin in the perceptual world. Language serves to liberate the meaning of the world, for Merleau-Ponty, by giving voice to the silent meaning of the perceptual world and ‘spreading a further layer of significance over it’ (Crossley, 2001:79). Language is, however, essentially in and of the world and ideas do not, in

fact, inhabit a separate realm from the things of the world. Ideas themselves are, rather, worldly, both in the sense that they are derived from the world ‘for there is no other source and ideas do not spring up *ex nihilo*’ (Dillon, 1997:214), and in the sense that we can only have them by virtue of our worldly embodiment and perceptual experience:

Language comes into existence in the phenomenal world and could not exist without it or the human bodies interacting within it. (Dillon, 1997:186)

Reference and (genuine, creative) expression

Merleau-Ponty was particularly interested in the idea – derived from Saussure – that meaning in language arises from the difference between signs within the linguistic system, rather than from any direct rule-governed relation between words and things. This position can be extended, as, for example, in the work of Derrida, to suggest that words are in fact related only to other words and that we never get any closer to a meaning, only to a relationship of difference between the words within the system. Derrida’s neologism ‘*différance*’ captures the dual ideas that meaning is based on the difference between words and also that it is constantly deferred as we can only refer from one word to another within the system of language, never reaching any endpoint as the system of language is itself incomplete.

The problem with this Derridian position is, however, that the ultimate conclusion is that we can never get outside of language and that words can never refer to anything

except other words. Thus while Merleau-Ponty was interested in the notion of difference and the way in which language refers back to itself in a way that he suggests may be analogous to the way the sentient body in perceiving the world refers back to its own sensibility, he differs from others who have followed a path into language derived from Saussure in that he continues to posit something prior to language – the gap of the significative intention against which we can measure words to see if they fit. If there was nothing beyond language then we could say anything, any set signs would do, but Merleau-Ponty argues that this is not the case. Rather, there is something, some meaning, that demands expression and which therefore delimits the range of words I can use to express it (Dillon, 1997:201).

This meaning which exists beyond the words I use to fill the significative intention and which demands expression emanates from the perceptual world. For Merleau-Ponty, words do not therefore exhaust, capture or embody the significative intention, indeed it is possible to formulate it in different ways, rather in giving voice to silent meaning they suggest something beyond themselves. In genuine expression of this kind then, words do not simply fill the gap of the significative intention but are also altered themselves in the process of insertion (Dillon, 1997: 199). Thus for Merleau-Ponty:

It is an essential part of our human being that we can go beyond signs toward their meaning: that is, can use existing signs in new ways, to express new thoughts. To express a meaning is not, after all, to copy something that already exists, but to make use of the relations between signs to create something new. Expression is a ‘transformation’ rather than a ‘representation’. (Matthews, 2002:157)

Language does not, therefore, imprison us or determine our thought. Rather we are able to make use of language, utilising the multiple potential interconnections between signs to ‘change the whole nature of the system and create a new meaning’ (Matthews, 2002:157). Giving voice to the perceptual world is not therefore a process of copying or reproducing what is already in the world, rather

... meaning *emerges* from the contact between the subject and a world, which, after all, the subject themselves is a part. (Matthews, 2002:157-158, emphasis in the original)

Genuine expression is the creation or evocation of a new meaning, but it is one that is derived from our interaction with the world and others.

Thus for Merleau-Ponty there is a creative capacity in language which allows us to come up with new ideas and to communicate with each other in the true sense of introducing someone to something that they did not already know (Matthews, 2002:153). This feature of communication – the possibility of learning something new – is also important for how we understand the way that language carries meaning.

Those theories, derived from Saussurian semiotics, which suggest that meaning is purely arbitrarily and conventionally attached to words fail to explain how it is that we can understand meaning in a chain of signifiers (words) that we have not already been introduced to and accepted as meaningful. Within such theories it is therefore impossible to think thoughts that we have not already learnt through convention and accepted as meaningful. The other cannot tell us anything we do not already know

because we would not be able to understand it if we have not already accepted that those words can have that conventional meaning.

Contrary to this, Merleau-Ponty suggests that our understanding and expressive capacities are not limited by the conventional meanings of words in language and that it is in fact possible to use words in new ways to express new thoughts. Thus, although Merleau-Ponty acknowledges that much of the meaning expressed in language depends on the conventional or institutionalised attribution of certain meanings to certain words, there is a continuum from very conventional or institutional uses of language such as the language of science or mathematics through to creative uses of language such as poetry or slang where the new meaning is evoked by the new use of words.

In the first form or mode of language the meaning of the words has been institutionalised or sedimented and we tend to pass right through the words or sentences we read to their meaning, hardly aware ‘that these are words and sentences that we are reading’ (Matthews, 2002:154). In contrast to this, the creative, or authentic in Heidegger’s terminology, form of language or expression involves authors finding ways to express new thoughts or add new meaning to words or sentences. In creative language such as poetry, meaning is not determined solely by convention but is somehow carried by the words themselves so that a new expression or signification might be produced. Thus we have language

... which creates itself in expressive acts, which sweeps me on from the signs towards the meaning. (from Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, quoted in Matthews, 2002:154)

It is this creative capacity in language, the fact that we can use words to evoke meanings that they do not already have – which can then be sedimented into conventional language usage – that explains how it might have been possible for pre- or non-linguistic forms of life to acquire language and how it is possible to express and communicate something new. For Merleau-Ponty, convention plays a major role in determining the meaning of most of the words we use, but there is also a possibility for our use of words to suggest new meanings that are not currently conventional. Words then, can imply meanings beyond that given by their place in conventional language by carrying some suggestion of a new meaning in their sound or placement within a sentence.

Thus Merleau-Ponty's account of language allows for the genesis of language (as a form of gestural communication about the world) and for reference to something beyond language. Language, for Merleau-Ponty, does not therefore occupy or create a separate realm, but is ultimately derived from our interaction with others and the world, giving an extra layer of significance to or breaking the silence of the already (pre-reflectively) meaningful perceptual world.

Painting, language and philosophy

For Merleau-Ponty, art-forms such as painting are also, like language, derived from and ways of expressing the silent meaning of the perceptual world. Merleau-Ponty in fact took a particular interest in painting and, in particular, the artist Cézanne, writing at length on the analogy between art and phenomenological philosophy.

Phenomenology enquires into our immediate pre-objective engagement with the world and how as embodied beings we perceive the world in which we are positioned. For Merleau-Ponty:

Perception is not a matter of intellectual contemplation, but of active involvement with things. Because of this, vision is charged with meanings that we find in the objects of perception because of our active involvement with them. Philosophy, in the form of phenomenology, attempts to describe in words the way in which these 'lived' meanings emerge, as the basis for meanings that we may attribute to the world in more abstract accounts, such as that given in the sciences. But art can do more than simply *describe* that pre-objective world of perception: it can directly *present* it. (Matthews, 2002:133-134, emphasis in the original)

Painting is not merely about re-presenting the world then, but, like authentic language, about expressing it in a novel formulation that can teach us something new, give voice to something previously mute. Art, in fact, teaches us to look at the world in a different way, just as phenomenology does, and can draw our attention to, for example, the way that different sensory faculties are integrated with each other. This is exemplified in cinema where the presence or absence of sound in the form of dialogue, sound effects or music can dramatically alter our experience of the visual

elements of the film. Art thus draws our attention to our way of being in the world as situated, embodied subjects in pre-reflective engagement with the perceptual world.

For Merleau-Ponty perception is itself meaningful in that it is always of something significant, a *Gestalt*. Perception is not a matter of building up our awareness of the world from isolated sensations through the work of judgement or intellect as it is conceived in classical psychology (and classical philosophy). Rather in *Gestalt* psychology there a rejection of the distinction between sensation and judgement and perception is understood to be a combination of the two. Thus, for Merleau-Ponty, perception is already a primordial patterning or stylisation of the world, and painting, like authentic language and other art-forms, spreads a further layer of significance over the already meaningful perceptual world, allowing new meanings to emerge from our contact with the silent things of the world.

The relation to the perceptual world suggested in *Gestalt* psychology is also exemplified, for Merleau-Ponty, in film. A film as a perceptual object is not a collection of images but a structured whole, a *Gestalt*, where the meaning of each individual part or image has to be understood in terms of its relation to the whole. A film is, in fact, a temporal *Gestalt* in that we cannot grasp its meaning from a single momentary perception but have follow it as it develops over time, relating each image to what has come before and what comes after. The full meaning of the film, and thus of the individual images of which it consists, is therefore only available after we have seen the whole and can understand the relation of the parts to that whole.

The meaning of a work of art for Merleau-Ponty is thus very much tied to the work as a complete perceptual object. There is an apparent separability of a film from its story or meaning – we can read the script, for example, or be told that this is an anti-war film – but, in fact, the meaning of the film with all its images and sounds is far richer than we can understand from the script and far more than a simply embodying the words ‘war is wrong’ (Matthews, 2002:141-142). We are presented, then, with a difference between art and conventional language in that it is not possible to express or translate the meaning of art into any formulation other than that of the work itself. This does not mean, however, that it is not possible to have works of art composed in words such as novels and poetry. These literary artworks display the same characteristics as visual art in the way that they constitute a meaningful whole which is not simply the sum of the words they contain and which cannot be fully expressed in terms other than those used in the artwork.

In the parallel between painting and language drawn in the part of the otherwise abandoned manuscript of *The Prose of the World* that was published in essay form as ‘Indirect Language and the Voices of Silence’ (Merleau-Ponty, 1964b), Merleau-Ponty therefore draws attention to the creative faculty of language rather than its institutionalised conventional functioning. He points to the fact that language, like art, is derived from our contact with the silent perceptual world and that language, like art, can somehow carry its meaning in its physical form. Art does not simply re-present an event in the world, rather it gives us a new, non-conventional understanding of the event, it brings a new meaning into being and changes the way we experience the world. This, then, is an important insight into how language works in genuine

authentic expression and how it is that it relates or refers to things in the world in a non-straightforward way.

Language, as I have suggested above, does not simply clothe or encode a clearly formulated thought, rather it is the very means and structure of that formulation, the way to discover what it is that needs to be said. Similarly art does not involve the artist formulating an idea or meaning which he or she then translates into or embodies in the medium of painting, sculpture or dance, rather the idea exists in its expression just as we come to know our thoughts by speaking them out loud or silently to ourselves. The parallel between (visual) art and language offered by Merleau-Ponty is therefore also suggestive of how we might understand the notion of art-forms such as dance as (like) language.

Art, like phenomenology, does not aim to rationally explain the world as classical philosophy does, but rather to make us more aware of and highlight different aspects of our situation in the world as embodied perceiving subjects. Painting, for Merleau-Ponty, is thus a paradigm case of how we can understand what it is to be in the world in a way that is different from classical philosophy because it is a situated embodied activity rather than a matter of a disembodied Cartesian mind contemplating the world from a remove.

Merleau-Ponty's interest in visual perception and his cultural context in twentieth century France drew him particularly towards painting and film as art-forms. Dance was not, therefore an art-form that he engaged with in any detail. Bringing his ideas

into conversation here with dance as an art-form and physical practice however allows us to explore many of the themes that he took up his discussion of visual art and film.

Indeed I would argue that dance as an art-form that it is performed by, through and on the human body, with the dancer always present to and aware of the audience offers us more opportunity than painting or film to explore the themes of embodiment and intersubjective communication. Furthermore dance emphasises our active engagement with the world in its use of movement and touch in addition to the visual aspects of the art-form.

I re-introduce the voice of the practice of dance at this stage then with the intention of seeing how it can speak to notions of parallel between art and language by exploring dancer's accounts of expression, communication and how they understand the meaning of dance.

II: Contemporary Dance as Language and Communication

It is particularly interesting, given the close relationship between language and art in the work of Merleau-Ponty, that my interviewees made reference to the idea of talking through their bodies, and to understanding dance as a mode of communication, as a language. In this second section I will draw on Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the parallel between art and language bringing it into conversation with the notion of dance as (a) language expressed by my interviewees.

Many of the dancers, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, used the idea of having a conversation as an analogy for the interaction they felt characterised dancing with someone. The conversation here, however, moves on to explore notions of communication and language in dance in the context of interacting or communicating with an audience.

For the dancers, dancing for someone was in some way equivalent to speaking to someone. Indeed many suggested that what had attracted them to dance as both a practice and a career was the possibility of being able to 'say' things that they found hard to express in words. This was described both in terms of the dancers' own individual difficulties expressing themselves in words and in terms of the inadequacy of verbal language:

I feel sometimes that some things can't be expressed in words and that by the sheer act of moving, I sometimes express the things that you cannot in words or maybe I'm not articulate enough to express those things in words. [Steven]

Furthermore it was a way of having your voice heard by a wider public than you would normally have the opportunity to address in conversation.

It is not a new idea to think about artistic production as a means of expression, and it is not only dance artists who feel that they are able to 'speak' to people through their art. What I wish to draw attention to here, then, is not simply the idea that artists can express something meaningful through their art. Rather I am interested in the ways in which the moving, responsive body is of primary importance for the ways dancers communicate, both with each other as I emphasised in the previous chapter, and with an audience.

As I will explore through listening to the voice of dance in this section of the chapter, embodied movement is central to dancers' understandings of dance as an art-form which they understand as allowing them to create and share meanings with others. It is this emphasis on and experiential understanding of the importance of the body for expression and communication in dance that I explore here and bring into conversation with Merleau-Ponty's philosophical ideas.

As with Section I of this chapter, Section II is divided into a number of sub-sections which explore different aspects of dancers' understanding of dance as language and communication, and which bring the voice of dance into conversation with themes from Merleau-Ponty's philosophy. These divides are intended to structure the

conversation in a way that is helpful to the reader, but it is intended that the conversation should be understood as flowing from one aspect to another in a way that builds up an overall picture of how Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the voice of dance can be brought together, rather than as addressing individual themes in isolation from or in contrast to each other.

Dance as a mode of communication and shared interworld

Notions of mutual recognition and sharing were very important to dancers in their accounts of dancing with others. Indeed for Steven *'being able to move and have contact with people and share things with people'* [Steven] were all tied up together in his idea of what it was to dance. Such notions also appeared in dancers' discussions of how it is that dance as art and physical practice communicates something to an audience.

As I have noted in previous chapters, dancers reject notions of dance as just being a series of steps or shapes:

For me as a dancer it's not about steps, the steps just link so I guess talk through my body so it's more about that. [Marco]

The 'physical conversation' or 'talking through the body' analogy that characterised a number of the dancers' accounts about how they communicated with each other can also be extended to describe what dance was about for the dancers as performers:

Dance, I suppose, was a kind of physical system of communication for me, an expression as it were, so becoming a street dancer was a kind of avenue or release for me to express myself creatively. [Ben]

Indeed it was the communicative faculty of dance and the dancer that was considered to be of primary importance, beyond even the physical expertise displayed:

I love to push myself physically but I think over and above that the artistry and how you communicate that to an audience is what I'm more interested in. [Louisa]

The importance of communication with the audience was also emphasised by dancers commenting on their own experiences of going to see dance performances. Tara, for example, plays down the importance of physical 'tricks':

I think the layman would be impressed with fancy moves and like tricks and big jumps and stuff whereas I know that that's possible and I'm more impressed by the relationship or the connection with someone on stage or the connection with the audience. [Tara]

Daniel similarly describes an experience of watching a performance by a company which also had a group of young apprentices and older retired dancers who performed short pieces. Of all three of these groups – the young apprentices, the main company and the older dancers – Daniel felt that the older dancers were the best despite their loss of physical abilities:

These older people who were just, for me, they stole the show – they were just absolutely amazing – what they'd lost in their physical ability they more than made up for in presence and contact with the audience, communicating with the audience. [Daniel]

Rather than being about performing the physical movements, then, dance was understood as being

...about sharing, it is about expression, it is about communication ... dance is a social thing, so for you to just dance on your own in a room is great and I think that's a fantastic exercise, but I don't think it will reward you as much as if you dance with other people or sharing the dance with other people. [Steven]

Many of the dancers in fact emphasised that while it was possible to dance on one's own, it somehow did not make sense to do so (unless, as Steven says, you were doing it as some kind of exercise).

Dance as a mode of communication is about sharing the dance with other people then, and the reciprocal way in which that impacts not only on them but also on how the dance is meaningful or rewarding for the dancer. Dance can thus be thought of as, as Merleau-Ponty conceptualises language, an intermundane space which dancer and audience are open to and share. Anna echoes this intersubjective, reciprocal notion of communication in dance:

I've seen dance that doesn't have that communication, and I think it doesn't work, I mean, like all art it's kind of expressive – you express feelings or issues

or whatever and you try to get through to someone through your art. I don't know whether it's more these days but you get quite a lot of performance artists who involve the audience as well, a lot, so there's definitely communication even, not just me communicating with the audience but they communicate back to me, I mean you get that anyway when you do, I mean you can feel the audience when you're doing your art and kind of try to reply – I think that's, that makes a good artist anyway – you can't just block yourself from the situation so the better you can kind of communicate, the better the artist. [Anna]

Being a dance artist for Anna was thus about expression conceived of as reciprocal communication with the audience. The expressive quality of dance, like language, is not, then, something that resides within the isolated Cartesian subject. Rather it is essentially collaborative and shared. It is something that happens between people, as Davis suggests of language under Merleau-Ponty's theorisation:

Language is not mine alone, as something that is somehow magically hurled towards the other. Language is not a projectile, but a collaborative project of reversible subjectivity. (Davis, 1991:37)

Daniel also described how, as a performer, he was always interested and excited by the meanings that audience members found in works he performed:

The audience will come back to you afterwards and read all these stories into it and they'll tell you all these things which you never thought, you never saw that in the piece. [Daniel]

Thus although dancers understood communication in dance as trying to express something or get something across to someone, there was also a sense in which this meaning which was being put across through the dance arose out of some kind of collaboration between the dancer and the audience. Meaning was, importantly, not situated inside the dancer or audience member's head, but rather emerged in the communicative space that they share. Dancers also emphasised that works were different in every performance as they were like evolving conversations both between the dancers and between the dancers and the audience.

The meaning of the work thus depends on the audience's personal interaction with the piece:

It should speak to the audience in different ways – it won't be the same for every member, unless the choreographer's crystal clear – when, you know, somebody slaps you in the face as they walk by – that's very clear to everybody what that is, but it's letting the audience decide for themselves as well – what the relationship is between two people, rather than me trying to tell them what it is...One movement can say many different things, to different people - it depends on how you feel as well and how you want to like, how you want to accept that thing that's in front of you – if you've got em, two of you come on stage and there's obviously there's definitely a relationship there whatever it is, you just that's – there's no getting away from that – and everybody in the audience might feel it differently – if they just walk slowly towards each other for two people sitting there it might be a confrontation, for another person sitting there who's just had a date with somebody they've been dying to go out with it might be more of a romantic thing, it might just be depending on how the audience

feels and how I feel and how I want to accept it, although sometimes, as I say, it can be very clear what it is, it depends on your approach as well, that they know when they walk towards each other that there's going to be a battle, but sometimes it can be more subtle and you can leave it open for the audience.

[Louisa]

The meaning of the work is not completely open – there is a definite sense that there is a relationship between the two dancers on stage – but neither is it completely determined by the dancers on the stage. Rather it emerges as the audience (and dancers) engage with and react to the scene as it unfolds.

The structure of the language of dance

As well as discussing ideas of sharing and reciprocal communication, which echo Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of language, dancers also explicitly referred to dance as (a) language during the interview conversations. Dancers also used the closely related term 'vocabulary' in their descriptions of learning a choreographer's movement style. Louisa gave me an example of this:

The Wayne McGregor [choreographer] vocabulary – you'd have to do a lot of classes with him to get into that, to get in sync with that, but em, somehow it does become comfortable after a while, 'cos it can be really difficult initially than after about five or six classes you start to know what they're going to do next.

[Louisa]

In learning dance of a specific style or technique, dancers become accustomed to the range of movements that the choreographer employs in building choreographies and also get some sense of how the choreographer might wish to fit these individual units of movement together. This could be seen as analogous to learning a set of words (the vocabulary) in a language and having some sense of how they might fit into a sentence within that language.

Dancers also emphasised that familiarity with the language – the style or technique – of dance is essential to being able to communicate through dance. Thus, as Carrie explains:

Technique is very important because it gives you the freedom to express what you feel inside because without any technique you're sort of struggling against your body to, whereas when you can do the step then you can think about how you do the step. [Carrie]

Here, then, knowledge of a certain technique can be understood as equivalent to knowledge of a language in that it is necessary to have a certain command of the language in order to say what you wish to say.

The parallel with language is less obvious, however, when it comes to the conveyance of meaning in contemporary dance, as there is no direct correlation between (individual) movements and meaning. As Carrie suggests in the above quote, in contemporary dance a lot rests on how you do the movement rather than what movement you do. Thus again dancers emphasised that dancing was more than doing the movement or 'making shapes', while acknowledging that going beyond 'making

shapes' did involve competence at the level of the movement as those who struggled with the basic movements would not be as free to engage with the expressive or communicative aspect of dance:

If you feel more comfortable doing something then it frees you up to use the movement as a means of expressing. [Rhianna]

Familiarity with the language of dance, (arguably) unlike with a verbal language such as English or French, does not therefore mean that you can necessarily 'read' the meaning of a piece. In my discussion with Michaela and Suzi about the language(s) of dance they described ballet as a particular dance language that they were both familiar with and which could be recognised in terms of '*the way they use their bodies*' [Suzi] where:

There's just different ways of moving but ballet is a certain like, it is a certain way. [Michaela]

The familiarity with and understanding that these dancers had of the language of ballet in terms of the possible ranges of movement and how these phrases of movements could be linked together did not, however, mean that they could necessarily understand the meaning of the work:

AP: So if you got someone creating a ballet, doing a ballet – do you know what it means because you understand the language, or?

Michaela: Mmm, sometimes, sometimes not. Sometimes I sit and watch a ballet in a performance and think “what the hell is going on here?”.

Suzi: You’re like that with contemporary.

Michaela: It’s true.

Suzi: Especially contemporary.

Michaela: You know the language to a certain extent – step-wise you know the language and everything but it could mean anything because my boyfriend is a ballet dancer and sometimes I go and watch him and I’m like “Hmmm”

Suzi: Yeah. Technically – yes – but what they’re actually trying to tell you – sometimes.

Michaela: Yeah it’s quite difficult – you get your pas de bourré and stretch and stretch but that’s it and sometimes it’s really hard to find what’s going on, and especially with contemporary dance – some of the more abstract dance you just think “what the hell are you doing?” you know it could go so many ways – I’ve seen people with toilet rolls rubbing under their arms, you know?

Suzi: Yeah, and you think to yourself – even if you’re a dancer – they could be, you think “what is it you’re actually trying to tell us here?” – you know? – and you could think to yourself “so maybe it’s like this, maybe it’s like that” and then it could be something completely different – you can make up a story in your own mind of what you’re, what they’re doing.

Michaela: That's it, precisely – you can understand a language and then there's other ways of mis-communication, mis-interpretation, so you've absolutely got no idea what's going on – but to a certain extent you do, you do understand it.

Dancers thus report that understanding the language of a dance does at some level give them a privileged understanding of the movement being performed.

Familiarity with dance might allow a dancer to be more open to the way dance works to convey meaning:

I don't know what it's like for the non-dancer, but I would have thought so [that dancers have a different appreciation] because if you're used to watching dance and you're used to being a bit more open to it whereas I think if you don't watch as much dance maybe you're, I don't know, you're not quite so much. [Rhianna]

It was also considered by many of my interviewees that their familiarity with dance made them more open or sensitive to the meaningful nuances of dance performance, where an ordinary member of the public might be more focussed on the purely physical or athletic aspects such as impressive big jumps. Steven suggests here that as a dancer he is better able to see how a dancer may have imbued a movement with a certain quality, although he emphasises that this does not allow him straightforward access to the meaning of the work:

AP: D'you think when you're watching dance because you know what it feels like to perform a certain movement that that means it's easier for you feel what the dancer's trying to evoke?

Steven: I think so, yeah of course with out a doubt. But then again it's such an individual thing isn't it? Because the, the way I may have a sensation of it or the way I approach that movement is going to be the way I approach that movement – even though we're doing the same thing he or she might be doing that but what I recognise, or the way they approach it may be different so that's something that I find that really interesting and I can see the differences in their approach and I get to see them, you know, and the choreography. So I think yeah it does and that's because I'm more familiar – like if I looked at a car engine I'd be like “phew” but if a mechanic looked at it he'd be like “yeah,- boom boom – there, he's done that job there, he's done this ba ba ba, I recognise this and oh he's done this, I would have done that maybe but that's good enough” and you can see the differences in between how people approach the work and I suppose because I'm involved in the art form then I think maybe it is easier for me to understand, possibly understand clearer the message of the choreographer but usually with most work it's not necessarily really about that, it's about what I get from it so you know yeah and no – I know I seem like I'm contradicting myself.

Thus although dancers may be more open to seeing meaning in contemporary dance, it was not suggested that it was possible for them to access the meaning of a piece in a straightforward way.

Dancers also spoke of a kind of physical empathy with other dancers when they watch them perform movements which means that they can appreciate what it feels like to

do the movement. My interviewees were, however, very aware that despite being dancers they did not always understand the dance that they saw performed. When I asked them to speculate about whether their experience of watching a performance was different from that of a non-dancer, answers were therefore often ambiguous as while the dancers felt that in some sense they did understand the (language of the) dance better because they were dancers themselves, they were unable to describe quite what this meant as it did not correlate exactly with being able to understand the meaning. As Christina describes:

Obviously when we watch a piece we will know that that movement they did felt amazing but I don't necessarily think we have a different [from an non-dancer] interpretation of the meaning of the piece because the movement doesn't necessarily explain the meaning – it's the feeling that you're putting across rather than the movement itself – d'you know what I mean? – so I don't really think that a dancer would interpret the meaning differently, they would just look at the, the movement differently. [Christina]

The individual movements within a dance language, such as the *pas de bourré* or the *arabesque*, do not, then, have a discrete, identifiable, conventional meaning, in the way that words do within a sentence or language. Understanding how, for example, the work of a certain choreographer or style is made up of certain movements put together in certain ways does not therefore help dancers to decipher the meaning of a particular sequence.

Interestingly, Merleau-Ponty in fact revised the straightforward parallel drawn between language and painting in his later abandoned work *The Prose of the World* in which he states that

... everything ... that is true of painting is also true of language...language is painting as painting is language. (from Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of The World*, quoted in Dillon, 1997:204)

The problem that he comes to recognise with this parallel is that:

There is little in painting that corresponds to the sedimentation of language. Sedimentation ... gives language a historical character, different to that of painting, but, more to the point, it grants ductility to the word that is nowhere equalled in painting. It is the sedimented language of acquired usage that recedes before the thing, bows to its meaning, renders itself unobtrusive, creates the illusion of a transparent signification: in short, sedimentation allows a transcendence of the signifier toward the signified. To be sure painting has tradition, many traditions, and those traditions confer an accessibility to past acquisitions (perspective, chiaroscuro, the techniques of rendering light, texture, etc.), but one does not see through the painting to its meaning as one does in language. (Dillon, 1997:204)

Similarly with dance, understanding the tradition or technique within which the work is made – what dancers refer to as the language of the dance – is not always sufficient to give transparent access to the meaning. Thus while all of the dancers that I interviewed used the idea of dance as a language, when I questioned them about this

further they struggled to articulate just how that analogy worked or failed to work in terms of being able to 'read' the meaning of a dance:

Daniel: The different languages are basically – you've got your very basic your ballet, your Cunningham, maybe contemporary dance -Graham – so you've got three very particular styles and within that you can take it off – they derived their own techniques, so they all had a different language – em, the guy [choreographer] that we have at the moment is very into fragmented, isolating through the body – we did a duet with him a couple of years back so I, I got to know his movement style so when we got to this work it seemed I had it already – I could switch it on. The previous choreographer was very much about, em, very specific counts, very specific isolations of the body, quite sort of rigid stuff that was – for me I found it harder to – that's not something that I would maybe dance so naturally – but I had to understand that language, that was his language.

AP: And by understanding it, does that mean that you can sort of read it and understand what he's trying to say?

Daniel: Em, sometimes, not always no, ... we try to, we try to take on all the information that they give to us, but there's going to be – trying to understand it or appreciate it – you try to understand where they're coming from.

The dancers' accounts do not therefore suggest that dance can be understood as a language in the sense of thinking of individual movements as words with conventional meanings which can be built up into chains or sentences. Indeed the dancers asserted that individual dance steps did not carry set meanings and that it was

possible to express many different things with the same movement depending on how it was done and in what context.

Dance as Gestalt

Interestingly, over-attention to the individual movements, breaking down the overall structure of the dance into component parts, was, in fact, considered by many of the dancers to be unhelpful when trying to find the meaning of a work:

If I've had a really pedantic day where I had to go and really break and analyse the movement right down and I go and watch a show that evening I find myself doing that to them – like I'd be really, really breaking down what they're doing and then that's not fair on not only them but it doesn't make me open to work which is a bit annoying. [Steven]

Understanding meaning in dance consists for Steven in being open to communication. Knowledge of the language – the tradition or technique – in which the work is composed does not, however, seem to be sufficient or indeed necessary for this openness to the meaning of a work. This can be compared to appreciation of visual art where over-attention to technical aspects such as brush technique may in fact make it more difficult for the viewer to encounter the work as a meaningful whole or *Gestalt*. Indeed Anna comments about watching dance:

I wish sometimes I wouldn't look at the language that I know – you know?- that "oh their legs shouldn't be there" or "should be there" and just looking at the

movement, at the technique – and I wish I could not have it and just look – “is he actually saying something to me?” [Anna]

For Anna then, attending to the language of a dance in the sense of the technique can sometimes interrupt her engagement with the communicative faculty of dance as art: focussing on the language actually prevents her from engaging with what the work is ‘saying’.

The comparison with viewing visual art is again useful here: a certain familiarity with cubism helps us see the faces and people in Picasso’s work as faces and people rather than blocks of colour. Yet focussing too much on the technique and how the blocks of colour are constructed and fit together will in fact render the painting meaningless (apart from as an example of cubist technique) again as the *Gestalt* is lost. Similarly this paradox exists in dance where knowing the language helps the dancer understand the work, as Michaela says, ‘to a certain extent’ but can also hinder appreciation of the work as a meaningful whole.

Meaning in dance was thus not considered to be based on the series of individual movements but to be a function of the whole or *Gestalt* where each movement can only be properly understood in terms of its relation to the piece as a whole. Thus it was considered crucial to the execution of the movement that the dancers should have some kind of idea of why they are doing the movement – in particular, how it fits into the wider context of the work as a meaningful whole:

You can be asked “throw yourself to your knees now” – you must give me a reason to throw myself on my knees – you know what I mean? You can’t just be

asked, you know, “spin on your head and then blink your left eye” – why am I doing that? – you know? – so it’s really important as a dancer, and the choreographer must know why he’s doing – what his intention is – really the whole way through. [Marco]

Anthony also emphasises the important communicative role of the choreographer in helping dancers develop this kind of understanding:

I think it’s really important for the choreographer to come and explain to them what the movement is about, definitely – what the piece is about and really – ‘cos that really helps the dancers to get a feel of what the movement is supposed to be instead of just doing a movement. [Anthony]

Indeed, as Anna describes:

I don’t think you can really get anything through – the communication part – if you don’t know yourself what you’re doing, you’re just copying that person in the video and then just trying to do the movements – but yeah, it’s the hardest part, but that’s what makes it kind of art, if you can find that “oh yeah, now it makes sense, now it makes sense”. [Anna]

This understanding of why a movement is to be performed takes the dancer beyond just doing steps – individual movements – or ‘making shapes’, allowing the dancer to conceptualise the work as a meaningful whole that expresses or communicates something. Thus although the dance steps are not inherently meaningful, the way in which they are put together in a choreography infuses them with meaning.

This process was effected in different ways depending on the choreographer. Tara gives examples of this where:

One choreographer would give us steps and talk about an emotional thing and the way they would talk about it felt quite separate so it was kind of my job, our job to put the two together. But then there was another choreographer who said “can you show me something” – she would talk about the emotion, she wouldn’t give us a movement, she would talk about the emotion, she was like “can you give me something, come up with something that expresses that?” and we’d be like – you have to really go to that place and see what movement bursts out of that. So, I’d say that most – I’d say on the whole – they go hand in hand – definitely, because a dance step that’s just a dance step doesn’t really say anything on stage. [Tara]

Despite different approaches to creating a meaningful piece of choreography, then, all the dancers emphasised the importance of going beyond ‘making shapes’ to a point where, as Louisa describes:

... you’re comfortable with the movements and then you can start to go somewhere and communicate so the audience might go “What was that? Oh – it’s a feeling”. [Louisa]

Dancers also emphasised that meaning in dance was often something that was sensed from the overall feel of the work as a whole, rather than clearly formulated in such a way that it would be possible to put it into words or break down how it was that it

managed to evoke certain feelings or ideas. The dancers' accounts did not, therefore, suggest that it was ever really possible to have a straightforward process where a choreographer could give a comprehensive account of the meaning that is appropriate for all the dancers involved, or indeed that fully satisfies any of the dancers. As Anna explains: *'it's not kind of so straightforward that you could go "what's the piece about?"'* [Anna]. Thus, for example, Toby describes contemporary dance as similar to classical music in that it expresses something that cannot necessarily be put into words but is rather felt by the audience.

Steven similarly describes identifying meaning in a contemporary dance performance as like identifying meaning in a dream:

I like to feel something from the work and then through that feeling I then – it kind of inspires me to think about the feelings and sensations that I've had from the work – that's, for me, when I watch really great work, I just feel something – I can't quite understand it in the same sense that you look at a dream and you can't really understand a dream but you have this feeling behind it and it kind of makes sense, but it doesn't really but you do understand it anyway. [Steven]

Louisa also compares dance to poetry. In response to my further questioning about what it meant to say that dance was a language, she replied:

It is, for me, like poetry, I think it's closer to that – poetry – than it is a language.
[Louisa]

The distinction that Louisa is making here is between a system of signs where every word/movement has a set meaning, which I have been asking her about and which she refers to here as a language, and the poetic form where meaning is derived in a less direct way.

In poetry then, as with a dream or music, the meaning is derived from an overall impression of the whole and does not rely on each word, movement or musical note having a particular conventional meaning. Poetry evokes new meaning in words through their use in the context of the poetic work as a whole or *Gestalt* in the same way that in dance or visual art each movement, brush stroke or block of colour can only be attributed meaning in the context of the whole.

In poetry I can use the creative capacity in language to bring extra meaning to, for example, the word 'love' which it did not previously have. This is the sense, then, in which the language of dance resembles poetry – it is permanently in the creative phase of suggesting or evoking new meaning without ever reaching a phase of referring to this meaning in a straightforward or seemingly transparent way.

There are, however, differences for Merleau-Ponty between the linguistic and non-linguistic forms of creative expression. While the words in poetry already bear meaning which is added to or changed, for example, the movements in dance do not come with these conventional meanings. In the language of dance individual movements do not have a conventional meaning outside the context of the work as a whole.

Furthermore there is the possibility with poetry that the new meaning evoked in an individual word will become sedimented so that future uses of that word will bear the new meaning outwith the context of the poetic work. In language this new meaning can then go through a process of sedimentation (through further usage of this new sense of the word 'love') by which it becomes incorporated into conventional language. At this point the extra or new meaning is incorporated into the conventional meaning so that the word 'love' now refers to this new aspect in a straightforward and conventional way.

It is this process of sedimentation that Merleau-Ponty suggests separates the operation of language from other forms of artistic production of meaning. For Merleau-Ponty, while the literary artist is adding to what gone before – the sum of our culturally accumulated meaning of the word 'love' – those artists who work outside of language in, for example, visual art or dance are continually forging meaning anew without the possibility of sedimentation (Dillon, 1997:205; Matthews, 2002:158). Thus while some levels of meaning in poetry such as certain metaphors can become familiar to us and conventional so that we understand them as straightforwardly having a certain meaning (dead metaphors), this process of sedimentation does not seem to happen in contemporary dance.

The parallel with poetry is therefore an interesting, although not straightforward, one. Understanding dance as analogous to poetry helps to explain how dancers can work with an established language to express something that is genuinely new. Furthermore, in exploring how a parallel between poetry and dance plays out in practice through consideration of how dancers can and cannot 'read' the language of

dance, we can begin to see the importance of his distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic art-forms. This level of analysis helps us understand in more depth why it may be that dancers speak of gaining familiarity with the different aspects of the language of a choreographer, but they do not suggest that this necessarily helps you to understand what is meant by a particular movement.

Who is expressing whose meaning?

O body swayed to music, O brightening glance,

How can we know the dancer from the dance?

– William Butler Yeats

For Merleau-Ponty, art does not merely consist in the artist expressing his or herself in the sense of evoking some aspect of personality or experience. Rather the artist

... starts from where he or she is, from his or her individual personality, and creates a work that expresses a meaning that he or she is probably not fully aware of. (Matthews, 2002:140)

The meaning of the work of art is so closely bound up with the physical form of expression that, although it originates in the artist's perspective on or relation to the world, the artist cannot know the meaning of the work before creating it 'and may not ever be in a position to know its meaning in full' (Matthews, 2002:139). The meaning arises in the creation of the work of art and is inseparable from its expression in that particular form.

The idea of the meaning of a choreography being entirely bound up in its physical form, the manner of its expression, is interesting for this discussion of dance because it implies that meaning is inseparable from the movements of the choreography as created by the choreographer, and also that the meaning is inseparable from the execution of those movements as performed by a particular dancer at a particular point in time. Thus my interviewees refer to dance both as their own communication with the audience and as a way of trying to convey something from the choreographer to the audience, allowing the audience to come into contact with the choreographer's intention or meaning. In response to my questioning about where the meaning comes from in dance – whether it is somehow in the movements or if perhaps it is important to know the choreographer's intention in terms of meaning, Christina suggests that:

if you are actually dancing a choreography, it's important that we know what the choreographer meant, obviously, then we can put across what she – you know? – what she meant. [Christina]

Christina illustrates this notion of putting across what the choreographer meant with reference to a piece she had performed which was inspired by the choreographer's visit to an aquarium and reflections on her pregnancy. In this case, then, Christina suggests that it is important to try to bring the audience into contact with the themes of 'wateriness' and 'nurturing' that she believes are central to the work.

This ambiguity about (or double sense of) who it is that communicates or expresses something to the audience – the dancer or the choreographer – was also noticeable in dancers' descriptions of their own experiences of watching dance. Thus my interviewees, when describing themselves as audience members faced with a dancer

performing a choreography in front of them, often introduced the question of what it was that the choreographer trying to say seemingly almost interchangeably with the question of what it was that the dancer was trying to say.

They did, however, sometimes introduce the notion of a difference between the meaning as expressed or intended by the choreographer and the meaning as expressed or intended by the dancer. Indeed while it was considered important by the dancers that the choreographer gave them some idea of the meaning of the work, there was a sense in which, as I have noted above, the full meaning of the piece could never really be explained. Thus there are always gaps which dancers need to fill in, in terms of the meaning of the piece as a whole and how the different parts relate to that whole:

there is freedom to interpret other people's work and that's where the kind of artistry comes into play – my interpretation. [Steven]

The extent to which the dancer needs to become involved with the work in this way was considered to vary depending on how prescriptive the choreographer was. Thus, for example, Tara describes:

One [choreographer] we worked with gave away very little of what, how he wanted us to move through the piece emotionally, and so you, I kind of just took it upon myself to just work out a way because if it's wrong he'll tell me "that's awful what you're doing" so just for my own kind of sanity, well not that, my own peace of mind – so, how this piece works for me – but then some choreographers will give you a whole heap of information about what it is, what it should be feeling like and how your emotional state should be. [Tara]

Thus there was a balance to be struck. On one hand, dancers attempted to ‘stay true to’ the meaning of the work as intended by the choreographer, not letting their own egos get in the way as Ben describes:

As a performer and as an individual, em, I should allow a work to communicate its worth before anything else and I think if a work is made very, very well you can see the essence and then the performer becomes immersed in the work and then it works. [Ben]

While on the other hand it was considered essential that the dancer should engage with the work at a personal level and genuinely express something of themselves to the audience in their performance of the work.

The relationship between choreographer (and the choreography) and dancer was not, then, entirely one-sided where the choreographer held the meaning and the dancers tried to reproduce this meaning, but took the form of more of a negotiation of meaning. The meaning emerges as the choreographer and dancer come together and is constituted in the dancer’s performance of work rather than in the abstract idea of the work in the choreographer’s head.

I have argued above that dance can be understood as communication between audience and dancer where the meaning emerges and is negotiated in the process of this communication. Steven echoes this idea but also alludes to a previous communication between choreographer and dancer:

There's ... a conversation between you the dancer and you the choreographer and once they leave there is so much other things to find in the work that in many senses it's almost like the choreographer gives you the skeleton and then you have to put the flesh on top of it and breathe life into it so that the work can express something to the audience and share something with the audience and that's for me a really good thing – it's not about me dancing on stage, it's about me sharing this thing between – kind of an interesting relationship and sharing going on. [Steven]

It is the dancers, then, who give 'life' to the work – *'it's not shapes – it's movement and it's a living breathing thing'* [Louisa] – by giving it embodied form and by investing something of themselves in its performance. It is only when a work comes to life in this way then that it can be understood to be genuinely communicative and meaningful rather than just 'making shapes', and for dancers this was about some kind of meaningful personal sharing or communication with both the choreographer and the audience:

You start to understand some things that the choreographer's telling you from the inside, I think that's maturing as a dancer, I think that's what it's about, I mean I watch mature dancers, that's what I see – this personal attribute, they're able to bring that across to the audience member. [Daniel]

Becoming better or less immature as a dancer was thus about an openness to sharing meaning in such a way that dance can be genuinely communicative. Compared to a dancer who has just left dance college, Tara thus describes:

Someone who's been a year out of college – I think you can tell, they've just that, they're more open, more presence on stage or even in the studio, they're just more ready to receive and give. [Tara]

Meaning is not something that resides in the head of one isolated Cartesian subject then, be that the choreographer, the dancer or the audience. Rather dance comes to be meaningful in a process of sharing and negotiation between these different subjectivities, and each subject is decentred with respect to the intermundane space where the meaning takes shape.

Furthermore the meaning of a dance or choreography is wholly tied up with its physical expression through the body of the dancer. This is not a meaning that can be fully grasped or articulated by the dancer or choreographer through introspection, rather it is something that has to be understood through each subject's openness to that intermundane space where meaning is produced. In art as in language, we understand meaning through its (embodied) expression not prior to it in some internal realm of *res cogitans*.

Chapter Summary and Conclusions

In this chapter I have argued that dance, like language, can be profitably understood as an interworld, or intermundane space. Verbal language and dance do not re-present the world in the sense of producing a copy of the world in a domain apart, but rather allow us to communicate with others by virtue of our embodiment and our practical orientation to the world.

As I have noted in ‘Intersubjectivity’, there is a great deal in dance that is communicated between the dancers without words. Dancers describe this non-verbal communication as important in a number of ways including where there is not enough time to explain, for example, a positioning to someone or where it is necessary to negotiate something such as the balance of weight between bodies leaning on each other that cannot necessarily be put into words.

This does not mean, however, that dancers do not employ verbal language in their interactions. Indeed the linguistic articulation and thematisation of aspects of dance during the learning process can vastly increase the possibilities for creating and interacting in dance. This concluding section briefly revisits the importance of linguistic articulation in learning and performing the practical skill of dance, before returning to the notion of how dance and language function in parallel ways as interworlds of intersubjective communication which we are open to by virtue of our mutual constitution in the flesh of the world.

In the context of learning and performing dance, language adds to the dancer's practical pre-reflective engagement with the immediate environment, including other dancers, extending the range of possibilities for action. The primary function of language here is not to represent the world but to diversify and extend our potential to interact with it. In dance this can take the form of simple commands or expressions of intention such as 'let's go over there' or 'wait for me to finish this before you start that'. Often in dance, this type of communication will be used where the dancer's pre-reflective practical grasp on the environment meets some kind of obstacle such as the failure of a partner to be positioned where you expected them to be. Here it can become useful to explicitly conceptualise the problem and discuss how it can be resolved, although, for dancers, this may well happen alongside a physical exploration of how the interaction should feel.

The reflective capacity allowed by language is, furthermore, crucial to the process of correction in the learning of dance. Such explicit conceptualisations of features of movement and dance are also central to dancers' understandings of techniques and ideas which underpin (and are, at the same time, underpinned by) their pre-reflective practical performance of dance. Importantly then, there is a mutual dependency between our practical pre-reflective engagement with the world and our reflective or conceptual engagement, where each one is informed by the other.

It therefore becomes impossible to understand language as belonging to an inner realm of consciousness or *res cogitans* which is entirely separate from the world of things. Indeed speech is part of our immediate pre-reflective engagement with the world, functioning to expand the possibilities for our engaged agency in phrases such

as ‘pass me the ball’. There is also no sense in which we can think about what we are going to say without (silent) speech, meaning that speech, like perception, must originally be pre-reflective.

Furthermore, speech, and thus thought, are, like dance, embodied practices: ways of using the body and interacting with the world around us. Indeed although language allows us to abstract aspects of the world into ideas, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the worldly basis of ideas both in that we are able to have them (speak them) by virtue of our worldly bodies and that they are ultimately derived from our interaction with the already meaningful perceptual world. Language does not represent or copy the world in a separate domain but is part of the world, reflecting the world back to itself like a (physically present) mirror.

Speech does, however, allow us to come into a new relation to and dialogue with ourselves where we can think and hear our own thoughts and thus inspect or reflect on them. Thus, as I have argued in ‘Intersubjectivity’, we have access to our own thoughts and feelings not through a transparent process of introspection as Descartes suggests, but rather through the (potentially) publicly available expression of these thoughts and feelings. We hear our own thoughts as we hear the thoughts of the other, then, just as we perceive our own behaviour as we perceive the behaviour of others, and it is this possibility of seeing or listening to the self from the perspective of the other – reversibility – that is the basis of reflection.

The location of the subject in language thus requires, for Merleau-Ponty, that the subject is open to and decentred in relation to the intermundane space of language.

We can explore how this actually plays out in practice by taking dance as functioning in a way that is parallel to language. This parallel was suggested by both my dance interviewees in their reference to the language of dance and by Merleau-Ponty in his reference to the parallel between language and art, and I have sought to demonstrate in this chapter that the parallel between dance and language is a useful one for illuminating both dance and language and exploring what opened up when philosophy comes into conversation with practice.

The meaning that dancers are able to express through the language of dance is tied up in the embodied practice of dancing and the whole effect that the performance has on the performers and audience, rather than being something that resides in the head of the choreographer or dancer. This can be usefully explored in relation to an understanding of how language, thought and meaning (in dance and in general) should not be understood as confined to an inner realm of consciousness. Rather Merleau-Ponty and the practice of dance both suggest that meaning originates in our bodily interaction with the world and is fundamentally social (dialogical) in character. Indeed an isolated individual would never, in Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation, develop a language:

The meanings that words and expressions acquire come from the communication between one individual and another. In using language, we are therefore necessarily brought up against the fact that we are in the presence of other selves, and it is our shared history that makes communication between us possible.
(Matthews, 2002:155)

Dancers also emphasise that dancing on your own – without other dancers or an audience – does not make any sense as meaning-making through dance is essentially communicative and collaborative. Meaning happens between people in the shared intermundane space of language or dance which we are mutually open to by virtue of our mutual constitution in the reversible flesh of the world, not inside an isolated individual.

Thus the voice of Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and the voice of the practice of dance both suggest parallels between how art functions to express meaning and how language functions. Dancers speak of dance as a language or of there being different languages of dance such as that of classical ballet and those of some of the major contemporary traditions. Merleau-Ponty, by contrast, discusses a parallel between painting and language, suggesting that language functions to convey meaning in the same way as art, although he later revises his position on this, referring to the difference that there is nothing in art that is analogous to the process of sedimentation or institutionalisation in language. This means that, according to Merleau-Ponty, art never acquires the apparent transparency of language, where we can pass through the words to their meanings with little awareness that we are actually reading words and sentences.

This lack of transparency of meaning in art can be understood in relation to dancers' accounts of understanding meaning in contemporary dance. Despite dancers' frequent references to the languages or vocabularies of dance, contemporary dance does not in fact function to convey meaning in the same (transparent) way as conventional language. Dancers were not able to 'read' the meaning of dances in a straightforward

way where they went from movements to meanings as we would do reading words on a page. Instead it was considered that movements were only meaningful as parts in the context of the whole, the *Gestalt*, of the dance work.

Understanding meaning in contemporary dance was thus not analogous to understanding meaning in conventional language, but my interviewees suggested that there were parallels between understanding meaning in dance and understanding meaning classical music, dreams, or poetry. Here again the meaning was a function of the work (or dream) as a whole or *Gestalt*, rather than a sum total of the different musical notes, images, words or movements. It is also notable that unlike conventional language where the meanings seem to be arbitrarily attached to the words and institutionalised as part of the system of language, here it seemed that some token of the meaning (arising from the silent perceptual world) was somehow carried in the expression itself such as a feeling of sadness that might arise from a dream or piece of music.

Familiarity with the vocabulary of a certain style of dance cannot then be conceptualised as analogous to familiarity with the vocabulary of a verbal language such as English, French or German where this knowledge could allow us to pass directly from the words to the meaning of a piece of speech or prose. There are, however, parallels with certain forms of spoken or written language – we might think of, for example, the difficulties of translating poetry or slang into a foreign language – where the meaning of words is bound up in their physical (sound-image) form and their position within, in the case of poetry, the work as a meaningful whole.

In dance then, rather than the individual movements bearing set meanings, meaning arises from the overall feeling of the piece, and dancers considered that the way in which movements were performed, the quality with which their performance was imbued, was more important for the evocation of meaning than the actual technical details of the movement itself. Understanding the meaning of a choreography was thus mainly about being able to sense the qualities with which the dancers imbued the movements. It was this aspect of ‘reading’ dance for which dancers did not feel that familiarity with the dance language was either necessary or sufficient. There was a sense then in which any member of the public should be able to see something meaningful such as sadness or longing in the way that a dancer performed certain movements as this evocation does not rely on technical conventions which have to be learnt.

Furthermore it was in fact suggested by my interviewees that too much focussed attention on individual movements and technique would often lead to a dancer being less able to appreciate the meaning of a piece than someone who was less familiar with dance techniques as, in going too far into the details, they lose sight of the work as a meaningful whole. This emphasis on the overall meaning or *Gestalt* rather than the individual movements was part of general resistance amongst my interviewees to the idea of thinking of dance as ‘making shapes’, which has also been noted in earlier chapters.

When dancers go beyond making shapes, then, they are opening themselves up to an interworld of genuine communication and shared, negotiated meanings. Dancers emphasise not only the importance of expressing something through dance but also

the notions of mutual communication and sharing of meanings where the audience made their own connections with the work and brought their own experiences and understandings to bear. This illuminates the true sense of intersubjective communication, as suggested by Merleau-Ponty, in that meanings in dance are collaborative, occurring in a shared interworld.

Understanding meaning in dance, which is the basis for understanding dance as a mode of expression and communication, relies on openness to a shared interworld. Here both parties are open to the 'language' of dance where meaning can be produced through a shared process of mutual recognition and understanding. Dancers can be more open to the shared interworld of the language of dance (than non-dancers) by virtue of their familiarity with dance as an expressive art form (knowledge of tradition and technique) and as a bodily practice (facilitating processes of physical empathy or transfer of corporeal schema), but this does not mean that they have transparent access to the meaning of a dance work. Rather it is the nature of dance as an art-form that it is not transparently meaningful – it only suggests meaning which is then picked up on by the audience who further add to the meaning by interpreting it in certain ways.

Openness to or participation in this interworld does not necessarily mean that dancers can 'read' the meaning of dance in a straightforward way, then, but it does allow the possibility of communicative self-expression through dance, and also makes them sensitive to meaningfulness in dance, allowing them to forge their own meanings and interpretation in communication with others. Thus the fact that even dancers do not have transparent access to meaning does not mean that we cannot see dance as a form of intersubjective communication. Rather it is this shared or collaborative aspect of

meaning in dance that makes dance a particularly good model of genuine communication.

Dance allows us to explore how meaning is shared (i.e. intersubjective), embodied and in the world rather than in the head of isolated Cartesian subject. Furthermore it opens up ways of understanding that we are not trapped in language only ever able to rehearse ideas that we have already encountered, but rather able to create and communicate new meanings through our interaction with the world and others.

It is this capacity for genuine communication where subjects can create new meaning with and for the other that Merleau-Ponty particularly values in art. In contrast to this he suggests that much of the language that we use and that conventional philosophy is written in is institutionalised and that we understand its meaning in relation to conventions of use that we have previously learnt. Philosophy constructed in this way can say nothing new about the world for Merleau-Ponty, and he suggests that it is only through the phenomenological approach to philosophy which he parallels with the writing of poetry or the practice of other art-forms, that we can truly say something new about the world and genuinely communicate new ideas to others.

I believe that this parallel between Merleau-Ponty's ambitions for philosophy and his understanding of the function of art is of great importance for understanding the conversation between philosophy and dance in this thesis. I have, however, left off discussing this important connection up to this point because of the need to characterise dance as primarily an embodied physical practice rather than understanding it in a reductive way as merely a symbolic form or text. The thesis has

thus far, therefore, worked through an understanding of dance that is based on the primacy of embodied practice, reaching a point in this chapter on ‘Representation’ where it has become possible to talk about dance as having a representational capacity outwith the dualist distinction between materiality and representation.

It is therefore now possible in the ‘Conclusion’ to this conversation between philosophy and practice to pick up this theme in Merleau-Ponty’s writing which equates the function of art with the true goal of philosophy in a way that fully recognises the non-dualist implications of this understanding.

CONCLUSION

As I have noted in the ‘Introduction’, Merleau-Ponty suggests that a non-dualistic understanding of embodied being must start from a theory of embodied practice. This allows us to think in terms of a body-subject, rather than seeing the body as object, and thus to consider embodiment as the basis of such aspects of being as subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Further to this suggestion, this thesis has been based on my contention that if we are to truly move away from dualism in our understanding of human being, then we need not only to conceptualise embodiment adequately in philosophical terms, but also to engage with lived embodied practice. The philosophy of Merleau-Ponty and the practice of dance have therefore been brought together in what I have evoked as a ‘conversation between philosophy and practice’.

It is this methodological approach of ‘conversation’ which I have argued allows Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and the embodied practice of dance to ‘speak to each other’ in such a way that makes it possible to explore the resonances between them without either reducing one to the other or enforcing/reinforcing strict dualist boundaries between philosophy and practice, mind and body; subject and object, or representation and materiality. This conclusion reviews and reflects on how this conversation has worked to open up a new space which lies in between these traditional dualist divides and has thus allowed me to develop and explore new ideas,

connections, perspectives and understandings of the embodied basis of being that a different methodological approach would not have facilitated to the same extent.

Embodiment, Philosophy and Practice

The thesis starts (in ‘Practical Knowledge’) from thinking about embodied practice as a fundamental aspect of our lives, and then moves on (in ‘Subjectivity’ and ‘Intersubjectivity’) to explore the workings of the corporeal schema in more detail. These chapters think through how human being or human subjectivity is inherently embodied and how our interaction with others (our recognition of, communication with, and sense of ourselves in relation to other human beings) is embodied. The last chapter then explores issues of ‘Representation’, looking at our capacity for symbolisation and the communication and understanding of meaning. Meaning, representation and language are not conceptualised here in terms of the ethereal *res cogitans* of the Cartesian subject or mind, but as capacities of embodied beings situated in the (reversible flesh of) the world.

The importance of the corporeal schema in our orientation towards the world and our understanding of self and others is particularly apparent in early (pre-linguistic) developmental stages. Such stages of infant development are used in Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical works, for example to illustrate and explore subjectivity and intersubjectivity as primarily functions of a pre-reflective corporeal orientation to the world and others, rather than being reliant on reflective (linguistic) thought as the Cartesian tradition suggests.

What is important to this philosophy of embodiment is, however, not just that early stages of infant development can be understood in terms of the importance and primacy of the corporeal schema, but that human existence as a whole can be

understood in these terms. The corporeal schema is thus to be understood as the basis for interaction and sense of self in adult life as well as for the infant, and it is with this in mind that this thesis has focussed on professional contemporary dance, taking advantage of the fact that dancers, unlike infants, are able to reflect on and talk about their experiences of their embodied practice during research interviews. Dance has also been taken to be particularly well-equipped to speak to Merleau-Ponty's philosophical conceptualisation of embodiment because of the expertise that dancers develop through their training in attending to their own and other (dancing) bodies.

The conversation between philosophy and practice covers four main areas where the dancers' reflections on their (embodied capacities for) 'Practical knowledge', 'Subjectivity', 'Intersubjectivity', and 'Representation' are explored in relation to Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the corporeal schema, intercorporeality and the reversible flesh of the world. We could talk about embodied knowledge, embodied subjectivity, embodied intersubjectivity, and bodily representation and communication, but these terms are problematic as they allow us to continue within the framework of body-mind dualism by suggesting, implicitly if not explicitly, that these aspects might have non-embodied (purely mental or ethereal) counterparts.

The importance of Merleau-Ponty's work and of the burgeoning field of embodiment studies is, by contrast, the move towards dissolution of body-mind dualism. Starting from the embodied does not limit us to thinking only about the body then, rather it is a starting point for rethinking what it is to be human in non-dualist terms. This is perhaps most elegantly captured by Elizabeth Grosz's (1994) notion of the *Möbius*

strip where body and mind are on a 3-dimensional, overlapping, twisting circular continuum with each other (see fig.2)

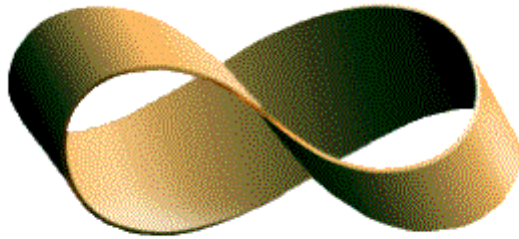


Figure 2: *Möbius* Strip

The metaphor of the *Möbius* strip serves not only to characterise the way that I am conceptualising embodiment in this thesis – as a fluid, looping continuum between the never entirely separable body and mind – but also the way I understand how philosophy and practice are able to speak to each other in the conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance. The thesis has not brought philosophy and practice together to test or oppose each other with regard to how we can understand (dancing) existence. Rather the voices of Merleau-Ponty and dance are understood to be located on a fluid continuum where that they flow and blur into numerous different positions. As Grosz suggests for the body-mind continuum, these two voices can never fully merge into one, but the continuum and twisting of the strip means that they are not entirely separate from each other and wherever we start with one we can trace it round until it blurs into the other or we find ourselves looking at the same point from the other side of the strip.

Conversation, Craftsmanship and Art

I also wish to note that the production of this thesis has, for me, blurred boundaries not only between research as philosophical reflection and research as empirical practice, but also between these aspects of research and the notion of research as art. C. Wright Mills (1959) suggests that ‘intellectual craftsmanship’ is central to the success of sociological research, and I find the notion of ‘crafting’ something feels particularly important and relevant to the process of producing or evoking this conversation between Merleau-Ponty and dance. In particular, I would suggest that due to the lack of well-established models for writing up research in this way, the sense of creative artistry or the feeling of carefully crafting something has been central to my experience of constructing this conversation. Thus in (formulating and) using the experimental approach entailed in the notion of conversation I am aware of the blurring of boundaries between research and art: between the thesis as a report of (empirical and theoretical) research and the thesis as purposely and creatively crafted.

Further to this, I wish to recognise that the engagement with and production of dance-art by my interviewees has had a great impact on the character of the research on the embodied basis of being that this thesis contains. Indeed it is contemporary dance’s ability to force us to think beyond a dualism between materiality and representation that makes it particularly suitable to be brought into conversation with Merleau-Ponty’s non-dualist philosophy.

In an attempt to move away from understandings of the meaning of dance-art as somehow lying in the realm of representation and thus divorced from materiality and

bodily experience, I have not emphasised that it is dance as artistic representation that speaks to philosophy, but rather that it is dance as an embodied practice that can be brought into conversation with philosophy to move beyond traditional dualist divides. This lack of emphasis has not, however, meant that the notion of dance as art has not been understood as belonging to the same flowing continuum on which I have located philosophy and practice, as I have begun to explore in ‘Representation’.

As we come to the close of this conversation I therefore suggest that we might begin to think about how following the *Möbius* strip round another twist might reveal a different (although always there and never fully separate) perspective on the embodied basis of being, and thus new potential for conversation through further opening up an exploration of the importance of dance as an art-form. Indeed as Williams and Bendelow suggest, praxical modes of embodied expression such as dance (they also extend this to all art) provide a powerful expression of ‘fundamental features of the human condition’ meaning that the boundaries between art and philosophical or social theory can be ‘temporarily destabilised, if not (permanently) effaced’ (Williams and Bendelow, 1998:8).

The rest of the ‘Conclusion’ serves to review and reflect on the conversation between philosophy and practice that has been central to this thesis. I will, however, return to the metaphor of the *Möbius* strip towards the end of my below discussion of ‘Representation’, inviting the reader to see the blurred boundary between art and philosophy at the end of the conversation contained in this thesis, not only as a fitting finishing point, but also as a starting point, similar to my original starting point of the connection between philosophy and practice, but seen from the other side of the strip.

From this point, I suggest, it is possible to imagine starting with the conversation all over again, tracing new meaning and finding new positions from which to understand embodiment as we loop back along the other side of the strip.

The Conversational Approach and the Opening up of a New Space for Understanding the Embodied Basis of Being

In what follows I wish to conclude the thesis by reflecting on both the process of ‘opening up a space’ through the conversation between philosophy and practice, and some of the new connections, ideas, and understandings it has been possible to form through this methodological approach. I have chosen to retain the original chapter divisions here, but I would, once again, like to emphasise that I intend this conversation to be understood as a flowing, looping continuum, rather than series of discrete chapters.

Practical Knowledge

The starting point for the opening chapter on ‘Practical Knowledge’, and thus for the rest of the conversation, is Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on understanding the embodied basis of being through notions of practice and the corporeal schema. In particular, I was interested to explore the concepts of tacit practical knowledge and the sedimentation of habit which Merleau-Ponty offers in his philosophy, and to find a way of not just understanding these concepts as theoretically viable but, more importantly, understanding them in relation to the experience of an embodied practice. The voice of the embodied practice of dance was evoked, in this chapter as in the rest of the thesis, from my thematic analysis of data from in-depth qualitative interviews which I carried out with sixteen professional contemporary dancers.

Having briefly reviewed Merleau-Ponty's concepts of habit, practice and the corporeal schema, this chapter was therefore chiefly interested in exploring how these theoretical concepts *about practice* might actually play out *in practice*, and what the embodied practice of dance might have to say in relation and in reply to these philosophical concepts. Here I engaged with dancers' accounts of learning, remembering and performing patterns of movement and, in particular, with the dancers' notions of having or getting a movement 'in/into the body', which I have suggested are resonant with Merleau-Ponty's concept of the corporeal schema.

In presenting this as a conversation, my contention with regard to these dual concepts from Merleau-Ponty and dance is that they do not need to be mapped onto each other as direct parallels in order to have something interesting to say to each other. In fact I have argued that it is the suggestive rather than the rigid nature of the connections between Merleau-Ponty and dance that allow this conversation to open up a space for new ideas and understandings of the embodied basis of being.

Thus through attending to these resonances between the dancers' concept of 'in(to) the body' and the Merleau-Pontian concept of the corporeal schema, I suggest I have been able to illuminate both of these concepts without reducing one to the other; and thus that in exploring aspects of the practice of dance, I have also been able explore aspects of corporeal schema theory. For example, it is notable that it takes time to get a movement 'into the body' but that once it is 'in the body' dancers do not have to think about it in order to perform it. I suggest that this allows us to see notions of sedimentation and the pre-reflective nature of the corporeal schema played out in practice.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the other side of the *Möbius* strip, in bringing Merleau-Ponty's theorising of the corporeal schema to the arena of dance I am able to explore new ways of understanding aspects of dance such as why dancers are able to improvise in a style once they have the rudiments 'in the body' and why they find it so difficult to correct movements once they have got them 'in the body'. The conversational approach therefore allows me to bring philosophy and practice together – without prioritising one over the other – to develop a richer and more nuanced perspective on embodiment than I would suggest is possible from either side of a dualist distinction between philosophy and practice or theory and data.

Subjectivity

In exploring 'Subjectivity', I have extended the discussion of the corporeal schema from 'Practical Knowledge'. This chapter starts from the idea put forward by Merleau-Ponty that the most fundamental or primary sense of self or 'I' is related to the corporeal schema and can be captured by the phrase 'I can', rather than traditional 'I think therefore I am'. This primary sense of self, understood as a pre-reflective sense of potential for action, comes about for the individual not through the reflective solipsistic introspection suggested by the notion of 'I think therefore I am', but through active engagement with the world and others.

Merleau-Ponty particularly emphasises the importance of mirroring interaction for the formation of the corporeal schema or the fundamental sense of 'I can' in early

developmental stages. In a way that I have argued is very suggestive for the furthering of the conversation between Merleau-Ponty and professional contemporary dance, he also maintains that the development of the corporeal schema is as integral an aspect of adult life as it is of infant development. From this starting point then, this chapter was primarily interested in hearing what the voice of dance had to say about how dancers understand their (dancing) selves through interaction with mirrors and others.

Much of the discussion of mirroring interaction present in dancers' accounts of learning and performing dance movements echoed Merleau-Ponty's ideas about the primacy and the interactive development of the corporeal schema in the infant. Indeed it is notable that mirrors and mirroring interaction with other dancers are particularly important – indeed often more so than verbal direction for getting a movement 'into the body' – in the everyday practice of dance.

I suggest that a sustained, experiential focus of the practice of dance of the kind that I have been able to offer in this thesis through in-depth interviews with dance practitioners can shed light on how we might understand Merleau-Ponty's concept of the corporeal schema as playing out in practice. Importantly, then, it is not just physical capability that is developed in the dance studio, but dancers also spoke of developing or maturing on an emotional or personal level and of developing a greater understanding of themselves through the practice of dance. This kind of discussion evokes the richness of a notion of 'I can' as a fundamental sense of self.

From the perspective of the other side of the *Möbius* strip, it is also important for the understanding of dance which I have been able to offer in this chapter that Merleau-

Ponty's concept of the corporeal schema allows me to think in terms of the primacy of an embodied sense of self – the pre-reflective 'I can'. This starting point suggests ways of engaging with dancers' understandings of themselves in relation to mirror images, copying and being copied, and being watched, that would not be available from the interview data alone. Dancers emphasise, for example, that mirror images can be difficult to engage with as they seem somehow distanced from the immediacy of the active body, and this can be explored in theoretical terms by examining how the mirror image objectifies the dancer's body and produces a feeling of splitting, detachment, or alienation. Dancers – in particular female dancers – also expressed feelings of vulnerability in relation to some situations of being watched which I have again argued relates to objectification.

Merleau-Ponty, however, suggests (*contra* Sartre) that the gaze of the other need not be objectifying and alienating where there is mutual intersubjective recognition. Thus if you recognise me as another subject like you, rather than as an object in your gaze, then I do not feel objectified or alienated. This idea can again be explored in the embodied practice of dance where dancers speak of copying and being copied – i.e. mirroring interaction with other dancers – in very different and more positive terms compared to how they speak about the use of mirrors. Thus the conversation in this chapter both helps to offer a theoretically coherent explanation for why dancers experience this difference between their images reflected by mirrors and by other dancers, and suggests how Merleau-Ponty's theorising of early developmental stages can be understood through the example of the dancers' experiences of their embodied practice.

Bringing Merleau-Ponty's non-dualist ideas about embodiment or body-subjectivity into conversation with the active practice of dance also opens up a space for re-considering the dual(ist) concepts of transcendence and immanence. Merleau-Ponty's conceptualisation of the body as a potential source of transcendence rather than immanence is another important departure from the Cartesian tradition in Western philosophy. It became apparent, however, in my analysis of dancers' concepts of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' that Merleau-Ponty's distinction between the transcendence of the task-focused body subject and the immanence of the body-focussed body subject, may in fact be another unnecessary dualism that cannot actually be seen to play out in the practice of contemporary dance.

I have argued that the dancers' concepts of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' are related to a sense of immediacy in the physical practice of dance which we might characterise as uninterrupted transcendence. This can, for example, be understood in contrast to accounts dancers gave of experiences where they have felt objectified and alienated (either in relation to mirrors or the gaze of others) while performing dance and have thus felt a sense of awkwardness and self-awareness that inhibits or interrupts the (transcendent) focus and flow of their actions.

The concepts of 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment', however, suggest that this uninhibited immediacy not only has characteristics of (task-focused body-) transcendence, but also of immanence. Rather than being future-focused as (task-focused body-) transcendence is held to be then, 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' suggest a focus on the here and now that is more reminiscent of understandings of immanence. Furthermore, 'being in your body' and 'being in the

moment' suggest a kind of groundedness in the body which includes a heightened awareness of the dancer's body and of their own grounding or location within their dancing bodies. This awareness of inhabiting your own body is generally taken in Western philosophy to characterise the negative states of immanence and 'being-for-others' in Sartrean/Beauvoirian terms, which are linked, by Young, for example, to the interruption and inhibition of movement.

In dance, however, 'being in your body' and 'being in the moment' are not considered to be negative or limiting, rather they are essential to uninhibited, uninterrupted movement. I have therefore suggested in this chapter that in bringing Merleau-Ponty into conversation with dancers' accounts of their embodied practice, it has been possible to open up a new space for the re-consideration of the traditional categories of transcendence and immanence which truly blurs the boundaries between these dual(ist) terms.

Merleau-Ponty contributes to this by giving us the language to understand the dancers' concepts in terms of philosophical theories of immanence and transcendence, and, most importantly, by the philosophically radical move of opening up the notion of the body as a potential source of transcendence. It is only when these ideas are brought into conversation with dance, however, that we begin to see a truly non-dualist blurring of boundaries and it becomes possible to think in a new way about dancers having a sense of their immediate connection with their own bodies and the world that gives them what I have called, rather than an inhibited transcendence, an *inhabited* transcendence: a concept that must be understood as something in between the traditional divide between transcendence and immanence.

It also became apparent through my analysis of the interview data regarding sense of self and alienation, that the experience of dance – and the feminine experience of dance in particular – may have something to say to Merleau-Ponty about gendered embodiment that is not foreshadowed in his philosophical concepts. Thus while Merleau-Ponty's philosophy does not distinguish between male and female experiences of embodiment, my interview discussions suggested that there were issues around emotional vulnerability and exposure – a kind of metaphorical nakedness – that were more salient for females than males in their reflections on the practice of dance.

In order to analyse what I suggest is a gender difference between dancers related to wider issues regarding women's socially-mediated relationships with their bodies (and selves), I have turned to the writers Iris Young and Gail Weiss who have engaged with Merleau-Ponty's work, considering its uses and limitations for feminist thought. Young's work suggests that Merleau-Ponty's notion of task-focused body-transcendence can usefully be combined with Simone de Beauvoir's gendered conceptualisation of transcendence and immanence, thus explaining why male action more often has the transcendent quality which Merleau-Ponty speaks, while female action is often inhibited as she exemplifies by the phenomenon of 'throwing like a girl' (Young, 1990). Critiquing Young's account, Weiss (1999) suggests that Young's emphasis on women as inhibiting their actions through a process of self-referral (self-consciousness that leads to awkwardness in performing the movement) is useful, but is in danger of essentialising this process and/or attributing blame to the individual

women, as it fails to adequately explore the socially-mediated character of this referral.

Bringing dance into conversation with Merleau-Ponty – and particularly the accounts of female dancers – however, gives me a different perspective from these feminist philosophers. Most obviously, female dancers do not ‘throw like girls’ – an idea that is central to Young’s analysis of gendered embodiment – and are in fact generally as physically confident as their male counterparts. What is interesting about dance then is not the potential for physical exposure and awkward self-awareness, but the idea that the physical practice of dance also entails emotional exposure or metaphorical ‘nakedness’ which could give rise to awkwardness and inhibition with regard to performing the dance movements.

These aspects of dance thus allow us to open up a new space for understanding the embodied basis of being where the boundaries between the physical and the mental and between immanence and transcendence are again seen to be blurred. Dance thus has something to say both to Merleau-Ponty’s gender-blind account of task-focused body-transcendence, and to Young’s feminist appropriation of Merleau-Ponty’s concepts in her essay ‘Throwing like a Girl’ (1990). It blurs the essentialist gender boundaries (and boundaries between physical and mental action and exposure) of Young’s analysis, while refusing to collapse male and female experience of exposure and inhibition into each other.

Intersubjectivity

The blurring of boundaries between physical and the mental or emotional is also central to my exploration of 'Intersubjectivity'. Indeed Merleau-Ponty suggests that by understanding self in terms of the non-dualist 'tacit *cogito*' – 'I can' – rather than the dualist 'I think therefore I am', it is possible to dissolve the problem of solipsism that haunts philosophy in the Cartesian tradition.

Sense of self is conceptualised by Merleau-Ponty as a practical orientation towards the world and others that is played out in (pre-reflective) action rather than requiring to be divined through a process of reflective introspection. This is not to say that human beings do not have the capacity for reflective thought or a conscious sensation of subjectivity, including thoughts, feelings, emotions and intentions. These reflective (linguistic) aspects of human existence need not, however, be thought of as logically or developmentally prior to the (potentially) visible and publicly available aspects of self suggested by the 'tacit *cogito*' or 'I can'. Linguistic competence and our linguistic grasp or understanding of the world and others is seen as possible through silent or vocalised speech, which is, if we understand it to have derived from gesture, in the last analysis, ultimately another pre-reflective practical use of the body.

Merleau-Ponty's work again suggests that a focus on early developmental stages may be illuminating for our understanding of the priority of 'I can' over 'I think therefore I am'. As with the discussion of subjectivity and the development of the corporeal schema in the previous chapter, however, Merleau-Ponty argues for the importance of the 'I can' throughout adult life as well as childhood. I suggest that dance is a

particularly interesting example for a discussion of the priority of practical orientation over introspection in constituting both subjectivity, discussed above, and intersubjective communication and understanding.

In this chapter I have engaged with Merleau-Ponty's concepts of reversibility and the transfer of corporeal schema to explore an understanding of intersubjectivity as fundamentally practical or bodily. This is signified by the shift from talking in terms of intersubjectivity to the use of the concept of intercorporeality. In bringing these philosophical ideas into conversation with the experiential accounts of contemporary dance from my interviewees, I have then been able to explore how intercorporeality might play out in adult life for dancers.

Dancers referred to a tacit understanding between themselves and other dancers where they often did not verbalise – either in their own heads or out loud – the negotiation of, for example, timing, space, weight or balance. Dancers suggested that instead of communicating verbally they communicated – both expressed and received 'information' – through their bodies. Often they were not, in fact, able to 'put into words' what had been communicated or they suggested that they did not have time to become reflectively aware of it during a sequence of movement.

Intersubjective communication in dance can thus be explored as an often pre-reflective, practical phenomenon which does not rely on linguistic articulation. Dancers did not have to go through a process of reflective introspection to discover their own thoughts about balance and timing, but were rather able to express themselves pre-reflectively through the practice of dance. Likewise they did not have

to reflect on the linguistic articulation of what another dancer was ‘saying’ to them, but could understand the other pre-reflectively through embodied practice.

Dancing together not only allowed this kind of negotiation regarding balance, weight and timing between dancers, but dancers also spoke of a very intimate and personal connection or harmony, not reliant on verbal conversation, which could be established between two people who danced together. This chapter is based on the contention that this experience of dancing together is very suggestive for an exploration of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of the transfer of corporeal schema where he argues that it is through the overlap between our (internal and external) perception of our own bodies and our external perception of the body of the other that we are able to gain access to the internal sensations, the thoughts, feelings, moods and intentions of the other.

The process of transfer of corporeal schema is considered important in all adult life – not just in dance – but due to its pre-reflective nature it may be something that most people do not reflect on and thus do not consider to be important to their intersubjective relations. When we are asked to reflect on how it is that know what another person feels or thinks, pre-reflective intuitions of which we are not necessarily consciously aware are likely to be over-shadowed by our impression of the importance of verbalising these thoughts and feelings.

What is interesting about bringing the adult of experience of dance into this discussion of intersubjectivity as intercorporeality then, is that dancers’ training and the nature of their practice means that, as I have observed before, they pay particularly close attention to and are particularly adept at ‘reading’ the body of another dancer. Indeed

dancers report, in a way that echoes and illuminates Merleau-Ponty's conception of transfer of corporeal schema, that moving together and paying close attention to the other dancer's body – or corporeal schema – allows them to somehow intuit personal aspects such as intentions, moods, and feelings in the other dancer without recourse to verbal conversation.

Importantly, this type of communication without words not only allows for shared experience or communion between adult dancers, but also, more often, allows dancers to intuit feelings that are not the same as their own. Unlike the situation described by Merleau-Ponty in early stages of infant development, then, transfer of corporeal schema in adults cannot be understood as a syncretic sociability where there is failure to distinguish the self from others. Rather it is the basis of adult communication of this kind that it occurs between two separate individuals who can understand the other's intentions without attributing those intentions to themselves.

It is my contention that the voice of dance allows us to explore the nature and importance of transfer of corporeal schema for these practitioners in a far more in-depth and sustained way than would be possible from the inchoate moments of awareness that we may get in our own everyday lives. I am therefore suggesting that the dancers are in a privileged position because of their training and practice, in that they are more aware of the pre-reflective practical processes that underlie intersubjectivity than most other people are. They do not offer the same philosophical insights into intercorporeality as Merleau-Ponty is able to do from a philosophical position which reflects on the pre-reflective, but they are able to offer a form of reflection on the pre-reflective that has been practically necessitated by the practice of

dance. As I have emphasised before, it is by bringing these two elements into conversation that I suggest we can again find an in-between space for the understanding of the embodied basis of being where even the boundaries between reflective and pre-reflective may be blurred or understood in terms of the looping twisting continuum of the *Möbius* strip.

My position with regard to the privileged position of dancers to speak to Merleau-Ponty regarding embodied practice and the pre-reflective is not, however, assured, or, I would suggest, a necessary foundation for this conversation. Indeed it is plausible to argue that elite professional dancers may be able to articulate aspects of embodiment and the pre-reflective differently from other groups, not because they have a heightened level of awareness of a phenomenon that is true for all humans, but because there is something specific about dance that means that they have a different experience from other people. Embodiment and practical orientation to the world may actually take a different form for them rather than just a different level of importance or salience.

I do not then wish to deny that there may be a sense in which the dancer's experience of their own and other (dancing) bodies may be significantly different from that of the non-dancer. I would, however, argue that the success of the argument made in this thesis does not rest on the experience of the professional dancer being generalisable to all humanity.

Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and perhaps particularly his conceptualisation of the body as a source of transcendence has been criticised for what has been suggested is

an implicit assumption that the agent in question is healthy and able-bodied and perhaps also a white male in his middle years. I am sensitive to this criticism and indeed have sought to engage with the issue of gendered embodiment in ‘Subjectivity’ as it arose in my data. This thesis has, however, been more concerned with the notion of exploration and potential than with the (equally pressing) project of critique, which has been addressed more fully in the work of other scholars in this area. I am thus, as I have emphasised before, interested in the positive potential of Merleau-Ponty’s philosophy and of the practical experience of dance to open up a new space for the exploration the embodied basis of being.

I do not therefore believe that the dancers I have interviewed need to speak of something essential about the human condition in order to have something interesting to say to Merleau-Ponty. Indeed it is the very fact that these two accounts (that of dance and that of Merleau-Ponty) are perspectival rather than universal that means they are able to have a meaningful conversation where each suggests new directions to the other rather than them just being reduced to one voice.

For my own part, however, I do believe that the voice of dance speaks of pre-reflective aspects of existence that are important to various extents for all of us. I am influenced here not only by the way in which the data from my interviews resonated in some way with my own experience – which may be related to my own social positioning as able-bodied and white or may be more closely related to my own (limited) involvement in dance – but also by the enduring significance of dance as a meaningful social practice across all societies and cultures.

Representation

The final chapter on ‘Representation’ in a sense reaches the opposite pole of the *Möbius* strip from my original focus on tacit practical knowledge and habit. My original assertion was that dance should be understood primarily as an embodied practice rather than as a meaningful but disembodied text. I therefore sought in the opening chapters of this conversation to move away from an understanding of dance as something symbolic and emphasised the importance of the practical and the pre-reflective rather than allowing language and representation the privileged position accorded to them in most contemporary philosophy and dance theory.

The aim of the thesis is, however, to explore the embodied basis of being rather than just the nature of practical action, and I have made it clear throughout that the intention is to blur or dissolve dualist boundaries. My intention has not therefore been to limit my discussion to one side of a materiality-representation dichotomy, but rather to show that materiality and representation need not be understood as dichotomous. Thus, as having ‘Representation’ as my final chapter suggests, the thesis aims to show that an understanding of representation can be reached through a discussion of embodied practice. The intention is to destabilise and blur the boundaries of the dualist categories then, not only by reversing the traditional Cartesian priority of mind over matter or representation over materiality, but also by showing that the two are intimately connected. They may be thought of as two opposite poles on the *Möbius* strip, but it must also be acknowledged that they blur into each other on this looping continuum.

Merleau-Ponty's early work suggests that language may be understood as having derived from gesture and is thus a bodily technique or tool which makes it possible to do something in relation to our social environment. Although he then offers a more complex account of language in later work influenced by emerging structuralist theories, Merleau-Ponty does, however, retain this notion of language as fundamentally bodily and related to practical orientation towards the world and others. To this, then, is added in later work more complex notions of language in relation to the concept of the folding of the reversible flesh of the world which underlies the idea seen in the previous chapter of intercorporeality. Language here is to be understood as an intermundane space to which we as speaking subjects must be open (through our constitution in the reversible flesh of the world) in order to communicate.

Merleau-Ponty's discussion of language also includes some interesting reflections on what he explores as a parallel between language and art, in particular painting. This chapter of the thesis brings these ideas into conversation with dancers' ideas about how dance is inherently expressive and communicative and can be thought of as a language or number of different languages.

My analysis of dancers' accounts of this embodied 'language' of dance in terms of their abilities to express and understand meaning through dance revealed important aspects of the dance-language analogy which echo Merleau-Ponty's discussion of a parallel between art and language. Dancers, for example, suggest that the meaning of a work can only be gleaned from an impression of the whole and that individual

movements do not have a (relatively) fixed symbolic meaning, in contrast to conventional language use. Likewise, Merleau-Ponty discusses art as having its meaning contained in the whole using the notion of the *Gestalt*, and he suggests that meaning is not carried in an institutionalised, sedimented form in individual symbols in art as it is in language.

Merleau-Ponty's discussion of art in terms of language and the lived body are particularly useful for exploring how dance works as a language, then, while dance as an arena where materiality and representation are so closely linked offers a way of illuminating Merleau-Ponty's theories of language and embodiment. I note here that that much of Merleau-Ponty's work on language was either abandoned by the philosopher or left unfinished at the time of his death. I do not then offer a complete reading of Merleau-Ponty's writings or ideas on art and language. Rather I draw on those ideas that resonate with dancers' experiences of dance as a language and explore, again, how the practical experience of dance can offer a sense of experiential coherence to Merleau-Ponty's (unfinished) theorisation of language, and how Merleau-Ponty's concepts can illuminate the nature of dance as an expressive and communicative art-form and practice.

Finally I would like to discuss Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the function of art – again he refers particularly to painting – as being to spread a new layer of meaning over the silent things of the perceptual world and thus to make us think about things in ways we have not done previously. This capacity to make us see the world afresh was also key to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the proper functioning of philosophy

and lay behind his advocacy of the phenomenological method rather than the more rationalist modes of enquiry of the Cartesian tradition (Mathews, 2002:133).

Thus for Merleau-Ponty, this non-dualist form of philosophy (which does not prioritise rational thought over experience) and art can be understood as having similar functions. While this conversation started by bringing Merleau-Ponty and dance together because they were both able to speak to the importance and complexity of embodied practice, it therefore ends with the recognition of a new connection between these two voices. Dance can speak to the philosophy of Merleau-Ponty not just from its position as an embodied practice but also from its position as an embodied art-form.

In ‘Contextualising the Conversation’ I have quoted Sheets-Johnstone’s (1981) distinction between philosophising/thinking ‘about movement’ and philosophising/thinking ‘through movement’ in dance. In these terms, this thesis can be understood as having brought ideas ‘about movement’ – ‘the voice of philosophy’ – into conversation with ideas experienced ‘through movement’ – ‘the voice of practice’. I wish to suggest as I reach the close of this conversation, however, that engaging with thinking ‘through movement’ need not just be understood as being about attending to ‘the voice of practice’, but can also be understood as attending to how dance works as an (embodied) art-form.

In concluding this thesis, I therefore invite the reader to consider how we might, having reached what can be understood as the far pole of the *Möbius* strip, follow its looping continuum back towards the pole of materiality again, seeing things from a

different perspective by focusing on art rather than practice. Having opened the thesis with a blurring of boundaries between philosophy and practice, and theory and data, I leave the reader with a new blurring of boundaries – which, I would emphasise, has necessarily been there all along – between philosophy and art: between philosophising about dance and dancing as philosophising.

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