THESIS CONTAINS VIDEO
DEPARTMENT OF DANCE STUDIES

Destabilising dancing:

tensions between the theory and practice of improvisational performance

by

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ABSTRACT

In the 1970s, the American performance group Grand Union introduced the idiom of improvisational performance in dance as a supposedly ‘totally’ open process. Resisting the methods of traditional choreographic practices which celebrate the authority of the choreographer in the decision-making process, improvisational performance in dance suggests an alternative option of ‘instant composition’ as a technique of exercising choice within the ‘present moment’ of the dance.

On the assumption that there are no totally open cultural manifestations, this research explores the contextual character of ‘instant composition’. In addition, it provides a practical methodology for the character of the ‘unknown’ to be grasped not within a set of limits but as a field of possibilities.

The research proceeds as a dialogue between the theory and practice of improvisational performance. The skill of performing improvisationally is treated by reference to Carr’s concept of practical reasoning and Foucault’s notion of the discourse.

Following the postmodern perspective of interrogation, this theoretical apparatus is subsequently problematised by a series of studio experiments. This confrontation between theoretical considerations and studio work exposes tensions in the decision-making process within improvisational performance in dance.

This research challenges at the level of theory the uniqueness of traditional choreographic practices in the making of dance - a perspective already challenged at the level of practice in numerous forms of postmodern dance. By these means, it destabilises dancing.
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1.1 Questions and perspectives

In studying improvisational performance as a learning skill within dance postmodernism and from the perspective of postmodern critical discourse, issues of practical knowledge in dance need be addressed, insofar as practice does not necessarily follow theory in a linear fashion. Philosophical questions in the domain of epistemology, such as the relationship between practical and theoretical knowledge, and a historical consideration of performance practices in the area of improvisational dance, are directly relevant to this discussion. In addition, the development of a practical methodology on the basis of a conceptualisation of 'practice' becomes a necessity within the prospect of a practical project as part of the research process.

On these grounds, the research approaches the skill of performing improvisationally as an object of learning. The postmodern strategy of interrogation keeps the process of posing questions constantly open; problematic issues are identified, elaborated and reshaped by the possibility of formulating new questions. In this space of reconsideration, aspects of the practice and theory of improvisational performance confront each other in an open dialogue. Evolving towards an improvisational performance event, my own practical project draws directly from the theoretical explorations of the thesis and simultaneously provides material for direct involvement through practice with the research questions. In this way the relationship between theory and practice in improvisational dance has been approached primarily in a non-hierarchical way. Neither practice nor theory come first; they co-exist in a permanent state of dialogue with each other.
Nevertheless, constructing a dialogue between the theory and practice of improvisational performance with a postmodern sensibility also involves exposing the tensions between the two in a way which constantly shifts perspectives. Thus dancing, in the form of improvisational performance, emerges within a double domain of destabilisation: both as a space of theoretical exploration and as a set of practices.

A range of methodological tools assist the research process. This is partly because the whole enterprise operates primarily on the basis of the postmodern strategy of interrogation; emerging answers to the research questions offer raw material within which new issues can be identified. Following these guidelines, it is possible that the problem of choosing relevant methodologies for the research might also be dealt within a similar spirit of reconsideration.

In approaching improvisational performance as an object of learning, knowledge itself becomes the focus of a discussion based on dance material directly related to the use of the dancing body in improvisational performance. The research firstly visits Carr's theory of practical and theoretical knowledge (Carr 1978, 1981a and 1981b) which is located within the branch of epistemology known as 'action theory' (Brand & Walton 1976 and Davis 1979).

Yet, the postmodern experience of interrogating traditional philosophy has revealed a number of controversies in the area of epistemology (Lyotard 1984). The French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault in particular has worked with this problem in detail, exposing, firstly, the relationship between power and knowledge (Foucault 1977a and 1980) in so far that it constitutes the latter as absolute truth and, secondly, exposing the dominance of the notion of unified subject within traditional history and philosophy (Foucault 1978, 1982, 1985 and 1986). Supported by this approach, the practical project of this research develops in such a way that the relevance of approaching the knowing of improvisational dance from the perspective of a decentred subjectivity gradually becomes more evident.

History has been also used as a means of organising the research material, yet without juxtaposition between traditional and postmodern approaches. The tool of the Foucauldian discourse (Foucault 1972) has facilitated the arrangement of the information on improvisational dance within dance postmodernism, providing a
theoretical structure within which the form of improvisational performance resists the possibility of operating as a series of instantiations of one fixed model. Instead, its numerous manifestations are considered within their potential to emerge, transform and disappear.

Another reason for the use of a range of methodological techniques is the fact that the research concentrates on the relationship between the theory and practice in improvisational dance. At this point it must be emphasised that characterising such terms as theory and practice becomes an extremely difficult task. The term 'theory' in particular has been extensively discussed in postmodern discourse. Culler argues that

theory should be understood not as a prescription of methods of interpretation but as the discourse that results when conceptions of the nature and meanings of texts and their relations to other discourses, social practices and human subjects become the object of general reflection.

Culler 1988 p22

The problem with this position is not only that it has been constructed on the basis of another debatable term, 'text', but also that it fails to address the relevance of specific experiences and contexts. From her feminist perspective, Grant emphasises that "since Plato, theory has traditionally been understood ... as a rationalist enterprise ... seeking universal principles" (1993 p146). Griffiths, who also joins this debate as a feminist thinker, does not feel so pessimistic about full-blown Theory ... [as] an attempt to draw together the perspectives of individuals into a better understanding ... [by means of abstraction, provided that] differences of viewpoint are taken as a starting point for wider agreement - or for a better informed, deeper level of disagreement.

Griffiths 1995 p61

Nevertheless, Griffiths notes that, in some cases, 'theory' "need mean no more than systematic and public reflection on ways of doing things and the assumptions that underlie them" (1995 p61). In a way, this last element brings to the fore the political aspect of any form of theorising, since there is no 'objective' way of reflecting upon things; the position of the theorist is always affected by her/his relationship with the particular 'things'.
Recently, in the discourse of dance, 'theory' has been sometimes considered as a dangerous form of abstraction which undermines the crucial element of the materiality of the dancing body in the study of dance (Foster 1995). And it is no wonder that suspicion towards 'theory' grows fast in the postmodern climate of anti-hierarchical thinking, an intellectual environment which does not welcome a dichotomous relationship between body and mind and the traditional approach of the superior mind.

In this respect, the recent concern of the discourse of dance with a reconsidered relationship between theory and practice is strongly political; it reclaims the full presence of the material body of dance within academic research. The very notion of 'theory' is almost directly constituted in relation to practice, in other words, as a form of abstracting directly from specific dance experiences.

This research adopts this position as a starting point. Nevertheless, it does not aim to prioritise practice at the expense of theory. Rather it concentrates on relocating their relationship as an open dialogue. This means that, while theory originates as an abstraction of practice, it also feeds practice in particular ways. In this way, by means of the interdisciplinary character of the research, 'theory' acquires new significance in the form of direct input from the theoretical discourses of other disciplines such as philosophy and (new) history. It follows that one of the main purposes of this research is to identify the conditions for a non-dichotomous relationship between theory and practice in dance. A good way to start pursuing this purpose is to confront the traditional argument of the practice-theory dichotomy in dance education. A dialogue between various methodological threads takes place at this point.

Adshead's perspective (1989), set against the argument of practice-theory dichotomy in dance education, draws directly from Carr's theory of practical and theoretical knowledge (Carr 1979, 1981a and 1982b). Yet, in the domain of dance this is almost a manifestation of postmodern sensibility. It is an example of non-hierarchical understanding of the nature of knowledge in dance. To attack the argument of the dichotomy between theory and practice in dance education means to introduce a theoretical basis for accepting the contribution of both to learning, on equal terms. Amongst other theorists participating in the critical debate of
postmodernism Foucault, in particular, in addressing the relationship between knowledge and power, has identified the problematics of a hierarchical approach to knowledge.

The research also touches upon the relationship between the theory and practice of improvisational dance from within practice. This part includes the study of the work of a number of improvisational artists amongst whom are the Americans Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Mary Fulkerson and the British Rosemary Butcher and Miranda Tufnell. Examples of improvisational performances produced by British artists Julyen Hamilton and Sue MacLennan and the American Katie Duck are explored in further detail. In terms of methodology, this area of the research unfolds as a combination of studying critically the written work of these artists, undertaking interviews, attending their performances and participating in their workshops, in order to grasp the notion of improvisational performance as discourse.

In addition, the practical project of the research requires the development of a practical methodology, for which a series of studio experiments is undertaken, as a dialogue between theory and practice. In this context, to provide the space for a non-dialectical confrontation between theory and practice becomes a major task of the research.\(^1\) This position distrusts the linearity of causal explanations and the polarisation of dichotomous interpretations. As Deleuze states in a discussion between Foucault and himself, the relationship between theory and practice is

\[
\text{more partial and fragmentary ... [since] practice is a set of relays from one theoretical point to another, and theory is a relay from one practice to another.}
\]

in Foucault 1977 pp205-206

Under these guidelines, the research unfolds as a 'problematization' in the way this is understood within the idiom of postmodern discourse (Hutcheon 1988) and particularly in the work of the French post-structuralist Michel Foucault (Foucault 1984, pp 381-390).\(^2\)

1.2. Foucault, 'problematization' and discourse

The method of problematising is a familiar practice within postmodern discourse which resists the tendency to seek absolute explanations. Within this
perspective, the character of the research emerges in the course of an open and constantly evolving dialogue, cross-referencing the outcomes of successive interrogations, and often conducted through a multiplicity of analytical lenses.

For Foucault, 'problemizations' are "capable of describing the history of thought" (Foucault 1984 p388).

[The] development of a given into a question, [the] transformation of a group of obstacles and difficulties into problems to which the diverse solutions will attempt to produce a response, this is what constitutes the point of problemization and the specific work of thought.

Foucault 1984 p389

Thus 'problematizations' refer to how problems emerge in the history of thought, and how different types of solutions are devised in response to these problems. In this respect, Foucault's historical methodology develops in relation to "the history of a 'problem' rather than of a 'period'" (Flynn in Gutting 1994 p42). The 'problem' becomes "the answer to the question ... [and] is resolved ... by displacing the question" (Foucault 1988 p185). Posing questions which can be answered only on the basis of carefully defined perspectives fundamentally shapes the research process. Yet the postmodern availability of different perspectives also implies the possibility of endlessly changing the perspective (whenever appropriate), which ultimately becomes a means also of endlessly displacing the original questions. According to Racevskis, Foucault only "raise[s] ... question[s] in order to ... maintain [them] in a permanent state of irresolution" (1983 p116).

Hutcheon (1988) discusses the method of problematising in terms of postmodernism's "doubleness". She claims that to practise a postmodernist critique is paradoxical: "you cannot step outside that which you contest, ... you are always implicated in the value, you choose to challenge" (Hutcheon 1988 p223). Thus, the method of questioning relies on the grounds of its own value and "to claim that questioning is a value in itself is [already] ideological" (Hutcheon 1988 p224), albeit a value shared by traditional epistemology and postmodern thinking.

Using Foucault's strategy, Hutcheon (1988) 'problematizes' the traditional causal relationship between art and theory as well as between practice and theory. She argues for an emancipated consideration which acknowledges overlapping and
similar concerns between the two saying that "the interaction of theory and practice in postmodernism is a complex one of shared responses to common provocations" (1988 p14).

In the specific context of this research, problematising is thus not a means towards a wider truth but a method applicable in a variety of cases which involve issues of theory and practice in dance. The debate reflects strictly upon specific questions and does not aspire any further than to expose, discuss and reaffirm the complexity of the relationship between theory and practice in dance with particular reference to improvisational performance in the context of postmodern dance.

Approaching history as a domain where 'problems' emerge and different solutions are sought in response, Foucault devises 'discourse' as a tool and 'archaeology' as an original methodology. With the former, Foucault adds a postmodern view to epistemology: he studies the production of knowledge only "to document [the latter's] conditions of existence and the practical field in which it is deployed" (Smart 1985 p48). Challenging the argument that knowledge means absolute truth, Foucault contends:

Knowledge is that of which one can speak in a discursive practice ... 
[it] is also the space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse ... [it] is also the field of coordination and subordination of statements in which concepts appear, and are defined, applied and transformed ...

Foucault 1972 pp182-183

Foucault's notion of discourse refers to forms of knowledge which exhibit an element of unity: sciences, theories or various forms of text can be such examples. Nevertheless, this coherence does not originate in the commonality of "an object, a style, concepts or thematic choices ... rather [in] the presence of a systematic dispersion of elements" (Smart 1985 p39). This type of organisation becomes possible because the elements of the discourse are not meaningful as such, but "have the capacity to carry meaning, because they are making a statement" (Racevskis 1983 p70). Yet this capacity relies upon "a play of [discourse's] prescriptions that designate its exclusions and choices" (Foucault 1977 p199).

On the other hand, Foucault's archaeological method does not deal with the material traces of the past in order to fill the gaps of a broken image which,
somehow, corresponds to the 'reality' of that time, as the methods of traditional archaeology would have suggested. Foucauldian archaeology is not interested in the thoughts, representations, images, themes, preoccupations that are concealed or revealed in discourses; but [in] those discourses themselves, those discourses as practices obeying certain rules.

Foucault 1972 p138

It directly assists the deconstruction of the myths of the present by "seek[ing] to dispossess us of our discourses" (Racevskis 1983 p67). The technique consists in identifying modes of knowledge production in the past which affect our understanding of the present "and in stripping them of their virtual self-evidence to discover what constitutes their unity" (Smart 1985 p38). In treating contradictions as "objects of analysis" which are worthwhile as such and not "as a surface phenomenon concealing underlying coherences", archaeology's "effect is diversifying rather than unifying" (Smart 1985 p49). As Foucault says, archaeology "does not proceed, in slow progression, from the confused field of opinion to the uniqueness of the system" (1972 p139). In this way, Foucault opens up the domain of knowledge as a space of disruption and discontinuity; in criticising dominant ideologies, Foucault legitimises both difference and heterogeneity.

Introducing discourse as a mechanism of producing meaning, Foucault abolishes the link between knowledge and truth and treats the vast range of forms of knowledge, available through their traces in texts and other remnants of the past, as "simple options" (Racevskis 1983 p75). By reconsidering the element of self-evidence in historical knowledge, archaeology destabilises the notion of the unified subject because it does not attempt to "trace the origin of discourse to a particular mind or founding subject" (Smart 1985 p48). Practising archaeology, Foucault does not attempt to exclude the problem of the subject, but to define the positions and functions that the subject could occupy in the diversity of discourse.

Foucault 1972 p200

In this sense, Smart describes archaeology as dealing with "the conditions in which a subject ... is constituted as a possible object of knowledge" (1985 p27).
Nevertheless, while "denying the subject his status of unifying consciousness" (Racevskis 1983 p78) Foucault constructs an archaeology, the "self-consciousness" of which is a consequence of his role as an author who practices it. Thus Foucault is "aware of his own subjectivity ... and as his discourse develops ... it raises also the questions of its own truth" (Racevskis 1983 p116). Once more, this method is in tune with Hutcheon's understanding of postmodernism. Hutcheon contends that, within postmodernism, the "humanist assumption of the unified self and an integrated consciousness" are challenged "by [processes of] both installing coherent subjectivity and subverting it" (Hutcheon 1988 pxii).

Looking at his own position through the same lens, Foucault accepts the discursivity of his approach and the impossibility of reaching this meta-systemic level which would make visible the very origins of discourse itself and what motivates it. His perspective is postmodern in Hutcheon's sense of 'doubleness' and paradox: it is a critique from within, a critique which, ironically, "cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine" (Hutcheon 1989, p4). Thus, while not offering any solutions, explanations or answers, he suggests a different form of understanding: one which does not seek to grasp fixed positions, but which is in constant flux in response to successive interrogations.

Foucault introduces problems without necessarily seeking solutions; he protects difference and otherness from the homogenising character of dialectical interpretation. His model offers a useful theoretical background for exposing an instance of the controversial relationship between theory and practice in dance. By these means an examination of improvisational performance in postmodern dance can operate as a case study of practical knowledge in dance.

A number of other poststructuralist thinkers offer theoretical pathways of similar kind. Yet Foucault's method of 'problematisation' and his tool of the discourse are directly relevant to this research because they provide, firstly, a firm methodology of keeping the debate open and, secondly, a specific strategy of dealing with historical material in a non-chronological way.

Lyotard's suggestion for a postmodern consideration of scientific research by means of the 'performative' negates absolute truth, but without addressing the
problem of approaching historical knowledge in any particular way (Lyotard 1984). Lyotard is more interested in 20th century methods of legitimation of knowledge rather than in what constitutes the variety of mechanisms for the justification of knowledge through time. His approach is analytic, not historical, and this is why he prefers to seek assistance from such disciplines as linguistics.

According to Lyotard (1984 p9), knowledge can be legitimated by means of the way it is pronounced as well as on the basis of who pronounces it. He exposes this point of view using Austin’s (1976) concept of the ‘performative’ utterance, an utterance which becomes an action simply by virtue of its enunciation, for instance, "I promise to pay you back tomorrow" (Wales 1989 p344). Lyotard does not expand further on this linguistic consideration of epistemology. Rather he prefers to refocus the discussion on the notion of ‘performativity’ as this operates in economics in terms of "the optimization of the global relationship between input and output" (Lyotard 1984 p11). Lyotard contends that "the two meanings are not far apart. Austin’s performative realizes the optimal performance" (1984 p88, note 30).

Lyotard's project is primarily dealing with the notion of 'narrative'. In this sense, Lyotard is mainly interested in what constitutes the coherence of a 'narrative'. Both the linguistic tool of the 'performative' and the economic concept of 'performativity' seem to be crucial parameters of the mechanics of a 'narrative'. Unfortunately, 'narrative' is primarily about constructing "succession[s] of (related) events" (Wales 1989 p313) and Lyotard is deeply interested in what makes possible this succession and how this can be unveiled. This particular priority makes his approach inappropriate for this research as there is no particular historical narrative in the area of improvisational performance in dance that the research aims to subvert nor does it aspire to construct one.

Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of the 'rhizome' is a tool of postmodern analytical thought which emphasises non-linear considerations and which, for this reason, could facilitate the task of this research. Yet, the problem with the 'rhizome' is that it is too atemporal to assist effectively historical analysis; it "connects any point to any other point ... it has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows" (Deleuze & Guattari 1987 p21). This
spherical pattern does not support a relevant reformulation of the problems of this research. Its non-linear method is of a different kind.

Approaching the skill of performing improvisationally in a way which does not rely on a fixed model of improvisational performance is not facilitated by a 'rhizomatic' arrangement of the research material. The main problem of this research is not that all its aspects can be let free to communicate with each other in this 'nomadic' fashion. Rather it is the challenge of handling a multidimensional and interactive relationship between theory and practice and of constructing an argument on the basis of a multiplicity of materials (not all of which are provided in or transferrable to written word), primarily through the body of a written text.

There is an element of temporality in both the character of the research material (the variety of manifestations of improvisational performance), and the research process itself which cannot be ignored or forced into randomness. On the other hand, the concept of the 'plateau' which accompanies 'rhizome' in some of Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) work, in its anti-climactic conception freezes any kind of motion into static, despite intensified, patterns and renders transformation impossible. Deleuze and Guattari explain:

A plateau is always in the middle, not at the beginning or the end. A rhizome is made of plateaus. Gregory Bateson uses the word 'plateau' to designate something very special: a continuous, self-vibrating region of intensities whose development avoids any orientation toward a culmination point or external end.

Deleuze & Guattari 1987 p21-22

As discussed in further detail in Part 2 of the research, accumulation of a specific kind of practical knowledge is the condition which makes possible the birth of certain forms of movement improvisation or of improvisational performance in dance. In this respect, Deleuze and Guattari’s metaphor of the intensity could be directly relevant. Unfortunately, it appears to be more problematic than helpful in the sense that it cannot accommodate the parameter of transformation. A major aspect of the argument of this research is to expose the transformational character of improvisational performance in dance and, more specifically, the conditions under which manifestations of improvisational dance emerge, transform and disappear.
Foucault does not offer a dedicated method for non-linear considerations. Nevertheless his strategy of 'problematising' becomes directly relevant to this research and creates generous opportunities for an interdisciplinary approach to unfold. Ironically, Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) suggestion on anti-representational thinking probably indicates that in postmodern discourse there is no necessity for analogical relationships. In this respect and within the context of this research, Foucault has not been selected on the basis of an analogical equation which places him as a non-linear theorist whose work supports theoretically a non-linear argument. He has been quoted and referred to only in his capacity to keep the dialogue open and in his approach to historical material in a non-chronological order. The limitations of this approach become visible in Part 3 of this research as a certain 'theory' of improvisational performance is tested against the very practice of the form. Yet, again this has been undertaken on the basis of Foucault's discussion on the dispersion of the subject, thus re-establishing the link with postmodernism's doubleness: a critique which "cannot escape implication in that which it nevertheless still wants to analyze and maybe even undermine" (Hutcheon 1989 p4).

1.3. The starting point: a canvas of events, ideas and interpretations

During the first half of the 1970s, the use of 'total' or open improvisation as a performance mode by the American group Grand Union was a conceptual choice; it was the outcome of a series of reconsiderations of dance which took place during the 1960s as part of a wider revolution in the context of the American avant-garde scene and radically changed attitudes to dance as an art form. The main contribution of this revolution can be epitomised in the shift of focus from appearance to conception within the nature of the artistic object, an element directly borrowed from the work of the Dadaists at the beginning of 20th century (Wheeler 1991). The blurring of the borders between the traditionally distinct art forms was one amongst other elements brought by the new order (Armstrong & Rothfuss 1993).

While postmodern dance grew as an integral part of the American avant-garde art of the 1960s, the character it adopted during the 1970s is indebted to a
double source: the heritage of this wider artistic context and the specific postmodern dance tradition which gradually emerged in the course of the same decade. In this atmosphere, dance artists attempted to emancipate themselves from the traditions of the past, primarily by reconsidering the use of dance vocabularies (Banes 1987). Pedestrian movement was introduced as working material and attention was brought to the dancing body via the new interest in the materiality of dance. 'Movement' as 'dance' was both studied in terms of its mechanics and totally liberated from its traditional role as representation of ideas, stories or feelings.7

Yet, during the second half of the 20th century, emphasis on the body was not exclusive to dance. Brown has pointed out the recent "proliferation of discourses on the body" (1994 p1), some of which can be traced back to the 1960s. In the post-war optimism of the developing American society, the interest in the phenomenological sense of the 'experience' and the "growing suspicion of verbal means" (Banes 1993 p191) contributed to the celebration of the physical body as an "alternative to the primacy of the verbal" (Banes 1993, p191). Holistic approaches to the body became increasingly popular, providing new models of understanding and suggesting new methods of treating both the physical and metaphorical illnesses of the harassed postmodernist body. Movement became a preferred means of self-study and subsequent therapy.

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, a number of improvisational practices which invested in a diversity of body and movement concepts emerged as independent practices in the U.S., not all of which were directly connected with dance. Such examples are Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen’s technique of ‘Body Mind Centering’ (Bainbridge-Cohen 1993) and Mary Starks Whitehouse’s approach to ‘Authentic Movement’ (Whitehouse 1987).8 This lineage, which draws from the discoveries of the 1930s through the work of Mabel Todd, and even further back via Frederick Matthias Alexander and others, reaches the present time, informing through the years the making of improvisational dance.9

In the early 1970s, a parallel story can be seen in Britain. Rosemary Butcher and Mary Fulkerson both fertilised the birth of British New Dance from their direct experience of the early American dance postmodernism.10 The former celebrated the primacy of the concept in the making of dance (Butcher 1992) and introduced

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improvisation as her preferred choreographic tool; the latter established the British tradition of New Dance through her teaching at Dartington College of Art, and consolidated the use of movement improvisation as a practice informing dance through the teaching of release technique (Fulkerson 1981-82).

Recently, a renewed interest in improvisational performance has stimulated further research in the character of the Grand Union work (Ramsay 1991 pxvi). At the same time, there is much significance in studying the nature of a major shift which has taken place both in the practice and conceptualisation of improvisational dance since the 1970s. It can be argued that during the last 25 years, while improvisational performance was manifesting itself on the basis of how various artists understood it, the experience of materialising it offered new insights into the form, thus suggesting new concepts for subsequent materialisations. This narrative of constant change organises the raw material of relevant information, sources and 'factual' details into an initial picture which opens the discussion.

The Grand Union's choice of improvisation as a performance mode was conceptual; an answer to the question 'what is dance?'. The purpose of this approach was mainly ideological; improvisation was chosen because of its power as statement of belief rather than its potential for new explorations at the level of movement and composition. New solutions to the generation of movement material and compositional approaches had been explored to a large extent during the 1960s with the Judson Dance Theater and post-Judson work; Grand Union was able to use extensively the material of these discoveries.

In the following years, improvisational dance gradually took on new tools. Not only was it increasingly informed by the work of the independent improvisational practices, but further aspects in relation to its character were gradually clarified, amongst which was the relationship between the work and the audience.

In addition, by using a wide range of movement and composition concepts, the improvisers were able to develop more sophisticated systems of selecting the material to meet the requirements of the instantaneous character of the work. The operation of such decision-making systems has often been described as 'instant composition'. This term, by joining improvisation with composition, draws
attention, firstly, to the major difference between improvisation as a performance mode and any other uses of improvisation and, secondly, to the necessity of a 'concept of composition', on the basis of which materials from a wide range of movement concepts are selected and 'composed' within the unique event of the performance.

Current improvisational work has inherited from the avant-garde American art tradition of the 1960s the perspective of 'art as life'. This position emphasises the understanding of artistic work as a means of both practising and suggesting new attitudes to everyday life, thus contributing to the birth of a new culture.

In the 1960s, the extreme position of the totally improvisational performance was intended to stimulate changes in the ways art was perceived at the time. This was not separate from the artists' overall attitude to life: rather, it was an aspect of their ideology of freedom and equality embodied through culture. The current practitioners of improvisational performance have not rejected this position; they still practise this form of dance as a manifestation of their attitude to life and, by doing so, they still attempt to provoke changes in the way art is conceptualised. By embracing a type of work which prioritises the element of choice so persistently, they believe their dance is political, a celebration of life and freedom - such a difficult task for the 1990s, stumbling towards the millennium in the middle of incurable illnesses, natural disasters and various forms of discrimination.

1.4. Resourcing the discourse

This research originated as a wide investigation of the use of improvisational practices in the context of postmodern dance. During this initial stage, it became increasingly evident that there was much scope in focusing on improvisational performance for two reasons. Firstly, because of a lack of consistent academic work directly dealing with this area. Secondly there is currently a renewed interest in improvisational performance at the level of dance-making while dance theorists seem significantly engaged with such closely related issues as the concept of the 'thinking body' and the possibility for a New Aesthetic in dance. In addition, approaching the research process with a postmodern sensibility, the element of personal perspective becomes also crucial. In this sense, the debate emerging from the
investigation of improvisational performance in the context of postmodern dance was very relevant to my current personal concerns in the sense of locating my theoretical preoccupations with direct significance to my artistic practices and vice versa.

In terms of written sources, the majority of the material has been found in the form of articles in two non-academic journals: the American Contact Quarterly and the British New Dance. This has both advantages and disadvantages. Most of these articles were written by artists or practitioners, which means that, although they lack scholarly discussion, they can be valuable as primary sources. They are contemporaneous with the manifestations of improvisation and they come directly from the relevant individuals.

The work of the American dance historian Sally Banes (1980, 1987, 1993 and 1994), as well as the contributions of the British academic Stephanie Jordan (1992) and dance critic Judith Mackrell (1992) have also made available crucial information and perspectives for the research. Material was also found in such journals as the American publication Dance Scope (no longer published), the currently available American Ballet Review and Dance Chronicle and the British Dance Theatre Journal and in rare instances in the ‘mainstream’ American Dancemagazine and the British Dancing Times. Finally, the Australian journal Writings on Dance has also supported the construction of a critical debate in relation to issues directly relevant to the research: for instance the problem of the ‘thinking body’, which is discussed in Chapter 3. In addition the critical debate has been largely supported by scholarly sources on the concept of postmodernism and the nature of knowledge in epistemology (as described in section 1.1 of this chapter).

In terms of dance material, the research process was seriously affected by a remarkable lack of audio-visual sources. Although the period dealt with was chronologically a fairly recent one, there is almost no available evidence in the form of videotaped improvisational performances, particularly for the 1960s and 1970s. Both the artistic spirit of this period and the nature of this dance form celebrated the transient character of the artistic product, thus avoiding the production of records for the future.
Interestingly, it became possible to identify useful areas of discussion in relation to postmodern dance production within the literature on the American visual arts of the 1960s. In a mixture of academic and non-academic publications, these references were helpful in providing contextual material while supporting the hypothesis that dance at that time developed as an integral part of the wider avant-garde context.

The practical project of the research in the form of a series of studio experiments leading to an improvisational performance event provided an additional kind of source material. This work originated as an effort to increase my familiarity with the practice of improvisation and evolved as an interactive process incorporating my personal artistic concerns, the knowledge emerging from studying the work of other artists and a number of theoretical perspectives made available by the academic character of the whole attempt. It has been thoroughly documented on video and examples from this archive have been selected to illustrate the points developed in Part 3 of the research.

The particular character of this practical project significantly affected the ultimate choice of focusing the discussion in the area of practical knowledge and the accompanying debate in relation to theoretical and practical aspects of dance making. Given the significance of the personal perspective within a postmodern consideration, it is also worth mentioning that a similar interest is also traceable in my own personal history and long involvement with dance. My past experience of practising dance in a constant spirit of interrogation had been always assisted by the analytical tools of coincidental theoretical considerations. The possibility of undertaking this project as part of a research process offered the appropriate context for approaching the problem of the relationship between theory and practice in dance making with academic discipline. In addition, my constant interest in the politics of dance is epitomised, in attacking the argument of theory-practice dichotomy from the perspective of the practice.

Part 1 of the research seeks both to expose the theoretical background of the discussion and to locate this background in terms of the specific project. Chapter 2 is dedicated to the notion of 'improvisation' with the special concern of clarifying
the way the term 'improvisational performance' has been used in this thesis. The work of the American performance group Grand Union becomes the point of reference within a historical perspective further explored in Part 2 of the research in a combined study of the work of both American and British artists.

Chapter 3 deals with aspects of epistemology, concentrating on Carr's theory of theoretical and practical rationality (as this has been mentioned in section 1.1 of this chapter), upon which the argument of the research later develops. As Adshead (1989) has pointed out, Carr (1981) claims that practical understanding cannot be demonstrated as a series of successfully followed logical steps; rather it is manifested in the competence of carrying out the action using a number of relevant practical procedures. It follows that, while the practical aspect of the research becomes an effort to achieve the knowing how of performing improvisationally, a number of theoretical questions also emerge within the process of learning how to 'carry out the action' successfully.

The notions of practical and theoretical knowledge are also discussed in the specific context of improvisational practices. In addition, issues of subjectivity are briefly presented in the context of the postmodern critical debate, relevant problems are identified and Foucault's perspective on the dispersion of the subject is also discussed. Thus an appropriate theoretical background is provided to support the discussion on the decentred subjectivity of the improvisational dance artist undertaken in Part 3.

In this way, Part 1 of the research presents the main components of the task: 'I want to know how to perform improvisationally', so that Part 2 can proceed towards the materialisation of the action. It is during this phase that the practical steps of the project have to be characterised and Foucault's epistemological tool of the discourse becomes highly instrumental.

Discourse "is a surface on which concepts take shape according to a system of discursive regularities" and, therefore, to designate the practical procedures towards a particular task means to "discern the articulations inherent in [this] conceptual field" (Racevskis 1983 p74). The emphasis on the conceptual does not underestimate the materiality of dance; rather it draws attention to the fact that dance is a cultural phenomenon. Dance gets materialised in a number of ways on the basis
of how the individuals involved in each case understand the notion of dance, and in the context of this research, improvisational dance.

It can be argued that while approaching the process of learning how to perform improvisationally, it is possible to avoid following the specific guidelines of any one of the improvisers whose work is discussed in Part 2 of the thesis. Nevertheless, in order for the work to have the character of an 'improvisational performance', it must share the same 'discursive regularities'.

In this process, Foucault's archaeological method facilitates a re-reading of the research material in the light of the contextual information. A range of different understandings of the form of improvisational performance thus become available. The list of artists interviewed for their approach to improvisational practices includes the Americans Mary Fulkerson, Steve Paxton, Katie Duck, Lance Gries and the British Rosemary Butcher, Julyen Hamilton, Miranda Tufnell, Sue MacLennan. A number of other people who have worked in close proximity to improvisational artists such as students, dancers or musicians have been also approached. Archaeology becomes a tool of deciphering the above mentioned artists’ vocabularies and trace their lineages. This work culminates in my own interpretation of the term ‘improvisational performance’, a discursive analysis according to which the elements of the specific instances of this dance form are dispersed in terms of notions of choice, change, concept and ideology, which are discussed in chapters 4, 5, 6, and 7 respectively.

Part 2 also provides the opportunity for selectively identifying differences and similarities between British and American improvisational dance. While the latter can be directly traced to the Grand Union experience of the 1970s, the former emerges from the work of Rosemary Butcher, Mary Fulkerson and Steve Paxton’s work in the U.K. during the 1970s. Butcher and Fulkerson, although not dealing directly with improvisational performance, can be credited for the popularity of a range of improvisational techniques in the U.K. Steve Paxton, on the other hand, made available to the British improvisers his technique of contact improvisation as well as the atmosphere of the American 1960s, by directly transfusing to his Dartington students the sense of community, democracy and informality of the
avant-garde arts of the early American dance postmodernists. Thus, current British and American improvisers share similar concerns out of slightly different lineages.

It must be emphasised that the work mentioned above has been approached through strategies of 'new history', avoiding the development of a chronology and the attempt to reconstruct a true picture of the 'past'. The main objective is rather to shape pieces of selected information into an initial starting point for the subsequent discussion.

Part 3 of the research discusses the practical aspect of performing improvisationally. As the studio work meets the theoretical aspects of the problem both the practical procedures and their conceptual approaches are constantly re-shaped. Discussing these experiments in terms of the use of choice, the emphasis on change, the relevance of the concept and the politics of interrogation, the controversial character of the undertaking becomes increasingly visible. The specific problems of practical projects based on personal processes in academic research are also briefly explored in Part 3.

Chapter 8 presents aspects of the practical project as this evolved over a period of 22 months (from July 1994 to May 1996). Extracts from diaries and notes, as well as excerpts from videotaped studio improvisational sessions have been used to support this task. The discontinuous character of 'crossing the border' between the theoretical aspects of such notions as choice, change, concept and ideology in the context of improvisational performance in dance and their practical contribution to studio experiments has been also addressed.

Chapter 9 presents and discusses the final product of the practical project, namely the improvisational performance event which took place in May 1996. The controversial character of this work brings to the fore two areas of discussion. Firstly, the problematic notion of authorship in improvisational work stimulates the debate in relation to the postmodern critique of the unified subject. Within the context of this particular project, the improviser's work from the position of a decentred subjectivity offers appropriate material for the study of a unique dancing subjectivity, one which, according to Foucault, "is not a substance but a form" (Schrift 1995 p38) and, moreover, one which is in the 'process of becoming' (Kristeva 1984).
Secondly, the nature of this improvisational performance event poses crucial questions in relation to ‘what a dance piece consists of’ as it suggests a different perspective for the characterisation of this form of artistic work, one which is mainly shaped by the improviser’s intentions. Not only are the areas of analysis and appreciation challenged by the primary significance of the element of the dialogue in improvisational work, but they also face the possibility of an alternative conception of what a dance piece might be.

Chapter 9 also faces the problem of the assessment of the practical project, insofar as the whole process was originally introduced within the perspective of a learning skill. Within the challenge of the improviser’s decentred subjectivity, and an alternative approach to the notion of the dance piece, the task of the assessment becomes extremely controversial.

In conclusion, this research suggests that it is possible to arrive at a reconsidered notion of choreography or ‘dance making’, one which operates beyond the traditional practice of devising and structuring movement material in the form of ‘dance steps’. Furthermore, the possibility for an alternative understanding of what a dance piece might be, primarily situated within the intentions of the dance performer, can support the integrity of the dance element within cross-disciplinary artistic formations.

In addition, examples of practical methodologies are provided in the areas of, firstly, using theoretical means directly within dance making (as in the case of the practical project of the research which has been crucially shaped by the understanding of improvisational performance as discourse) and, secondly, using the element of dance in interdisciplinary artistic contexts on the basis of a dialogue between the different art forms.

All these points in relation to alternative possibilities for an understanding and making of dance, based on an exploration of the improvisational performance, support the postmodern stance of multiple perspectives and advocate the merits of non-dichotomous and non-hierarchical methodologies in the study of dance.
NOTES

1. Hutcheon contends that "there is no dialectic in the postmodern" (1988 px). As Quinton notes, "dialectical logic sees contradictions as fruitful collisions of ideas from which a higher truth may be reached by way of synthesis" (in Bullock et al 1998 p225). In his theorising, Foucault does not seek to "produce a new synthesis, but rather to postpone indefinitely the very possibility of such a synthesis" (Racevskis 1983 p88).

2. There is a difference in the way the term 'to problematize' appears in various written sources. Hutcheon (1988) uses, in the majority of the cases, the verb 'to problematize' or the gerund 'problematizing' and very rarely the noun 'problematization'. Sheridan who has translated the interview 'The Concern for Truth' (Foucault 1988 pp255-267) uses more often the noun 'problematization'. By contrast, Davis, who has translated Foucault's interview 'On Polemics, Politics and Problemizations' included in Rabinow (1984 pp381-390), prefers the shorter term 'problemization'.

3. Hutcheon (1989) also argues that another paradoxical aspect of the postmodern critique is its inherent element of "complicity". Postmodernism is not 'innocent' in the sense that it also encompasses elements of power and domination. Its practices operate on the basis of their own ideological foundations. The device of 'parody', through which fragments of past representations contribute to the construction of the present (reality), operates as an ironic comment of postmodernism's impossibility to escape from its own ideology while "signal[ling] how present representations come from past ones and what ideological consequences derive from both continuity and difference" (Hutcheon 1989 p93).

4. Considering himself and his approach as part of his system of study, Foucault adopts a reflexive position which brings to mind similar approaches in 20th century physics. In quantum theory there are cases in which the results of the experiments are not considered within the perspective of causality. By contrast, "the measuring apparatus, the observer and the quantum phenomena to be measured functionally constitute a system which itself reflexively defines properties of the phenomena which may be measured" (Suber in Bartlett and Suber 1987 p13).

5. Nancy Lewis, who was a member of Grand Union emphasises that she enjoyed the intellectual character of the work. She notices: "The physicality was also obviously brilliant and thrilling but it was the minds between the lines" (in Banes 1987 p224).

6. A detailed account on Grand Union's work has been provided by Ramsay (1991). See Banes (1987) on the early American dance postmodernism and Banes (1993) for the American avant-garde art of the early 1960s, an integral part of which was the work of the early dance postmodernists. For further information on the American avant-garde art of the 1960s see Batcock (1966, 1968 and 1973) and Chapter 6 (6.2) of this research.
7. Since the 1950s, Merce Cunningham had already been investigating the possibility of using movement as dance for its own sake.

8. Bainbridge-Cohen explains that Body Mind Centering is "currently applied by people involved in ... dance, athletics, bodywork, physical occupational, movement and speech therapies, psychotherapy, medicine, child development education, voice, music and the visual arts, meditation, yoga, martial arts" (1993 p2). "Authentic movement" on the other hand was originally conceived by Mary Starks Whitehouse as form of movement therapy (Olsen 1993 p47).

9. Lisa Nelson and Nancy Stark Smith, editors of the American journal Contact Quarterly who included in this publication articles by Bainbridge-Cohen on Body-Mind Centering (between 1980 and 1992) explain: "Our particular interests as dancers ... have served as a lens through which the BMC material was focused for the CQ readership" (in Bainbridge-Cohen 1993 pxi). In addition, Paxton (1995) points out the importance of Body Mind Centering and other holistic approaches to the body for the development of improvisational dance. Clark-Smith (1996/interview) mentions that the way 'contact improvisation' has evolved as a technique since the 1970s very much relies on movement knowledge made available through Body Mind Centering work that the practitioners had experienced. Finally, Olsen (1993) describes examples of using the approach of 'Authentic Movement' in performance work. More information on Body-Mind Centering and 'Authentic Movement' is included in Chapter 4 (4.3.1).

10. See Crickmay (1988) for Mary Fulkerson's contribution and Jordan (1992) for a detailed account of Rosemary Butcher's training and early work both in teaching and choreographing.

11. In her account of the Grand Union work, Banes writes: "What is a dance? What could the outer limits of dance art be? ... A new world of possibilities ... had come into being" (1987 p218).

12. The Grand Union not only inherited attitudes to dance and compositional strategies from the Judson and post-Judson period of the 1960s but in some cases, their work included movement material directly borrowed from earlier periods. Steve Paxton mentions that, in the early days of the group, Grand Union could be considered as "a repertory dance company with an inheritance from Continuous Project - Altered Daily" (Paxton 1972 p129). The latter was a piece conceived by Yvonne Rainer in 1969 which, while being performed, evolved from the more 'set' to the less 'set' and led to the beginning of Grand Union as a company (Ramsay 1991). Similarly, David Gordon who participated both in Judson Theater group and Grand Union admits that:

When Grand Union began its improvisatory evenings ... he fell back on doing the sequence (Trio A) whenever he felt he might run out of things to do.

Banes 1987 p53

Trio A was a piece by Yvonne Rainer premiered in 1966. More information on Grand Union's work is included in Chapter 2, (2.5.).
Lorber describes the work of Grand Union as resulting in an "ambivalent relationship with the audience" (1973 p34). He explains that this problem emerged because the boundaries between audience and performers had been blurred; often these performances had the character of a workshop because the group "aim[ed] to spur themselves new awareness" (Lorber 1973 p34).


For more information in this area see Banes (1993) and Sayres (1984) as well as Chapter 2 of this thesis.

In a recent issue of the American journal Contact Quarterly focusing on 'sexuality & identity', Jaime Schmitt wonders: "Does Contact [Improvisation] now exist within a new culture? How has our cultural ideology changed [since the 1970s]?" (1996 p44). In the same issue, Cynthia Rounds discussing the problem of dancing/performing and pregnancy contends: "We in the C[ontact] I[mprovisation] community have profound body wisdom, resources unavailable to the culture at large. It behooves us to use them!" (1996, p55). The American improvisational artist Lance Gries (1995/i) who has also worked for many years with the American postmodern dancer and choreographer Trisha Brown, adopts a similar position in a more extreme fashion. He sees current dance artists as 'healers', in the sense that their deep (experiential) knowledge of the body is such a powerful tool that it can let them see possibilities for solving global problems which would be otherwise unsurpassable.

As examples of this recent academic attitude, see Dempster (1994/95 and 1995/96).

The interviews conducted specifically for this research are listed in a separate section of the bibliography. This is why the symbol ‘/i’, follows the dates of all the references which belong in this material.

For example, Caroline Waters (1996/i), who studied at Dartington College of Arts, Devon, UK in the late 1980s, has been interviewed in relation to her training with Steve Paxton, Mary Fulkerson, Katie Duck and Julyen Hamilton. Dancer Jo Blowers (1995/i) has been also interviewed in relation to her experience of collaborating with the British improvisational artist Miranda Tufnell. Finally the musician Sylvia Hallett has been approached both on the basis of her collaboration with Tufnell and her personal work in the British improvising music scene since the 1970s.

The debate in the area of 'new history' can be traced back at least to the 1950s and includes a number of different perspectives within the main task of reconsidering the nature of history. Such authors as White (1978a, 1978b and 1987) and LaCapra (1983) have extensively produced relevant work. Within this perspective, the domain of history has been approached on the basis of the assumption that there are no absolute truths and, in this sense, writing history becomes a re-writing largely affected by the position of the author in relation to the material. In the area of dance history, Adshead-Lansdale suggests a similar methodology: a "mapping of events, which takes into account the position of those who created dances and those who wrote about them, in the past and who do so now" (1994 p20).
To locate the notion of improvisational performance in terms of how this has been used in the context of this research does not imply the necessity of providing definitions;¹ neither as far as improvisational performance is concerned nor even in relation to the wider concept of improvisation. In postmodern discourse, it is crucial rather to identify the perspective within which a theoretical claim has been made and to make clear that there can be other options or different forms of understanding. This framework resists the possibility of approaching the material in dualistic fashion, locating it in terms of right and wrong, or placing it within binary relationships of diametrically opposite concepts.

Thus the main aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the fact that there can be no universally accepted notion of improvisation which is valid across space and time. Similarly, there is no necessity of polarisation, in terms of positioning improvisation in dance making as a process opposite to choreography, or improvisational work as opposite to set work in dance. This appears to be a rather inadequate theoretical consideration in relation to the wide range of 'in between' possibilities currently available in the context of postmodern dance.

¹
In this way, it becomes possible to concentrate on aspects of 'improvisational performance' within a specific framework of space and time without arriving at causal interpretations supported by contextual or chronologically prior information. The domain of postmodern dance has been selected with special attention to the American performance group Grand Union during the first half of the 1970s. The work of the latter has been presented as an instance of 'total improvisation'. An initial attempt to provide an understanding of 'improvisational performance' has been made in relation to this material. Part 2 continues the discussion by looking at the work of subsequent British and American improvisers as this has been manifested during the last twenty years alongside an ever changing concept of 'improvisational performance'.

It is important to clarify that the contextual information and the discussion on prior and contemporaneous (but different) uses of improvisation included in this chapter are not meant to cover the area comprehensively nor to construct a firm lineage within which improvisational performance can be located. Rather they provide an overview of selected forms of knowledge possibly available in various degrees to the artists whose work has been examined in this research.

It follows that this chapter aims at pointing out a particular way of both practising and understanding improvisational performance in the light of a number of other possibilities in improvisation. It is crucial to remember, though, that various types of links can be identified between improvisational performance and these other possibilities. Improvisational performance in dance has not been always directly informed by other forms of movement improvisation. Some of the latter have indirectly contributed to the birth of improvisational performance either through processes of their own transformation or as areas in which resistance or denial has been ultimately exercised. On the basis of this theoretical position, these experiences cannot be considered as 'influential'. Rather, they should be understood as a range of tools, verified through experience, on the basis of which further experimentation could be undertaken.

The whole picture is neither even nor smooth. Yet, it is a space which acknowledges both disruption and discontinuity in the way Foucault (1972) and other postmodern theorists have discussed.
2.1. About improvisation

From within the philosophical discourse, Ryle (1979) not only prefers to replace the terms 'imagination', 'creativity', 'originality' with 'improvisation' but also detects an improvising element in the very mechanism of 'thinking' itself. He asserts that

the vast majority of things that happen in the universe are in high or low degree unprecedented, unpredictable, and never to be repeated.

Ryle 1979 p125

Human thinking and the ability to respond to such unpredictability is also part of this picture, insofar as "innovative thinking is a necessary element in inferring itself" (Ryle 1979 p127). Technically, the way this mechanism operates means it is possible that "between some premises and some conclusions there are no intermediate steps" (Kolenda in Ryle 1979 p12).

This is an unusual position for the philosophical discourse because improvising becomes thus "logically necessary" within the process of human thought (Kolenda in Ryle 1979 p12). On the basis of this assumption, Ryle comes to the conclusion that thinking "quite generally is, at the least, the engaging of partly trained wits in a partly fresh situation" (Ryle 1979 p129). It seems as if, for Ryle, thinking is always creative; moreover, as if a degree of improvisation is always part of the very process of thinking. In a similar way, improvisation can be described as the ability to bring together efficiently the partly known with the partly unknown. If it were feasible to devise a general definition of improvisation, this statement would probably be fairly close to it.

From her perspective as a dance educationalist, Barbara Haselbach would probably agree with it, at least, as far as movement improvisation in dance education is concerned. Her understanding of the term includes two options: improvisation as "experience" and improvisation as "spontaneous creation of form and content" (1981 p5-6).

In the first case, the unknown movement possibilities of the body are explored from the known position of the mover as individual. This can be accomplished as a "sensitizing experience ... focus[ing] not on the creative activity itself, but on the individual perception and its capacity to differentiate" (Haselbach 1981
The second case is a formalisation of the human being's need to express her or his "stored experiences"; it is an 'inside out' process which creates a new (and therefore unknown) vessel (or form) for the already existing (Haselbach 1981 p6). As Ryle has said: "It is the pitting of an acquired competence or skill against unprogrammed opportunity, obstacle or hazard" (1979 p129).\(^3\)

Yet, after Wittgenstein, there is not much space for definitions.\(^4\) From the perspective of the practitioner, the American improvisational artist, Steve Paxton, not only avoids any similar attempt but finds it particularly difficult to speak about improvisation.

Trying to pin down something concrete about improvisation ... was a mind wrenching experience. Verbal experience is a different state of mind than improvisational experience, and I learned once again, that a rule of thumb of media might be: one medium cannot describe another. Writing about movement is an academic sideline to an experience of now/now where the "/" is indicator of time passing. Paxton 1980 p44

It remains that improvisation in dance is the totality of cases named as such, all of them assembled together in one group by means of their 'family resemblances'.\(^5\) To study these 'family resemblances' means to isolate smaller groups of instances of improvisation and this would probably be a more realistic task. Except that the same problem would appear in smaller scale: more 'family resemblances', smaller groups and so on.

In addition, to describe improvisational performance as the form of theatre dance in which there is no choreography and movement takes place spontaneously during the event of the performance does not only polarises the relationship between choreography and improvisation, it also implies the necessity of a pre-existing definition of the concept of choreography.

2.2. What is improvisational performance?

To claim that, in improvisational performance, the audience witnesses "the creation and disappearance of irretrievable formal elements" (Sulzman 1979 p16) is a possibility but not a necessity.\(^6\)
Dworin (1981) provides more parameters of what she names ‘improvisation in performance’ and which further specify the sort of ‘family resemblances’ one expects to find within the idiom of improvisational performance. Nevertheless, the term ‘improvisation in performance’ is not very accurate; although it places ‘improvisation’ in the context of ‘performance’, it does not guarantee that improvisation is the only, or even the main, performance mode of the work. This expression can also refer to those cases in which small parts of a set dance piece have not been choreographed and the dancers are free to fill these ‘gaps’ in their own ways, with relevance to the main concept.

The above description is not what characterises improvisational performance as such and, as Dworin says, the audience too is expected to play a different role.

The emphasis in a performance of improvisation is different, as is the attitude it requires of its audience. It is a process of creating at the very same moment as performing and it asks an audience by their presence to become part of that making process ... The audience must be able to suspend their notions of art as a spectacular event and be ready to participate kinaesthetically and emotionally in the creating of art in the moment.

Dworin 1981 p12

Dworin adds it is crucial to stress the argument that the unstructured character of improvisational performance does not reflect the absence of skill or discipline (1981 p12); most significantly, it does not indicate a lack of ability to use compositional techniques. In fact, the mechanism of decision-making during the performance event operates on the basis of instantaneous choices of primarily compositional character.7

Pressing notes that the literature about the teaching of improvisation in music includes at least five approaches (in Sloboda 1988). The oldest one that can be found in history manuals on Western music is largely based on the idea that "improvisation is real-time composition and that no fundamental distinction need be drawn between the two" (Pressing in Sloboda 1988 p142). In principle, it seems that improvisation in music is generally understood as improvisation in the context of performance. Pressing also discusses the character of improvisational skill in music pointing out that it
depends partly on increasing the efficiency of perceptual processing to allow the inclusion of more and better-selected information in the improviser's decision-making procedures.

Pressing in Sloboda 1988 p167

The element of decision-making is far more important in performance than in other contexts where improvisation might be used. Amongst other possibilities, decision-making also refers to compositional choices in terms of timing as this takes place in the form of response to other elements of the work. In dance, improvisation is often used for choreographic purposes. Under these circumstances the improvisational process is much less about composition than about generation of movement material. Yet, in music, this use of improvisation is more of an exception (Pressing in Sloboda 1988).

Emphasising the compositional aspect of improvisational performance in dance facilitates a reconsidered understanding of the relationship between improvisation and choreography. This theoretical position is not without relevance to manifestations of postmodern dance during the last thirty years. As Fulkerson explains, in this context, choreography became "concerned with what it is to be present within experience" (1996 p40). She situates this perspective in relation to the post-modernist search for the real person in dance, the whole person, the holistic act of performing, and the non-manipulative approach to the audience.

Fulkerson 1996b p40

Fulkerson locates her own work "in the neighbourhood of Contact" (1996b p42), which is indeed a form of improvisation.

In the same article, Fulkerson (1996b) directly situates Contact Improvisation within the follow-ons of the Grand Union work. Similarly this research argues that the Grand Union experiment was the culmination of a series of reconsiderations of the medium of dance which took place in the avant-garde American dance scene during the 1960s. By adopting the extreme artistic strategy of 'total improvisation', this work provided the ultimate crystallisation of the perspective according to which 'dance could be anything'.

It was not surprising, then, that a number of new attitudes to dance as an art form subsequently became possible, amongst which improvisational dance could also
Yet, because of the socio-economic character of the following decades (a series of economic crises with international repercussions and retrogression towards more conservative political attitudes), the artistic ethos of the 1960s and 1970s was quickly abandoned. Banes writes in the late 1980s: "We can no longer afford the permissiveness of the sixties ... Ours is an age of artifice, specialization, conservation and competition" (1987 pxxviii). Siegel, referring to the dance production of the 1980s, also notes: "Little by little the diversity, the unpredictability, the strangeness that was so much a part of experimental dance was tamed" (1991, p xiv). The artistic attitudes that responded to the 1960s optimism, sense of democracy and freedom lost financial and audience support and became marginalised. Improvisational dance was part of this.

Fulkerson also explains that, for the last twenty-seven years, she has been involved with "developing mind-body imagery within choreography" and she describes her work as

the creation of forms which are participatory, chaotic, life-like in structure, which allow for continual renewal and change, as well as imply lines of predictability.

Fulkerson 1996b p42

Fulkerson does not use the term 'choreography' in contrast to 'improvisation'; rather she refers to dance making or dance production as a whole, encompassing the entire range between completely improvised movement work to strictly choreographed, as this is manifested in the practice of postmodern dance. This is an interesting perspective, which exhibits an integrated understanding of these terms, from the position of the practitioner, whose involvement with creative work in the area of dance making has dissolved the accompanying theoretical contradiction. By locating choreography and improvisation along a single spectrum, Fulkerson does not simply legitimise them both in equal terms but also creates an appropriate conceptual framework within which all their possible combinations become acceptable.

2.3. A reference to the past: movement improvisation and modern dance

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, neither the reconsiderations of the 1960s, nor the work of the Grand Union was an exclusive domain where
improvisation contributed to Western dance production during the 20th century. The whole preceding tradition of modern dance had made available a number of creative tools. For instance, improvisational techniques were an important part of the work of such modern dance artists as the Americans Isadora Duncan and Alwin Nikolais, and the German Mary Wigman. It can be argued that Isadora Duncan's theory of movement has an improvisational aspect, which is her fundamental trust of the body. For Duncan, movement meant a response to experience and experience is very much linked to emotion. According to Martin,

She has described her search for certain key movements which should arise out of elemental emotional experiences such as fear and love, and from which a whole series of developing movement should flow as of its own volition.

Martin in Magriel 1947 p6

Duncan was firmly convinced that "spontaneous movement of the body is the first reaction of all men to sensory or emotional stimuli" (Martin in Magriel 1947 p3). This position brings to mind the technique of Contact Improvisation, which prioritises the understanding of movement as response to direct physical stimuli through sharing weight with a partner (Novack 1990).

In traditional dance literature, Duncan has been frequently criticised for not having provided a proper technique in relation to her innovative approach to movement. In some ways, such opinions reflect the failure of traditional dance theory to acknowledge improvisational approaches to movement as frameworks within which movement can be generated in specifically chosen ways.

Scholarly work on Duncan's contribution preceding the recent emphasis on the notion of bodily intelligence cannot avoid the assumption that improvisation is the opposite of choreography. Layson claims that Duncan is not an improvisor, because this seems to be the only means of legitimising her work as choreography (1987 p165). Within this perspective what validates the work of a choreographer is the ability to exercise choice and the risk of taking the responsibility of the decision-making process, thus assuming that improvisation lacks the above features and occupies a lower position within a hierarchical system based on higher and lower forms of dance.
Current dance theory would probably come to different conclusions. Given the diversity of current approaches to the body, which shape the development of several ‘techniques’ of movement production, the specificity of Duncan’s ‘technique’ could be evident in her concept of how the body moves. "She had become convinced ... that movement arose from a central inner source which she called the soul" (Martin in Magriel 1947 p5). Although this belief adds a spiritual character to Duncan’s work, it can be argued that her method of movement production was operating on the basis of specific choices made according to her understanding of how the body moves.

Daly discusses the same problem from a feminist perspective without touching upon improvisation as opposed to choreography; rather she concentrates on the problematic aspect of a gendered-biased (and therefore hierarchical) understanding of the relationship between the dancer (the performer) and the choreographer. She contends that Duncan has been described as dancer rather than choreographer by her contemporary critics and historians because of their "wilful denial" of her different sense of choreography (1992 p241).

This perspective exposes the discussion to another form of dichotomous interpretation; in this case body and mind are not only separate from a philosophical point of view, they are also strictly attributed to two separate areas of the society. The mind, which is responsible for the decision-making processes of the human being, is the realm both of the choreographer and the male. The body is the domain of the dancer and it becomes the means by which the female fulfils her role in meeting the needs of the male.

Daly disagrees with the argument that the theory of the ‘male gaze’ provides an appropriate lens through which to read Duncan’s contribution. She claims that "a new theory of representation is required: one that includes within its very structure the capacity for change" (1992 p244). It seems that this suggestion is better equipped in relation to the currently changing notion of choreography. In this respect, Daly’s understanding of Duncan’s contribution implies a reconsideration of what the choreographer’s skill might be. Daly notes:

Unlike ballet, [Duncan’s] dancing was not vocabulary-intensive ... her vocabulary served as a kind of neutral backdrop for the dynamic
coloring of her movement. For it was how she moved - and sometimes how she stood still - that distinguished her dancing.

Daly 1995 p64

Daly adds that Duncan's use of structure was similar to her use of movement vocabulary, in the sense of "a framework, meant to recede from view as the work was performed" (1995 p67). Finally, Daly identifies further similarities in the way Duncan used tension-release principles in building movement vocabulary and choreographic structure.

The lifting of the arm is precisely calculated ... The upper arm is tensed as it is raised until midpoint, when the full arm and chest are released upward together. Duncan strategically choreographed such release points into her dances, usually at the top of an extension.

Daly 1995 p78

Martin also reports Duncan's discovery of the relationship between "emotion and visceral action and visceral action to outward movement" (in Magriel 1947 p5). This information brings to mind such current approaches to the body and movement as Body-Mind Centering (BMC). An important objective of the BMC technique is to increase the mover's awareness in relation to her/his internal organs and support with this knowledge a wider understanding of the movement possibilities of the body.15

Mary Wigman's approach to movement was also improvisational. Yet, hers was understood and used more as a technique "to make the body an instrument so dexterous and so pliant that it can express all shades of emotions" (Wigman 1975 p53), than as a material repercussion of a certain spiritual conception of the body. It was a tool of exploration, not unexpectedly emphasising individual processes, in Laban's fashion:16

Instead of studying dancing from a diagram of what other dancers have done before you, you travel the realms of the dance with your own body.

Wigman 1975 p53

Wigman's approach to movement generation seems to have been largely based on improvisation but she reworked this material thoroughly through pre-
performance compositional choices in order to make her choreographic intentions clearly visible. She maintains:

Composing embraces construction, clarification, arrangement, rounding out, completion. Composition is the concrete expression of a creative inspiration. Improvisation is a loose coordination of successively occurring, spontaneous ideas; whereas composition is clearly delineated, inspirited form. From the happen-stance of improvisation there flowers the final reality of composition.

Wigman 1975 p86

Manning locates Wigman’s approach to improvisation on the basis of the difference between “‘technique’ in the American sense, a codified movement vocabulary and Technik in the German sense, a method for experiencing and structuring movement” (1993 p91). Wigman used the latter for both her teaching methods and dance making processes.

Manning also traces Wigman’s competence with improvisation to her training with Rudolf Laban, yet she acknowledges the impact of her Dalcrozan education at Hellerau, Germany. During these early years, Wigman "learned how to manipulate movement by improvisationally varying its formal qualities" (Manning 1993 p54). Later on she was able "to release and intensify the expressive range of her movement" (Manning 1993 p56) while she worked with Laban, whose approach to improvisation was less tight.

Hanya Holm, who studied with Mary Wigman at the Folkwang School in Essen, Germany, later became Wigman’s close collaborator and the director of her school in New York. Manning notes that Holm’s contribution to Wigman’s technique was to formalise it, to place it closer to the American sense of ‘technique’ (1993 p272). Alwin Nikolais, who studied with Hanya Holm, acknowledges directly her impact in his work:

I am for ever grateful to Hanya that I did not have to forget anything that she taught ... I added new dimensions to what she had already given me, in theories, in the relation of the psyche, in relation to the physical act itself, the union of the two, and the expressive possibilities in that union as well as its purposeful disunion.

Nikolais in Livet 1978 p191
The improvisational aspect of Nikolais's work was not an effect of his understanding of how the body moves. Rather, his sense of improvisation was directly affected by his anti-Freudian, behaviouristic notion of the body. Early in his career he rejected Graham’s psycho-dramatic perspective and started working towards "a kind of energy force behind what we call the psyche - a more animistic kind of behaviorism" (Nikolais in Livet 1979 p190). He aspired to liberate the dancer from the compulsory role of the actor, and concentrated on the "beauty of motion". Thus, he introduced a Cunningham-like conception of the dance performer, that of "an instrument of motion rather than an instrument of emotion" (Nikolais in Liver 1978 p191). This also operated as an integral part of the surrounding space.

Nikolais contends that this attitude was a kind of philosophy; he used it in his technique classes on improvisation "which involve[d] motivations derived from super-conscious sources in communication" (Nikolais in Livet 1978 p194). He describes two forms of improvisation. The first one is the activity which emerges from particular motivations and the other is a form of activity which reflects the state of the "inner" mind rather than its response to motivation. It seems that his second approach manifests itself as a polarisation between ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ domains, ‘mental’ and ‘physical’, ‘mind’ and ‘body’. Finally, Nikolais mentions that his dances also included "controlled improvisation" (Nikolais in Livet 1978 p191).

Nikolais’s close collaborator, Murray Louis, describes improvisation as "the practice of creativity" (Louis 1980 p124). His emphasis on the body as an "incredibly wise and knowledgable source" (Louis 1980 p124) brings to mind notions of the ‘thinking body’. He suggests that the dancer must trust the intelligence of her/his body, which is a form of instantaneous choreography. He describes this kind of choreography as ‘organic’ or ‘natural’ and contrasts it to such forms of choreography which intrusively seek to force "this naturalism [in]to correspond[ing] with and reflect[ing] the mind-vision of the artist" (Louis 1980 p125). Finally, Louis places the practice of improvisation within a lineage of a long and flamboyant history. It is a highly developed art amongst wits and satirists, fertile minds skimming an internal reservoir of imagery, musicians
rambling along, cleverly weaving and dodging wherever their quick associations take them.

Louis 1980 p124

By contrast, the British improviser Julyen Hamilton (1995/i) refocuses the discussion in a more specific and political way. He emphasises that "the idea of set work came after" improvisation and refers to "a long lineage of improvising creators that goes back hundreds of years" (Hamilton 1995/i). From a slightly different perspective, the current American improviser Steve Paxton places improvisational practices in the context of postmodern dance within the lineage of American modern dance.

If you look at a lineage, say one in which I’m in, would be something like Isadora, St.Denis, Graham, Cunningham, and then me, none of us are like our teachers. So, it is as though it’s a lineage of mutation rather than evolution in the prior way ... We are not going to be the vessel that carries on the teaching of our teachers, what we are carrying on is the permission to use the training in new ways.

Paxton 1995/i

2.4. Improvisation in the avant-garde milieu of the 1960s

Within the same postmodern consideration of history, the wider avant-garde context of the 1960s is treated as a space of contemporaneous manifestations of notions of improvisation. This could have potentially informed the development of the improvisational practices of postmodern dance during the 1960s culminating in the work of the Grand Union. This is again a presentation of a number of examples of relevant experiences of ‘knowing how’ which were more or less available to the dance artists, depending on the circumstances and the efficiency of communication channels.

The use of *improvisation* in the avant-garde art of the 1960s was both political (it reflected the attitude of the artists towards art and life, their philosophy) and methodological/compositional (functional). It was a manifestation of the period’s urge for freedom and at the same time a position against the socio-political *status quo* and an artistic programme for exploring the possibilities of the ‘new art’.
Further understanding of improvisation as part of the American politics of the 1960s requires familiarity with the socio-political and intellectual context of the period. Similarly, further understanding of improvisation as an artistic practice requires knowledge of the character of the avant-garde American art of the 1960s with special attention to postmodern dance practices.

In this framework, the presentation of the work of the Grand Union as the culmination of the Judson experiments of the 1960s does not imply the construction of an evolutionary line, gradually progressing from the less to the more improvisational. Rather, it should be treated as a space within which the accumulation of particular experiences (or manifestations of 'knowing how') made possible the embodiment of a radically different conceptualisation of the dance work: that of the 'totally' improvisational performance mode of the Grand Union group.

This experience should not be considered as a direct 'influence' on the work subsequently made; rather the Grand Union made available to the succeeding artists an embodied form of 'knowing how' that subverted traditionally accepted notions of theatre dance. In conjunction with the prevailing interest in the body, new concepts of movement were able to emerge by means of primarily improvisational practices. At the same time, more possibilities of 'what a dance piece could be' became conceivable, amongst which improvisational dance also claimed a space.

2.4.1. The context of the American avant-garde art of the 1960s

At the dawn of the 1960s, "there was a feeling - so unlike in the early 1990s - that all things were possible ... and permitted" (Banes 1993 p3). In fact, this period was a post-war phase characterised by the co-existence of two elements: the painful political reality of the Cold War and the optimistic economic situation of an ever increasing prosperity within the western industrialised world.

In terms of political attitude, the peculiar combination of these two elements favoured a predilection for 'participatory democracy' and decentralisation. The New Left was deeply concerned with removing oppression from the society and "invent[ing] a new past that served the present rather than the 'truth' of the past" (Aronowitz in Sayres et al. 1984 p25). This new form of political activism
celebrated such notions as 'process' and 'experience' (Aronowitz in Sayres et al. 1984).

Aronowitz concludes his account of the New Left adventure of the American society of the 1960s by pointing out the failure of this movement to achieve any radical changes within the American political tradition. Alternatively, he considers as plausible the argument that

the enduring achievement of the 60s was the cultural changes it brought about, particularly the codification of a new morality in sex, gender and race.

Aronowitz in Sayres et al. 1984 p42

On the basis of the above point, and as much as the arts are a major part of the cultural apparatus of a given society, Banes's (1993) argument on the political character of the avant-garde American art of the 1960s offers an interesting perspective in a reversed fashion. For Banes, "these artistic acts were political" (Banes 1993 p7) not because they passively reflected the new political spirit; on the contrary, the artistic attitudes of the American avant-garde artists of the 1960s induced direct political outcomes.

It is worth noting that these artists were not working in close proximity to any particular political parties. Aronowitz states explicitly a certain kind of 'hostility' between the political counterculture and the cultural radicals. The latter had lost faith in the state completely and were seeking freedom outside any political action whatsoever. They were interested in building an alternative culture (in Sayres et al. 1984 pp24-25). Banes explains:

These alternative modes of cultural production were crucial elements of social change. They were not 'reflections' of society; they helped shape the very form and style of political and cultural protest in the later Sixties.

Banes 1993 p9

Part of these artists' political strategy was to provide paradigms of alternative communities, in an effort to demonstrate the potential for different kinds of relationships. Banes analyses Rainer's piece *We shall run* which consists of simple running in different formations by changing directions and leadership, as one which offers "the image ... of a serious, even heroic, egalitarian collective" (Banes 1993
p35). In a way, the American society of the 1960s "was a society in search of a cultural identity that could keep pace with its economic and political flux" (Banes 1993 p256).

Other scholars claim a more direct link between the arts and the political arena. Berger, for instance, analyses the work of the visual artist Robert Morris from a more traditional Marxist perspective: "Morris's production reveals an intense commitment to social issues and to political and cultural activism" (1989 p4). On another occasion, Berger suggests that in "oscillating between philosophical and social themes ... (Morris) reconciled the interests of the avant-garde with those of the New Left" (1989 p162).

Both these arguments carry implications of the same idea: the artistic attitudes of the 1960s American avant-garde were radical. The post-war economic prosperity in conjunction to the conviction that a better future could only be achieved by cutting all links with the unhappy past, were relevant to the artistic revolution of the 1960s; eventually, the latter emerged as a reaction to formalism. In this respect, the autonomy of the artistic object was deeply questioned, while the idea that artistic work is directly linked with the social and cultural context which gave it birth was welcomed. Discussing the birth of Conceptual art in the late 1960s, Plous states

> Early Conceptualism was a reaction from within modernism, prompted by the enervated condition of abstract art and the dogmatism of formalist theory. A similar restless spirit was being felt in architecture, literature, music and dance and had become an international phenomenon by the end of the sixties.

Plous in Colpitt 1992 p61

In addition, the avant-garde artists of the 1960s engaged passionately with the newly born philosophical debates in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and Wittgenstein's philosophy of mind. These intellectual experiences allowed them to change their thinking processes and attitudes to life and art and provided them with new points of inspiration. In contrast, Sartre's existentialism had promote[d] a general feeling that man was alone in the world, was now detached from all systems of belief, and that the creator [artist]
must find his salvation in art alone, reinventing it from the very beginning.

Lucie-Smith 1984 p10

The impact of Wittgensteinian thought can be identified in the visual artists' working processes. The idea that "the meaning of a word is its use in the language" (Wittgenstein 1953, p 20) was particularly welcomed by the Conceptual artists. They considered language more interesting than their traditional working materials; they celebrated the 'word' as their preferred artistic medium.

Krauss perceives a Wittgensteinian background in the way Judson Dance Theater fully legitimised as 'dance ' such ordinary movements as walking or bending. Borrowing the above quotation ("the meaning of the word is its use"), Krauss explains that, within this perspective, the meaning of the word does not refer to a picture in the user's mind, but rather to her/his ability to use it (Krauss in Morris 1994 p6). Thus, there are no private meanings, there is nothing 'interior', nothing which is not public can be expressed in dance and, consequently, ordinary movement is the only type of movement human beings can claim they are able to use best.

2.4.2. The artistic strategies of the avant-garde art of the 1960s

Within this political, intellectual and cultural radicalism, the meaning of the arts was deeply re-considered. In her analysis of the piece Zen for Head in the first Fluxus concert, Armstrong mentions:

The questions that Zen for Head raises about art ... have to do with the role of art and artist; with the relationship between action and object, between object and museum, between art and life; and with how art is made, presented and received. They also have to do with the boundaries of art - how these are determined and by whom.

Armstrong in Armstrong 1993 p14

During the 1960s the use of such terms as 'multimedia' or 'intermedia' manifested the birth of new artistic forms where artistic media (such as words, music, movement and materials), which were traditionally used separately, could co-exist in the form of 'events'.
In their multifaceted search for freedom, Banes argues, the avant-garde American artists of the 1960s adopted the artistic form of 'multimedia' as one that abolishes the hierarchy among the arts; it "enacted an equal union" (Banes 1993 p129) of them. Kostelanetz prefers to use the term 'theatre of mixed means'. He points out that these forms are fundamentally different from similar attempts of the past, Diaghilev's ballets for instance, because their components did not "complement each other ... [they rather] function nonsynchronously, or independently of each other, and each medium is used for its own possibilities" (Kostelanetz 1968 p4).

This new artistic strategy indeed facilitated a certain blurring of the borders between the different arts. As the American postmodern dance artist, Kenneth King, states:

"The new theater [was] an arena of transacting techniques assimilated from what we previously called 'play', 'modern dance', 'sculpture', 'painting' and 'movies'."

King in Battcock 1966 p243

Avant-garde dance, as an active agent within this fervent process of reconsideration, was also deeply affected:

"There are no rules for a choreographer. He is no longer wholly dependent on dance movement as the medium, and now extends his actions into theater."

King in Battcock 1966 p247

The redefinition of the meaning of dance as art was both an outcome and a starting point for generous exchanges with other arts, particularly the visual arts. Movement, legitimised as dance, was an important part (sometimes the most important part, as in Anna Halprin's work, for instance) of such mixed forms as the 'happenings'. This experience was instrumental for both parts. On the one hand, dance artists had the opportunity to broaden their notion of dance and, on the other, the wider artistic community fully accepted them within a common artistic space.

Historically, this is probably one of the rare cases when dance was able to grow in such an environment of direct exchange with other arts, in particular the visual arts. This became an important element within its radical development during the 1960s in America, without losing the importance of its own potential as an artistic medium.
In this artistic climate, "improvisation was seized on by the avant-garde artists as a potent emblem of freedom" (Banes 1993 p156) and became a common strategy for a large number of artistic media. George Maciunas, the instigator of the Fluxus movement, sees improvisation as one of the major artistic strategies of the 1960s seeking on the whole to abolish formalism and abstraction. For him formalism, which also means artificiality, relies on pre-determination while "the reality of nature ... like that of man himself is largely indeterminate and unpredictable" (in Armstrong 1993 pp156-157).

Kenneth King discusses the role of improvisational strategies in the context of the ‘happenings’:

The Happening prevents a logical literary explication by improvisation or indeterminate methods which strip the performance of connotation and specific meaning by the use of repetition, juxtaposition of objects and acausal relationships.

King in Battcock 1966 p245

At the same time, improvisation was also becoming popular within theatre training. In 1963, Viola Spolin published the book *Improvisation for the Theater* which was the outcome of many years of experimentation in ‘game structures’, ‘problem-solving’ methods and ‘point-of-concentration’ techniques. This material was published following a period of thorough testing with professional actors and it was extensively used in actors’ training as a preparation for acting in written plays. Spolin’s approach is deeply egalitarian. She does not accept the difference between ‘talented’ and ‘non-talented’ people. Learning is a matter of experience, experience means a relationship with the environment; an aspect of this relationship is intuitive. She asserts: "When response to experience takes place at this intuitive plane ... [the person] is truly open for learning" (Spolin 1963 p4). The intuitive operates spontaneously and this is where Spolin locates the value of improvisation. In brief, she uses it for learning purposes and her ultimate goal is to make the theatre techniques intuitive. Improvisation in the theatre has a long tradition, especially in the area of training. In Stanislavsky’s method, for instance, which is based on the actor’s ability to identify with the role, personal exploration is a key element approached mainly through improvisation (Litvikoff 1972).
Using his mixed background in theatre and dance, Daniel Nagrin also developed his own improvisational approach during the 1960s. He started applying his method the following decade and this work became available as a book in the early 1990s. His method, applicable to dance as well as to theatre or music is, primarily based on the idea of movement as metaphor.

Like dance, in music, improvisational practices during the 1960s were not new ground. Many forms of traditional music around the world hold past experiences of improvisation. Yet, in the context of the 1960s in America, music improvisation within the jazz idiom was the most directly available. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, there was considerable exploration in jazz improvisation at the level of "harmony, rhythm and melody" (Banes 1993 p25).

The history of improvisation in the musical forms of the 20th century is well documented in a number of sources. A close reading of such material seems instrumental for the researcher of movement improvisation, mainly because it makes available a number of models by which, issues of movement improvisation could be approached theoretically.

In the dance scene, Banes points out that the avant-garde dance artists of the 1960s not only chose improvisation because of its relationship with the idea and practice of freedom but also as a practice which "relied on the wisdom of the body" (Banes 1993 p211). The Judson Dance Theater group used improvisational practices in a number of ways, but most frequently in structured forms, similarly to jazz music. The choreographer Trisha Brown in particular was critical about free improvisation. She contends that this method of generating movement should be treated

not as an instrument to surrender to the body's impulses, but as a rational plan for generating action in a cohesive community.

Banes 1993 p211

It seems that the Judsonites welcomed improvisation more as a choreographic strategy than anything else alongside indeterminacy and chance methods. This attitude was consistent with the spirit of freedom in the early 1960s and the general tendency to reject everything belonging to the past. According to Banes (1983), such artists as Simone Forti, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Robert Morris, Lucinda
Childs, Carolee Schneemann and others used extensively structured improvisation as a performance mode, as for example in Concert #14 of the Judson Theater group where the first part included seven improvisations.\textsuperscript{29}

The lineage of the Judson Dance Theater can be traced back to Cunningham’s use of chance in choreography, Anna Halprin’s teaching of improvisational dance during the late 1950s, and Robert Dunn’s radical teaching of composition. Most of the Judsonites had worked with at least one of them. Dunn’s approach to dance was fundamentally subversive and it can be argued that it was the initial point of all of the successive reconsiderations of the medium of dance which took place during the 1960s and culminated with the work of the Grand Union.

2.5. Grand Union

Grand Union lasted from 1970 to 1976 and the company took its name when Yvonne Rainer decided to abandon the leadership of her group. At that time, the company was already performing Rainer’s work \textit{Continuous Project-Altered Daily} in an improvisational style, although still under her guidelines. By abolishing herself as a leader, she abolished the last possible sense of control in the creative process. From then onwards, the decisions were open to any member of the group at any time.

\textit{Continuous Project-Altered Daily}, which premiered in March 1969, in its very first version, included a decision making element: the performers could choose the sequence of pre-made pieces of movement material during the actual event of the performance. Gradually, Rainer decided to show through this work all the intermediate stages between the making and the performance of a finished piece; she identified seven ‘levels’ of performance: rehearsal, run-through, working-out, surprises, marking, teaching and behaviour (Rainer 1974 p130).

Illustrating these concepts, the work was perpetually changing, until Rainer realised that she could not go any further along these lines. Grand Union was born at that point as a democratic group without structure nor hierarchy. No one was responsible for the group. All the performers participated on equal terms and contributed to the making of the performance event in a totally unstructured manner which was named ‘total improvisation’.
Continuous Project-Altered Daily was not an exception among Rainer's other pieces. As early as 1964, around the end of the Judson period, Rainer devised another improvisational piece. After having danced at the Green Gallery for an event organised by the artist James Lee Byars, Rainer wrote an essay which would later accompany, in taped form, an improvised solo entitled Some Thoughts on Improvisation. In this text, Rainer emphasised the necessity of 'connection' between the performer and another element, either externally (in the same space and time) or internally (within the performer's internal state), but always carrying this 'connection' with conviction (Rainer 1974 pp298-301).

The period of Rainer's work between 1964 and 1970 not only traces the mutation of the Judson Theater experience into the Grand Union experiment; it also documents the 'story' of the practice of improvisation which, as a tool in the hands of a radical artist who trusted it deeply, was allowed to reveal its inherently subversive character.

The following description of the character of the Grand Union's performances is an attempt to provide an image of the group's use of improvisation. It is very difficult to obtain a clear picture of a 'piece' performed by Grand Union. Unfortunately, the only book devoted to its history and character, The Grand Union (1970-1976): An Improvisational Performance Group (1991) by Ramsay, presents the information solely in a thematic way. Thus, many vivid and detailed descriptions of chosen instants of the performances are included but there is no reference to a single performance as a whole. From this account the following assumptions have been made:

1. The beginning of the performance was always a challenge and there were extreme cases when some of the performers decided not to participate (p115); it usually consisted of or sometimes only included a warm-up on stage either individual (p1) or as a follow-the-leader exercise (p48).

2. Movement, sound and speech were the working materials as well as props and costumes (p1) brought together in a "collage-like way" which combined "the aspects of real-life, rehearsal and performance behaviour" (p1).

3. The only predetermined element of the performance was that improvisation should be the only method of movement production (p1). "Anything could be said or done ... their appeal was the honesty and rawness generated by
using real behaviour as performance material" (Ramsay 1991 p68). The performers never tried to create any relationships among the simultaneous or successive parts of the performance "although often the random juxtapositions seemed to create a kind of coincidental logic". (Ramsay 1991 p118). The performers could join or leave the performance space at any time and equally develop or distract the ongoing process (p119). They did use devices like describing their thoughts aloud as they performed or even 'loitering on stage' (p122).

4. In some cases members could suggest an idea, for instance about costumes (p8), but it was never guaranteed that the whole group would be finally be working under the same guidelines.

5. They often borrowed elements or whole events from popular entertainment and improvised accordingly (p8).

6. They never excluded the idea of executing 'technical' movement sections in various group formations because they were all exceptionally able trained dancers (p9).

7. During the first two years they used to rehearse "setting up situations that would serve to strengthen and quicken each member's imaginative reflexes" (Ramsay 1991 p114). Later, they did it just "to reestablish their timing and performance skills" (Ramsay 1991 p64) but this was no more than a performance without an audience.

8. The selection of music "was random, unplanned, and totally up to the individual performers" (p11)

9. They used as props whatever was available in each performance space.

10. They had no particular sign system for communicating with their stage manager about lighting and sound effects (p109). Therefore, they relied on the stage manager's skills of interpreting their vague messages according to the available facilities. In some cases, they gave contradictory instructions to the various technicians. When the technicians introduced personal solutions to these problems, the result was interesting; otherwise there was confusion (p107).

11. In general, the company did not like audience participation (p55), yet "the audience was there ... to observe and encourage a process rather than partake of a finished product" (p126).
2.6. A parallel story of improvisation: modern dance teaching methods and the choreography manuals

It is not only the area of dance making where traces of improvisational practices were manifested during the 1960s. The teaching of modern dance, shaped by Rudolf Laban’s theories, included different forms of improvisation. Authors like Cheney (1989), Duffy (1982), Lockhart (1982) and Sherbon (1982) refer to improvisation as a means of developing students’ creativity and liberating their movement. Although some of these publications are still available in the bookshops, most of their first editions appeared in the 1960s. In addition, the system of ‘modern educational dance’, which was devised in the same period as movement training for amateurs and school children, is improvisational in character. Based on Laban’s principles, this system was an approach of guiding students within the exploration of various elements of movement such as time, space, flow, elevation, group composition, etc.

On the other hand, the practices of postmodern dance were reflected within dance training in the way ‘choreography’ was taught between the 1960s and the present. A brief reference to some of these approaches follows with the main task of discussing their ways of dealing with improvisation as a choreographic method.

During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the American dance educator Barbara Mettler used movement improvisation as the main tool of her choreography classes. Her approach seems to have been affected by the practices of the European modern dance tradition as this was crystallised in Mary Wigman’s work. Mettler’s teaching material included free movement expression, exploration both of the human body and everyday movement as sources of movement material and experimentation with movement qualities, force, time, space, sound, visual design and dramatic element. She used the method of solving ‘creative problems’ and therefore her approach can be considered as a form of structured improvisation:

Improvising freely in body movement, establish a regular pulse ... by emphasizing the first of every three beats, create a measure of three (count loud) ... now, cease moving on the second beat of every measure without losing the feeling of the measure (continue to count) ... we may say that you have omitted a beat ...

Mettler 1960 p185
Lois Ellfeldt (1967) focused on the choreographer's method of making her/his task possible by choosing appropriate material and making the right decisions in the use of this material. She contends that

the unique problem in creative forming of dance is in selecting image-provoking movements. This must not just be thought about or dreamed of, but must be pulled out of the action of the human body.

Ellfeldt 1967 p36

She offers two long lists that include a large variety of elements grouped in different categories which could be used as starting points for movement explorations and improvisations. The main difference between her two lists is that 'explorations' refer more to improvisational work with a single element as the starting point or controlling factor, while 'improvisations' suggest movement work responding to some sort of 'situation', a relationship between two or more factors.

Turner (1971), in her 'treatise' of nonliteral choreography, refers to work by such choreographers as Alwin Nikolais, Merce Cunningham, Sybil Shearer, Erick Hawkins, Murray Louis, Paul Taylor and the 'Experimentalists' (Judson Theater Group, Twyla Tharp and Ann Halprin). She also sees improvisation as a method of generating movement material, because "in its elimination of intellectual planning, it provides an immediate route to the spontaneous movement characteristic of nonliteral dance" (Turner 1971 p32). Turner claims that improvisation is useful because it familiarises the dancer with a vast range of neuromuscular experiences and the possibility of moving with other dancers; it can be defined as "a complex process of responding to specific stimulus" (Turner 1971 p33). Yet, when she approaches the problems of creating structures for what she names 'non-literal' pieces, she suggests non-improvisational methods of processing the movement material in order to set the final form (Turner 1971 pp42-62).

Blom and Chaplin state that "improvisation is a good way to learn choreography" (1982 pxiii). They claim their strategies aim at including choreographic concepts within improvisational structures:

Sometimes it is tucked behind a non conceptual mask (image) and sometimes the improvisation deals directly with the movement and/or choreographic element being explored.

Blom and Chaplin 1982 pxiv
Their perspective does not differ considerably from Turner's. Firstly they accept 'improvisation' as a teaching device for the 'choreographic concepts' and secondly they claim that choreography is ultimately "the means and the method whereby creativity can be structured" (Blom and Chaplin 1982 p5). They include numerous examples of experimentation with various choreographic problems from simple ones (the study of a single element) and to the most complex (group work or experimentation with style). Yet, this approach does not take into consideration the possibility of the reverse case: the fact that improvisation can also operate as the leading factor of the overall creative process, and determine the final form of the work.

Minton's (1986) manual is a reduced version of Blom and Chaplin's (1982) work including a series of rather static photographs which do not reflect the excitement of the ideas presented in Blom and Chaplin's version. For Minton, as well, improvisation is "the ability to explore spontaneously and conceive dance movements that are representative of an idea, concept, or dance style" (Minton 1986 pviii) while choreography is again a mental process aimed at providing the final form of the dance.

Blom and Chaplin's (1988) second book is entirely devoted to the development of the skill of improvisation. This work does not consider improvisation as a means of teaching choreography; the book explores improvisation for its own sake and discusses the compositional qualities of the improvising skill.

Most of the time when an improv works you can look back and see the form ... [which can] ... result from the ongoing impetus of the movement itself. Just as we tend to move in phrases, we also tend to group them - to explore a subject, take it somewhere, and resolve it.

Blom and Chaplin 1988 p20

They also deal with the possibility of improvisation as performance style, analysing in detail the risks of such an attempt and offering many instructions which, according to their point of view, could save the practitioners from dangerous 'pitfalls'. The book provides some theoretical background on the creative process and numerous instructions on the practicalities of working with improvisation. It also acknowledges improvisation as an approach to movement work worthwhile for its own sake and offers 'over two hundred improvs'. Yet, their overall attitude to
Improvisation remains practically the same as the one presented in their first book. Thus for them improvisation is still

the dynamic daughter of dance, at times self-indulgent, at times concise and determined, but always developing and changing. She has a free spirit; she should be given free rein within wisely and flexibly set boundaries.

Blom and Chaplin 1988 pxi

None of the exercises they suggest evades the format of 'structured improvisation' in which the dancer explores one or more elements or even relationships between elements that have been clearly defined beforehand.

Tufnell and Crickmay's (1990) relatively recent book attempts to cover this gap. They believe that improvisation is a free process and this idea permeates the book. The material, instructions, or suggested starting points operate simply as a context for the movement work; as an inspiration. The content of the book is very carefully prepared to achieve this purpose. The authors do not enumerate instructions; they just offers hints, feelings, spaces, images to hook on or to escape from within a movement reality. Both the layout of the text and the structure of the whole book have a strong visual aspect; photographs, sketches and other relevant material are organically incorporated within an inspiring entity.

Tufnell’s approach to improvisation loosens the austerity within which the it has been used in the choreographic process. At the same time, as explained in Part 2 of the research, Tufnell also offers specific examples of using this method for making dances. She develops a strategy in relation to how choices can be made and uses this both for the preparation and performance of her pieces. Her model is based on an intense study of the 'landscape of the body' bringing together elements of extended perceptual awareness, anatomical knowledge and the study of the self in an almost Jungian approach (Tufnell 1996/i). Her suggestion is significant not so much for having combined the above areas in a way which has not been followed by other choreographers but, especially, because she provides for the British context an updated notion of the 1970s American version of improvisation as a performance mode.

The element of choice is of primary significance within her work. She has developed an appropriate technique that allows her to make choices during the
performance event both in movement material and in structuring the piece (Tufnell 1996/i). Yet, this technique relies on a single predetermined choice which is both a clear decision and a suggestion about what a dance piece might be.

Within an emphasis on the role of a highly developed and multidimensional skill of making decisions during the performance event, a reconsidered version of the 1970s American sense of improvisational performance becomes available. It remains to show how the ability to perform improvisationally can be approached as a learning skill. This is the task of the following chapter which examines the relationship between theoretical possibilities of 'knowing how' (or practical knowledge) and their application in the specific domain of improvisational performance.

NOTES

1. In philosophy, Wittgenstein pointed out the controversial character of the attempt to provide 'definitions' as early as during the early 1950s. With his work Philosophical Investigation (1953), he introduced the perspective of 'family resemblances' claiming that the necessity of using definitions arises as a consequence "of an insufficient grasp of how language works" (Sluga in Audi 1995 p859). Thus, he contends that there is no single common element amongst all the different instances which seem to represent the same 'definition'. Rather these examples have common elements only with some of the rest, in such a way that all of them have something in common with at least one other member of the group.

2. Foucault (1972) refers in detail to the problematic character of using the notion of 'influence' in historical studies.

3. Haselbach notices that the distinction between her two notions of improvisation is only a theoretical model, because "in reality there is a constant exchange with reciprocal influences in both directions" (1981 p7).

4. See note 1 of this chapter.

5. See note 1 of this chapter.

6. Haselbach makes a similar claim. Her sense of 'improvisation as spontaneous creation of form and content' refers to "a form which is not final or calculated, but transitory and provisional, only valid for the moment" (1981 p6).

7. This is probably why Julyen Hamilton (1995a), amongst other improvisers, prefers to describe his performance strategy as "instant composition".

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8. An extended reference to the teaching of choreography with relevance to postmodern dance has been made in section 2.7 of this chapter. This investigation attempts to reveal the importance of improvisation as a major choreographic method in the context of postmodern dance.

9. For more details on the historical and technical aspects of Contact Improvisation see Novack (1990).

10. The British choreographer Rosemary Butcher, who experienced directly the American dance postmodernism of the late 1960s during her visits to New York notices: "I knew then that choreography could relate to any form of moving activity" (1992 p18) and she adds: "There was always something about the fact ... that dance could be anything" (1995b/i).

11. See note 11 of Chapter 1.

12. Although written and other sources directly mention the use of improvisation in the work and choreographic processes of these choreographers, there is not enough evidence about the absence of this approach in the work of others. Further research has to be undertaken in relation to methods of generating movement material in the work of other modern dance artists.

13. Martin is particularly bewildered by Isadora's unknown method of generating "the lowest common denominator and the basic unit of composition", namely the gestures which she subsequently built into sequences. He speculates on the possibility of a link between this method and the Stanislavsky approach to theatre training, claiming that Duncan was familiar with the latter.

14. A detailed discussion on this area follows in Chapter 3.

15. For more information on Body-Mind Centering see Bainbridge-Cohen (1993) and Hartley (1995) as well as in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

16. Wigman herself traces her familiarity with improvisational practices to her training with Rudolf Laban. She describes the exploratory character of Laban's teaching method and his attitude of never "hold[ing] on" to any of his discoveries. As a consequence, "he always needed people who would ... put [his ideas] to practical use" (Wigman 1975 p34). This approach was extremely beneficial for his students who were allowed to, and supported in, developing their individual approaches. It is particularly striking though that, for his teaching of improvisation, Laban frequently used other media as a starting point: drawing, drama and poetry. Wigman does not explain clearly how the transition took place from the initial idea to its application in dance.

17. Louis explains why, for him, choreography and creativity are different: "The choreographic process is objective and dealt with externally, whereas creativity is a highly subjective inner process" (Louis 1980 p119).
18. This area is explored in detail in relation to the notion of 'bodily intelligence' in Chapter 3.

19. For an overview of artistic manifestations in the area of 'new art' see Battcock (1966).

20. For the nature of 'participatory democracy' in politics, see Aronowitz in Sayres et al. 1984 p19. For a parallel discussion on aspects of 'participatory democracy' as these were manifested in the 1960s artistic context of Greenwich Village, New York, see Banes 1993 p39 who detects at least five kinds: direct involvement of the spectators, explicit political content in art, the collective character of the festivals, alternative artistic institutions with local autonomy and the development of a spirit of informal friendship which consolidated other forms of association.


22. Aronowitz discusses the operation modes of the New Left student organisation Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) and explains that by emphasising experience, SDS was manifesting "a converse retreat from the abstractions of the red politics of yesterday" (in Sayres et al. 1984 p20). Particular emphasis was given to replacing the 'political' with the 'personal' and 'political rationalism' with 'feeling'.

23. Robert Morris's relevance to this research is of major importance because of both his close proximity to Yvonne Rainer at a personal and professional level and his own dance pieces, seminal within the context of the early dance postmodernism.


25. Robert Morris, when asked in a recent interview by Pepe Karmel on Wittgenstein's influence on his work, answered in a Wittgensteinian fashion: "People do things and find a reason for them. Or they have reasons and then do them. Or they do things without reasons and never look for them. Or they do them for reasons they did not know they had. Wittgenstein asks somewhere 'Have I reasons? The answer is my reasons will soon give out and then I will act without reasons' (Philosophical Investigations, Part I, paragraph 211-P.K.). In the early 1960s most everybody read the Investigations" (Morris 1995 p94).

26. The Fluxus movement, which originated in 1962 and included primarily American and German artists, was a form of Dada revival. For more information see Armstrong & Rothfuss (1993).

27. For a brief but substantial reference to improvisational practices in music see Pressing in Sloboda (1988). In this essay, there is a short chapter dedicated to 'oral traditions and folklore'.

28. For example, see Cope's (1989) chapter on improvisation.

29. For more information on the Judson Theater group see Banes (1980).
30. Nothing more specific has been mentioned about the place and time of this event in Rainer (1974 p298). According to her 'Chronology' of work (1974 p332) *Some Thoughts on Improvisation*, which was performed accompanied by the recorded version of this text, premiered as part of a programme shared with the visual artist Robert Morris and toured in various places in Europe during 1964.

This chapter examines the notion of practical knowledge in 20th century philosophy in relation to its usefulness within the prospect of learning the skill of performing improvisationally. The postmodern critique of the dichotomous interpretation of the relationship between body and mind becomes very relevant to this discussion; it provides useful background to focus the debate on a reconsidered notion of the relationship between the theory and practice of improvisational performance.

In approaching theoretically the process of learning a skill, questions in relation to the nature of knowledge inevitably arise. This is an epistemological concern traditionally located within philosophical discourse and further expands as a discussion of issues of theoretical and practical knowledge.¹

In philosophy, such territory has frequently been explored in close proximity to the problem of the relationship between 'body' and 'mind'. The concept of the 'thinking body' becomes helpful in approaching similar issues both in the theory and practice of dance. The work of the British philosophers Gilbert Ryle and David Carr on practical knowledge is discussed in this chapter on the basis of its potential to support the non-dichotomous character of the 'thinking body' of the postmodern dance performer, in particular the improviser. Finally, the problems of approaching the 'thinking body' of the improviser assuming for the performer a unified dancing subjectivity are also addressed.
3.1. ‘Knowing how’ and bodily intelligence

3.1.1 The emphasis on the body

Recently, the materiality of the dancing body has been rediscovered within the discourse of dance from different perspectives, such as history and anthropology. Seen in this light, and further informed by a wider interdisciplinary debate on the body, current dance theory and practice can engage with the body/mind problem in dance in new ways. The concept of the ‘thinking body’ is particularly helpful in this respect, insofar as it provides the framework for a non-dichotomous consideration. It remains to show how and why the ‘improvising body’ becomes an adequate space for grounding the discussion. It must be pointed out though that, linguistically, the term ‘thinking body’ draws attention to the notion of the ‘body’, this is a ‘body’, which besides everything else is also capable of thinking. This should not be surprising in the context of the discipline of dance studies. It is a repercussion of dance’s recent politics of reintroducing the materiality of the body as both a perspective and tool of serious research. In addition, the term ‘thinking body’ indicates a non-dialectical formation. As becomes clear later in the thesis, the physical and the mental have not been dissolved into a new homogenised whole. They are both still fully present in pure and hybrid forms as well as in an infinite number of in-between combinations. And yet, the ‘thinking body’ is at the same time an independent fully-operational concept in the discipline of dance studies which does not rely on other historically located considerations about the notions of ‘body’ and ‘mind’.

From a cultural studies point of view, Juliet Flower MacCannell asserts that "the body is the slate on which the letters that seal its destiny are marked as its 'thinking'" (in MacCannell and Zakarin 1994 p6); then she exposes a multiplicity of Thinking Bodies as these emerge in the "post-cartesian history of our efforts to think the body and to embody thought". In her collection of essays, Lacanian, Irigarayian and Deleuzian versions of postmodern thinking crossbreed and meet the current debates on culture, knowledge, power, communication in an interdisciplinary study of the body.

As a dance historian, the American scholar, Susan Foster, raises an urgent reminder:
Dance, perhaps more than any other body-centered endeavour, cultivates a body that initiates as well as responds. Even those dance-makers who see in the dancer's body a mere vehicle for aestheticized expression must, in their investigation of new work's choreographic problematic, consult bodies, their own or the dancers'.

Foster in Foster 1995 p15

Reconsidering the traditional approaches to dance history, Susan Foster not only rediscovers the silenced voice of the dancing body in a historical writing which becomes a bodily writing; she also acknowledges the multidisciplinary character of the current issues of the dance discourse as history. In Foster's notion of bodily writing, movement emerges as "a nonnatural relationship between ... physicality and meaning" (1995 p4). While she pinpoints a number of material traces in dance as discourse or as making, she also addresses the role of the symbolic, how the body is constituted through language. Yet, these metaphorical dancing bodies, which she seeks to reconsider in terms of their materiality, reverberate in her own body of writing. In 'choreographing history' she reverses verbally the traditional concept of dance history thus adopting the postmodern strategy of shifting the perspective (Foster 1995 p10).

As Linda Hutcheon says: "the postmodern is seemingly not so much a concept as a problematic" (1989 p15) and Foster is not seeking the truth of dance as history, rather she experiments "in the transgression of the boundaries" (Hutcheon 1989, p 18) between history and choreography. In rediscovering the materiality of the body in the discourse of dance as history, she renegotiates the positions allocated to theory and practice in the study of dance.

From an anthropological perspective, Andrée Grau, similarly attacks Western logocentricism (1995 p143). Using her long experience in the study of non-Western dance forms she argues against current Western thought which has overemphasised the role of the discourse in the shaping of the bodies (1995, p 141). She discusses the relationships between biological and social factors in the development of human species. She points to Marcel Mauss who, as early as 1935, had argued that

the body is at the same time the original tool with which human beings shape their world, and the original substance out of which the human world is shaped.

Grau 1995 p142
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s (1980) work on metaphor supports Grau’s argument about the impact of the physical properties of the natural world in the construction of mental patterns through which understanding is achieved (Grau 1995 p143-144). Grau also calls upon the anthroposophical medical method of 'neurological reorganisation', in which "through movement brain cells can be regenerated" (1995 p146), a case considered impossible in the context of traditional medicine.

Grau’s reference to the theory of biological (and, therefore, physical) origins of human movement brings to mind a similar argument available since the 1930s in the work of Mabel Todd. In her book *The Thinking Body* (published in 1937 in the United States), Todd introduced both this term and a new concept. Her "thirty years’ experience in teaching bodily economy" fed a research process, the conclusions of which emphasised the "psycho-physical" character of movement (Todd 1937 pxiii). Todd’s ‘thinking body’ was a healthy physical body, able to control the negative psychological factors that affected movement by means of an effective use of the brain and nervous system. Nevertheless, while this argument seems to support the mental origins of movement, Todd’s theory (1937) is fundamentally biological because she eradicates the notion of ‘mind’, almost in a monistic way, in favour of a physiologically based element, which she has been named as "neuromuscular unit".

Todd not only explicitly introduced the problem of the relationship between body and mind in the discourse of dance in using the term ‘body’ in the title of her book, she emphasised the possibility of a bodily-based conception of movement and dance. Similarly, her approach was not only inevitably juxtaposed to the traditional methods of immaterial abstractionism within the study of dance, frequently justified by its elusiveness; it also offered a starting point for further considerations of issues in the theory and practice of dance.

Since the 1930s, the ‘thinking body’, more as a concept than as a term, has constantly informed the practice of postmodern dance. It has been responsible for the recent emphasis on notions of bodily intelligence. Fertilised by a number of alternative theories of the body, it has instigated the birth of a new, liberated moving/dancing body, one which assists the production of movement with
suggestions grounded by its direct physical understanding. Improvisational practices become thus an ideal space for this emancipation: the improvising body can fully use its 'thinking' opportunity, because apart from suggesting, in some cases, it is also responsible for the making of the decisions.

In the domain of dance theory, where the points of contact with other discourses are more easily discernible, the echoes of the old philosophical debate on the relationship between body and mind can easily induce an atmosphere of suspicion. The practitioners' frequent use of the terms 'body' and 'mind', the lack of an appropriate term for the body/mind as Paxton says (1995/1), can create the impression that practitioners conceptualise movement in a dichotomous way. Moreover, the conclusion that they are unable to overstep the Cartesian dogma in the production of movement can follow from the previous assumption.

At this crucial moment, philosophy can probably facilitate an alternative consideration of the problem. Firstly, the concept of the 'thinking body' must be philosophically supported as a non-dichotomous one. Secondly, it must be demonstrated that within the forms of dance examined in this research dancing bodies operate as 'thinking bodies'. As a consequence, lack of practitioners' interest in an accurate use of language will be probably considered as a less important factor.

3.1.2. 'Action theory' and bodily intelligence

The interdisciplinary method of developing arguments is pertinent within postmodern discourse. Because of "the transgression of the boundaries between genres, between disciplines or discourses ... and most problematically, perhaps, between practice and theory" (Hutcheon 1989 p18), the tension accumulated on these borders provides sufficient momentum for an expanded discussion of a multidimensional character. In as much as the rediscovery of the body in dance, in combination with the interdisciplinarity of the discourse on the body, encourages deep reconsiderations of dance concepts and approaches, an open dialogue between dance and philosophy becomes possible. In particular, the philosophical debate on issues of practical and theoretical knowledge not only enriches the study of dance
with an additional perspective, it also itself benefits from dance's long experience in problems of practice and acquires a new context for a more widely informed study of the controversial concept of 'action'.

There is much relevance in relocating some of the questions of 'action theory' in conjunction with the current theories of the discourse of dance. As MacCann succinctly says, 'action theory' is an ontology of human action, the study of the "process by which it originates, and the ways in which it is explained" (in Audi 1995 p6). While this domain of philosophical discourse includes a number of different approaches, the study of the relationship between action and 'free will' appears to be a dominant common perspective (Davis 1979 p2). Moreover, action is often linked with some form of motion (or non-motion), to the point that some theorists have described bodily movement as basic actions.8

From an anti-cartesian perspective, 'body' and 'mind' are not two different entities of the human nature, and therefore, they cannot be separated in the act of dance. In the current discourse of dance, the concept of the 'thinking body' aspires to support this position.9 The movement produced by the dancing body is not a consequence, an outcome or a reflection of any mysterious mental processes. Rather it is the manifestation of the body's own wisdom, within which mental awareness and control are only one aspect.

In Contact Improvisation, the movers share weight and develop techniques of rolling and falling in such a way that the momentum of the body becomes a major source of movement production (Novack 1990). The correct use of this technique relies on an important safety factor, the body's ability to react, almost automatically, during emergency circumstances so that injuries can be prevented. In these instances, the body operates through its reflexes and the theory of action suddenly faces an unusual controversy. In its traditional version, the latter does not accept reflexes as actions on the basis of the assumption that they do not emerge out of conscious mental work represented as intention. MacCann characteristically states:

The question of how bodily actions originate is closely associated with that of what distinguishes them from involuntary and reflex bodily events, as well as from events in the inanimate world. There is general agreement that the crucial difference concerns the mental
states that attend action, and in particular the fact that voluntary actions typically arise out of states of intending on the part of the agent.

MacCann in Audi 1995 p7

It follows that it becomes possible to ask how such a theoretical position would cope with the type of movement produced in the Contact Improvisation idiom.

A ‘thinking body’, acknowledging the locus of its wisdom across the full range of possibilities from conscious mental processes to direct physical understanding, becomes uneasy within the austerity of the above perspective. As for the ‘improvising body’, this body, which not only suggests but also keeps part of the responsibility of making decisions during the movement, has been rendered almost intolerable. It is necessary to clarify that the current ‘improvising body’ intends not only on the basis of mental states but also directly from the state of its own physicality. Thus, its movement can emerge both out of a mental decision or a physical necessity and all the in-between combinations.

The traditional perspective of action theory not only fails to accommodate all of the experience of the current practice of dance but also manifests recurring symptoms of an uncurable Cartesianism.\(^\text{10}\) The unbridgeable gap between mind and body has not been eliminated completely; it seems that it is still possible for mental processes to be considered as separate from a certain category of physical events (reflexes).

Carr (1987), from within action theory, has called upon the art of dance to develop further some earlier thoughts (Carr 1978) on the nature of ‘action’. His theory supports the continuity between the intention and the performance of the ‘action’ thus refuting a dichotomous relationship between the two. As it is explained later in this chapter, the same argument can be used in support of the non-dichotomous character of the ‘thinking body’.

3.1.3. Ryle’s theory of practical knowledge and the non-dichotomous ‘thinking body’

Despite the above controversy within ‘action theory’, it can be argued that other areas of philosophical discourse have been able to assist current dance theory
significantly. Gilbert Ryle's notion of practical knowledge, is, at least for historical reasons, an interesting basis for addressing philosophically the practical aspect of dance. Ryle's subversive stance that "'knowing how' precedes 'knowing that'" (Lyons 1980 p58) is a politicised philosophy capable of reclaiming the frequently ignored voice of practice within dance theory, from the perspective of a different discourse.\(^{11}\)

Ryle, was fundamentally anti-Cartesian. His thesis against "the ghost in the machine" (Ryle 1949 p32) attacks the assumption that the mind controls the performance of the action through a system of "internal [unwitnessable] operations" (Ryle 1949 p33).\(^{12}\) He asserts that "the mind is not even a metaphorical place. On the contrary, the chessboard ... the football field are among its places" (Ryle 1949 p51). Thus the thinking about the action and the action itself are not two different things and a person's mental processes are nothing more than "ways in which parts of his conduct are managed" (Ryle 1949 p50).

This theory offers a simple tool for an alternative conceptualisation of movement (and consequently dance movement): mental and physical processes are different places within one continuum rather than two separate entities dichotomously related to each other. Ryle claims,

> there are many activities which directly display qualities of mind, yet are neither themselves intellectual operations nor yet effects of intellectual operations. Intelligent practice is not a step-child of theory. On the contrary theorising is one practice amongst others and is itself intelligently or stupidly conducted.

Ryle 1949 p26

Thus, Ryle's position tolerates a wide range of 'intelligences', amongst which the bodily intelligence of the current 'thinking body' of dance could easily reside. Most significantly, Ryle touches upon the delicate debate of the precedence of practice over theory, arguing that to be able to formulate a theory about some form of action presupposes the existence of the action. In this way, his work stimulates processes of reconsideration within the very study of dance as it becomes obvious that it is possible to theorise without eliminating the voice of the body.

Ryle's notions of both the intellect and knowledge "are neither items nor processes but dispositions, which in turn are chartable behaviour patterns" (Lyons
For this assumption, Ryle has been attacked by Carr (1981b) as naively reducing epistemology to action theory. Indeed, Ryle himself realised the problems of this perspective as he was ultimately faced with the question: "how can an account in terms of behavioral dispositions make sense of intellectual activities where no behaviour is going on?" (Lyons 1980 p49). Later in his career Ryle partly abandoned his early arguments and developed a different theory of thinking of a non-dispositional character.

The first stage of this process was to adopt a Wittgensteinian stance according to which he concluded that "there is no general answer which could be given to the question ‘What is thinking?’", rather there are "family resemblances" across the whole range of possible instances of thinking (Lyons 1980 p187-188). His next and most important step was a characterisation of thinking on the basis of its adverbial properties.

Ryle went on to argue that, not merely is thinking not a ghostly inner activity, it is not even an ingredient common to a variety of activities, it is merely an adverbial-like modification of activities. Thus to think is to do practically anything you like with one’s wits about you or ‘with initiative, care, patience, pertinacity, and interest’. Different kinds of thinking can be distinguished [in that way]...

Lyons 1980 p189

Despite the criticism that this statement faces within philosophical discourse, it offers the possibility for a widely open notion of the ‘thinking body’ in dance. This is a dancing body resisting characterisations in terms of movement techniques, style or heritage.

As Lyons says in relation to Ryle’s perspective, the ‘thinking’ aspect of this body is not one of its "ingredient[s] but a qualification-of-an-activity-factor" (1980 p190). It consists in its ability to operate ‘with initiative, care, patience, and interest’. This is not a dichotomised body of dance. Its performance act is an embodiment of a variety of processes, including all the range of possibilities from almost irrelevant abstract thoughts which indirectly affect the movement, to the purely physical factors of bodily reflexes which also shape it in a different sense.

If this dancing body happens to be also an ‘improvising body’, the qualification of the activity becomes the activity itself. An ‘improvising thinking
body' is not just a dancing body which performs its dance 'with initiative, care, patience, pertinacity, and interest'. The dance itself consists of the ability to dance 'with initiative, care, patience, pertinacity, and interest'. This is by no means without aesthetic implications and a dedicated dance theory seeks to explore the unique possibilities of such manifestations. As a consequence, this can probably subvert the traditional methods of dance appreciation, suggesting new avenues for making and receiving meaning through the medium of a work of dance.

3.1.4. 'Action theory' revisited in Carr's method of practical reasoning

In his effort to define an "order of logical priority among questions of a philosophical sort", David Carr contends that unless the areas of "human thought and action" are somehow considered within the philosophical discourse, questions of ethics cannot be approached adequately (1987 p345). Embarking on an examination of the notion of 'action' as this occurs within the specific context of the art of dance, Carr contributes to this preliminary stage of a subsequent discussion of ethics in philosophy (Carr 1987 p345).

Having explored the differences between practical and theoretical knowledge in philosophy in some of his preceding works (1978, 1981a and b), Carr relates this debate to the wider area of 'action theory':

How are we to understand the relationship between thought and action in the conduct of artistic skills? How do aesthetic or artistic ideas and intentions come to be expressed or embodied in works of art?

Carr 1987 p345

In addition, Carr argues it is preferable to study dance "as a form of human action or activity, rather than as a form of human movement" (1987 p355) since the latter could refer to a "bare physical event". According to his thesis, this is not accurate as far as the art of dance is concerned. Having acknowledged, in the Rylean fashion that, the "practical knowledge and skill of the pianist [for instance] is only fully manifested in the execution of his performances" (1981b p91), David Carr is led to the conclusion that
the mastery of complex forms of human practical knowledge depends, then, on an ability to distinguish and identify particular practices and the actions involved in them.

Carr 1981b pp91-92

Carr wants to develop this point further and he maintains that "practical knowledge is considerably more complicated than that of physical ability" (Carr 1981a p53). It seems that practical knowledge cannot be demonstrated simply through the performance of the activity, because the latter could be a matter of coincidence. In addition, the performing agent should be competent in applying the rules of practical reasoning, a distinct type of logical procedure by means of which practical knowledge is constituted and which differs from theoretical reasoning. More specifically, practical reasoning establishes logical connections "between specific means and particular ends" (Carr 1981a, p60).

Thus, motivated by both the insights and inadequacies of Ryle’s radical theory, Carr argues against Ryle’s premise of the dispositional character of practical knowledge and introduces the concept of practical reasoning. This approach, he argues, is more effective because it "promis[es] a correct understanding of both knowing how and human agency" (Carr 1978 p4). In addition, by asserting that "the notion of practical reasoning is of central importance for a correct understanding of intentional (meaningful) action and rule-guided behaviour" (1978 p4), Carr clearly locates the discussion in the area of action theory.

Developing his perspective on the basis of the specific example of the art of dance, Carr (1987) revisits some issues of action theory. He contends that dance is not just movement but human action, thus taking the opportunity to expose his teleological understanding of the concept of ‘action’. Teleological relations of the form of ‘if B then A’, indicate B as a necessary stage (or means) for A to be fulfilled. According to Carr, this explanation refutes the causal character of the relationship between the intention of the action and the action itself, relocating them both within a single process where the former is simply a necessary stage of the latter.

In this article, Carr’s (1987) objective is to construct a purely philosophical argument. Yet, at the same time, he provides firm extra-disciplinary support to some of the current theories in the discourse of dance. A Cartesian perception of
movement perpetuates the gap between mental and physical processes because it approaches dance as a reflection of something else. Within a perspective of causality, action or the physical manifestation of movement is a repercussion of a mental state which is the intention of the mover and precedes movement. The mind operates first and the body follows.

Yet the current dancing body as revealed through postmodern dance practices is a ‘thinking body’ with the ability to make suggestions (or even take decisions) on the basis of the whole spectrum between physical understanding and mental concerns. If, as Carr has maintained, dance is not a "bare physical event" (1987 p351) but an "intentional human action" (1987 p347) and if there is no dichotomy between intention and manifestation of the action, then dance could not be just a reflection.

By not having to correspond to mental events which necessarily precede movement, dance is manifested within a range of different possibilities. This is why Carr's perspective of the action (which, in this case, is the dance) as fulfilment of an intention appears more effective. As much as the performance of the dance is an embodiment of the intention for this particular dance, there are vast possibilities for non-dichotomous considerations of the body/mind aspect of dance.

This perspective not only supports philosophically the non-dichotomous character of the ‘thinking body’ within the practices of dance postmodernism, but reassembles a number of disparate parameters to facilitate the study of improvisational performance. An appropriate theoretical background emerges and a number of questions become relevant: for example, how ‘intention’ is located and specified in the context of improvisation as performance and what the special character of the embodiment of the intention is, if this is manifested by means of ‘instant composition’.

In addition, Carr's theory of practical reasoning provides a firm methodological tool underlying the organisation of Part 2 of the research. His claim that practical knowledge is primarily a matter of "how particular ends are logically related to specific means" (1981a p60) motivates the task of approaching improvisational performance as discourse. In this way, the tool of the Foucauldian discourse offers the logic on the basis of which a number of practical procedures are
gradually identified as appropriate steps in achieving the skill of improvisational performance.

Yet, this tool can only function in the presence of specific material. In this respect, Part 2 of this research has been constructed in a multidimensional and interactive way. The elements which characterise improvisational performance as discourse emerge as a dialogue between the critical study of various sources on improvisational performance and the outcomes of my own studio experiments.

Within the limitations of the linear character of this written text, Part 3 necessarily undertakes a discussion of the relevance of the studio work to the construction of Part 2. Remaining consistent with the postmodern methodology of keeping the discussion open by posing new questions, Part 3 also addresses the controversial character of the improviser's subjectivity. While the knowledge emerging from the studio experiments supports and inspires the construction of improvisational performance as discourse, the latter also provides guidelines for these experiments. Within this process, the controversy in relation to the improviser's assumed unified subjectivity is gradually revealed thus making a parallel with the problematic position of the subject in Foucauldian discourse.

3.2. Whose 'thinking body'? The dancing subjectivity of the improvising body

To situate the 'thinking body' as a non-dichotomous formation is an epistemological claim; it can be considered an effort to show the truth of its non-dichotomy within the practice of postmodern dance, improvisational dance in particular. Yet, the concept of truth has been seriously criticised within postmodern discourse.

As Judith Grant (1993 p100) clearly describes, with the Enlightenment, truth became the product of rationality and knowledge was defined according to these lines. A number of postmodern thinkers, such as Lyotard (1984) and Foucault (1972), have repeatedly challenged this position. They have maintained the impossibility of 'absolute truths' and addressed the limitations of exclusively rational thinking.

This debate, supported by other current discourses, such as feminist philosophy (Grant 1993), allowed for other forms of knowledge to become
conceivable and consequently possible. From both within and without epistemology the very notion of knowledge was questioned. Foucault's contribution in this area is crucial. In his *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972) he challenged the self-evident link between knowledge and truth. In *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), he associated knowledge with power and in the second volume of *History of Sexuality* (1985), he brought to the fore the element of the 'experience' which allowed him to relate issues of knowledge and subjectivity. Within this poststructuralist framework, to treat the non-dichotomous character of the 'thinking body' as the revelation of an absolute truth simply manifests recurring positivist and essentialist attitudes. In contrast, the debate remains open by reconsidering the existing material on the basis of a different consideration, which is, in this case, the postmodern debate on subjectivity.

Given the fluidity of improvisational practices, appropriate ground becomes available for the discussion of a distinct type of dancing subjectivity. Improvisational performance in particular, characterised by temporariness as an artistic and/or physical event, exposes issues of authorship and process as these emerge from the alternation between fixed subjectivities and their own subversion. In a Foucauldian spirit, this is the moment to ask the next question: 'Whose body is this non-dichotomous improvising thinking body?'

This question can be further elaborated upon along two different routes. In the first case, the argument springs out of a critique of David Carr's (1987) contention about the nature of the art of dance as 'human action rather than movement'. The second arises from Foucauldian problematisation, in the sense that the theoretical construct of the non-dichotomous improvising 'thinking body' is tested by means of a specific experience. This experience is my personal attempt to achieve the 'knowing how' of performing improvisationally through the practical project of the research.

In the first case, a re-reading of Carr's belief that the art of dance must be considered as 'human action rather than movement' is necessary. Carr first asserts: "the notion of practical reasoning is of central importance for a correct understanding of intentional (meaningful) action" (Carr 1978 p4); then he discusses
the concept of ‘knowing how’ or ‘practical knowledge’ only in terms of its conditions of ascription to a third person (1978 p17). He claims:

Knowing how necessarily involves both agent and observer in practical reasoning which is necessary to determine whether practical knowledge and rational procedure are involved rather than mere luck.

Carr 1978 p18

Although he does not directly exclude the possibility of an agent to ascribing ‘knowing how’ to oneself following the same guidelines, Carr does not comment specifically on this case. In relocating the discussion within the context of current improvisational dance practices, Carr’s perspective seems inadequate. According to this perspective, the study of the ‘knowing how’ of the current improvising body faces a lack of guidelines for any other case apart from the one which legitimises this form of knowledge by means of an external subjectivity.

In the case of improvisational performance, an interesting controversy emerges at this point. As Chapter 7 undertakes to show, part of the intention of improvisational performance is to change the audience’s assumptions about what a dance piece should be. By this token, its idiom cannot include pre-determined fixed standards on the basis of which the efficiency of the performance event could be evaluated. This means that the external subjectivities of the audience (who are the observers in this case) cannot assess a practical reasoning they ignore.

On the contrary, the performers as dancing subjects must be able to ascribe to themselves the ‘knowing how’ of this skill, because otherwise they have no framework within which they can operate their mechanisms of decision-making. Yet there is no way for this form of practical knowledge to become legitimised by an external subjectivity.

Another way of further elaborating upon the question ‘Whose thinking body?’ is to use the Foucauldian method of problematisation as has been explained in Chapter 1 (1.2). This approach also brings to the fore issues of theory and practice in dance. Foucault’s method of ‘problematizing’ is a method of testing theoretical material in the light of relevant experiences; it challenges the credibility of theoretical models and unveils the controversial character of the discussed issues from within practice. In this way, the theoretical non-dichotomous ‘thinking body’
of the improvisational performance can be observed in the light of a number of experiments which seek by means of the practical project of the research to give it specific material form.

This process is guided by Carr’s suggestions on the methodology of practical reasoning. According to Adshead (1989 p42), Carr could have recommended that, in order to complete the project, I have to get involved in a number of practical procedures which would lead me to the final stage of the 'knowing how' of the improvisational performance. But before this stage, it is necessary to break the task into smaller portions of manageable amounts of work (Carr 1981b p94). Following these guidelines, my very first step is to characterise the material I aim to learn, that is to organise it as a coherent object of learning. This is the main objective of Part 2 of the thesis, within which I have chosen the concept of the Foucauldian discourse as the main tool.

This approach can help me to discuss issues of practical knowledge (which are rooted in traditional philosophy) from a postmodern perspective. In addition, the characterisation of improvisational performance by means of the Foucauldian discourse becomes a form of politics, a way to criticise from within the traditional theories of the epistemological discourse.

This approach subverts knowledge as fixed by revealing the mechanisms which have linked it to truth. It refocuses the discussion as a study of the nature of knowledge. Foucault suggests that, within his version of the discourse, the element of unity should not be sought "in the coherence of concepts, but in their simultaneous or successive emergence" (1972 p35) and develops this further by asking:

Rather than seeking the permanence of themes, images, and opinions through time, rather than retracing the dialectic of their conflicts in order to individualize groups of statements, could one not rather mark out the dispersion of the points of choice, and define prior to any option, to any thematic preference, a field of strategic possibilities? Foucault 1972 p37

Although Foucault states, in *Archaeology of Knowledge*, that "the questions of the human being, consciousness, origin, and the subject emerge, intersect, mingle, and separate off" (1972 p16), he does not deal with the very position of the subject in
relation to knowledge. According to Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), this is why he creates the "illusion" of an autonomous discourse, "heavily influenced by the vogue of structuralism in France" at that time (1982 pvii).21

The adoption of the Foucauldian discourse as a means of characterisation of the improvisational performance inherently constructs the material in a way which is problematic from the perspective of the current debate on subjectivity. This problem becomes more apparent as the practical project of the research unfolds. This discussion also includes the problems emerging from my personal involvement with the task. While the practical procedures are undertaken, I engage personally with this experience and within this role I become a subject. At the same time, my subjectivity becomes an observable element of the project. The possibility of a unified dancing subjectivity within improvisational performance is seriously questioned, by means of studio work. Issues of self-knowledge come to the discussion and the role of the 'I' becomes an important aspect of the problem.22

According to Ryle's theory of knowledge, the problem of self-knowledge is directly linked with the nature of the 'I'. He contends that the latter is systematically elusive (in Cassam 1994 p40)23 and explains:

My last year's self, or my yesterday's self, could in principle be exhaustively described and accounted for, and ... your past or present self could be exhaustively described and accounted for by me, but ... my today's self perpetually slips out of any hold of it that I try to take.

Ryle in Cassam 1994 p40

Ryle's approach is particularly interesting for this research. In performing improvisationally, the dancing subjectivity of the performer is elusive, because it is constantly reconsidered by each new choice within the dance. Concluding the argument, Ryle also brings to the discussion the notion of 'now':

'I' is like my own shadow; I can never get away from it, as I can get away from your shadow. There is no mystery about this constancy, but I mention it because it seems to endow 'I' with a mystifying uniqueness and adhesiveness. 'Now' has something of the same besetting feeling.

Ryle in Cassam 1994 p42
Improvisational performance, which is largely based on the technique of instant composition, faces a similar problem: the need to grasp the sense of 'now'.

While Ryle (1949) claims that self-knowledge is a type of knowledge "without privileged access" (p 167), Vendler notices that

the distinction between imagining myself to be a such and such, and imagining someone in general to be a such and such is an illusive one.

Vendler in Ryle 1976 p112

Vendler also points out the difference between thinking of "[myself] objectively, in the way other people think of me" and thinking of "[myself] subjectively, as the source of all representations, including all possible alternatives in history" (Vendler in Ryle 1979 p118).

It is this dichotomous nature of the subject/object discourse that feminist philosophy has criticised in particular. In compensation feminists have explored alternative notions of the self and suggested different strategies for pursuing knowledge (in this case, self-knowledge) such as learning from experience, using autobiography and aiming at change (Griffiths 1995).

In particular, Daly uses Kristeva’s perspective of the self ‘in the process of becoming’ to analyse Duncan’s contribution to modern dance. In confronting Duncan’s alternative approach to choreography, Daly finds particularly useful the theory of a self as not "situated in one position and unchanging over time ... [but rather as] a process that fluctuates through space and time" (1992 p244). As mentioned in section 2.3 of Chapter 2 Duncan’s work has been often described as improvisation within the implicit assumption that it lacks decision-making processes.

It must be noted that improvisational performance is not unique in bringing to the fore problematic issues of subjectivity as these occur within theatre dance production. Burt discusses the contribution of the Judson Dance Theater’s work in "addressing the aesthetic implications of acknowledging the problematic nature of the construction of subjectivities" (1995 p64). Attempting to take a closer look at Yvonne Rainer’s Trio A, he claims that such works "take as their starting point modern dance’s failure to convince us of the coherence of the subject" (Burt 1995,
p 64), thus locating interesting links between dance postmodernism and some of the major issues of the current critical discourse.  

In the same study, Burt (1995) explains in detail how minimalism (in sculpture), which is an important part of the context of postmodern dance, has treated the spectator as a non-unified subject. This form of sculpture disperses the spectator's subjectivity in terms of position and time. The position from which the spectator experiences the work is not that of a detached subjectivity. "Minimal sculpture requires the spectator to see it as art in order for it to become art" (Burt 1995 p62). The spectator becomes part of the work. Thus the viewer/subject cannot really become such, apart from as part of the work/object. The viewer is subjectified only as an element of the object. In terms of time, the viewer's subjectivity becomes also destabilised since these works include a theoretical aspect according to which the spectator is asked to experience them through time.

Part 3 of this thesis becomes a 'problematization' on the improviser's subjectivity. Yet, this is not inconsistent with Foucault's own theoretical journey, as he became increasingly interested in studying the human subject. In the second volume of History of Sexuality (1985), he exposed the crucial role of the experience in the constitution of knowledge. As early as 1982, he had already made public some of his thoughts on the notion of 'subject', in his essay 'The Subject and Power' (in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982 pp208-226), in the following way:

There are two meanings of the word subject: subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to.

Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982 p212

Without undermining the importance of Foucault's perspective, which primarily linked issues of subjectivity with power relationships, this thesis ultimately focuses on one specific repercussion of this work: Foucault's contribution to the postmodern project of de-centering the subject. Claiming that Foucault "advocate[s] a dispersion of a fixed and unified subjectivity", Schrift explains:

Foucault's genealogy of the subject provides a theoretical articulation of this account of a multiple subject positioning insofar as it frames
the subject not as a substance but as form, a form, moreover, that is not always identical to itself.

Schrift 1995 p38

In locating the notion of improvisational performance in Chapter 2 and discussing practical knowledge and the problematics of the improviser’s dancing subjectivity in Chapter 3, all of the components of the original learning task (‘I want to know how to perform improvisationally’) have been introduced. At this point the research can proceed to Part 2, an examination of improvisational performance as discourse. This stage undertakes the construction of the logic according to which a number of practical procedures are gradually selected as appropriate within the scope of achieving the skill of improvisational performance. Part 2 also addresses theoretically the elements underlying the chosen procedures while Part 3 discusses their controversial character within the very process of the practical project of the research.

NOTES

1. Recently, the interdisciplinary character of current debates, has allowed for a laterally-oriented involvement with this problem. Knowledge has become an issue in a number of other discourses, such as sociology and feminism, for instance, which deal with it from different perspectives. Michel Foucault’s contribution is particularly in theorising the relationships between knowledge and power in a number of his works. See Discipline and Punish (1977) in particular.

2. Foster rediscovers the physical character of the historian’s work as she reminds the reader that such an activity "requires high tolerance for sitting and for reading ... it cramps fingers, spawns sneezes and squinting" (in Foster 1995 p6). At the same time traditional dance theory has even attempted to undermine the physicality of the body in the very act of the performance. The latter has been presented as a primarily elusive event while the choreographer’s intention has been accepted within its "enduring impact" (Foster in Foster 1995 p15). Thus "the body is at best like something, but it never is that something" (Foster in Foster 1995 p4).

3. From an anthropological perspective, Lakoff and Johnson do not agree with contemporaneous theories about meaning in such areas as linguistics and philosophy. For them, metaphor is a means of conceptualisation (1980 pix). In particular, ‘orientational’ metaphors are based on our everyday spatial understanding of the natural world (1980 pp14-21). For instance, the idea of ‘prices going up’ is obviously based on the element of height which determines spatial relationships. Robert Schwarz (1993) philosophising on issues of modern physics has pushed this
idea further and his theory, in spite of its universalist character, maintains a privileged position for the art of dance. Schwarz contends that the mere concept of space is nothing more than a necessity for the thinking mechanism to operate and "thinking is a choreography of shifting spatial orientations in an imagined space" (Svane in Schwarz 1993 p43). The brain can only think about things it can 'move' around and therefore, the concept of space is an abstraction of a number of physical properties of movement. According to this theory, researching the thinking process also means researching human movement and dancers can be very helpful in supporting this work, through their knowledge of the body's movement. Unfortunately, Schwarz acknowledging Lakoff and Johnson's thesis on the importance of metaphor, ultimately adopts a universalist stance; he supports that "in the entire history of civilisation, all the major ideas were based on 29 basic metaphors" (1993 p46).

4. Todd explains further that in the past when there was much mystery about the function of the brain, the 'mind' had been identified as an additional element with spiritual connotations alongside the biological notion of the brain. She contends that once it became clear that the brain consists of two parts (the autonomic and the cerebrospinal), "we no longer speak of mind as independent of these systems" (1937 p272).

5. **Monism** was introduced in philosophy by Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and supported the existence of only one substance. Later, various versions of monism were expressed by such philosophers as Schelling, Hegel, William James, Russell and Bradley while Spinoza, Descartes and Leibniz accepted only certain aspects of it (Hall in Urmson & Ré 1989 p216). Monistic approaches in philosophy attempt to provide alternative attitudes to the long established logocentric tradition of the Western philosophical thought which emphasises understanding on the basis of binary relationships between mutually exclusive concepts. The above debate is relevant to this research, as it deals with, amongst other questions, the possibility for a non-dichotomous 'thinking body', within a number of improvisational practices in the context of American and British postmodern dance.

6. Todd contends that the 'neuromuscular unit' initiates movement on the basis of an association between internal and external stimuli ultimately inducing a specific response. Thus psychology meets physiology in the sense that "psychological factors affect the response" (Todd 1987 p2). These views should be carefully located within the relevant debates of the 1930s. The impact of behaviourism, first launched in 1913, as a major tradition in the psychological thought of the period was probably relevant to Todd's emphasis on the physiological basis of the production of movement. Similar perspectives have been developed in monistic philosophy (see previous note), where the mind becomes "a reflection of underlying material processes. Thoughts reflect the firing of neurones in the brain, emotions our endocrinological state" (Taylor in Urmson & Ré 1989 p236). Carr describes this form of philosophy as "un-Cartesian" but he criticises its tendency to locate these processes as manifestations of causal relationships (Carr 1978 p12).
7. See for instance the development of the technique of Contact Improvisation in Novack (1990).

8. Davis discusses the case of unwanted movements of the arm (because of spasms or other reasons) in order to characterise as action only this kind of motion which takes place in full awareness of the human being who performs it (Davis 1979 p2). Other theorists accept as action even the pointless attempt to move a paralysed limb (MacCann in Audi 1995 p6). MacCann also explains that some action theorists consider basic actions the ones which are indispensable for the performance of others, but they do not require any others to precede them in order for them to be performed (in Audi 1995). This is an effort to face the problem of infinite regress in action theory, which would fail to provide an operational characterisation of the notion of action, since for each action there should always be a preceding one.

9. See Writings on Dance, no 11/12, 1994/95. The Australian dance journal has devoted an issue to the conference 'Thinking Bodies' which took place in Melbourne in October 1993 (Rothfield 1994/95 p3) and investigated the possibilities of integrating theory and practice in dance as well as writing with performance. Similar ideas were explored in THE CONNECTED BODY? project which took place in Amsterdam at the School for New Dance Development in August 1994.

10. See Taylor in Urmson & Réé 1989 pp 75-76.

11. Much of Ryle's (1949) work refers to the nature of two different forms of knowledge: 'knowing how' and 'knowing that' which are otherwise described as practical and theoretical knowledge. Ryle's contribution consists in reconsidering the nature of 'knowing how' as different from 'knowing that' but also not reducible to it. Within philosophy, the discussion of the difference between theory and practice can be traced back at least to Aristotle who distinguished theoretical from practical reasoning on the assumption that the latter is not a statement or a proposition like the former, rather it is an action (Carr 1978 p5).

12. Ryle explains that the main problem with this philosophical attitude which he calls 'the ghost in the machine' originates in the assumption that theorising is both "the primary activity of minds ... and intrinsically private" (Ryle 1949 p27).

13. Lyons offers a characterisation of the concept of disposition as "an ability, ... proness to act or react, or fail to act or react, in a certain way in certain circumstances" (1980 p46). He also describes 'disposition' as a behavioural pattern, emphasising that behaviour cannot be possessed, it can only be displayed (Lyons 1980 p47).

14. See note 1 of Chapter 2.


16. 'Practical knowledge' for Carr refers to the mastery of practical skills and it can be demonstrated only through the performance of these skills, as has been briefly
mentioned in Chapter 1 of this thesis. By contrast, theoretical knowledge is demonstrated through correct use of the rules of logic (see also Adshead 1989).

17. Developing his theory further, Carr concludes that the method of "distinguishing and identifying these practices and actions" is actually a gradual proceeding from complex ones, through simpler ones to 'basic actions' (see note 8 of this chapter), while theoretical reasoning starts in contrast from basic propositions (Carr 1981b p94).

18. In a later article, Carr explains how "the concept of 'knowing how' is located in an area of logical geographical dispute - at a point of overlap between epistemology and action theory" but he maintains that he is mainly concerned with this concept's "practical instantiation" (1981b p88).

19. As Paxton (1995/i) has explained the term body/mind with slash (or hyphen) attempts to compensate for the lack of a single term which would be able to refer to the state of the dancing body in which mental and physical events are not dichotomised.

20. In a similar way, Grant (1995 pp99-100) describes the paradoxical position of this feminist philosophy which becomes self-justified on epistemological grounds. Since feminists criticise the very concept of truth as a by-product of male rationality, in presenting the argument of women's oppression as true, they face a major self-contradiction. For Grant (1995), feminist philosophy should deconstruct the dominant assumption of knowledge which links it with truth, by seeking alternative approaches. Similarly Foucault studies the concept of knowledge in terms of power, which is another strategy of deconstructing the self-evident relationship between knowledge and truth.

21. Foucault has attempted to support that in his Archaeology of Knowledge (1972), his "aim is not to transfer ... to the history of knowledge, a structuralist approach" but he admits that "this transformation, the problems that it raises, the tools that it uses, the concepts that emerge from it, and the results that it obtains are not entirely foreign to what is called structural analysis" (Foucault 1972 p15). Gutting (1994) does not agree with Dreyfus and Rabinow who seek to provide a general interpretation for Foucault's work, "interpretive analytics" (pviii), which emerges from the "triangulation" of "three positions: structuralism, phenomenology and hermeneutics" (pxv). For him, this is an inadequate approach because it "den[ies] the ... most distinctive and most valuable [elements] in [Foucault's] voice: its specificity and its marginality" (Gutting in Gutting 1994 p3).

22. The fact that Descartes defined his notion of the thinking subject with the phrase 'I think therefore I am', in which the pronoun 'I' plays such an important role is probably crucial for subsequent explorations which bring in, into the same discussion issues of subjectivity, notions of self and the character of the pronoun 'I'.

24. For more details on this subject see Grant 1993.

25. For more information on Kristeva's perspective see Kristeva (1984). For more information on Daly's interpretation in relation to why Duncan has been presented as dancer rather than as choreographer by many critics and dance historians, see also Chapter 2 (2.3).

26. It is not surprising that Rainer developed her later works, in particular her work in film, within the feminist arena. Feminist philosophy has thoroughly explored issues of subjectivity. See also Phelan (1988) for an extensive discussion of Rainer's film *The Man Who Envied Women*.
Part Two: Towards the action - Improvisational performance in dance as discourse

Introduction

In approaching improvisational performance in dance as discourse, an alternative way of dealing with historical material is suggested. Part 2 of the research becomes the next stage towards achieving the skill of performing improvisationally by providing an appropriate framework for understanding this skill on the basis of its history. This analysis has been undertaken with postmodern sensibility involving strategies of new history, in particular, Foucauldian discourse, which has been used as the main tool for the organisation of the material.

This approach is particularly advantageous. Linear conceptions of history, which attempt to re-constitute the ‘true’ nature of the past in describing processes under development and prioritising the notion of progress, can be thus avoided. In compensation, the notion of discontinuity can be introduced to support the task of treating historical material as a space of transformation.

One of the most essential features of the new history is probably the displacement of the discontinuous: its transference from the obstacle to the work itself; its integration into the discourse of the historian, where it no longer plays the role of an external condition that must be reduced, but that of a working concept.

Foucault 1972 p9

Within this perspective, forms can be conceived within their processes of being "repeated, known, forgotten, transformed" (Foucault 1972 p25). It becomes impossible to confront this complexity on the basis of such concepts as ‘tradition’, ‘influence’, ‘development and evolution’ or ‘spirit’, linking devices of major significance in traditional historical analysis (Foucault 1972 pp21-30).

In this way, Foucauldian discourse, which organises concepts in terms of systems of regularities, as mentioned in Chapter 1, allows for "grasp(ing) ... other types of relationships" (Foucault 1972 p29); discourse uses as "principle of the analysis ... the condition of possibility" (Foucault 1981 p68). The accompanying notions of chance, discontinuity, dependence and transformation are thus accommodated accordingly.
For Foucault, to achieve this requires that "the linear model of speech ... and the one of the stream of consciousness" (Foucault 1972 p169) is abandoned and the "invalidation of the] smallest units that were traditionally recognised ...: the instant and the subject" (Foucault 1981 p69) accepted. Ultimately, Foucault's method does not aim to reveal "the uniqueness of the system ... [nor at] restoring what has been thought, wished, aimed at, experienced, desired" (Foucault 1972 p139). It seems as if

the problem arises of knowing whether the unity of a discourse is based not so much on the permanence and uniqueness of an object as on the space in which various objects emerge and are continuously transformed.

Foucault 1972 p32

Under these guidelines, improvisational performance in dance can be grasped within its processes of transformation. In this sense, to adopt the above position becomes a means of approaching the problem of 'what-it-is-to-know-the-skill-of-improvisational-performance' in an alternative way. By using the tool of Foucauldian discourse, this research emphasises that what constitutes a more relevant form of knowledge, from a postmodern perspective, is an understanding of improvisational performance's mechanism of transformation rather than the construction of a fixed model of the form.

As has been explained in Chapter 3 (section 3.1.4), Carr's theory of practical reasoning relocates the ability of the learner to understand "the rational procedures necessary for the successful execution" of the learning skill at the very core of the notion of practical knowledge (Carr 1981a p60). Therefore, an understanding of processes of transformation in improvisational performance provides the necessary logic for selecting appropriate practical procedures, the successful performance of which can demonstrate the practical knowledge of the improvisational skill.

This position has an additional advantage. The practical project of the research, which is also an artistic project involving the production of an improvisational performance event, has been liberated from the necessity to materialise any of the pre-existing models of the form. Approaching the learning of improvisational skill by selecting a number of practical procedures on the basis of the perspectives of transformation of the form implies the will to create an
original artistic product, an additional possibility of what improvisational performance might be.

This is by no means inconsistent with Foucauldian interpretation, in the sense that discourses have been presented "as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault 1972 p49). At the crossroads between his theoretical and practical considerations on improvisation, Steve Paxton approaches the problem in a similar way: "To study something like improvisation, which is defined as you go, everything you assume is going to affect the result" (1993 p66).

This research suggests four perspectives along which processes of transformation of improvisational performance might be discerned. In a more strictly Foucauldian terminology, these perspectives constitute a "system of discursive regularities" (Racevskis 1983 p74) or a "systematic dispersion of elements" (Smart 1985 p39) across which manifestations of improvisational performance have been enabled "to be repeated, known, forgotten, transformed, utterly erased" (Foucault 1972 p 25).

The above four perspectives emerge as multidimensional considerations of such notions as choice, change, concept and ideology, which are examined in Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 respectively. These four elements are not of the same order. As terms, the first two, choice and change, have been primarily borrowed from the practitioners' vocabulary, as this appears in their numerous written texts and oral interviews. By contrast, concept and ideology have emerged through my own means of critically looking at the material and the those of other researchers. The route followed in the exploration of each of these areas does not necessarily link points across one selected plane. As Foucault said,

these elements that I am proposing to analyse are of rather different kinds. Some constitute rules of formal construction, others rhetorical practices; some define the internal configuration of a text, others the modes of relation and interference between different texts; some are characteristic of a particular period, others have a distant origin and far-reaching chronological import. But what properly belongs to a discursive formation and what makes it possible to delimit the group of concepts, disparate as they may be, that are specific to it, is the way in which these different elements are related to one another.  

Foucault 1972 p59-60
Foucault's tool of the discourse allows not only the location of links between different levels of the problem or research object but also the possibility of 'composing' within the argument pieces of information of a different nature. Thus, the discussion of Part 2 approaches principles which are common (but in different ways) across a wide range of improvisational dance, compositional practices, contextual parameters, conditions which emerge from looking at the form as a whole, characteristics of particular works and working methods of different artists. The element of difference and the degree of division within such variety of levels become almost the activating mechanism within a pattern of using them metaphorically in relation to each other. This is by no means without merit, since, as Black insists, "a metaphorical statement can sometimes generate new knowledge and insight by changing relationships between the things designated" (in Ortony 1979 p37).

This analysis based on the history of improvisational performance has been also supported and inspired by the simultaneous experiments of the studio work, which is discussed in Part 3 of the research. This studio project focuses on the materialisation of a number of practical procedures which have been devised within the scope of achieving the skill of improvisational performance on the basis of an understanding of the notions of choice, change, concept and ideology as these have been presented in Part 2. In this way, Part 3, reconsiders the discussion undertaken in Part 2 from a different perspective, bringing to the fore issues which emerge within the double task of both devising and materialising these practical procedures.

NOTES

1. See note 20 of Chapter 1.

2. Paxton's interest in developing the technique of Contact Improvisation seems to have sprung out of confusion in relation to whether improvisation had to do with "perception, projection or proportion"; he was trying to arrive at a "definable, clear way to improvise that was still improvisation" (Paxton 1981-82 p6); in other words he was trying to create a working definition on the basis of practical means.

3. The task of 'classifying' the sources for this part of the research is by no means without problems. There is at least one exception within the above classification. The British choreographer Rosemary Butcher, whose contribution to the birth of
improvisational performance in the current British context is discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, has repeatedly used the term ‘concept’ similarly to academicians. For instance, see Butcher (1992).
Chapter 4 Choice

4.1 Notions of choice in improvisational dance
4.2 The context of choice: the ‘present moment’ and the body/mind issue
4.3 Two pools of choices:
   4.3.1 New movement concepts
   4.3.2 Postmodern compositional strategies and Robert Dunn’s contribution

The element of choice is of major importance within the practice of improvisational performance in dance. Chapter 2 emphasised the role of decision-making procedures in improvisational dance focusing on the improviser’s ability to make choices as an essential part of her/his skill. On the basis of this assumption, the traditional understanding of improvisation as the opposite of choreography in the sense that the former does not involve the ability to make choices has been challenged.

Chapter 4 undertakes further investigation of the notion of choice, firstly, introducing a range of different conceptions of this element from the practitioners’ point of view. Secondly, the specific character of the decision-making procedures as these take place in the context of the ‘present moment’ and on the basis of a non-dichotomous understanding of the body/mind issue is also discussed. Thirdly, an overview of current approaches to movement, based on different ways of conceptualising movement, is presented as a rich pool of possibilities from within which the improvisers can select. Finally, the problem of making compositional choices within improvisational dance is addressed and the contribution of the American teacher, choreographer and composer, Robert Dunn, is emphasised.

In his discursive analysis, Foucault offers a privileged position to the notion of choice. Given that the unity of a discourse is based in "the presence of a systematic dispersion of elements" (Smart 1985 p39), Foucault suggests that "the principles of the individualization of a discourse ... should be sought in the dispersion of the points of choice that the [latter] leaves free" (Foucault 1972 p 36). In this way, his work is primarily involved in "mark[ing] out ... a field of strategic possibilities" (Foucault 1972 p37).
It can be argued that, in a way which is similar to Foucauldian archaeology, the study of improvisational dance seeks, amongst other objectives, to reveal "field[s] of strategic possibilities" emerging from the way different artists exercise choice in the making of their work. A significant part of this task is directly related to the way these artists claim they understand and use the element of choice in their dances; this is the focus of section 4.1 of this chapter. Yet, in order to understand better the character of these different artistic attitudes in relation to choice, it is also important to discuss the nature of the material which was contemporaneously available to these artists and constituted their pool of choices; this is the aim of the last section (4.3) of this chapter.

4.1. Notions of choice in improvisational dance

In his writings, the American teacher Robert Dunn, a seminal figure within the birth of American dance postmodernism, emphasises the improvisational skill in dance as a three-way process. This skill includes firstly an understanding of "perceptual cues", secondly different kinds of movement vocabulary and thirdly possible ways of correlating these two elements (Dunn 1987 p32). In this model, mastery in both theoretical and practical understanding of "perceptual skills" and movement vocabularies is not sufficient in Dunn's concept of an effective improvisation. The ability to make choices in relation to the particular cues and materials underlies the final stage of the whole attempt, which is the one of correlation.

On the assumption that composition is primarily about making choices, Robert Dunn's partner and close collaborator, Judith Dunn, offers an extremely privileged position to improvisation, claiming that it is "the sole method of composition" (1979 p139). She admits that working with choice in the area of improvisation is one of her main artistic interests and further discusses the impact of the performers' "decision-making power" in the making of improvisational work (1979 p139).

In a discussion amongst the American improvisational artists Patty Giovenco, Lauri Nigel, Elesa Rosasco and Nancy Stark Smith about the differences between performing choreographed and improvised work, Nigel describes improvisation as
choreography in a way which is similar to Judith Dunn. He contends that the decision-making aspect of the artist’s personality which operates during the choreographic process also "comes out in improvisation ... [because] you're choreographing naturally as you're doing it" (Nigel in Givenco et al. 1983 p50).

The American artist David Appel brings to the fore another comparison; he differentiates between improvising as dance therapy and improvising as a performance skill. He claims that, in developing improvisational techniques for performance, the objective should be to "learn to listen to all the available information"; on the basis of this material a "fine-tuning" ability of making choices should operate (1983 p36). Therefore, the difference between improvisation as dance therapy and improvisational performance is the lack or presence of an audience and the responsibility of the artist to establish connections with this audience. Appel contends that the artist’s ability to communicate with an audience directly relies on her/his ability to make choices on the basis of a "fluid sensibility ... away [from] old habits and patterns ... and open to ... change" (1983 p36).

The American improvisational artist Dana Reitz, who has also performed in London several times, pushes the discussion further and describes various types of choices that have become part of her own improvisational processes. Reporting on a performance by Dana Reitz in London in 1981, Hayes (1982) creates the impression that the event became almost a lecture-demonstration. After having introduced herself to the audience, Reitz performed two solo pieces, answered questions and, in the end, repeated her second piece to let the audience see the character of her improvisational method. She described her approach in the following way:

I give myself permission to make choices, sometimes mind choices, sometimes body choices. I try and sink into the rhythm and explore it. The core choreography is solid, the core movements and the idea of what I want to give - then I improvise. I have a specific goal within each piece.

Reitz in Hayes 1982 p13

Fourteen years later, Reitz seems to be working along the same lines but on different levels. In October 1995, while offering a workshop at the London Contemporary Dance School, she primarily worked with different levels of freedom
in relation to the amount of set material, different types of decision-making techniques. In addition she discussed her performance process and confessed that, in such moments, she lets herself decide how far she can go with the improvised parts and when she needs to come back to the set material. The piece becomes thus "a wonder trip" during which she tries to discover and crystallise while never allowing the feeling to become dominant during the performance event as she might do in the studio (Reitz 1995).

Whereas Reitz clearly prioritises the element of choice in her work, her pieces cannot be clearly characterised as fully or partially improvised. In this way, the case brought in Chapter 2 (2.2) in relation to the problems arising in classifying current dance production as either fully improvisational or fully choreographed is further supported by an additional example.¹

A number of other artists, looking at movement improvisation through their specific perspectives, also notice the relevance of choice as a fundamental aspect of their creative skill. Elaine Summers, who combines dance making and film making, uses improvisational techniques based on John Cage's 'chance' methods, which give her the possibilities of "infinite choices"; she admits: "Considering choices, arranging choices, and changing choices is one of the delights of my life" (1987 p36).

Kent de Spain, who travels further down the area of 'chance' and attempts to discuss issues of quantum theory in the context of movement improvisation, describes the latter in the following way:

Improvisation can be thought of as a series of minute creative acts, with each action arising from the improviser's experience/physical structure and the conditions created by the improvisational choices that precede it. Quantum theory tells us that after each action there is a moment, a place, a world where many choices for the next movement simultaneously coexist.

De Spain 1994 p 59

De Spain contends that he experiences this state physically through his body in "microseconds of stillness between movements" in the form of tension emerging from the coexistence of several contradictory impulses (1994 p 59).
Bringing together the skills of improvisation and meditation within the act of making and performing her dance pieces, the American postmodernist Barbara Dilley also sees the ability to make choices as a crucial aspect of her creative work. In a similar way to Paxton who developed the technique of Contact Improvisation as an antidote to the loose character of Grand Union’s total improvisation (1981-82 p6), Barbara Dilley also ended up feeling uncomfortable within the Grand Union’s lack of focus (1990, p41). Dilley sought assistance in meditational practices which allowed her to view movement experiences in a more "unified way" (1980 p19). In Dilley’s work, the process of choosing becomes the channel of communication on two levels: the first task of the performer is to establish communication with her/his self and the second to achieve connections with the surrounding world and other human beings (Dilley 1980 p21).

At this juncture it is important to add that an examination of the therapeutic movement work offered by the Alexander Technique can further illuminate the debate in relation to the significant role of the ability to choose within the practice of improvisational dance.²

In the last decade of the 19th century, the actor Mathias Alexander, having temporarily lost his voice, started developing his own theory for an optimal body posture. His main concern involves the efficient organisation of the human body around the spine. The head in particular must balance appropriately on the top of the spine and a lengthened spine is the ultimate aim of the work. The main strategy of the Alexander method consists of a process of unlearning bad habits of bodily posture and misuse of the body in uneconomical movements. An Alexander teacher aims at developing deep awareness of the body (kinaesthetic sense) both through anatomical explanations and rearrangement of the student’s body through touch. This process develops the ability of inhibition, namely the ability to stop the wrong pattern. Thus, through conscious control, muscle tension is released and more efficient posture and movement coordination is achieved because released body parts can use the maximum potential of the force of gravity.³

In her teaching of modern dance techniques, Jayne Stevens (1995/i) uses the Alexander Technique extensively in order to maximise performance. She points out Alexander’s contribution in having implied through his work the importance of the
ability to exercise choice within the very process of reacting to stimuli. Alexander understood ‘habit’ as a lack of the ability to react to stimuli with fresh responses. According to Stevens (1995/i), Alexander argued that through habit, forms of misusing the body ultimately appear as inherent movement characteristics of the mover and her/his ability to choose an effective alternative disappears.

The skill of responding to stimuli (this term should be considered in a wide sense) has often been considered integral to the skill of improvisational performance. The British improviser Eddie Prevost, a seminal figure in the British improvising music scene since the 1960s, maintains that the difference between improvised and composed music lies in the fact that the former primarily relies upon

1) the application of ‘problem-solving’ techniques ‘within’ performance [and]
2) the dialogical interrelationships between musicians

Prevost 1995 p172

Without major alterations, the same model could be applied to improvisational dance. It is possible to consider the movement solutions of the improvisational problems arising during the performance as responses to stimuli. For Prevost, ‘dialogical interrelationships’ occur during the performance as the sounds produced by the musicians operate as stimuli for each other; in dance similar interrelationships are formed amongst the performers or amongst the soloist and other parameters of the work (lighting etc). It can even be argued that a dance performer actually responds not only to ‘external’ stimuli but also to those which originate in her/his own body. The fact that the dancing body is a living organism, permanently changing at least at the level of its physicality, challenges the idea that in improvisation the same movement task can be offered absolutely identical physical solutions twice.

The contribution of the Alexander Technique to the improviser’s work is that it provides a method of working within the scope of eliminating constraints in the very process of making choices. In this way, the improviser’s ability to come up with fresh responses in relation to various sorts of stimuli increases and this has been usually considered as an enhanced state of the improvisational skill.
4.2. The context of choice: the ‘present moment’ and the body/mind perspective

In improvisational dance the character of the decision-making procedures is also closely related to the fact that many artists emphasise the importance of the ‘present moment’ in their work. Furthermore the body/mind issue becomes a crucial aspect within these artists’ search for a physically intelligent body in a way which is similar to the concept of the ‘thinking body’ (see Chapter 3). Therefore it is pertinent to examine the role of the notion of the ‘present moment’ in various artists’ improvisational work and their varied responses to the body/mind problem. In this way, particular strategies of making choices during improvisational dance will become visible.

The British improviser Julyen Hamilton (1995a) has named his improvisational dance work ‘instant composition’, emphasising in this way the importance of the element of time in his work. Hamilton credits Butcher, with whom he worked at the beginning of his career, with offering him a firm method of making decisions, an "editing technique" (1995c). In the way Hamilton subsequently developed his own technique of making dances ‘instantly’, the ability to discern which elements are more important than others within the limits of the ‘present moment’ plays a crucial role (1995c).

Other movement artists who perform improvisationally, such as the British Miranda Tufnell and the American Steve Paxton, have described the relevance of the ‘present moment’ in their work in terms of their understanding of the notion of 'nowness'.

Miranda Tufnell emphasises the centrality of the ‘immediate moment’ within the improvisational skill. She is fascinated by the possibilities of Mabel Todd’s ‘thinking body’. Tufnell’s understanding of this concept is about "the shifting evolution of a thought through a dancer’s body ... within which [she] experience[s] each moment" (Tufnell 1993 p22). In addition, her sense of receptiveness and the ability to respond to stimuli can only be located within the specific context of the "immediate moment". Her suggestions for the learning of improvisation include a large number of methods through which the learner can improve her/his ability of "becoming ‘present’, attentive to the immediate moment" (Tufnell 1990 p1). Tufnell’s main tool for this task is the use of powerful imagery on the basis of
accurate anatomical knowledge of the body (1990 pp1-41). This method increases the possibilities of a deeper awareness of the ever changing body of the dancer.

Paxton, on the other hand, develops an unusual theory in relation to the character of the ‘now’. He contends:

When you look at how the body works it seems as though ‘now’ is a very difficult question, because it actually is a span of time. It has a duration in a sense that it takes a certain amount of time for the sensing from your foot to reach your brain and then to be acknowledged and known as ‘oh, yes this is how my foot is feeling, it itches on the bottom’, you know. That ‘itch’ has actually occurred some milliseconds ago, it’s not occurring at the same time that you’re aware of it ... You are working slightly from behind, what one would think of as the actual ‘now’ which is going to happen to you and you are going to sort it out and then you are going to try to choose the next ‘now’ moment, but you are already ...

Paxton 1995/i

While Tufnell’s understanding of the immediate moment focuses on the state of the physical body, Paxton’s consideration of the notion of ‘now’ is almost philosophical. It feeds the theoretical debate on improvisation in a way that can affect practice because it primarily aims at questioning assumptions.

Other artists, such as the American improviser Lance Gries, whose professional experience includes a long collaboration with Trisha Brown, locates the importance of the ‘present moment’ within the necessity of a widened awareness (1995). Nevertheless Gries’s sense of ‘awareness’ is an over-extended one, in the sense that it encompasses both the dancing body of the performer and the surrounding world which consists of spatial, environmental factors and other human beings, even these people’s "thoughts" (1995).

These practical and theoretical concerns in relation to the relevance of the ‘present moment’ within improvisational performance in dance seem to have been shaped in conjunction with a prevailing interest in the physicality of the body. As mentioned in Chapter 1 (1.3), Banes (1993) contends that during the 1960s, the ‘physical’ had been emphasised as a form of resistance to the ‘mental’ or the verbal. In dance, the physical body was gradually rediscovered in its ‘wisdom’ as a ‘thinking body’ and issues of materiality in dance entered the debate. Various
(creative) solutions were offered to the body/mind problem in the context of postmodern dance, improvisational dance in particular.

It is important to note that many improvisational artists have approached the problem in terms of their understanding of the so-called 'experience' of movement. This has been manifested in numerous published interviews or texts written by the artists themselves.

Throughout the last three decades, the term 'experience' has become increasingly more popular in the vocabulary of the practitioners. It seems that two elements might have motivated the use of this term. On the one hand, the phenomenological notion of the 'experience' was both familiar and popular within the American avant-garde milieu of the early 1960s. As Chapter 2 (2.4.1) explains, the ideas of Merleau-Ponty in his seminal work Phenomenology of Perception (published in 1945) were extensively discussed by visual artists. Minimalists in particular, within their fascination with theory, introduced the element of the spectator's 'experience' of the work as an integral part of the work. The visual artist Robert Morris, who had a long minimalist phase in his work during the 1960s, wrote an article entitled 'Some notes on the phenomenology of the making: The search for the Motivated'. This article does not refer directly to Merleau-Ponty although it discusses "the direct experience ... of perceptual meanings" (Morris 1993 p90), which is a major guideline in Morris's artistic programme.

Halprin's notion of the 'experience' of movement is physically rooted. This veteran American dance artist, who has been producing improvisational performances since the late 1950s, constantly encourages her dancers and students to develop and use the possibilities of their own bodies and admits that she is "very physically based" (1987 p13). She credits her teacher Margaret H'Doubler with having "ground[ed] her in a more biological approach to movement ... the stress in movement was on understanding [the] body action" (1967-68 p12). Halprin's method consists of exploring anatomical aspects of movement, in going "deeper and deeper into the body" (1967-68 p13) almost to the point of psychedelic experiences in order to "experience new ways of moving" (1965 p145). In this way, Halprin's method of making choices in the context of improvisational dance is shaped both by her deep interest in the physical character of the movement and a certain degree
of spirituality which underlies her passionate dedication to the human body. Halprin admits: "I have tremendous faith in the process of a human mechanism" (1967-68 p18). The American improviser Simone Forti who studied with Anna Halprin refers to the latter's concept of kinaesthetic awareness:

The kinaesthetic sense has to do with sensing movement in your own body, sensing your body's changing dynamic configurations. But it's more than that. I can remember just waking from dreams and still having a sense of the dream landscape not only in my memory but in my limbs as well.

Forti 1974 p31

Mary Fulkerson's creative solutions in relation to the body/mind problem also rely upon her fundamental interest in the 'experience' of movement. Fulkerson is an American dancer and choreographer who moved to the UK in the early 1970s to take up an appointment at Dartington College of Arts. She contributed to the birth of British New Dance not only through her teaching but also by means of organising the Dartington Festival, an important British experimental dance festival which lasted from the late 1970s to late the 1980s.

Although Fulkerson shares with Halprin a similar movement education, the former, without denying the physiological aspect of movement, focuses on the importance of highly developed perceptual skills. For Fulkerson the expansion of physical awareness enhances the ability to respond to stimuli. Yet her notion of the 'stimulus' expands across the full spectrum of possibilities between physical events and mental states. In this way, she suggests a moving body which can be considered as a 'thinking body' in the way explained in Chapter 3.

In her attempt to explain how she understands stillness as a means of developing awareness, Fulkerson seeks assistance from anatomy. She believes that anatomical knowledge "provides a starting point where mind and body can come together for an extended moment of time within stillness" (1981-1982 p10). Even if Fulkerson seems to believe that it is possible to conceive 'body' and 'mind' as two distinct entities, she works "towards a thinking body where creative thoughts containing simultaneous idea and movement may arise" (1981-1982, p10). She has described the relationship between body and mind in the following way:
I like to see body and mind as a strip, the inside becomes the outside and the outside becomes the inside because of the way it's folded. I think this is also a model for time flowing and to me that's the way the body/mind construct is true in its existence, without inside without outside. That also means, it includes the exterior to one's perceptions as well as the interior. So that when I look at something and experiencing a part of it within and becoming a part of it without, the barriers are down, the boundaries are down. When you start to think and feel within this sphere, it is about a folded and turned shape.

Fulkerson 1996/i

The American improviser Steve Paxton has also taught in the UK, particularly during Fulkerson's appointment at Dartington College of Art. Similar to Fulkerson, Paxton is interested in the development of perceptual skills as this can enhance the ability to respond to stimuli. Yet, Paxton's understanding of the relationship between 'body' and 'mind' includes a range of different possibilities depending on the elements he is working with in each different case. Thus, for Paxton, physical and mental states do not always contribute to the shaping of the 'thinking body' in equal terms.

Sometimes Paxton directly attacks the use of 'mind' as an element that blocks full access to creative movement material.

It seems to me that one can let one's mind be so guided by words that words become a substitute for experience, and you think experience in words. I'm not interested in thinking experience in words.10

Paxton 1981-1982 p7

On other occasions, Paxton emphasises the significance of mental processes within the very act of improvisation. In reviewing The Moment of Movement: Dance Improvisation, a choreography/improvisation manual by Blom and Chaplin (1988) for the teaching and practising of improvisation, he comments:

Food for thought is a first food for improvising. With not too great a leap we are back to the mind - the idea to orient one way or another comes from (or to) the mind ... What sort of mind? Simply, your mind, with enlarged perceptual arenas, more data about what is dancing (composition of the body), deeper and more varied feelings. More thoughts.

Paxton 1989 p16

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It seems that Paxton does not accept the substitution of words for 'experience'. He does not want 'experience' to 'be thought in words', although he does not dismiss thinking as such. His interest in studying movement analytically (which is part of his method of making dances), almost in the same way he would have dealt with an abstract concept, proves his recognition of the role of mental processes in the making of dance.

In his study of 'Helix', where rolling has been used as "a way to examine structural forms in the body", Paxton observes in detail how the use of energy or dynamics is affected by the fact that the body must execute a specifically predetermined type of movement (1991 p17). Opportunities to explore both 'form' and new sensations (particularly in the areas between the vertebrae) become available in this way. The specification of the strict limits, within which the nine different types of rolls he examines can be executed, becomes the necessary prerequisite for the discovery of new bodily (physical) sensations.

In his written account on the technique of Contact Improvisation, Paxton fascinated by analysis, produces 'mathematical' formulas in order to describe possible relationships between the elements of 'active', 'passive', 'demand' and 'response' (1975 p40). At the same time, he states clearly the primary significance of touch in the exchange of information between partners (1975 p40). The experiential aspect of the practice of the technique is thus equally emphasised.

In addition, Paxton brings to the fore the theory according to which some forms of movement have the effect of switching on parts of the brain, particularly as far as babies are concerned (1989 p16). Paxton also recalls the importance of the endocrine system, "which can speed up or retard our experience"; in an effort to work with a model "about the effect of models upon the mind", he asks: "how fast do we sense our thought?" (Paxton 1987 p16).

In a recent interview, Paxton (1995/i) further clarified his position on the body/mind issue. He maintained that one of the major problems in this discussion is the confusion in the use of such words as 'mind' and 'consciousness'.

When we use body/mind we are just trying to deal with the fact that there seems not to be a word which contains both consciousness and all of sensation and the ability to move and create sensation or to move yourself and create sensations by the way you are dancing ...
Elaborating further upon this idea, he describes Descartes' dichotomous approach to 'mind' and 'body' as a form of "statement about the 'I'", as an attempt "to make the mind be an ego ... the seat of the self" (Paxton 1995/i). Paxton points to the Buddhist approach that "the mind is a sense in itself" and the possibility of a mind which is just "a witness trying to assess all the events that are going on" (Paxton 1995/i). In conclusion, he presents his own criticism of the Cartesian notion of the 'self':

The self is much more diffused and just keeps diffusing right out to [where] we can't see it any more and we are picking up materials, or actually we are ignoring materials, through the mind's ability, the consciousness's ability to focus ... it's like surfing, sensory surfing. Paxton 1995/i

Paxton's ability to discern a variety of options in the relationship between body and mind further supports the argument of the non-dichotomous character of the 'thinking body'. The fact that mental and physical elements are not hierarchically positioned to each other within the very act of improvisational dance re-locates them as available options in relation to the improviser's ability to make choices. At the same time, the dichotomy between body and mind dissolves in the face of the possibility of their co-existence in different combinations without resulting in a dialectically homogenised whole. Thus Paxton's attitude to the body/mind issue is multidimensional, epitomising, in this way, the improviser's potential to exercise choice on the basis of a wide range of physical and mental criteria as well as on the combinations in between.

4.3. Two areas of choice: movement material and compositional strategies

The character of the decision-making procedure within improvisational performance is not only dependent upon the artists' understanding of the notion of choice. It is also crucially shaped by the artist's conception of, firstly, what movement might be (or what movement as dance might be) and, secondly, what constitutes the successful mechanism of putting movement together in the form of
a distinct dance piece. This means that the study of the element of choice in the context of improvisational dance includes the investigation of available movement conceptions during the period on which the research focuses. Similarly there is much relevance in exploring the prevailing ways of understanding the notion of composition within the selected context of the research.

At first glance, the above paragraph seems to imply that movement approaches and compositional strategies are two clearly distinct aspects of improvisational dance. Yet, this is not accurate insofar as some options of what movement might be can be relevant only in the context of particular compositional approaches and vice versa. This means that attention should be drawn to the manifestations of these special relationships while practical research could be undertaken in exploring further possibilities within this domain.

4.3.1. New movement concepts

A link can be located between alternative body concepts and new movement concepts. A number of new dance techniques (such as Contact Improvisation and release) or other practices directly related to dance (such as ideokinesis) have gradually emerged in the course of the last thirty years. This work would not have been viable unless it could rely upon new and solid ways of understanding the body. In addition, a number of independent movement practices (such as Body Mind Centering, Meditation techniques, Authentic Movement and Kinetic Awareness) have also grown during the same period in the form of alternative attitudes to the body. These practices use movement improvisation as a means of achieving their objectives. Improvisational dance has been largely informed by the discoveries which these new approaches to movement have made available.12

According to Novack, Contact Improvisation should be understood "as part of culture ... [because its] changes ... [were] revealing and commenting on transitional moments in recent American history" (1990 p3-4). In this way, links can be located between this movement form and the atmosphere of 'equality' and 'democracy' in the United States during the early 1970s. Novack mentions that

many of the early participants, audience members, and critics felt that the movement structure of contact improvisation literally embodied
the social ideologies of the early 70’s which rejected traditional
gender roles and social hierarchies.

Novack 1990 p11

The basic principle of this technique is the exchange of weight between two bodies in motion, in a kind of duet form;\textsuperscript{13} it takes place in gatherings of more than two people who change partners during the session. Novack summarises the character of Contact Improvisation in 10 points:

i. generating movement through the changing points of contact between bodies
ii. sensing through the skin
iii. rolling through the body: focus on segmenting the body and moving in several directions simultaneously
iv. experiencing movement from the inside
v. using 360-degree space
vi. going with the momentum, emphasizing weight and flow
vii. tacit inclusion of the audience; conscious informality of presentation, modeled on a practice or jam
viii. the dance is just a person
ix. letting the dancer happen
x. everyone should be equally important

Novack 1990 pp115-124

The element of process is also crucial: there is a constant exploration of new possibilities for points of contact between the two bodies of the duet and movement can grow out of this work. Moreover, the basic idea of exchange of weight underlies the degree of physicality of the technique.

Contact Improvisation was almost contemporaneous with the activities of the Grand Union and partly practised by the same group of people. Some of the Grand Union’s practices survived directly in the context of this experience, yet there was a clear effort for a specific focus. Paxton, who actually founded the technique, explains:

I was trying to define the problem of how to have a definable, clear way to improvise that was still improvisation, in movement, so that one could discuss principles and aspects of the body and its physiology and its chemistry that one could sense.

Paxton 1981-82 p6

Contact Improvisation’s movement concept for a spherical, sometimes disoriented body which can operate across the full range of tension and lightness
would probably not have been so effective without the support of the ‘release’ approach. Joan Skinner developed her ‘releasing’ technique in the early 1960s. Unable to recover completely after a spinal injury while working professionally with Merce Cunningham, she asked help from an Alexander teacher. Later, she attempted to apply the Alexander principles to ballet technique and ended up researching ‘multidirectional balancing’. In the mid 1960s, she started teaching her discoveries, using simple images in order to lead the students to an understanding of the Alexander principles. The students became very creative in this context: they started improvising and dancing with the images and Skinner decided to develop this method further. The following points summarise Skinner’s Releasing Technique (SRT):

SRT can be described as a system of kinaesthetic training which refines the perception of and performance of movement through the use of imagery. (p 8)

... the dancer’s technical growth becomes a creative process of individual discovery. (p 9)

... imagery is applied toward the realization of four specific principles of technique: multi-directional skeletal alignment, multidirectional balancing, economy and autonomy.

... skeletal alignment is viewed as a dynamic process of continual adjustments to changes of weight in space.

... balance is also viewed as a dynamic process since shifts of weight cause shifts in actual centers of balance ... the only constant is change. (p 10)

Skinner 1979

The structure of her classes is completely free and in this sense it is improvisational. In addition she teaches a form of "thinking body": her concept of the human organism not as the one of "a [dichotomous] mind-body complex, but as a psycho-physical system of energies" (Skinner 1990 p13).

Mary Fulkerson trained with Joan Skinner. In 1973 Fulkerson came to Britain with an appointment at Dartington College of Arts as the coordinator of the movement courses for the drama degree of the college. Her long residency in Britain throughout the 1970s and most of the 1980s became seminal in the growth of British New Dance. She was able to invite a number of American artists (to teach and perform), amongst them, Steve Paxton who directly brought to Britain not only his technique of Contact Improvisation but also the attitudes of the early
American dance postmodernists. In addition she organised the Dartington festivals which became a nucleus for British New Dance. Such British artists as Rosemary Butcher, Julyen Hamilton, Kirstie Simson, Miranda Tufnell, Sue MacLennan and many others repeatedly presented their experimental work on these occasions.

For her own work, Fulkerson uses images extensively: "image informs movement and movement is energised and particularized by the image" (Crickmay 1988 p10). The origins of her approach can be traced back not only to her training with Joan Skinner but also with Mabel Todd's student Barbara Clark in 1965. Nevertheless, Fulkerson investigated from her own point of view the possibilities of 'release' and arrived at the following 'theory' which apparently has a vast range of applications.

Release is neither a method nor a technique, nothing more than an enquiry ... Joan Skinner's is a technique, Joan's work is a manifestation of what I call release, but what I call release is an involvement in a process of enquiry and the enquiry has to do with changing the framework for thought and body construct so that it may be reconsidered. This can be done in many ways, through physical endurance, psychological motivation, pain, meditation, many gateways to the changing perception of the link between mind and body ... it has no predetermined outcome, one need not be floppy, soft, anyway at all ... firstly the gateway that you choose to reconsider through is important ... and secondly the work itself has never involved a bearing only toward the positive ... it is a huge limitation to one's life and sole purpose to pretend to oneself that only the positive feelings are around. And one can do this as a creative artist, one can do this in the study of release. So one has to investigate, history, social images etc.

Fulkerson 1996/i

Release technique became very popular in the context of British New Dance and because of its loose characterisation artists and dance teachers were able to understand it and apply in various ways.15

For Julyen Hamilton, release technique was meant to be a way of learning about the physiology and kinetics of the body. But it too has certain mannerisms, that unfortunately get labelled as the style.

in Hamilton & Simson 1986 p116
The British choreographer, Rosemary Butcher, also uses a 'released' approach to movement both in her teaching and her creative work. For her, release is about the philosophy of letting the energy disperse rather than use it to hold on. The whole thing is about releasing it so that the body becomes more open to do more things. I don't know what Mary [Fulkerson] was known for because she taught a specific type of class, a lot of it was imaged-based, she set up anatomical images ... she had a skeleton ... I take a completely different approach. I teach information via the use of the body. So I'm informing all the time what the body could be doing ... Both are valid ... mine is much more guided.

Butcher 1995c/i

For Butcher another characterisation of the 'released body' is a body which is 'connected'. For her work, she chooses dancers who have strongly technical, "connected bodies". She seeks connection between where you are thinking you are and where you are and the skill to be able to be there ... just knowing that you would stop at that point, but you've actually felt this from inside to get there, there is a huge difference.

Butcher 1996

Along with these dance practices, a number of other approaches, not so widely used in Britain currently as in the USA, have also contributed to the practice of improvisational dance new body and movement concepts. Ideokinesis was devised as a therapeutic approach for the dancing body, and Authentic Movement was originally used for psychotherapeutic purposes. Other approaches such as Kinetic Awareness or combinations of movement and meditation are probably not at all taught in Britain. In contrast Body-Mind Centering has become increasingly more popular in Britain and although there are not many courses available, artists and teachers study it with much enthusiasm in Amsterdam at the School for New Dance Development (SNDO), where a major course was introduced in 1995.

Body-Mind Centering (BMC) is a special therapeutic approach which uses movement improvisation amongst other tools. The expression 'body-mind centering' is probably unfortunate in the context of this research in the sense that it carries implications of a dichotomous understanding of movement. Yet many aspects of the
practice manifest close proximity to the notion of the 'thinking body' as this has been explained in Chapter 3.

The major aim of BMC is to understand 'how the mind is expressed through the body in movement' (BMC brochure), and it can be pursued in a variety of forms. Hartley explains that with the technique of Body-Mind Centering,

another state of alertness is reached (a higher part of the brain is in control), and without disturbing the unselfconscious thinking-moving body, we are able to perceive the forms we are making.

Hartley 1984 p27

'Body' and 'mind' do not exclude each other, rather they have penetrated each other's areas. Thus, the 'intuitive' mind becomes directly linked to and influential in the quality of 'outer experiences' (or movement material), since, without it, movement would not have happened. On the other hand, 'inner' experiences are articulated by means of an 'alertness' which emerges from the ability to move under conditions of hyperextended physical awareness. At the same time, it is very important that the movement take place within this state of 'alertness' without anticipation. As in Fulkerson and Paxton's cases, 'body' and 'mind' come together, creative thoughts are in full use, movement and ideas arise together.

Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, the founder of the BMC method, was a dancer and teacher at the Erick Hawkins school in New York and she also trained as a movement therapist. She has worked with severely disabled individuals and she developed her BMC system with students of the School of Body-Mind Centering in New York and Amherst. Her work has been informed by yoga, effort-shape analysis, meditation, martial arts, and alignment therapy. It is interesting to note that Bainbridge emphasises, similarly to Sweigard, the importance of the nervous system in the flow of energy. The aim of the technique is primarily therapeutic: "to integrate the whole body through opening and reconnecting the natural paths of energy" (Hartley 1984b p5). This can be achieved through a particular use of the mind which is gradually trained to focus on the body structures and the physiological systems (muscles, bones, joints, organs, glands, fluids, nerves, ligaments). This process is facilitated both by anatomical knowledge and the use
of imagination and the ultimate goal, if this were possible, is to be able to be aware of each single cell of the body.

A number of statements by artists and practitioners in Note 9 of Chapter 1 has been already used within the scope of supporting the argument that there is a direct link between alternative approaches to the body and improvisational dance. Steve Paxton emphasises:

We now have whole new approaches to the body, in yoga, in the martial arts ... In things like Body-Mind Centering ... a lot of new ideas about the body, a lot of the holistic health ideas, if you thought of yourself as just muscles and circulation and bones ... and you ran with the idea of meridians coming from Chinese medicine ... how would this affect you/ or from Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen's idea about the organs and the way they are.

Paxton, 1995/i

While he criticises the way these ideas are invested in current dance practice: "these ideas are now currency to spend ... the new clichés have already arrived and for us" (1995/i), he also explains how these approaches affect the making of dance and how the audience communicates with this kind of work.

I don't think the dancer's idea of a meridian is necessarily that accurate, it's an impression, is almost a poesy, a poetics of the medicinal or physiological thinking that is going on elsewhere. But that the dancer is making movement from new sources, creates new movement, ... somehow the dance conveys that feeling ... and so if somebody is working from their kidney it is very different than if they are working from..., making arm patterns in space or spatial arrangements on a stage or relating to the movement in a certain way. All these are very different things and the audience can feel them and may be unable to articulate what they are seeing, in the way that they could with Balanchine and his musicality or Cunningham and his technical conventions but ... something is being expressed which is a human material and once again dance is keeping us aware of what is possible, what we can think.

Paxton 1995/i

4.3.2 Postmodern compositional strategies and Robert Dunn's contribution

Coming back to Fulkerson's reconsidered notion of choreography as presented in Chapter 2 (2.2), both the way the movement approaches discussed in 4.3.1 can be involved in the making of dance and their entwinement with
appropriate compositional approaches become more visible. If a wider understanding of the notion of choreography re-positions this term as the art of making dances beyond the traditional method of devising and structuring steps, improvisational dance becomes a form of choreography as well. Thus movement is allowed to emerge from new sources, take place in new ways, and be put together according to new criteria.

A reconsidered notion of composition becomes indispensable in accommodating the new movement discoveries, since their 'anti-step' improvisational character would behave peculiarly in the theme-variation model of composition, familiar in the context of modern dance. The work of the American teacher, composer and choreographer Robert Dunn has fulfilled this purpose since the early 1960s, providing an extremely versatile approach to composition which was used extensively by the American dance postmodernists and flexible enough to operate appropriately in the context of improvisational dance.

The first generation of the American dance postmodernists such as Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown, David Gordon and many others emerged through the will of this group of people to put into artistic practice Robert Dunn's teachings of composition (Banes 1983). Dunn remembers:

In the fall of 1960, I began a series of four courses in choreography at the Merce Cunningham Studio, then at the corner of 14th Street and 6th Avenue, a building shared by the Living Theatre... For me the 'Judson' experience began with the first of these classes and ended in October of 1964.

Dunn 1989 p10

Dunn's contribution is a key element in the very core of dance postmodernism. Not only the majority of the first American dance postmodernists were his students but his approach to composition or 'choreography', as he prefers to describe the content of his classes (Dunn 1989 p10), epitomised the late 1950s atmosphere in the arts, in a way which was both new and relevant to the art of dance. Dunn made available to this group of people not only a number of specific compositional practices but a radically new attitude to the making of dance.

An important aspect of Dunn's teaching was the use of Cagean techniques of chance and indeterminacy. Rainer explains:
He seemed as interested in how something was presented as by what method it was made ... the Cagean idea that chance offered an alternative to the masterpiece.

In Chin 1975 p54

In fact, Dunn explicitly connects the use of chance with his emphasis on developing perceptual skills. For Dunn, "chance or arbitrary structures force you to reperceive the movement event ... it is the cycle of reperception that is important" (Dunn 1987 pp29-30).21

The use of chance is an inherent aspect of the compositional character of improvisation: while a performer makes decisions about what to do next on the basis of what takes place 'now', the unpredictability of how the 'now' will become 'next' introduces a significant chance factor into the whole process. Furthermore, once the 'wisdom of the body' is accepted by most of improvisational dance artists as an equally important motivating force for the decision-making process, there is always an element of chance as to what the body will suggest.

Cage's theory of composition in music and Cunningham's in dance, welcomed 'chance' methods because of their better 'chance' to make available new movement ideas.22 Yet the most important outcome of using chance methods in the domain of composition was the recognition that in art making "it's possible for anything to follow anything" (Charlip in Brown et al. 1985 p28).23 This was a method of liberating the compositional process from the necessity of devising the material according to causal relationships. Rainer was particularly interested in this approach and confesses that it was Simone Forti's work, in which there was "no effort to connect the events thematically", that both inspired and convinced her about its advantages and relevance to her own work (Rainer in Hecht 1973/74 p17).

Cunningham and Cage's chance methods operate fundamentally on the basis that nothing needs to be conceived "beforehand" (Charlip in Brown et al. 1985, p34). Thus not only did the artists adopt a new attitude, but equally the audience was almost forced to do the same. Their pieces are made in such a way that the spectators have to make their own choices in relation to what they concentrate on seeing and how they construct a personal meaning out of this material. The artist has no ambition to convey anything in particular. Cage reminds: "We are not in these dances and music saying anything" (1990 p66).24
It is worthwhile noting that Cunningham and Cage didn’t like improvisation - at least, this is what they said - is that they felt that in improvisation you always head toward what you know, but with chance you have the possibility of doing something you never could have thought of, such as your head going in one direction while your body must move in another.

Charlip in Brown et al. 1985 p28

Nevertheless, they opened up a whole new area of possibilities. Paxton insists that Cunningham "was the revolution, what [the members of Judson Dance Theater group] did was essentially follow up": they simply investigated some of the ideas Cunningham had no time to investigate (1995/i). In addition, Paxton traces his personal lineage, starting from Isadora Duncan, via Ruth St. Denis and Martha Graham to Merce Cunningham and then himself "as a lineage of mutation rather than evolution ... what we are carrying on is the permission to use the training in new ways and to adapt" (1995/i). It is not surprising that Terry Riley, the American avant-garde musician who has worked as a minimalist for more than thirty years, says:

Improvisation is important. Being able to create music on the spot and to keep it open. That was the message that kept coming through to me from John Cage: keep it open.

in Toop 1995 p23

In using John Cage’s compositional methods in his teaching, Robert Dunn was probably attracted by the same possibility of keeping the creative process open. Dunn was interested in confronting compositionally the problem of "premature closure before the practically unheard-of had some chance to poke its way into our presence" (applicable, according to his opinion, both to the artist and the audience) (Dunn 1989 p11). His work as a whole can be described as an attempt to develop strategies which would allow the "unheard-of" to appear.

It seems that he pursued this aim from two positions. The first one was his non-judgemental, positive, constructive attitude towards art-making. He claimed:

Evaluation comes a long way after invention and trained observation, not as a readily formulated body of opinion, but rather as the power to make any event enrich whatever you or I may do next.

Dunn 1972 p28
The second reflected his predilection for analytical thought. Dunn has mentioned many times that his work was not about providing "recipes for making dances" (Dunn 1972 and 1989); instead he was interested in setting up the conditions of a "challenge" (Dunn 1972 p18). His background in Laban-based movement analysis and his inclination to structuralism as an analytic framework, often shaped his system of ‘challenging’ the students as a method investigating contrast between two or more elements (Dunn 1987 p30). Dunn’s sense of ‘challenge’ in compositional work was also about seeking articulation on several levels at once: on the level of how a person moves ... where they are going in space ... which dynamic ... these articulations are following ... what relationships they affect.

Dunn 1987 p30

In this way, Dunn’s system attempts to accommodate discontinuity: he sets up compositional problems which he intends to approach analytically. He works towards this point at which some of their constituent parts can be re-organised in different relationships on the basis of the insights emerging through their re-perception. Thus different aspects of the same problem (which were not implicit within the original articulation) gain the opportunity to appear; for Dunn this is the creative moment. He is not interested in multiplying the solutions, rather in making visible the process through which the original material reached a new formation. In other words, he focuses on how an aspect of the material gets transformed into the next one and how the material develops in a ‘discontinuous way’. Dunn’s approach brings to mind Foucault’s re-interpretation of the element of ‘change’ in historical analysis in terms of the more versatile notion of ‘transformation’ which is further discussed in Chapter 5 (5.1).

In addition, Foucault’s method of problematising, of keeping questioning, and, more specifically, of keeping questioning theory through the experience of practice in historical analysis, could be compared with Dunn’s choreographic analysis. Dunn keeps the process of transformation alive just by questioning the material. For instance, in his study of the element of ‘variation’ (already mentioned in Note 26 of this chapter), Dunn is not interested in how many successful variations the choreographer could devise, rather he aims at emphasising that when choices are
made, some elements remain as they are while others disappear. This mechanism can offer numerous solutions according to the criteria in relation to which choices are made. In this way, Dunn’s method includes a considerable element of ‘thinking’ and is inherently reflexive.

As far as it can be assumed from the written sources, Dunn did not emphasise improvisation as a performance mode in his teaching; he rather used it as working method which could also become part of the final product if this was appropriate.

In teaching improvisation to a group, I’ll initiate a discussion, and bring to it my own private list, of why we improvise, why we should study improvisation. There are a number of different reasons and only one of them is for performance. If we’re wishing to perform our improvisations, I’m interested in what are the considerations needed to work on it.

Dunn 1987 p31

Following Dunn’s guidelines, a working method towards what improvisational performance in dance consists of can be constructed. Thus a suggestion must be made in relation to ‘what are the considerations needed to work on performing our improvisations’. This research proposes improvisational performance in dance as a primarily compositional event and, in this respect, the character of the above ‘considerations’ should be primarily compositional. This means that, following Dunn’s description of the improvisational mechanism (already mentioned in section 4.1 of this chapter) as one which encompasses "perceptual cues", movement vocabulary, and ways of correlating the two, the stage of correlation should fulfil compositional criteria.

Dunn’s method offers an additional area of practical knowledge to the improviser: the chance to incorporate a questioning procedure to her/his performance work. This procedure offers the opportunity of re-perception or re-understanding the existing conditions at the very moment of 'choice' thus radically affecting the character of this choice. It must be pointed out though that questioning can take place across the full range of all the physical and conceptual conditions of the ‘present moment’ during which choice is exercised (as well as their in-between combinations), thus increasing the possibility to achieve change within the very
process of the improvisational skill. In other words, the element of change, which is another point of dispersion across which improvisational performance as discourse can be discussed, appears directly linked with the improviser's ability to choose. Change is discussed in Chapter 5.

Following Foucault's guidelines of discursive analysis, Chapter 4 has revealed the decision-making procedure of the improvisational skill as a point of dispersion in relation to which an understanding of improvisational performance as discourse can be constructed. In this respect Chapter 4 claims that, within the very skill of performing improvisationally, transformation has taken place in the area of the decision-making procedures. In addition, the material presented in this chapter suggests that there is further potential for transformation of the decision-making mechanism provided that the non-dichotomous concept of the 'thinking body' is fully operating. In arguing that physical and conceptual aspects of the improvisational skill are not elements diametrically opposed to each other but options within the same range of possibilities (including all their in-between combinations), the improviser's field of choice acquires unprecedented breadth.

NOTES

1. The American improviser Lisa Kraus seems to be working in a similarly unclassifiable fashion. It may be argued that her approach is a variation of Reitz's method. Having completely defined and clarified the material of her performances, during the actual performance, Kraus feels free to expand and not remain faithful to her set movement ideas (Kraus 1983 p26). It becomes even impossible to characterise Kraus's work as 'structured improvisation'. Nevertheless, such artists as the American postmodernist Trisha Brown who clearly state that their artistic strategy is the one of 'structured improvisation' also point out the significance of the element of choice in their work. Brown contends: "Improvisation, uncensored decisions which affect movement, is allowed to work as shaping force in pieces that are tightly choreographed" (1977 p8).

2. Although the Alexander method is mainly used for therapeutic reasons in cases of permanent body problems, certain dance artists have managed to incorporate it creatively in their movement work. Bierman (1978) mentions the dancer and choreographer Remy Charlip who during the 1960s used to be a member of the Merce Cunningham company. Remy states that ballet and modern dance teachers found it easier to explain visual rather than kinaesthetic qualities ... "All my dance teachers were unwilling or unable to explain where the energies came
from or how they were released ... the way (Merce) did (the movement) was always very clear and very mysterious at the same time" ... Remy's work with the Alexander technique led him to seek out movement which did reflect the creative process he underwent.

Bierman 1978 p32

3. For further details on the Alexander Technique see Jones (1976).

4. Similarly in dance, Steve Paxton succinctly notes: "A mark of the dancer used in improvisation is his quickness of response" (1972 p134). Instead of theoretically exploring this problem, Paxton created a practice based on this principle. His technique of Contact Improvisation prioritises the use of the 'reflexes', in other words, the body's ability to react to emergency physical circumstances in order to avoid injury.

5. See note 19 of Chapter 3.

6. As mentioned in Chapter 3, the notion of 'now' has been also discussed within the philosophical discourse, often in parallel with that of the 'I'. Its problematic nature consists in its difficulty to be grasped within a fixed characterisation, particularly from the point of view of the speaking agent who seeks to understand her/his form of 'I' or experience her/his sense of the 'present moment'. See Chapter 3 for Ryle's philosophical approach to the notions of 'now' and the 'I'. See also Ryle in Cassam (1994).

From the perspective of music improvisation, Eddie Prevost, founder of the British improvisational music group AMM in 1965, also comments on 'nowness'. He notes that his work has been described as 'John Cage jazz'; he personally discerns commonalities between the two, especially in their sense of 'nowness'. The ideas of John Cage allowed any sound-source material into music and encouraged a zen-like sense of 'nowness' that superseded formal appreciation (and its attendant philosophy) of the western music tradition.

Prévost 1995 p12

7. See Chapter 3 (3.1.1) for Mabel Todd's concept of the 'thinking body'. See also Todd (1973).

8. For more details on this subject, see Colpitt 1990.

9. As mentioned earlier in this section of Chapter 4, Anna Halprin credits her teacher Margaret H'Doubler with her physiologically based notion of movement. Fulkerson's training can be also traced within the same American tradition of a biologically based approach to movement, which includes the work of Mabel Todd (see 3.1.1). More specifically, Fulkerson trained with Todd's student Barbara Clark. For more details on Fulkerson training see note 14 of this Chapter.

10. Following the Wittgensteinian method, Best could have severely criticised Paxton's repudiation of the word.
One cannot have thoughts of the relevant kind, whether private or public, unless there is already a medium, such as language or art form, in which to formulate them.

Best 1992 p112

Paxton though seems to be using these expressions in order to point out that, when the mental processes dominate the physical ones, movement can become a manifestation of the Cartesian dichotomy which is in itself problematic.

Paxton, is idiosyncratic in his use of vocabulary and general approach to the written form of ideas. As a member of the American avant-garde dance scene of the 1960s, he is characteristically neo-dadaist in his spirit of subversion through extreme forms of articulation. His definition of 'improvisation' exemplifies this point:

Improvisation is a word for something which can't keep a name; if it does stick around long enough to acquire a name, it has begun to move towards fixity. Improvisation tends in that direction.

Dance is the art of taking place. Improvisational dance finds the places.

Paxton 1987 p19

11. This reference brings to mind Andrée Grau's similar point of 'neurological reorganisation' which has been mentioned in Chapter 3 (3.1.1). This is an aspect of the medical discourse from an anthroposophical perspective according to which "through movement brain cells can be regenerated" (Grau 1995 p146). Grau points out the importance of such approaches within non-Western cultures, which are not easily acceptable in the context of traditional Western medicine.

12. There are many occasions in which the work of improvisational artists includes direct involvement with the above mentioned alternative attitudes to the body. Both Contact Improvisation and release techniques have been very common practices in the context of improvisational dance. On the other hand Body-Mind Centering, Authentic Movement, Kinetic Awareness, martial arts and a whole range of 'bodywork' such as the Alexander Technique, Feldenkrais, and energy work have become of great interest to movement improvisers because of the wide range of additional skills they can offer to performance work. The following example can be mentioned: The ex-Trisha Brown dancer Lance Gries, who currently develops improvisational work, uses energy work and elements of the Alexander Technique as the main warm up techniques in his classes of group improvisation, because of the quality of physical and perceptual preparation they can offer to the dancers (Gries 1995).

13. The same principle can be applied while working in trios or larger groups of people but the duet is more popular because it is more manageable.

14. Fulkerson remembers:

At the University of Illinois ... Joan Skinner was working through her idea of applying her personalised understandings of the Alexander technique specifically within the context of dancing. She used a
process of imagery and stillness which was important to my work when coupled with the particular anatomical images and thought process taught by Barbara Clark, student of Mabel Ellsworth Todd. Barbara’s work provided a specific anatomical pedagogy for the work with imagination that Joan had begun. The integration of these sources and their further development has been my ongoing process.
Fulkerson 1981-82 p5

15. Unfortunately, this has created various misunderstandings in relation to what release technique actually is (Fulkerson 1996b).

16. Sweigard’s work on ideokinesis emphasises the importance of correct alignment of the bones. She focuses on the neural aspect of movement. She claims that effectiveness and efficiency of movement depend upon minimal expense of energy and that

our voluntary influence on movement is limited to controlling starting, stopping, direction, range, speed and force ... The choice of muscles whose coordinated work will achieve the goal and the selection of the nerve pathways over which the messages travel to these muscles reside in the nervous system.
Sweigard 1974 p4

Her system aims at increasing the efficiency of movement training for people who study dance and who, within the context of traditional dance teaching, are constantly misusing their bodies, forcing the skeleton into badly designed relationships by means of excessive muscle work. Ideokinesis was developed as a product of her long observations of students and professional dancers in practice. Her principle is based on the idea that concentration on the image of the movement helps the central nervous system to choose the most convenient neuromuscular coordination for the performance of this particular movement. This technique presupposes a period of unlearning bad habits in terms of alignment and movement performance as well as a thorough knowledge of the laws of mechanics, the skeletal structure and the principles of muscular and neurological function.

After Sweigard’s death, her disciple Irene Dowd continued the development of this system. Dowd, analysing Sweigard’s work, further emphasised the importance of the process of ‘neutralization’ before the stage of ‘visualization’ ultimately leading to the performance of the visualised movement.

Stevens (1995) notes that elements of ideokinesis are probably present in the work of many movement teachers in Britain. Yet, it seems that no one is teaching this technique per se in Britain.

17. Since the 1950s, Mary Whitehouse initiated the ‘tao’ of the body, "a way that can lead to union and wholeness" (Adler 1987 p29) and which she named Authentic Movement. Whitehouse had been trained in the Mary Wigman and Martha Graham dance traditions which both dealt with the unconscious. When she started her own research, "she shifted her orientation from artistic to personal/developmental aspects of dance" (Olsen 1993 p47) and her work has been instrumental for dancers, therapists and educators. In 1981, two years after her death, her disciple Janet Adler
decided to continue Whitehouse’s work. Her method can be described in the following way:

One person moves and the other observes. The observer is mentioned as the ‘witness’ because she is not ‘looking at’ the person moving, she is witnessing, listening - bringing a specific quality of attention or presence to - the experience of the mover.

Adler 1987 p20

At the end of the session they both talk about their experience or they write first and talk afterwards. The most important point is that the witness witnesses the mover’s experience in an non-judgmental way, allowing for the appropriate conditions within which unconscious material can be explored. The exchange of information that follows contributes to a sharpening of the experience.

While Adler deals mostly with the therapeutic aspect of the Authentic Movement approach, since she analyses it from an analyst’s (that she is) point of view, her disciple Olsen (1993) refers more specifically to the new possibilities of movement opportunities that this system offers to the dance artist. She compares the mover/witness relationship with the performer/audience relationship.

At first, the collective mind of the audience supports the surrender of the performer to unconscious energies, but soon the audience surrenders its awareness of self and goes with the performer towards transformation as well.

Olsen 1993 p49

She also notes that the Authentic Movement experience enriches the performer’s quality of movement through the new possibilities it offers. It can also provide material which can be used both in choreographed and improvisational performances. Ultimately, Olsen describes specific cases from her own experience in which Authentic Movement had been successfully integrated within performance work.

It includes the sensation of moving and being moved, a merging of unconscious and conscious states, and a moment by moment unfolding of the performer and the work.

Olsen 1993 p53

Authentic Movement workshops do not take place in Britain very often and whenever they do happen, the method is primarily presented as an independent movement practice for personal growth and similar therapeutic purposes.

18. Kinetic Awareness was devised by Elaine Summers after the 1960s. The origins of this work can be traced back to Continental Europe during 1930s and the work of Elsa Gindler whose experience was brought from Germany to the States during the Second World War by some of her students. One of those who emigrated to America was Carola Speads, Summers’ teacher. Summers was also a dancer and choreographer with the Judson Theater Group. Kinetic Awareness can be described in the following way:

A system of bodywork in which all parts of the body are encouraged
to be free to move in all of the directions in which it's possible for them to move.

Becker 1993 p54

The work involves a period of developing body awareness with the use of hollow rubber balls and learning to use each body part separately without tension. A stage of combining movements of various body parts follows, and, later on, changes in the level of tension and speed of the movement are also allowed; to combine all these possibilities is the ultimate purpose. An important element of this system is a re-education to tension which can be positive when it is used for the production of movement and negative when it is held unconsciously producing 'frozen tension'. The psychological factor plays an important part at this level, since people who have worked with this method claim that "when frozen tension starts to release, hidden memories and associated emotions may be released" (Becker 1993 p54). Frances Becker trained in kinetic awareness with Elaine Summers and has extensively used this experience to choreographic work. Becker is particularly attracted by this approach to movement production because it makes available all degrees of tension and speed in movement during improvisation and pushes the dancers to their extremes, helping them to overcome their physical and psychological limitations.

When she was in New York, Rosemary Butcher was taught the method by Elaine Summers. Butcher explains:

Her system was totally changing your body. She did this with me.
I was working from the outside and I transported the whole focus of attention to the inside.

Butcher 1995c/i

Nevertheless, Butcher does not use this technique in her teaching.

19. Barbara Dilley, an ex-member of the Grand Union who also participated in the Judson Theater work, integrates movement improvisation with meditation practices. [Her] work has always reflected her interests in Jungian psychology, meditation, and the Sufi legends and philosophy taught by Idries Shah.

Ramsay 1991 p85

Dilley (1990) admits that her Grand Union period was influential in her work. "However, in that experience there was something disturbing. The work was constantly shifting and there wasn't much to hang on to" (1990 p41). She started collaborating with the Naropa Institute in 1974 because the meditation work of this institution was useful to her effort of 'taming' the looseness of the mind.

According to Dilley, meditation develops firstly an 'awareness' of space; through slowing down the mental speed, "in improvisational dance I felt that I was mingling the body with space" (Dilley 1990 p41). This process helps to develop an awareness of the environment which further facilitates the process of movement improvisation. The Dance Contemplative Intensive workshop of 1980, amongst other subjects, included some Maitri work: "a primitive space awareness situation that deals with beginning to see how gesture and posture affect your state of mind" (Dilley 1980 p19). Yet this awareness of space refers both to inner and outer space
and, in terms of dance experience, the element of 'mingling the mind with space'
gives you a kinaesthetic memory of being present versus being lost in thoughts ... you begin to feel the sensation of awareness as your arm is extended versus the sensation of your arm being extended with your mind going in the opposite direction. The two things become kinaesthetically available to you. Then you have a choice.

Dilley 1980 p20-21

In an interview in 1980, Dilley said to Nancy Stark Smith that she knew very little about how to guide people to find the link between the inner and outer worlds (Dilley 1980 p21). Ten years later, having worked on composition "as about making something out of nothing" (Dilley 1990 p42) alongside her interest in communication, she had achieved a high degree of merging the Buddhist tradition with the contemporary American improvisational dance. According to her experience, this fusion can be achieved within three stages: the outer aspect which refers to the awareness of the surrounding world, the inner aspect which develops the ability of fully experiencing ourselves and perceptions and the 'secret' aspect which expresses the transcendent awareness that comes from simultaneously attending to details without and to what is happening within ... and finally, when the outer world and the inner perceptions are synchronized there is this presence of 'nowness'. It is awake and without conflict. It is natural and open - it is direct communication.

Dilley 1990 p44

20. For more information on the theme-variation model of composition see Dalbotten 1973-74, where the work of Louis Horst, the main collaborator of the modern dance American choreographer Martha Graham is described.

21. In one of his workshops entitled Dance/IMPROVISATION/Music, offered in 1983 at the School of Movement Research in New York City, he worked with those perceptual skills which are necessary in a dance/music collaboration. He notices:

It was quickly discovered that each dancer hears and responds to a different polarity in the music. Each person's perception of structure is unique, and further, that what we chose to do with what we hear, or if we choose to do nothing with what we hear, is changing by the moment.

Dunn 1985 p20

22. Brown characteristically mentions:

Cage ... uses chance as a means to remove his own memory and the memory of the musicians from the process, in order for them all to make an almost pure event.

in Brown et al. 1985 p40

23. Later in this article, Brown notes that this was in fact the legacy of surrealism (in Brown et al. 1985 p33).
24. Indeed, there is still a purpose for the artist (and Cunningham in particular) to fulfil. The work becomes a form of permanent statement about movement's own value as a meaningful element in itself, attacking the traditional approach that it should always reflect something else.

Fulkerson enumerates a number of compositional strategies in the context of postmodern dance which operate on the basis that the audience must play an active role within the production of meaning of the work.

Collection ... autobiography ... personal statement ... accumulation ... field composition ... systems ... chance operations ... all these forms result in participatory involvement for the watcher. This means that meaning within the work is constructed as a dialogue, with the audience selecting where to look and what to do to construct personal meaning from elements of the composition.

Fulkerson, undated CNDO paper

25. Hamilton on the other hand, who insists that improvisation is a rather more advanced form of composition in comparison to traditional choreography, confesses he has been fascinated by Cunningham's recent work, primarily by those pieces in which the computer programme Life Forms has been used.

That complexity of composition ... it was beautiful musically ... it wasn't simplistic, it was as complex as we can take in in the body ... with the body we can take in many different textual patterns at the same time ... it's deeply sensuous.

Hamilton 1995/i

26. It could be argued that the whole project of dance postmodernism is investigating this possibility. Otherwise, Louis Horst, could be also considered as postmodernist. Some of the choreographic devices that Horst suggests according to Dalbotten (1973/74) are not different from Blom and Chaplin's guidelines about the making of dance. Blom and Chaplin's choreography manual *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (1982) which has been briefly discussed in Chapter 2 (2.6) and which emphasises the importance of process in the making of choreography has often been used as the basic written source for the teaching of 'postmodern choreographic practices'.

Nevertheless, Blom and Chaplin teach a number of compositional structures (AB form, ABA form, Rondo, Natural Forms, Narrative, Collage), theme and variation, and Choreographic Devices for the development of the 'motif' (repetition, retrograde, inversion, size: condense/expand, tempo: fast/slow/stop, rhythm, quality, instrumentation, force, background, staging, embellishment, change of planes, levels, additive/incorporative, fragmentation, combination), which have been criticised by postmodern dance artists.

Fulkerson (undated CNDO paper) criticises the ABA form and Dunn resists to the traditional ways the 'theme and variation' have been used in choreographic work (Dunn 1972).

Horst teaches the use of theme and variation technique in the context of ABA form by means of repetition, rhythmic variation, inversion, manipulation of spatial elements, new combinations with the same elements and counterpoint (Dalbotten 1973/74). Interestingly, Horst has situated this part of his theory as the learning of
pre-classical forms while his modern forms concentrated on uses of space, time and flow in an almost Laban-based way, further investigating various 'styles'.

Thus there is no reason why Horst should be attacked for not having emphasised the importance of 'processing' movement material within his method of dance making. By contrast, Horst could be blamed for not having allowed the element of 'process' to participate equally in the final product. Yet, this is a perspective which is also missing from Blom and Chaplin's manual, perpetuating in this way a narrow-minded understanding of choreography within the educational sector, which does not reflect the character of current choreographic work in the area of postmodern dance.

In fact the difference between modern and postmodern choreography is that the latter usually accepts the element of 'process' as a visible aspect of the final form of the work. In this way, Robert Dunn's exercise on 'variation' reconsiders the traditional ways of using this device in dance making. Dunn's purpose in this exercise was not to induce perfect choreographic solutions but to make clear "how this very simple idea may be thought and rethought in dozens of new directions" (Dunn 1972 p17).

27. Trisha Brown (in Hecht 1974/74 p18) notices that Dunn "would give a problem that was so vague that it was provocative". Dunn confirms that "the assignment must leave room for the personal approach and inventiveness of the choreographer" (Dunn 1972 p18) and Brown continues

once the piece was completed he directed the criticism in terms of how did you make the piece, how did you make your decisions, so the making of the dance was important.

Brown in Hecht 1973/74 p18

28. Dunn's written work does not manifest any further use of the structuralist method beyond the basic principle that "it's the difference between things by which we recognize them, not the things isolated" (1987 p30), which he considers as a source of creating meaning through movement.

29. At this point it is interesting to note one of Dunn's metaphors linking continuity and discontinuity.

When I do see the continuity in a waterfall ... still I seem to see two things: I see an overall continuity of the body of water but inside it I see all this discontinuity.

Dunn 1987 p33

30. Dunn's 'definition' of analysis is the following:

I often say that analysis, for me, is a combination of a fast car and a road map. We use a car and a road map to get to a different part of the country very swiftly. But then you have to get out of the car and walk. And that's my analysis cycle.

Dunn 1987 p33
Chapter 5  Change

5.1  Notions of change in improvisational dance
5.2  Changing habits
5.3  The Practice of improvisational dance as a series of transformations in the context of dance postmodernism
   5.3.1  Anna Halprin
   5.3.2  Improvisational practices in Judson Dance Theater and the Grand Union
   5.3.3  The British New Dance context of the 1970s and Rosemary Butcher’s conceptual ‘thinking body’

Focusing on the element of change within the practice of improvisational dance is the purpose of this chapter and has been mainly inspired by the artists’ emphasis on the importance of this element in their work. This is why section 5.1 presents a wide range of conceptualisations of the notion of change. In section 5.2 special attention has been drawn to the problem of habit, as this has been often considered by both artists and practitioners as the main parameter which inhibits change.

At the same time, an element of change is also evident in the history of improvisational performance itself. It seems that the practice of improvisation in the context of postmodern dance gradually shaped and reshaped the very notion of the term itself. While old questions were reformulated through the physical experience of new answers, and vice versa, a number of mutations were activated within the very notion of improvisation. A discussion of this phenomenon is the purpose of the third section of this chapter.

The Foucauldian perspective provides the grounds for pushing the discussion further in the sense that it suggests the substitution of the notion of ‘change’ within historical analysis for that of ‘transformation’. The introduction of Part 2 makes a case for a characterisation of improvisational performance on the basis of its mechanism of transformation, as this has been activated in relation to a number of elements such as choice, change, concept and ideology. By contrast, section 5.3 of Chapter 5 points out a number of selected stages in the course of this transformation since the 1970s. This section discusses different qualities of the improvisational
skill as these emerged, in America, through the work of Anna Halprin, Judson Theater group and Grand Union and, in Britain, through the work of Rosemary Butcher, Julyen Hamilton and Sue MacLennan.

It is important to note that, in the course of these fluctuations, the improvisational skill often remained suspended between manifestations of improvisational performance and other types of improvisational practices. Foucault's emphasis on discontinuity facilitates the understanding of this uneven process.

5.1 Notions of change in improvisational dance

David Appel (1983) positions the problem of change in relation to the attitude of the audience. He attempts a comparison between choreographed and improvised work and criticises the audience for their predilection for 'set' work which is an excuse for their "desire to have again exactly what [they] once had" (Appel 1983 p36). He considers this position "judgemental, stemming perhaps from a fear of loss, instead of supporting an openness to the one real constant, which is change" (Appel 1983 p36). Nevertheless, Appel in his attempt to promote change as 'the one real constant' adopts a rigid position which becomes increasingly problematic in relation to element of flexibility inherent in the notion of change.

On the other hand, what mostly fascinates Dana Reitz about the possibilities of her improvisational work is the "motivation for, and the presence of change" (Dufton 1987 p27). In 1987, Reitz performed in London her piece Solo in Silence, which was followed by a post-performance discussion. Reitz explained that, in her work, there are some 'set' elements such as "lighting, overall timing and certain physical goals" which provide the structure within which she can explore different possibilities in relation to her "individual timing and actual steps" (Dufton 1987 p27). Thus the 'changeable' element is her own dance against a group of external and more or less set parameters.

Miranda Tufnell has a different viewpoint. She considers change as an inherent element of the outside world: "we live in changing landscapes of movement, people, objects, spaces, light, sound, words and stories" (1990 [introduction] n.p.). Improvisation enhances the possibilities of fully appreciating
this wealth of experiences and provides a means of constructing "personal narrative[s] of discovery" (Tufnell 1990 [introduction] n.p.). Tufnell's strategy to accommodate change prioritises the importance of the 'present moment' and the necessity to develop the ability to tune in "our sensations, feelings, dreams" (Tufnell 1990 [introduction] n.p.). Thus Tufnell locates the potential for change in the tuning of the improviser's physical awareness.

Body tuning is also a central element in Steve Paxton's technique of Contact Improvisation. Paxton prefers to "think of the body as a tuneable instrument rather than as an instrument whose tuning is pedestrian or organic" (1981-82 p18). Paxton's sense of tuning is not limited just to the skill of fully perceiving the 'present moment'; it is also about the possibility of "pursu[ing] different ways". In other words, in order for the body to operate in full awareness of the immediate moment, the activity or the state within which this will take place has to be defined. In this way, Paxton pushes the discussion further by locating the possibility of change within specific parameters of given contexts.

Paxton (1981-82) has confirmed that Contact Improvisation is a training method which can facilitate the body's ability to identify these 'different ways'. Nevertheless, it is possible to argue against this position, since this technique is in itself a particular way of using the body. To train a person in sharing weight, supporting, falling and rolling does not necessarily guarantee that s/he learns the skill of differentiating between different ways of presupposing the body.

Julyen Hamilton is another improviser who acknowledges 'change' as a major element in his work. He says:

Dancing is about transformation. It is founded upon and relates to movement and change, and can be the art form which most inherently understands change. In improvisation not only are the changes shown but also the action of change itself. From disquietingly slow to confusingly rapid: clearly logical ... irreverently illogical ... from glacial to volcanic. It exposes how change can be based not only on profound need but also on the seemingly lightest whiff and quivering of the surface, by the chance touch which overbalances one thing into another. It gives no hierarchy of 'profundity' ... and this in itself is the key to its depth. (Hamilton 1994)

Hamilton 1995d
An interesting aspect of Hamilton’s position is the awareness of the relationship between ‘transformation’ and ‘change’. He presents the possibility for ‘dancing to be a transformation’, a position he shares with Katie Duck (1996/i), by contemplating the nature of ‘change’. In this distinct way change becomes an aspect of improvisational dance. Ultimately, Hamilton identifies both the possibility and the necessity of reaching a point of transcendence in the context of this work:

The work is not a time of politeness or letting just anything go; one is trying to get up to (or down to) a transcending level ... not simply producing anything for the sake of it.

Hamilton 1996

From his perspective as philosopher and historian, Foucault also becomes interested in the relationship between ‘transformation’ and ‘change’: he devised a version of archaeology which "tries to establish the system of transformations that constitute ‘change’" (1972 p173). He contends that the concept of ‘change’ is not specific enough for the purposes of history because it "is both a general container for all events and the abstract principle of their succession" (Foucault 1972 p172). Transformation takes place when "one discursive formation is substituted for another ... but this does not necessarily alter all the elements" (Foucault 1972 p173). Yet it has this "analysable status" (Foucault 1972 p173) which permits a satisfactory description of "the dispersion of discontinuities" (Foucault 1972 p175).

Improvisation is an open-ended formation. There are rules and principles but these are not always the same; they cannot define anything more precise than areas of choice. No matter how carefully the rules are selected, there are always many chances that an element of unpredictability appears in the end result, strong enough to question the coherence of the whole attempt. This is the point at which transformation takes place either temporarily or as a more permanent alteration, as a new unexpected possibility which once revealed by means of an old set of rules ultimately reconsider their very character. This is also about discontinuity, a manifestation of the non-coherent nature of the rules.

In the context of an improvisational performance, the chances for transformation increase because of the distinct character of the event. The decision-making mechanism operates under the pressure of the presence of the audience and
the work is composed instantly without any chances of retreating. It seems that more factors are involved in the selection process and at the same time the very mechanism of this selection operates at a higher speed.

In improvisational dance, the problem with transformation is not the lack of willingness to acknowledge the presence of the unexpected factor but the difficulty of recognising the indications of discontinuity in the first place. Once this has been accomplished, another choice must be immediately made in relation to whether the improviser adopts the new element and necessarily reconsider the original criteria or ignores it and falls back on predictability.

Many artists of improvisational dance seem to be fully aware of the potential for transformation inherent in their practice. Furthermore, they often express a certain degree of anxiety within their strong wish to achieve 'change'. It is understandable that the opportunity to meet the unpredictable, the unexpected, the unknown, to make a new discovery becomes their only form of reward for having exposed themselves so consistently to a permanent field of uncertainty.

5.2 Changing habits

One of the most important areas in relation to which 'change' becomes very crucial in the context of improvisational work is the problem of 'habit'. In the teaching of traditional dance techniques 'habit' plays an important and positive role. It becomes the body's direct physical means through which performance of highly virtuosic material is achieved. Nevertheless, in the context of improvisational performance, movement habits (whether 'good' or 'bad') unavoidably inhibit the unexpected or unpredictable aspect of the work. As far as change is generally welcomed habit usually operates negatively in improvisational work.

In a position which calls to mind Tufnell's and Hamilton's perspectives as these have been presented in the section 5.1 of this chapter, Paxton also notices the importance of the element of change in the natural world. He sees the improviser's work as part of this natural process.

It is almost a mystical thing to improvise, you're taking natural flow of life, that is that everything changes, and that you have to keep adapting and you are pushing it, you are trying to create it as it's
coming in a way and to shape it and to form it and to affect how it's seen and what it means on stage.

Paxton, 1995/i

In relation to these possibilities, Paxton is deeply concerned with the problem of 'habit'.

I feel that certain things mask other things, that the habits for one thing mask exploration possibilities, that the conscious mind acting as it does through knowledge and in pursuit of the knowledge that it can envision, can't very well see a full spectrum of possibilities.

Paxton, 1981-82, p 18

In some of his most recent written work, his critique of the problem of habit reaches an extreme position; he almost argues that the state of the improvising mind is in itself habitual: "I cannot go on improvising without somehow remaining in the same relationship with myself" (1994 p22). He expresses the wish to start ‘setting’ material, to make choreographed work (which would be the only way to break his own rules). Yet, he subverts his own position simply by sharing with the reader his understanding of ‘set’, as "a linguistic convenience, for these ways which are more the same than they are different" (Paxton 1994 p23). In addition, he notices his difficulty in becoming a choreographer because of the non-democratic character of this role. Ultimately he seems to opt for the possibility of "paradigm change" by means of "mak[ing] technical changes in every moment" (Paxton 1994 p23).

Paxton metaphorically considers the range of movement possibilities as a ‘palette’ and argues that this ‘palette’ emerges from the kind of concept one has about movement. For instance, he maintains that his conceptualisation of the ‘step’ has emphasised the use of the torso almost throughout his whole career. In this sense, for Paxton, to reconceive the step as a form of changing weight just with the legs could be a way out of the impasse (Paxton 1994 p 24).

Paxton’s understanding of change is closely related to his concern for the negative role of habit in improvisational work. Focusing on ‘changing the habit’ his concept of change is revealed as mainly physically-oriented. In addition, primarily interested in the "mechanics of movement" (Paxton 1995/i) Paxton has no reasons for approaching change as something undefinable or spiritual. His main position is that the improvisational artist is the one who has the responsibility for initiating
change by developing adequate physical means; a significant part of Paxton’s whole career has been spent in devising strategies for this task.

Familiarity with some of the alternative approaches to the body can be beneficial within the improvisational artist’s major task of achieving change in her/his work. For instance, Alexander Technique and Body-Mind Centering offer directly relevant practical knowledge.

The "concept of use" is of primary importance in Alexander’s theory of the body and movement possibilities; furthermore, Alexander claimed that a mover is "both the user and the mechanism that is used" (Stevens 1995/i). In this sense, this technique is primarily concerned with the problem of ‘misuse’, one which is directly linked with the development of movement habits, as mentioned in Chapter 4 (4.1). The Alexander Technique specialises in the area of treating cases of misusing the human body by making available methods of changing the related ‘bad habits’.

It is crucial though to mention at this point that one of the cornerstones of Alexander’s theory is that no physical change is entirely possible unless a fundamental change of conception is also involved. In other words, in order to achieve those movement changes which will restore a more effective use of the human body, the movements involved should be radically reconceived. Stevens offers the following example:

One of the common problems we all face .... is that we think of stepping in terms of the legs and the use of the legs. And that’s a major problem for dancers because in order to really locomote through space, stepping isn’t just about legs. It’s actually got to be about the movement of everything that’s above the soles of the feet and including the soles of the feet ... what they really have to do is to rethink their entire use ... So they’ve first of all got to change their conceptions of themselves, that their conceptions of themselves is a whole. They have also got to change their entire conception of the movement, that they can’t see it in bits ... and the perception seems to be the crucial thing ... how to deal with the change in conception, is for them to see that stepping in dance class is essentially no different from stepping anywhere else.

Stevens 1995/i

It probably seems as if Paxton and Stevens support two arguments in contradiction, in relation to the nature of the ‘step’. From a strict Alexander perspective, it is obvious that Paxton cannot solve the problem of the ‘step’. Since the body has to
be understood as a whole, to think of the 'step' in terms of emphasising the legs rather than the torso is still the same misconception as the 'body as fragments'.

It is crucial to point out though that Paxton is not interested in treating the misuses of his body. He only wishes to find an efficient device for 'changing his paradigm' together with his movement habits within his improvisational work. This problem brings to the fore an important aspect of the relationship between movement techniques available through alternative attitudes to the body and the ways these can be relevant to the practice of dance as art. There is no need for these techniques to be introduced within the practice of movement as dance in a narrow-minded, rigid fashion. They have to be adopted and accordingly adapted in a way that can fundamentally assist the artists in their attempt to overcome problems they would not be able to overcome otherwise. In other words, following simultaneously the perspective of Chapter 4, the Alexander Technique should be used as means of enhancing the decision-making process in the practice of improvisation, by making available its practical knowledge in the area of eliminating constraints but without necessarily imposing its distinct movement concept.

Yet, Stevens (1995/i) suggests a different axis on which this technique could be helpful in the learning of the skill of improvisation. She points out the difficulties in recognising the 'habitual', which means that, in some cases, what seems new might be a hidden version of the old. Given that one of the main aspects of learning and teaching improvisation is to explore strategies of change or transformation in movement, the Alexander Technique can be instrumental in reminding the practitioners to be very careful before they make any assumptions about the presence of 'change' in their practices.

Another way to approach the problem of 'change' is Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen's method of Body Mind Centering (BMC). As Mags Clark-Smith (1996/i) says, the contribution of BMC was to shift the emphasis on the knowledge about the body from the conceptual to the experiential. Bonnie Bainbridge-Cohen, starting from the assumption that the theory of evolution in biology is correct, argues that organisms belonging in different evolutionary stages bear traces of all the previous ones. In terms of studying and developing movement possibilities, her approach is useful because it suggests techniques of rediscovering these hidden abilities. For
instance, in order to achieve the movement quality of jumping like a frog, a human being has to be guided through a number of exercises to feel the head-tail connection, which is crucial for this kind of movement (Clark-Smith 1996/i).

Once you do it you feel the connection, the body is informing the mind. BMC accepts that there is an intelligence of the body that can inform the mind and the two must be integrated. With improvisation that’s what’s happening.

Clark-Smith 1996/i

Nancy Stark Smith, one of the major practitioners of Contact Improvisation, has strongly supported Bainbridge-Cohen’s work (Clark-Smith 1996/i). On the basis of this information, Clark-Smith (1996/i) contends that the growth of Contact Improvisation was partly achieved because of the relevant information made available through the BMC work.  

Jean Johnson Jones (1996/i) is a Laban notator who has combined the tools of Laban Movement Analysis (LMC) and BMC to support her work as a movement analyst. She argues that both these methods not only provide specific frameworks for observing movement and articulating the outcomes of the observation but can be also used as grids on the basis of which movement (habits or patterns) can be changed.

One part of the training is to recognise your preferences (both in LMA and BMC) ... So having ... a vocabulary or a language or a way of understanding your preferences also gives you a vocabulary for making other kinds of conscious changes ... until you know your choices you can’t possibly change them. You must have the perspective to say what you are always doing, [for example] a combination of weight-flow, ... [realising that] there is always the choice of time, space, thinking about external space as well as internal space. In a combination of LMA and BMC we talk about the internal kinesphere, the kinesphere that you are familiar with, there is also the external kinesphere, BMC people talk even about skinesphere. So it gives four ways of thinking.

Johnson Jones 1996/i

While the debate on the importance of the element of change within improvisational performance in dance unfolds, it becomes increasingly evident that defining the parameters across which change is pursued facilitates the ultimate task. Johnson Jones’ approach on the basis of an LMA/BMC understanding of movement
is a tool through which the problematic areas can be identified and dealt with accordingly by means of direct action. In attempting to solve the problems of his 'movement palette', Paxton suggests an equivalent method to the LMA/BMC perspective. Finally, the practice of the Alexander technique offers a specific kind of practical knowledge which is instrumental in building up a critical attitude in relation to habit thus indirectly facilitating change.

Not only are these examples significant because of the precise methods they can offer in confronting the problem of changing movement habits in improvisational work, but they can also stimulate further thought about how problematic areas of this work can be detected and dealt with accordingly. In this way, while it seems that habit occurs primarily within generation of movement material and construction of movement patterns, it is also possible that there are habitual attitudes to improvisational performance as a whole; how it is conceived, how it is rehearsed, what composition is, what instant composition is, etc. A full range of levels, which includes both physical and conceptual aspects of improvisational work as well as inbetween combinations of these two, provides thus clear grounds on which strategies of change can be pursued.

5.3 The practice of improvisational dance as a series of transformations in the context of dance postmodernism

There is an additional domain within which the concept of 'change' meets the practice of improvisational dance. In this case, Foucault's suggestion for substituting 'transformation' for 'change' offers a useful conceptual tool.

Foucault contends that the concept of transformation can accommodate such problems as discontinuity and should replace the traditional linking device of the 'influence', which joins together points in time and space by means of causal relationships (1972 p21). On the basis of this new perspective, it can be argued that the history of improvisational performance in dance since the 1960s unfolds as a series of 'transformations' between wider forms of movement improvisation or more set forms of theatre dance and improvisational performance itself.

The moments of transformation are the ones during which the very notion of improvisation is radically reconsidered. If these moments can be recognised, it
becomes possible to locate links between improvisation in performance and other forms of improvisation beyond the linear concept of development.

This method accommodates better the problems of this research, in the sense that it seems impossible to construct a line of 'evolution' on the basis of the improvisational work studied in this chapter. This account includes Anna Halprin's improvisational dance in the late 1950s, Yvonne Rainer's early choreographic preoccupations which were followed by her experiments towards an increasingly looser concept of improvisation, Rosemary Butcher's multifaceted research on improvisation as a choreographic method, Julyen Hamilton's model of 'instant composition' and Sue MacLennan's recent experiments in group improvisational work.

In contrast, it is possible to identify types of improvisational practices, available for the practitioners to borrow by means of their own previous experiences in dance work. Across the span of the last thirty years, while these artists were using this practical knowledge in relation to the specific contexts and purposes of their work, the very notion of improvisation was undergoing a number of conceptual shifts. Travelling through space and time, the practice of movement improvisation, acquired the form of a performance mode only in such instances when the nature of the accumulated experience could afford it.

Adshead-Lansdale (in press) emphasises, from within the area of dance studies, that all knowledge is partial. On the basis of this assumption, my attempt to construct a fragment of the history of improvisational performance is also partial and has been motivated by my interest in those practices which might have made possible the rare examples of current British improvisational dance and the viability of the form in the present context.

From the work presented in this research, only Sue MacLennan's can be considered as purely British, in the sense that she permanently lives and works in Britain. Julyen Hamilton, while British by birth and training, spends most of his time performing in Continental Europe and currently lives in Spain. Nonetheless, he shares with Sue MacLennan the experience of having worked with Rosemary Butcher, which has largely shaped their attitudes to the practice of improvisation, as they both have acknowledged (Hamilton 1995e, 1995/i and MacLennan 1987,
1989, 1996). Kirstie Simpson, who currently lives in the United States, is also British by birth, trained in Britain and worked closely with Julyen Hamilton for many productions of improvisational dance performed in Britain and abroad during the 1980s; she similarly credits Rosemary Butcher for the way she developed her understanding of dance which prioritises the practice of improvisation as a performance mode (Hamilton & Simpson 1986 and Parry 1986).

Although American, Katie Duck credits Europe as the context of her personal growth and artistic development (Duck 1996). Although she has spent long periods of her life in such places as the Netherlands and Italy and currently lives in Amsterdam, she has also lived in Britain between 1986 and 1990 and produced improvisational dance performances which she presented in Britain and Europe. During the same period she was also appointed as a senior lecturer at Dartington College of Arts in Devon, Britain. Thus, she was a member of the Dartington group of artists gathered in Devon by Mary Fulkerson, in her effort to create a basis for British New Dance throughout the 1980s. Such artists as Steve Paxton (1995), Julyen Hamilton (1995/i) with whom Duck collaborates regularly, and Sylvia Hallett (1996), a major figure of the British improvised music scene during the last 20 years (Couldry 1995), have all three emphasised Duck’s contribution to improvisational dance.

Such network of connections between different artists in the form of a either teacher/student relationship or artistic collaborations should not be considered as an attempt to trace ‘influences’ in their work. As suggested in Chapter 2 (2.1), this information is meant to locate forms of practical knowledge which were available in various ways and degrees to the artists whose work is studied in this research and which might have informed it in a number of ways.

5.3.1. Anna Halprin

Anna Halprin is a devoted veteran of improvisational dance; she has been working improvisationally since the late 1950s. Halprin studied anatomy and kinesiology at the University of Wisconsin with Margaret H’Doubler who introduced her to improvisation (Halprin 1965) and "a more biological approach to movement" (Halprin 1967-68 p12). After having left the modern dance scene, she started
exploring a number of movement ideas with a group of students in San Francisco in an attempt to "break down any preconceptions ... about ... dance ... movement ... composition (Halprin 1965 p143). Originally, she used improvisation with the intention to free the bodies of the dancers from the mannerisms of modern dance; then she moved to space ideas and the use of dynamics (Halprin 1965 p143). The American postmodern dance artist Simone Forti, who studied with Halprin for four years, describes her approach:"

Our basic way of working was improvisation following the stream of consciousness ... at the same time a part of the self acted as a witness, watching for movement that was fresh and good ... we were not interested in having ideas about how our movements should relate, but in looking at how things did relate.

Forti 1974 p108-109

Halprin (1987) was also interested in exploring different ways of improvising so that she would avoid falling back on fixed pattern. Working in this way while being also inspired by the creative skills of the people whom she taught (Simone Forti, Trisha Brown, La Monte Young, Terry Riley, Robert Morris and others) brought to her work new elements such as voice, sound, words and objects. Finally, in the late 1960s, she created improvisations for audience participation. An area of her work includes the so-called 'explorations' which were more specifically focused than the 'improvisations' on particular tasks.

Libby Worth (1995/i), who trained with Halprin, mentions the physical basis of Halprin's improvisational tasks and points out her strength in using the physical environment. According to Worth (1995/i), Halprin's method included open improvisation exercises lasting about 20 minutes which were developed by means of additional instructions or strategies for breaking down the material. The work was usually presented and discussed with the rest of the students although these improvisations were not meant to contribute either to choreographic or performance work."

For Worth (1995/i) the benefits of her training with Halprin include knowledge in the areas of both generating movement material and providing structures for organising this material. This structuring technique was primarily taught through the use of RSVP cycles. R represented "resources which are what
you have to work with", S "scores which describe the process leading to performance", V "valuaction which analyses the results of action and possible selectivity and decision" and P "performance which is the result of scores and is the 'style' of the process" (Halprin & Burns 1974 p147).

Anna Halprin's work particularly stimulated interest in the physical and biological aspect of the movement thus supporting the re-discovery of the physicality of the body in dance. In addition, she freed dance from pre-existing dance vocabularies, introduced more interdisciplinary working methods by bringing other materials into her creative work and assisted improvisational dance technically by devising specific methods of generating and structuring movement material. In this way she made available to those American dance postmodernists (Forti, Rainer, Brown and other), who trained with her, forms of practical knowledge in the area of improvisational dance on the basis of which, in the course of the following years, their work grew in the form of expansion, transformation, rejection or disappearance of these original guidelines.

5.3.2 Improvisational practices in Judson Dance Theater and Grand Union and Yvonne Rainer's contribution

Amongst other Judsonites, Yvonne Rainer was one of Halprin's students. Rainer's steps throughout her artistic career can be considered as a series of transformations between the work of the Judson Theater group and Grand Union.

As explained in Chapter 2 (2.5) the birth of the improvisational performance group Grand Union was the last of a number of transformations which took place within the very process of performing Yvonne Rainer's piece Continuous Project - Altered Daily which was premiered in March 1969. This piece epitomised Rainer's predilection for process and focus on the dancers' involvement with the dance rather than the demonstration of their technical abilities. Yet, these concerns were already evident in Rainer's work as early as 1964. Rainer describes:

In 1964 I began to play around with simple one - and two -motion phrases that required no skill and little energy and contained few accents. The way in which they were put together was indeterminate, or decided upon in the act of performing.

in Brown 1980 p146
During the same period, Rainer was also experimenting with improvisation as performance mode. As mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.5), her piece *Some Thoughts on Improvisation* was already available in 1964. It could be argued then that, during Rainer's creative journey from the Judson period to the Grand Union one, her original interest in improvisation as device for emphasising process and revealing the dancers' involvement with the work was gradually transformed to an end in itself. On the basis of these two extreme positions of understanding improvisation as tool for making dance, a comparison can be made between the use of improvisational practices in Judson Theater work and Grand Union's experiments.

Ramsay emphasises the role of improvisational dance in the Judson Theater work:

> Among the improvisational forms explored by the Judson Group were ones in which sections of a dance were improvised in an open manner, with no prearranged theme or guidelines and other works based on 'spontaneous determination', or structured improvisation, in which dancers freely used preset material within a defined framework.
> Ramsay 1991 p28

It is worth mentioning that the so-called 'open manner' of improvising within the context of the Judson Group does not coincide with the absolutely unrestricted improvisational techniques adopted by the Grand Union. In fact, in the latter's case,

> the performances were without plan, without script, without a single preplanned structure. There was no focal climax, no particular order, no illusions that were allowed to stand for more than a moment.
> Banes 1987 pp215-217

The Judson work also included improvisational dances and improvisational techniques for making dances, but the performances were never treated as improvisational events. Rather, Judson Theater work emphasised 'structured improvisation' as an excellent opportunity for re-examining movement as an artistic medium, breaking the preconceptions about its limits and possibilities. With the tool of 'structured improvisation', the artists had the opportunity to deal with concrete, almost tangible material, introduce new perspectives, realise previously hidden aspects of their object of investigation and be exhaustive with their task.15
On the other hand, when improvisation was used in the 'open manner', this was still in the context of specific performances which were made up of several pieces some of which had been defined as improvisational. In this case this was a matter of particular choices and not the outcome of any general approach.

By contrast, 'unrestricted' or 'total' improvisation (namely, non-structured improvisation) was the leading concept of Grand Union's performance work. However, the lines along which this concept was materialised could not be totally undefined, because the artists involved had already accumulated relevant experiences through a preceding phase of their work in the context of the Judson Theater group. This is probably why Ramsay has the impression that

> despite the apparent randomness and unpredictability of Grand Union's process, the imaginative creating of material through these varied approaches brought about performances that were not only original and unusual, but surprisingly cohesive.

Ramsay 1991 p12

A specific investigation could probably reveal many interesting commonalities between the movement vocabularies and structures of the choreographed (or even improvised) works of the Judson Theater Group and the 'totally improvised' performances of the Grand Union. Following this, there are good reasons for claiming that improvisation can never be 'total' in absolute terms. Such 'totality' is strictly contingent upon the contextual parameters of the particular point in time and space in which the practice occurs. Thus, since no fixed notion of 'total' improvisation can ever be possible, the use of this practice, within contexts that welcome it, can result in further discoveries about what this form of dance making might be and, consequently, what improvisational performance consists of.

Another comparison can be made between the work of the choreographer Rosemary Butcher and subsequent improvisational dance artists within the context of British New Dance. Butcher's work cannot be considered as a form of improvisational performance in the way this has been described in Chapter 2 (2.2). Nevertheless, in the course of the last twenty years, Butcher has thoroughly investigated a number of improvisational practices either in the form of structured improvisation as part of the performance process, or as her main choreographic method for generating and structuring movement material during the pre-
performance stage. By collaborating with numerous New Dance performers who were also interested in making their own work, she made available to these people specific forms of practical knowledge in the area of improvisation which supported in a variety of ways their work in improvisational performance. Yet, it must be mentioned that she directly experienced the work of the early American dance postmodernists through visiting New York in the early 1970s and this was a crucial turning point in her choreographic career (Butcher 1995c/i).

5.3.3 The British New Dance context of the 1970s and Rosemary Butcher’s conceptual ‘thinking body’

The link with the visual arts was as crucial for British New Dance, as it was for the early American dance postmodernists. According to Jordan (1992), the recognition of the London School of Contemporary Dance as an institution that would train the ‘new dance’ artists of Britain coincided with the strong interest of British sculptors in expanding into performance art and new media in the late 1960s.

The first mixed media company that attempted to meet this need was Moving Being. Its founder Geoff Moore had an arts background and he was a ‘self-taught’ choreographer. His work was an ‘assemblage’ of various heterogenous elements: movement, light, speech, slides, sound effects etc. He was very attracted by Cage’s principle of multiple centres. According to Jordan (1992), his collaborators came from a variety of places: Berners Place, The Royal Ballet School, The Laban Art of Movement Centre, Dartington College, and drama and art schools. Moore’s "mixed-media techniques ... shifted gradually more and more towards text-based drama and away from dance during the 1970s" (Jordan 1992 p25).

The first company that dealt exclusively with dance in this context was Strider (1972-1975). According to Mackrell (1992), in 1974, the company worked with Fulkerson at Dartington College of Arts on choreography and improvisation. Dartington had an established tradition of teaching modern dance since both Rudolf Laban and Kurt Jooss had worked there during the 1940s and 1950s. When Fulkerson was appointed to the college, her work emphasised the role of non-dance elements and the use of non-dancers as performers and everyday movement
vocabulary. Her method of exploration was improvisation through imagery and, by encouraging students to discover their own movement possibilities, her teaching style was aimed at eliminating a competitive atmosphere in the classroom. Fulkerson made Strider familiar with this way of working and she also choreographed for the company. According to Jordan (1992), Strider performed Fulkerson's piece *Small Brown Shell* in 1973: the British dancer Dennis Greenwood, who was at the time a member of the company, performed Fulkerson's solo piece *We love you, Dennie* in 1974, and Fulkerson herself performed *Making Light Work* with Strider during the same year. Thus she communicated her choreographic views to Strider.

Now, new possibilities for using the floor and for improvisation within performance were explored. There was fast work but, now too, sparse material, much stillness and ... a new easy fluidity or flow and a democracy in partnering derived from the premises of contact improvisation.

Jordan 1992 p53

In 1978, Fulkerson was invited to teach release technique to the X6 Collective (Jordan 1992). According to Mackrell (1992), the X6 Collective had already been in contact with Dartington College of Arts since the end of 1976, and had been thus introduced to Contact Improvisation technique by regularly inviting American teachers (Steve Paxton, Lisa Nelson and Nancy Stark Smith) to teach.

In some aspects, the X6 was equivalent to the American performance group Grand Union; in other ways it was very different. Jordan, compares the X6 Collective with the Judson Theater Group in the sense that they were both cooperative, artist-run organizations dedicated to alternative ideas. And there were clear likeness across the work, for instance, the wide range of materials incorporated into performance, the broadening of the definition of dance, the use of non-technical movement, the collage structures.

Jordan 1992 p83

The X6 Collective established a completely new perspective towards dance; it was the first time a group of dance artists had so clearly located a creative balance between aesthetic concerns and political ideology. In this sense, while X6 was not an exclusively improvisational performance group, it 'de-formalized' dance in
an attempt to challenge society's most problematic aspects of social construction. Within these concerns, the X6 Collective which was created between 1975 and 1976 by Fergus Early, Jacky Lansley, Emilyn Claid, Maedée Duprès and Mary Prestidge protested against mainstream dance. The members ran their independent dance space in complete democracy. They could perform, rehearse and organise their dance classes any way they thought this was appropriate. Within this atmosphere they promoted a relaxed type of work which welcomed informal performances. Artists had the opportunity to show work in progress and "were allowed to fail ... the arena was non-judgemental" (Jordan 1992 p73).

Although the work was not always improvisational, sometimes it included improvised parts within a set framework and, often, it was prepared for a single viewing, as a reaction to "repeatable products associated with established dance" (Jordan 1992 p74). In this context, when improvisation was used as a performance mode this was legitimate in the sense that "pleasure for the audience lay primarily in following the process of a performer's spontaneous response to a situation" (Jordan 1992 p74).

The X6 Collective offered performance space to various avant-garde British dance artists. Rosemary Butcher, the "solitary figure in the British dance" (Jordan 1992 p160), was among the artists who had been invited to perform during the Collective's opening celebration in 1976.

Butcher undertook her dance studies in Dartington College of Arts between 1965 and 1968, went to the States twice (1968-1969 and 1970-1972) and, coming back to Britain, taught briefly at Dartington. Her American visits gave her the opportunity of direct contact with the American dance postmodernists and the non-technical, 'minimalist' and improvisatory character of their work.

Butcher perceived that all around her choreographers were working closely with artists from other disciplines, expanding their own disciplines and choosing to show their work in galleries and outdoor spaces, outside the usual dance venues. This, she has said, encouraged her to be alive to new contexts for dance.

Jordan 1992 p162

In other words, Butcher's visits to the United States between 1969 and 1973 were seminal for her artistic development:
I've spent one year in Washington and the rest of the time in New York. It was absolutely at the time after Judson, the Grand Union was performing, Yvonne [Rainer] was performing in 1970, I saw both the Grand Union and Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown's *Walking on the Walls* and Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown's concert at the Whitney [Museum] based on improvisation and I saw Meredith Monk in Washington.

Butcher 1996

In 1975 she established her own company whose first performance took place in 1976. Until the mid 1980s, "improvisation [was] not only crucial to the creation of the movement material, but also to its performance" (Mackrell 1992 p57); later her works became almost completely fixed for performance. Butcher explains:

I think improvisation is a wonderful thing to enable you to find a language ...but I've never seen it, as others have seen it as an end in itself.

Butcher 1995c/i

In relation to the Grand Union work, she "responded to them [only] from an idea's point of view ... [because she had] this obsession with the idea of things being placed" (Butcher 1996). Ultimately her method of choreographing through improvisation can be described as "very much about sculpting [and sculpting in particular] the time that [the dance] is existing" (Butcher 1996).

The 'visual arts' element of her work is not only manifested in her emphasis on the use of space but also in her preference for non-proscenium performance spaces (special indoors settings, natural sites and open-air locations) and in her interest in film and television work.

Her teaching of improvisation attracted many dancers who wanted to get involved in a more creative experience. Some of them, such as Julyen Hamilton, Sue MacLennan, Dennis Greenwood, Miranda Tufnell and Gaby Agis, soon became members of her company and invested her legacy into their subsequent independent work.

Sue MacLennan describes the period of her collaboration with Butcher and notices some 'influences' in her work:

The work wasn't like anything I've ever done, but it's funny, I've never questioned whether it was worthwhile or anything, I just had this faith in it. And a lot of influences in my own work come from
that time - using improvisation to find material, and a lot of things to
do with contact and release.

MacLennan 1987 p8

MacLennan also discusses the working process in Butcher’s company and points out
what she found interesting in this collaboration.

I worked for Rosemary Butcher and didn’t really choreograph for
about three years - because the way she worked satisfied me
creatively. It involves the dancers making their own material and
improvising with that. You felt a very important part of the creative
process - but it also felt very much her choreography ... That was a
very releasing thing, knowing that it was one person’s vision you
were all trying to arrive at, and that there was a certain sort of
responsibility that you didn’t have.

Davies & MacLennan 1989 p9

MacLennan has not done much ‘totally’ improvisational work. She has primarily
used structured improvisation, while her solo pieces are more improvised than her
group ones (MacLennan 1987 p9). She explains:

It always made sense to me to keep in touch with both spectrums, to
have a liveliness always in the set work and to inform the
spontaneous work through the work with form. There is a sense of
discovery that you never lose in improvisation.

MacLennan 1996/i

Yet, MacLennan did a ‘totally’ improvised piece Catching Light, originally
made as the first part of a full evening programme with the overall title Spontaneous
Combustion. In 1995, she presented Catching Light at the Chisenhale Dance Space
as a full evening piece. MacLennan confesses that the working process towards the
first performances of Catching Light was not what she had envisioned to doing.
There was a difference of perspective between herself and the dancers: while she
wanted to work "with the possibility of different structures", the dancers found this
particularly distracting for the spontaneity of their contribution; finally she agreed
to "keep it completely open" (MacLennan 1996/i).

MacLennan believes that this disagreement was a consequence of the
different backgrounds she and these dancers had. She admits that these performers
are excellent improvisers and they know how to cope with this completely open
process. On the other hand she felt that Catching Light was still her piece and
that she ultimately had the responsibility for the overall project. Later on, she realised that the difference between her and the other dancers was that she "could see the possibility of building structures ... which would be easy to remember" (MacLennan 1996/i). In fact, this is the method she definitely wants to follow, if she decides to do another improvisational piece in the future. MacLennan seems to acknowledge both the special area within which her practical knowledge of improvisation is situated and Rosemary Butcher's contribution in this.

I had a lot of experience of doing lots of pieces with different degrees of structure. [The other dancers] hadn't, they had done a lot of very open improvisation. When I started playing with form, they resisted that, because they could not see where I could go and it was difficult for them to keep it in their head and be spontaneous. But I had a lot of experience with Rosemary [Butcher] ... maybe it is a whole skill that I haven't recognised.

MacLennan 1996/i

Julyen Hamilton, on the other hand, is equally experienced in working both with and without structures and believes that, in group improvisation, it is possible to work with "unsaid structures" provided that the dancers have the ability to operate on the same "wave length" (1995/i). Working with given structures, which can be often "banal" in the sense of organising solo, duets and other group formations across a time parameter, offers the luxury to the performer to drop the "overall compositional thing ... [and] get into the microcosm of it" (1995/i).

Nevertheless, Hamilton has developed a firm technique of 'instant composition' on the assumption that

improvising as performance mode is to open your valves and perceptions and memories and awarenesses to your inspiration and to your compositional senses to create, receive the inspiration, create and perform it, all in the same second.

Hamilton 1995/i

The technique of 'instant composition' relies on the ability of the performer to achieve a degree of "transcendence", in the sense that

the configuration of all the concrete items: the tangible body, the verbal word, the sound of the song, the sound of the breath, the colour of the lights becomes more than the total of them.

Hamilton 1995/i
This state of transcendence applies to both the performer and the audience but the responsibility of the performer is "to get it going" in her/himself at least. At the same time, the improviser must be able to discern when this state of transcendence reaches the spectators in the form of a state "which you don’t question", "you have the privilège of not knowing", "a time for experience" and support it without interfering (1995/i). In group improvisation, in particular, this skill relies on the ability of the performers to operate on "the same wave length", "to distinguish between feeling and compositional decision" and to operate "without any ego", "to be a hundred percent ready to drop" their ideas for the sake of the general compositional set up (1995/i). In this way, Hamilton brings to the fore the ability of the performer to choose, which although operating under different parameters in the context of solo work, is, in both solo and group improvisational work, the ability to "edit". In this respect, he credits Rosemary Butcher as the one who made available to him this practical knowledge of "making decisions, making forms" (1995e).

Butcher's interest in improvisation gradually lost its performance context and, from this point of view, there is no direct link between her work and the current British improvisational dance. Nevertheless, Butcher's work is a statement about dance and an effort to change the audience's preconceptions about 'what can be dance'. She believes that in the 1970s, her work became "part of a movement" which was never sufficiently supported and "given enough credibility" (Butcher 1995c/i). Her critique of the dance establishment is that

what it refused to embrace was a new ideology of any degree, with any capacity other than to say it wasn't dance.

Butcher 1995c/i

In this way her dance is a form of politics in that it claims a space for the non-mainstream. Not only does Butcher share with the current British improvisers the claim for 'another' dance, she also leads this campaign by actively participating in the debate. The retrospective of her twenty years' work, scheduled at the Royal College of Art in London during Autumn 1996 / Winter 1997, will be a recognition of her contribution to the British dance scene. At the same time, such an event becomes a form of acknowledgement of non-mainstream dance in a wider sense; an
appropriate context for the growth of improvisational dance in Britain becomes ultimately feasible.

This chapter has explored the element of change as a point of dispersion on the basis of which improvisational performance in dance can be understood. Aspects of the same debate are further explored in Chapters 6 and 7. Section 5.1 introduced a range of conceptualisations of the element of change, as these become apparent in the work, interviews and written texts of various artists. Section 5.2 investigated the negative role of habit within the practice of improvisation and a number of strategies to confront it. Following Foucault's suggestion for a historical analysis based on the concept of transformation, section 5.3 has presented selected stages of the history of the improvisational skill since the late 1950s. Whereas this account does not focus on any particular aspects of improvisational dance, section 6.3 of Chapter 6 introduces two stages of this transformation from the perspective of the conceptual character of improvisational performance. This section becomes a comparison between Yvonne Rainer's and Rosemary Butcher's contributions within this domain. Finally, Chapter 7, which focuses on the ideological character of improvisational performance, approaches the element of change as this becomes a political task.

NOTES

1. In Chapter 2, it has been mentioned that, in the context of postmodern dance, it is ineffective to differentiate between choreography and improvisation. In many cases, choreography is not necessarily concerned with precision of dance steps and has adopted a number of improvisational practices within both its working processes and end results.

2. Julyen Hamilton (1995/i) contends there is nothing unusual about this form of pressure because this is the way "things come into being ... in the natural world". The audience assists the performance event from a double perspective: on the one hand they want satisfaction for the money they have paid and on the other they deeply wish to be taken in by the dream. Hamilton explains:

Those pressures help me to get even more to the point ... help me to make those instant decisions even more clear and I try to harness that energy not in a conceptual way ... but in a purely energetic way ...
they [the audience] bring an energy and an intention and together we can get further that either of us could alone.

Hamilton 1995/i

Duck (1996/i) locates the same problem in a slightly different way. For her the difference between a rehearsal and a performance is not stronger concentration, rather "the excitability of the space and adrenalin". She also thinks that the presence of the audience alters the perception of time for the performer. This means that the latter has to be trained in time perception, which is an element she works with during the rehearsals of her work.

3. Paxton is fully aware of the importance of the contextual climate within which any art work is made, improvisational dance included: "It strikes me that the artistic climate that you grow up in has a very strong influence on the nature of the choices that you make" (1994 p24). He admits that his career evolved under the impact of a strong new paradigm, the one introduced by John Cage, Merce Cunningham and others and his personal challenge now is to be able to operate artistically beyond the limitations of their guidelines.

4. Hamilton also admits that the mechanics of movement is an area of considerable support within his way of practising movement improvisation as a performance mode: "When I don't know what I'm doing, I always go to the body which keeps changing, always the same but different" (1995e). Thus Hamilton devises a method of working with movement material on the basis of both its aspect of mechanics and its inherent nature of being constantly in flux.

5. Within a postmodern perspective, some of these approaches are problematic. The Alexander Technique, in particular, is based on the assumption of right and wrong movements which is unacceptable within a postmodern consideration in the sense that what is right or wrong cannot be such in an absolute way and in the absence of specific contexts.

6. This position meets the very perspective of this research in terms of the problem of how knowledge becomes available. In Chapter 2 (2.1) it was argued that knowledge is not transferred in the form of 'influence', which according to Foucault (1972) is a vague and inaccurate concept. Rather the fact that certain practices at certain points in time become mature enough to have a wider use informs the work of subsequent artists or practitioners because it enriches their range of choices at experiential level. In a way which is similar to Clark-Smith's position in relation to the contribution of BMC work in the growth of Contact Improvisation technique Paxton contends:

We now have whole new approaches to the body, ... in things like Body Mind Centering ... whereas in the Sixties it seemed that the crosscurrents were happening inter-arts, now ... a very important crosscurrent is happening just from approaches to the body, that we have many more approaches now and that they are causing these
kinds of eddies and whirlpools where one finds oneself every now and then.

Paxton 1995/i

7. Paxton would probably agree with Johnson Jones, since he has already admitted the contribution of "the notations that are now available" to the birth of new ways of understanding movement (1995/i).

8. During 1995 and 1996 an emphasis on the use of improvisation took place at the training level in Britain, later on followed by performance work. In June, Greenwich Dance Agency in South London organised a five-day-long residency on group improvisation with the ex-Trisha Brown dancer Lance Gries, who is currently working on improvisation and making solo work, as well as open classes with the British dancer and choreographer Sue Maclellan.

In August, Chisenhale Dance Space in East London offered a two week Summer School in Contact Improvisation and group improvisation with the British improviser, Kirstie Simson, currently living in California, USA. This Summer School culminated with an evening of improvisations including an example of the group's work and featuring Simson's and Russell Maliphant's collaboration in the form of improvised solos and duets accompanied by improvised music.

At the beginning of September, the British improviser Julyen Hamilton who has worked extensively with Kirstie Simpson during the 1980s offered a three-day workshop in improvisation for professional dancers in Liverpool as part of the Physical State International summer course. A similar course was offered again by Hamilton in Greenwich Dance Agency at the beginning of November. At the same time Hamilton presented his solo improvised work 40 Monologues at Jackson's Lane Theatre in London, at the University of Surrey in Guildford (where he also offered a class) and in Coventry.

In the meantime, Chisenhale Dance Space organised a whole season between September and December 1995 for the study of improvisation and various forms of body work. This season included workshops with Sue Maclennan and Miranda Tufnell, Contact Improvisation and improvisation for beginners courses and a wide range of workshops on Body Mind Centering, Feldenkrais technique, movement and voice work etc. During this season, evenings called Improvs became part of the regular performance events of Chisenhale Dance Space. Because of the particular character of the season, Sue Maclennan was invited to perform with her company a part of her last work, which she had toured in Britain in the previous two years. This piece, Spontaneous Combustion, included a first half which was completely improvised. For this season, Maclennan extended this part to a full evening performance which took place at the Chisenhale Dance Space in October. Two members of her group, Andrea Buckley and Paula Hampson, have been trained and worked with Julyen Hamilton in the past.

In the following season, Winter 1996, Sue Maclennan shared the Chisenhale Dance Space choreography residency for two weeks with Liz Aggiss. Maclennan taught improvisational techniques for choreography and performance. The new series of Improvs included new work made by young improvisers, amongst them the British dancer Fin Walker, who has worked constantly with Rosemary Butcher for the last 6 years.
In addition, Miranda Tufnell organised a series of workshops on body work and the use of improvisation across Britain, between March and September 1996. Some were offered in collaboration with Chris Crickmay, co-author of Tufnell's book *Body Space Image: Notes Towards Improvisation and Performance*. Their plans for the immediate future include the writing of a new book to replace their last one, as they think "it has become old-fashioned" (Tufnell 1996/i).

Finally Chisenhale Dance Space invited the American contactor and improviser Daniel Lepkoff for the 1996 Summer School which focused on the teaching of 'Contact Improvisation and Real Time Composition' according to the title of the workshop.

9. Rosemary Butcher (1995c/i), Miranda Tufnell (1996/i) and Sue Maclennan (1996/i) have all mentioned the importance of the Dartington Festivals for the birth of the British New Dance during the 1980s. The Festival and the movement component of the Theatre Department of the College no longer exist and many scholars, students and artists including Butcher (1995c/i), Tufnell (1996/i) and Maclennan (1996/i) have expressed their regret at the lack of an equivalent nucleus for the current British New Dance.

10. At this point, it is worth noting Margaret H'Doubler's concept of movement. She claims that:

   The student of dance ... must learn to be aware of muscular tensions, to discover in movement the manifestations of physical laws, and consciously to employ those laws if he is to develop a style in accordance with them. A study of movement must penetrate into the anatomical factors of joint structure ... it is this anatomical structure that sets the mechanical limits for motor response. But this structure, when it is set in action, is dependent upon physiological aspects. In the last analysis, movements that follow any stimulating cause are manifestations of physiological principles.

   H'Doubler 1957 p78

11. Both the American dance postmodernists Trisha Brown and Yvonne Rainer had also studied with Halprin but for much shorter periods of time (Brown 1987 and Rainer 1974).

12. Worth (1995/i) adds that this approach was very useful in the sense that the participants could freely explore absurd or grotesque things.

13. Worth emphasised that the participants were not necessarily interested in dance as art practice. They came from a wide range of different backgrounds such as medicine or psychotherapy and were planning to use this information in their professional contexts. Therefore the element of performance was not strictly understood with artistic connotations. This element manifests a change of focus in Halprin's work. She has referred to her work during the 1960s in the following way:

   If you use the word therapy in terms of personal growth, any art experience that is valid to a person and that is based on personal
experience certainly, automatically must have therapeutic value. But if your attention as an artist is only on what you are getting therapeutically, you are not paying attention to the fact that essentially you're a craftsman, that essentially your job is to be a vehicle for other people.

Halprin 1967-68 p14

In the same interview, Worth went on to point out that part of the skill she was teaching was the ability "to get right down to the essence" of the element you are dealing with which depends not only upon the awareness of the body but also of the environment (Halprin 1967-68 p14).

It seems though that although her 1990s work has become even more distant from traditional artistic practices than in the past (for more information on this subject see Halprin 1989a and 1989b), this is not far away from her original position in favour of eliminating the distinction between art and life (Halprin 1989b).

14. Rainer contends:
   The artifice of performance ... was more interesting and important than the exhibition of character and attitude ... the display of technical virtuosity ... no longer make sense.
   
in Brown 1980 p145

15. Trisha Brown notes
   If at the beginning you set a structure and decide to deal with X, Y, and Z materials in a certain way ... that is the principle, for example behind jazz. The musicians may improvise, but they have a limitation in the structure just as improvisation in dance does. This is what I would call structured improvisation because it locates you in time and place with content.
   
in Banes 1983 p20

It is worth mentioning that resistance to jazz music's fixed approaches to improvisation was one of the most important motivating forces to the birth of the British improvising music scene during the 1960s. More information on this subject see Bailey 1992, Couldry 1995 and Prévost 1995.

16. For instance, the first half of Concert #14 included seven improvisations (Banes 1983 p194).

17. Chapter 6 (6.2) discusses the links between the avant-garde context of the American visual arts of the 1960s and the birth of early American dance postmodernism.

18. For more details on this subject see Huxley 1988 about the distinct character of the X6 Collective, the ADMA Festivals and the British journal New Dance; all of them are different manifestations of what Butcher 1995c/i calls 'a movement', namely the movement of British New Dance.
19. In addition to Sue MacLennan, the other members of MacLennan Company were at the time Andrea Buckley, Andrew Fifield, Paula Hampson and Edwin Lung. It is worth noting that Paula Hampson has worked extensively with Julyen Hamilton both as his student and collaborator.

20. Steve Paxton (1995/i) discusses the unfortunate situation of the late Grand Union work when the members of the group lost trust in each other. He describes this as a lack of communication emerging from the tendency of these performers to operate on the basis of their ego. After this negative experience, Paxton avoided for many years improvisational work in group situations. Nevertheless, in 1995, he participated in a series of improvisational performances organised by Katie Duck in Louvain, Belgium where he rediscovered his faith in this form of work.

21. Butcher's understanding of what is dance is very specific. Inspired by the work of the early American postmodernists, she understands dance as "released from the tyranny of the story and the sequence of steps" (Butcher 1992 p18). She also believes in a dance free from the tyranny of "institutions and bureaucracies" which "dictate" funding to the artists and ignore their requirements (1992 p18). Butcher contends that there is a long literary British tradition with a strong narrative character and, although such it is a "contribution to European art", it can become "restrictive and diminishing where applied to the visual arts" (1992 p 18).

It seems as if she has inherited the concern for the mechanics of movement within a parallel attempt of searching for a "movement language which is linked directly to an original concept" (Butcher 1992 p21). The importance of these objectives overcomes the "dictatorship of a dance style such as ballet, Graham, Cunningham" or Contact Improvisation the idea of creating a specific movement vocabulary (1992 p 21).
Chapter 6: Concept

6.1 Relationships between the Foucauldian approach to 'concept' and improvisational performance in dance
6.2 The conceptual character of American avant-garde art during the 1960s
6.3 The conceptual element in Yvonne Rainer's and Rosemary Butcher's work
6.4 Concepts of movement
6.5 Concepts of composition: towards an analysis of improvisational dance from a compositional perspective
   6.5.1 Katie Duck
   6.5.2 Julyen Hamilton
   6.5.3 Sue MacLennan

Within the study of improvisational performance as discourse, this Chapter claims that the element of concept is as another form of discursive regularity, on the basis of which the character of improvisational performance can be grasped. This means that 'concept' is one more perspective within which improvisational performance is constantly transformed. Chapters 4 and 5 (which deal with the elements of choice and change respectively) have introduced processes of transformation within the practice of improvisational performance by means of presenting a range of decision-making procedures and strategies of change. Chapter 6 approaches the problem of transformation from the perspective of theory by means of introducing a range of conceptualisations of improvisational performance.

Some of the information included in Chapter 4 prepares the ground for the ideas pursued in Chapter 6. Chapter 4 (4.3) has presented a number of available movement conceptions from within which the artists have the opportunity to draw material for their improvisational work. The same section has also discussed Robert Dunn's contribution to improvisational dance in terms of his reconsideration of the notion of composition. This information emphasises the variety of angles under which improvisational performance could be considered from the perspective of the artist and consequently materialised. Chapter 6 continues this discussion in sections 6.4 and 6.5 and explains how selected artists work on the basis of their distinct conceptualisations of movement and composition respectively.
This chapter also claims that the ability to create concepts and use them in creative work is an important part of the improviser's skill and has specific historical reasons. Section 6.2 of this chapter discusses the importance of the conceptual element in the American avant-garde art of the 1960s on the assumption that this contextual information is directly linked to the birth of improvisational performance during the 1970s.

Section 6.1 establishes explicit connections between Foucault's theory of discursive analysis and the role of the concept in improvisational performance.

6.1. Relationships between the Foucauldian approach to 'concept' and improvisational performance in dance

Part of Foucault's approach to discursive analysis is the attempt to reconsider traditional assumptions about 'concepts'. He is interested in revealing why the nature of concepts cannot be understood by means of linear logic. In compensation, he claims that both concepts and conceptual systems are dispersed in the form of a non-deductive "organization of the field of statements" (1972 p56). Foucault suggests the perspectives of 'succession', 'coexistence' and 'intervention' along which the dispersion of concepts takes place (1972 pp56-59). He contends there is no way a general theory about the nature of 'concepts' can be constructed because there is no common element which links together conceptual systems. On the basis of this assumption, his work rather aims at

discover[ing] how the recurrent elements of statements can reappear, dissociate, recompose, gain in extension or determination, be taken up into new logical structures, acquire on the other hand, new semantic contents, and constitute partial organizations amongst themselves. These schemata make it possible to describe - not the laws of the internal construction of concepts, nor their progressive and individual genesis in the mind of man - but their anonymous dispersion through texts, books and oeuvres.

Foucault 1972 p60

Foucault considers it impossible to capture the notion of 'concept' within a characterisation valid that is valid amongst a number of different manifestations. Instead, he recognises within the very nature of conceptual formation the potential for transformation by means of reappearance, dissociation and recomposition,
thus offering an alternative perspective for the study of the element of concept in the context of improvisational dance.

For example, the way improvisational performance in dance tends to be practised in the form of 'instant composition' implies the existence of various possibilities for conceptualising the notion of composition. Thus, the use of 'instant composition' by different artists does not operate on the basis of any common understanding of the term; in each work, it becomes a specific instantiation of the compositional choices involved.

As argued in Chapter 4, a number of historical and contextual parameters have made available to the artists of improvisational dance a multiplicity of movement and composition concepts. It seems impossible to locate links across the diversity of the manifestations of these concepts in the form of causal relationships or linear progression. What makes these concepts possible is not their character as part of some sort of evolutionary line but the presence of specific forms of practical knowledge within the dance experiences of the artists introduced. On the other hand, these artists' ability to operate on the basis of concepts they themselves construct relies again on specific forms of practical knowledge each one of them possesses. These artists do not necessarily have access to the same forms of practical knowledge and this is why their concepts have not necessarily been formed according to the same model.

Nevertheless, the very method of artistically working on the basis of selected 'concepts' is in itself a form of artistic practice which became similarly available to the artists of improvisational dance through sufficient accumulation of relevant experience. In rediscovering the work of the Dadaists of the early 20th century, the avant-garde American artists of the 1960s actually rediscovered a form of aesthetics which places the value of the artistic product on its conception rather than on its appearance (Wheeler 1991). This group of artists, which included the early American dance postmodernists, widely explored the potential of this approach and made available to subsequent generations a large number of relevant artistic practices. In the domain of dance, the work of Yvonne Rainer epitomises this aesthetic position.

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Art historians as well as dance historians have described the 1960s as a period of major breakthroughs that provided the guidelines for the subsequent artistic production of the 20th century. Banes, in her account of the work of the American avant-garde in New York around the year 1963, states:

Here in Greenwich Village in 1963, numerous small, overlapping, sometimes rival networks of artists were forming the multifaceted base of an alternative culture that would flower in the counterculture of the late 1960s, seed the art movements of the 1970s, and shape the debates about postmodernism in the 1980s and beyond.

Banes 1993 p2

This revolution was ultimately achieved by an overall rejection of the past. To replace the old forms, the avant-garde artists of the 1960s had to invent alternative possibilities and their basic tool for this task was the method of posing questions. Various assumptions about the arts were thus revisited and radically reconsidered.

Art became almost similar to philosophy; by repeatedly posing the question 'what is art?', these artists arrived at new answers, increasingly more extravagant. Surprisingly enough and despite the furious rejection of the past, the whole attempt resulted in the rediscovery of an already existing answer to the question. In the early days of the 20th century, the French dadaist artist Marcel Duchamp had anticipated their efforts and revealed the crucial difference between "appearance and conception" in the arts (Wheeler 1991 p244). This perspective was re-adopted and fully investigated across a wide range of artistic practices.

Thus, the avant-garde artists of the 1960s (collagists, assemblagists and neodadaists, pop artists, and happeners, minimalists and conceptualists) positioned themselves against formalism and illusionism, appropriated the ordinary by directly borrowing material from everyday life, prioritised the temporary and non-hierarchical, and generally attempted to reduce the gap between art and life. They also tried to offer a 'total' experience to the spectator and developed theories about the new role of the audience as an integral part of the artistic work.

In this atmosphere of radical changes, an unprecedented amalgamation of theory and practice was integrated within the processes of art making. As Batcoock notices, "the idea dominate[d] - the artist's interest ha[d] shifted from exclusively
pictorial values to consideration of the extremes of the medium" (in Battcock 1966 p13). The above statement is particularly relevant to the character of minimal and conceptual art.

*Minimal art* was generally created, three-dimensionally, as sculpture. According to Wheeler (1991), painting is by nature illusionistic and therefore it was rejected by minimalists within the scope of eliminating the gap between art and life. The minimalists produced work that was industrially fabricated to prevent the interference of the artist's self within the form of the work, which was what they criticised abstract expressionism for.

Minimalism became thus another reaction to abstract expressionism. Yet the former directly drew from the experience of the latter, in the sense that they were both deeply involved with form. Colpitt maintains that

historically a reaction to what young artists saw as the autobiographical, gestural excesses of Abstract Expressionism, Minimal art, at the same time, pursues the formal innovations of Abstract Expressionism, particularly as laid out by the paintings of Jackson Pollock and Barnett Newman.

Colpitt 1990 p1

Yet minimalism's persistent engagement with form was a peculiar outcome of its fundamental commitment to the physical presence of the artistic medium, its materiality. While minimalism rejected abstract expressionism's autonomy of the artistic object, it adopted another type of autonomy: the one resulting from the object's absolute negation of extraneous references for the sake of "its indivisible wholeness" (Wheeler 1991 p213) and as object completely liberated from anthropomorphic associations (Colpitt 1990 p70).

According to Colpitt, "presence evokes a bodily non specific response in the spectator" (1990 p 71). The notion of 'presence' and the type of response it can generate in the spectator can be further clarified by the accompanying concept of 'scale'. "Like presence, scale is felt rather than empirically measured ... [therefore] minimal art is as much kinesthetic as it is visual" (Colpitt 1990 p73). In addition, within their simplicity of form
the aesthetic object[s in minimalism] no longer had internal relationships, [their] relationship with the environment seemed to become disproportionately important.

Wheeler 1991 p213-214

These simple geometric objects were thus constructed in order to inhabit fully their spaces and the artists treated them as integral parts of their beholders' spaces.

The sense of temporality of these works, and therefore theatricality, arose as a consequence of the fact that space cannot be experienced independently of time. In other words, the presence of these works was considered fully available to the viewer, if s/he had the opportunity to experience their existence in space, through the act of exploration. Nevertheless, this involvement with the work has a significant time-based parameter and establishes a new relationship between the spectator and the artistic object. As the spectator becomes an integral part of the work, this participation in the very nature of the artistic object becomes the viewer's 'experience' of the work.

The conceptualist mood of the period facilitated the amalgamation of theory and practice. The possibility to combine a theoretical perspective with traditional physical materials in the making of an artwork was introduced. In minimalism, "the artist's conception, rather than the materials, [was] the determining factor" without saying that these works were Conceptual in character (Colpitt 1990 p8). This is why "it is the overwhelmingly significant role played by Minimalist theories that differentiates Minimalism from earlier art" (Colpitt 1990 p132).

By the end of the decade, further pursuing their reductionist goals, some of the minimal artists of the mid 1960s eventually became conceptualists. Conceptual art draws directly from Duchamp, investing in his main principle that "art [could] come into being merely through designation" (Wheeler 1991 p245). Minimalism had previously celebrated the priority of the conception of the work of art and the minimal artists stubbornly rejected craftsmanship by industrially fabricating their works. Conceptualism pushed this strategy to the extreme, reducing the physical aspect of the works to the minimum, namely to "verbal statements, proposals, or game plans" (Wheeler 1991 p245). In extreme cases, they 'produced' works completely lacking material form.
Thus in Conceptual Art, minimalism's predilection for conception and the theoretical parameters of the work was further emphasised and the artistic object was gradually dematerialised. Conceptual art, ultimately "question[ed] the nature and definition of art itself" (Colpitt in Colpitt 1992 p11); it chose 'meaning' as subject matter. Very often, "art practice and theory were [simply] becoming interdependent" (Plous in Colpitt 1992 p61).

In the meantime, with the neo-dada and the happenings, the gap between the visual and performing arts had considerably diminished, and hybrid and intermedia forms were fully legitimised. As Banes states, "the performing body [was] central to all the interconnecting arts of the period" (Banes 1993 p3) and the immediate context of postmodern dance had become a "metacommunity of sorts where the different communities revolving around single arts disciplines coalesced and where interdisciplinary imagination flourished" (Banes 1993 p73).

Dance was widely accepted as an integral part of the avant-garde art of the period. The close proximity between dance and the visual arts was further emphasised as their distinct creative methods and artistic strategies freely circulated and were generously exchanged. Living together within their prototype community, these artists were free to try anything and to name their work in any way they liked (Banes 1993).

Some of the most important American postmodernists of the early 1960s, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer and Simone Forti had already participated in proto-Fluxus events during the March-July 1961 period. George Maciunas, the instigator of the Fluxus movement, and his close friend the composer La Monte Young were organising at the time "a series of interdisciplinary 'Literary Evenings and Musica Antiqua et Nova'". (Banes 1993 p60). Simone Forti who never really joined the Judson Dance Theater had the opportunity to participate more in the Fluxus concerts and she toured her piece Huddle in Europe as part of the Fluxus Festorum during 1962 and 1963.

Pincus-Witten points out Rainer's "prestige among post-Minimalists" and wonders: "Does recent dance come out of painting and sculpture or does sculpture and painting come out of dance?" (1977 p196). Pincus-Witten also notices that
when dance - and music too, for that matter - engages a wide reach in relation to painting and sculpture, it is tacitly assumed that this kind of dance or music is in some sense an expression formed by painting and sculpture rather than one that is formative of painting and sculpture. This is by no means a clear question today.

Pincus-Witten 1977 p196

In this atmosphere, the early American dance postmodernism primarily problematised the making of dance; its manifestations were frequently means of posing and answering questions of a conceptual character. The contemporaneous interest of visual artists in the conception of the work also supported, within dance, the possibility for theory to become part of the artistic product. Postmodern dance grew within the awareness that the position of the artist in relation to art and life was a major parameter of the work. The conception of the dance piece became one of its most crucial aspects; this new perspective consequently legitimised the position that ‘dance could be anything’ because it established a viable relationship between art and conceptualisation. ‘Dance could be anything’, if there was a reason (or a concept) for this to be so and, at a particular moment, ‘total improvisation’ as dance became a perfectly acceptable choice.

6.3. The conceptual element in Yvonne Rainer’s and Rosemary Butcher’s work

In this respect, Yvonne Rainer supported the birth of improvisational dance during the 1970s not only by creating the Grand Union, but also by making available to subsequent artists the whole of her preceding work; in other words, a form of practical knowledge in the domain of testing conceptual means against the medium of dance. The British choreographer Rosemary Butcher who visited New York in the early 1970s and directly experienced the atmosphere of the early American dance postmodernism states in relation to Rainer’s work:

Yvonne’s work to me was very much an intellectual and conceptual stimulus rather than actually saying I really do think that this is how I believe work should be made ... I seem again to realise the natural forms and objects and whatever was going on in her mind, she was trying to work through these people, through various things they were doing, that really interested me, because it got me away from the idea that movement should be made up of steps.

Butcher 1995c/i
Furthermore, it is almost possible to argue that, through the final stage of her dance career, the Grand Union experiment, Rainer was able to prove by means of real performances in front of real audiences that the theory according to which 'dance can be anything', total improvisation included, could be literally materialised. 

Butcher notices again:

[I saw] two Grand Union performances. They had a very ambient feel, as much as the work I had seen when Kirstie (Simson) and similar people used to dance at Dartington. You get a lot of this interaction between people at quite a naive level. It was just not very interesting a lot of it. You know you go for two hours or two and a half hours on a Sunday night to watch but it was something extraordinary for its time, in the sense that it was a huge different statement and I knew I was looking at very special people: Barbara Lloyd, Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Steve [Paxton], David Gordon, Valda [Setterfield]. These people all in one loft. You knew that it was something else.

Butcher 1995c/i

Yvonne Rainer seems to have been deeply affected by Robert Dunn's methods as these have been described in Chapter 4 (4.3.2). Chin notices:

one could enumerate the terms of Rainer's aesthetic, including improvisation, chance, movement continuity, movement discontinuity, prop-oriented movement, rule-governed movement, acrobatics, gymnastics, tableaux.

Chin 1975 p52

Rainer adopted Dunn's 'inquisitive character' of work, not only within the making of individual dance pieces but in relation to the development of her work as a whole. Hecht argues: "The work of Yvonne Rainer is characterized by a constant re-evaluation of ideas" (1973/74 p23). She started using indeterminacy methods in her work Terrain (1963) when she was still a member of the Judson Theater group. She used improvisation as a performance mode in her piece Some Thoughts on Improvisation which was toured in Europe in 1964 (Rainer 1974). She gradually adopted 'total improvisation' as her preferred performance tool in the course of successive performances of her piece Continuous Project - Altered Daily (1969) and ultimately transformed her company into the totally improvisational performance group Grand Union.
Although Rainer abandoned dance after 1972 and devoted herself to film making, she had already irrevocably changed the conceptual framework of dance. As Hecht notes:

dance hasn't been and will probably never be the same again since Yvonne Rainer decided to explore the dilemma of dance as art form.
Hecht 1973/74 p25

Subsequent dance artists and other movement practitioners have had thus access to infinitely new creative possibilities, because the conceptual barrier that dance could be only certain things was not any longer applicable.

Butcher's work can be also seen through a similar lens in relation to the birth of British New Dance, firstly, because of the radical role she played in the history of British New Dance and, secondly, because of her conceptual approach to dance making. It is important to point out though that her direct experience of the early American dance postmodernism was crucial for the development of her subsequent career. Her visit to New York in the early 1970s made available to her, "firsthand", specific forms of practical knowledge which allowed her to construct her alternative notion of dance. Butcher notes:

Unless you understand something firsthand, you cannot change it. Yet the outline of it, you might think you've absorbed it, but you comprehend it in a very different way than if you actually were surrounded by this particular thing that made you click. It's a bit like a light going on suddenly: you perceive that you actually understand something. Now if you learn that almost as if you might learn a language, you don't know quite where it connects.

Butcher 1995c/i

In her work Butcher emphasises physical awareness as a 'matter of principle'; other practitioners who work on developing perceptual skills, for instance, use awareness as a tool that can help them devise new movement, new sensations in their bodies, the possibility to use the body at its fullest. Butcher would follow such directions, under one condition: there should be a reason for her to do it, but more precisely there should be a 'concept'.

I believe that my work should be the expression of a language of movement that is linked directly to an original concept.
Butcher 1992 p21
Her approach to dance is ‘conceptual’ and brings to mind the practices of minimal and conceptual artists. These artists worked so closely with ‘concepts’ that their work became answers to specific questions which were asked before or during the making. In the same way, Butcher’s interest in physical awareness is directly linked to her principle that dance means the use of gravity and weight exchange. The mover must be aware and use this physicality as much as possible; s/he must explore these possibilities and make them part of the final form of the work.

It is not surprising that Butcher’s theory of movement and dance is so basic and simple. She has absorbed the early American dance postmodernism which was a period of basic questions on the nature of ‘movement as dance’. Yet, Butcher’s use of the dancing body is a distinct one. It does not attempt to fuse the functions of the brain with those of the body in a journey towards the unknown, as other artists might have done, especially in the context of improvisational dance. She uses the body ‘conceptually’, in the same way Yvonne Rainer did during the 1960s but with one crucial difference. Her work is not an attempt to provide answers for the questions ‘what is dance?’, ‘what is movement?’. Early in her career, having solved this problem through the clear decision that movement as dance is the use of gravity and weight exchange, she was subsequently able to go deeper in this direction; in other words she investigated movement as dance in a ‘vertical’ fashion.

By contrast, during the 1960s, Yvonne Rainer had to travel fast through a series of successive questions in a rather ‘horizontal’ fashion until she offered the most radical answer: she created the Grand Union and then she abandoned dance.

Butcher, on the other hand, coming back to the UK after her American experience of the early 1970s, was able to decelerate, to settle down and work peacefully with these ideas, almost in isolation, since not much similar work was taking place in the British context. Having decided that dance is the use of gravity, she spent a long time finding out what this means physically. This is why her notion of the ‘experience’ of movement is about the full recognition of the physical aspect of movement.

Everything is a body experience really ... Weight for me is where your balance points are and how grounded you are. There is a sensation, even if you are floating to be weighted. It is about pulling down and having reference to earth. I don’t know whether that’s an
aesthetic law. I have been always concerned with weight because it is fundamental to where you going, to where you are - your knowledge of where you are - of course the more you are on the ground, the more you are able to move somewhere else, to experience something else. When you have lost your sense of ground you are open to exposure.

Butcher 1995a/i

She explored with her dancers infinite possibilities of exchanging weight. And gradually her questions became increasingly involved with the working process. It can be argued that Butcher is not making work in order to answer a question, she is asking the question while she makes the dance.

I started on Tuesday afternoon something new and I had a vague idea of what I wanted to do. I talked about temporary and permanent and these areas of work, issue, state, whatever - I realised that I could not get any of that, any interpretation, but I was getting something else and my dilemma was to go with something else and try to go back to my point. That’s how I go all the time. It’s that duality for what you see and what you set up to see and that’s the making, that’s the mind and the sensation but you’ve got to know what that body can do in order to change it. You can’t just alter by saying that’s not right, this whole skill about knowing how that will change. And then when you change it what is it and do you then know what is it in order to do something else with it. It never stops ... you have to know what you are seeing, therefore the purpose of doing that is again about what you can do. This is why I think it is essential to know what your body can do and where feeling and sensation come from and identify feeling and sensation through the articulation of the body but it’s a lot of work and if people can’t do that, don’t know how to do that and the level of what you get will be equal to level of where the feeling and the sensation was.

Butcher 1995a/i

It is this continuous interaction with her material - the improvising bodies of her dancers - that offers answers to her questions, and questions to be answered. Butcher works with the physicality of the improvising bodies of her dancers. Her ‘thinking [dancing] body’ is thus different in that it exists as a conceptual dialogue, albeit, by means of its physicality.

In this way, Butcher’s contribution to British improvisational dance is that, by working with a number of dance artists such as Julyen Hamilton and Sue MacLennan who subsequently produced their own work, she made available to them
her extensive practical knowledge in the exploration of the physicality of the
dancing body on the basis of conceptual means. There is no need to establish naive
relationships between Butcher’s choreographic attitude and Hamilton’s
improvisational work, nor to underestimate the fact that Hamilton’s creative skill has
been fed by a wide range of forms of practical knowledge in the area of dance
making. Yet, it is worth noting that Hamilton possesses highly developed
conceptual skills by means of which he approaches improvisational work.

In an attempt to describe the specific character of being flexible and
determined in improvisation, Hamilton explains determination as a form of non-
reactionary intuition (1995/i). In this way, in the context of working with a regular
group of people, determination is not to keep stubbornly to the common language
of this group when there is a feeling that something must change. On the other
hand, one has to be determined in her/his intuition so that some development of
material can occur. This is why to be flexible is not

just change ping-pong-pang-pung, flexible involves that there is a
‘you’ and there is a force working on you that suggests that you
bend, it’s not just an arbitrary stretch or change.

Hamilton 1995/i

Similarly his understanding of the ‘emotion’ arises from the link between emotion
and movement. He describes the feeling of the spectator on the basis of "the pure
force of watching a body move" and notices that as spectators

we are not still and on a pure level just to see something moving, to
see a body moving can touch the emotions.

Hamilton 1995/i

Finally, in his discussion on how structures can be used within improvisational skill,
he clarifies that his understanding of this device does not refer to the traditional
approach of ‘theme and variation’ but to the ability "to use it to creatively serve a
certain concept, a certain direction you want to take in" (1995/i).12

On the other hand, discussing the period of her collaboration with Butcher,
MacLennan points out that the conceptual character of Butcher’s work was reflected
in her ability to work with ‘vision’. MacLennan emphasises her "confidence in
[Butcher’s] vision. She has a good vision although she wouldn’t articulate it to us
during the rehearsal" (1996/i). Working in this way offered to MacLennan a wide range of skills in the area of creating her own 'visions', namely purposes for her pieces. This is probably why she prefers to work with 'structures' rather than in totally open contexts, as has been explained in Chapter 5 (5.3.3).

6.4 Concepts of movement

This section and the following one (6.5) present a selection of movement concepts and compositional approaches respectively, as these are manifested in the work of individual artists. As mentioned in Chapter 4 (4.3), this research does not claim that movement concepts and compositional approaches are two separate areas of dance making in the context of postmodern dance. By contrast, they operate within complex relationships and, as it will be discussed in Part 3 of the thesis, the concept of the 'intention' (of the improviser) accommodates better this complexity. Nevertheless, the ability to distinguish between various movements concepts is an important part of the improvisational skill insofar as it enhances the improviser's ability to choose by providing her/him with a wider spectrum of choices. Some improvisational artists have developed this skill to the point of creating strong personal approaches to movement which have become an important aspect of their creative work. Without undermining the complex relationship between movement and composition concepts, it is worthwhile to discuss the work of some of these artists with an emphasis on their personal approaches to movement.

Deborah Hay (1994c) combines within her version of movement improvisation a number of non-western elements, such as meditation. She locates the process of movement production within the tension between the performer's attempt of "inviting being seen" and her/his simultaneous effort to remain in the "shade". This is a process of "re distributing the energy" in such a way that the performer does not become the prey of adrenalin which is produced in high levels during the performance. After a semi-improvised piece, performed in Amsterdam in August 1994, Hay wrote on my copy of her book Lamb at the Altar (1994b): "when your shade meets your brightness your performance is exceptional". Hay's approach to improvisationally conducted movement production is mainly based on the paradoxical. She draws directly from the tension between the co-existence of
mutually excluding elements, such as life and death. She reconceives consciousness
at the level of simultaneous multiple realities and considers movement as a
manifestation of this redefined notion of consciousness. The importance of the
paradox within her theory has significant implications for the character of the
movement which is eventually produced: she is interested in the "unnamable",
something which is not definable within the limits of pre-existing systems of
interpretation and which she presents as her personal version of ‘chaos theory’.
Hay’s approach does not provide opportunities for the development of exceptional
physical skills, it is fully applicable to non-dancers and this is why the participants
in her workshops and the people who perform her work come from a variety of
backgrounds. One could almost argue that her interest in the tension between
incompatible elements, combined at the same time to her spiritual approach to
movement, both give a particular focus to her work which almost eliminate the
possibility of working towards physically exceptional tasks. Hay’s body, within its
paradox, tends towards the "non-fixed body".

Kirstie Simson (1995), focuses on a system of redistribution of energy which,
despite its spiritual origins, supports the development of exceptional physical skills,
investing at a large extent on information learned by practising contact
improvisation. Her notion of body is primarily a "body-in-the-process-of-healing",
one which explores carefully its physical resources. Her notion of treating the body
gently, does not only eliminate the possibility of abuse, but also gears towards its
recovery from any injuries of the past. She uses bodywork and partner work
extensively to develop the awareness of a particularly ‘light’ way of circulating the
energy through the body and attempts to apply this information in solo work as well.
She performs improvisationally within pre-determined structures, namely
predetermined sections of her pieces in collaboration with musicians. Within these
sections, she applies different degrees of freedom in movement improvisation from
the strictly structured one to the fairly open one, performing highly exceptional
physical tasks yet constantly fighting against the building up of negative tension.

him, the improvising body operates within a given space. Yet, his notion of space
is a fairly large one, it includes not only the room or the location of the dance,
sounds, objects and number of other dancing bodies, but also the thoughts of the
participants. He uses bodywork, Alexander technique in particular, not within a
process of healing as Simson does, but as a method of unblocking the energy so that
a deep awareness of the vast range of possibilities in the use of energy is achieved.
His approach indirectly relies on the performance of virtuosic movements. He is
particularly interested in the interaction among the performers within their given
space which he calls "habitat". This interaction is primarily based on the parallel
existence of different movement stories which interrupt, divert and contribute to a
process of redefinition of each other. He is fascinated by ambiguity which he seeks
via a system of constantly subverting the predictability of the movement. He seeks
the "unresolved movement", one which expands in time and space reaching different
degrees of tension and suspension and avoiding the balanced state of neutrality.
According to his point of view, improvisers tend to unfold their movement as an
effort to transform the moments of tension into moments of smoothness; he claims
that this is a misunderstood way of practising release technique. By contrast, release
technique teaches how energy accumulated because of tension can be released, yet
this does not necessarily mean that this energy should be released or redirected in
the environment smoothly but it can also lead to a new state of tension.

The above concepts of body and movement rely partly on systems of re-
organising the information about the body and movement so that new,
unprecedented images are available (as if the body could be seen through different
lenses) and partly on techniques of visualization, techniques of converting non-visual
information about the body into visually meaningful forms.

6.5 Concepts of composition: towards an analysis of improvisational dance from a
compositional perspective

In a way which is similar to the discussion of movement concepts in section
6.4, this section presents selected improvisational pieces on the basis of their
compositional approaches. Again, without undermining the complexity of the
relationship between movement and composition concepts, it is crucial to undertake
an analysis of improvisational dance from a compositional perspective. Such
analysis can illuminate, by means of specific dance examples, the possibilities of the
technique of ‘instant composition’ and further support the argument that improvisational performance operates through a highly developed ability to choose.

The compositional choices in the area of improvisational dance do not follow any particular model, rather they are variously informed by the wider postmodern atmosphere of theatre dance. The latter favours the multidisciplinary approach, the use of fragmentation, juxtaposition, chance methods, and theory in a reflexive fashion. The impact of such artists and thinkers as John Cage, Merce Cunningham and Robert Dunn becomes particularly important as their contributions significantly broadened the pool of compositional approaches available to postmodern dance. It is possible to discern distinct compositional approaches in the work of such artists as Katie Duck, Julyen Hamilton and Sue MacLennan.

6.5.1. Katie Duck

Duck’s (1996/i) compositional attitude has been primarily shaped by her predilection for total theatre forms, non-western versions of them included. In addition, fascinated by the power of traditional musical forms, she has much explored their possible uses in the context of making instant movement choices. For instance, while she accepts the significance of the ‘present moment’ and the way this is moulded by the character of the space and the presence of the audience, she wants to "develop"; in her last work with Magpie Music Dance Company (no title was given to this work), she attempts to develop the possibilities of the ‘present moment’ through the form of solo, duet, trio.

Her ‘musical’ understanding of the performance event has been reinforced in the course of long collaborations with the musicians Tristan Hosinger and Alex Maguire. She shares with them both the avant-garde viewpoint of subverting traditional assumptions about the concert hall. She says:

My research is taking me into areas very strict, old ancient forms, total theatre forms, ... my research has to pull there all that happened with Cage, Cunningham, Forsythe, Paxton, contact improvisation.

Duck 1996/i

Some aspects of her approach to ‘instant composition’ are the following:

1. She works with the group on the basis of various compositional problems, for example conscious or unconscious overlapping between two or more
persons speaking during the performance, the possibilities of dealing with a
wider space while working with somebody in very close proximity simply
by focusing far away and not 'into' the other performer, the skill of 'exiting',
how to make an exit from the stage or from a movement, developing time
awareness etc. This training becomes gradually part of her performers’ pool
of choices; she is not expecting them to include these choices in the
performance in any particular degree, she only expects them to be able to
pull them out if the circumstances are suitable. Using techniques of
repetition, ‘picking up’, development and variation primarily borrowed from
the compositional strategies in music, she develops this musical feeling of the
work, in which the narrative and the linear aspect of the event unfolding
through time dissolve under the rich textural qualities of each ‘present
moment’. To achieve this standard, it is important that she works with very
experienced performers which have developed the ability to sense the
idiocyncracies of each ‘present moment’ through their extended awareness
and react accordingly. This is why she "is not interested in improvisation
which gives [her] space for self-expression and freedom". Her research of
the ancient total theatre forms "interests her not [because of] the way they
liberate [the performer] but [because of] the way the pull up her/his limits in
the moment". Adding to this, the work on the musical forms illuminates the
vast possibilities and options.

2. Duck is not interested in developing the movement qualities of her
performers. She collaborates only with selected people whose skills of
musical timing, athleticism, and physical awareness of the correct use of the
body and intuitiveness can meet the requirements of the work. Yet, some
times she uses people with idiosyncratic movement qualities because they
can inspire the rest of the group in new ways of moving.

3. Her work is also based on the use of the space. Her approach is not analytic
and objectified. She is not working with such elements as levels, diagonals,
distances. Rather she has constructed an almost metaphysical concept of the
'space' on the basis of its energetic qualities. It is not the diversity of spaces
in which she performs that fascinates her most but also the specific character
of the small scale theatres in which she has chosen to work and where "you
can hear the audience breathing" (Duck 1996/i). In addition, the audience is
a major aspect of the space: "once a crowd is there it is a space" (Duck
1996/i).

4. Her work is multidisciplinary: the performers should be competent in a
number of movement and acting skills including speaking on stage. She also
collaborates with musicians like Tristan Hosinger or Alex Maguire who "are
interested in themselves as figures in the space" (Duck 1996/i). This
combination of skills and media multiplies the opportunities for constantly
transforming the material as the activity or the focus are transferred from
one medium to another.
In her last work, she approached such "basic things" as the form of solo, duet, trio, the nature of exit and entrance and the possibilities for transformation. She chose a specific performance space, the small theatre Muiderpoortheater in a suburb of Amsterdam, the architecture of which offers this type of possibilities. The second of the three performances has been recorded on video which facilitated a closer examination of the work. The following compositional analysis seeks to identify forms of solo, duet and trio in an excerpt of this work which is included in Appendix II (excerpt 1). The performers are mentioned by their real first name since there was no role playing or particular characters or predetermined areas that they were meant to cover. This analysis refers to a section between the 15th minute of the first part of the performance and the end of the first part after 18 minutes.

**Solos, duets and trios across different media**

Katie starts working with her multiple pedestrians exits and entrances. It becomes increasingly more difficult to work out the transformations of the structure. Although it is possible to follow the forms of solo, duet and trio as far as the movement is concerned, the multidisciplinary character of the work ultimately requires a multidisciplinary perspective. Structures in solo, duet and trio appear amongst individual elements. Occasionally units of elements operate as a single one. In rare cases an element becomes a duet with itself. Thus Martin’s and Katie’s duet coexists with Tristan’s solo for cello. Yet Tristan’s physical presence becomes a duet with the music he plays. Is this a coexistence of two duets, or probably a ‘duet for two duets’? The event unfolds with further spatial complications. While Katie and Martin are on ‘stage’ a new performance space has been suggested: Eileen and Vincent appear on the balcony. Later on, both Katie and Martin leave the space and the new duet takes place between the sound of the cello and the dialogue on the balcony, because Michael has literally left the space. The episode on the balcony comes to an end and exactly 20 minutes after the beginning of the piece, a new performer appears: Sharon accompanied by Vincent. Their duet is about avoiding each other, ‘counterpointing’, interrupting each other. The cello behaves similarly towards each one of them and this becomes another trio; each one uses the other two. A period of successive physical exits and entrances starts; Katie, Michael are involved. Vincent’s and Sharon’s duet continues with the additional element of Sharon’s voice. In the meantime, Katie has become a solitary figure unable to join their dance until the whole spatial arrangement opens wide and their movements (of the three of them) become bigger, stronger including running, shouting, jumping. When Sharon goes off after 4 minutes, both cello and percussion go up so that Vincent can start another solo with "rises" which soon becomes a duet with Katie. 2 minutes later Martin enters from downstage left, followed by a new melodic line for the cello and ready to start another spherical solo. As this section leads to climax, especially as far
as the instruments are concerned, Katie approaches Tristan and unfastens his shoe-laces. This is what motivates Michael to stop, while Tristan remains with a sad but unusually long note on his cello; then he starts speaking. A dialogue (another form of duet) develops between Katie and Tristan, while Eileen and Martin enter in duet. The dialogue acquires a very fragmented form, words, broken words, letters and even sounds all join in in a surrealistic mood. It seems that the two concurrent duets lead into a high-spirited trio. Michael joins his percussion as in a circus show and Eileen's and Martin's duet has something of clowns, something of clumsiness, something theatrical but they don't speak. Martin is German and he thinks his English is not good enough; he resisted any form of speaking until the third performance of the piece when he joined the rest of the performers in a distinctly inventive monologue. After Martin has gone off, Sharon becomes Eileen's partner in a more 'clowny' section. At the very high point of sound, Sharon and Eileen start shouting to each other cheerfully. Vincent appears from downstage left in an almost solemn look; Sharon and Eileen comment the fact whispering to each other. Katie slowly appears in the half-darkness of the left corner of the balcony. There is a moment of suspension. Vincent does one more move forward. There is no sound any more and Katie whispers 'I love you'. Before she finishes, the lights have gone down exactly after 33 minutes and 38 seconds from the beginning of the performance. The responsibility to bring both parts of the performance to an end belongs to the light designer who also improvises. Yet there are two restrictions: the first part should last between 30 and 45 minutes and the second one shouldn't last more than 30 minutes.

6.5.2. Julyen Hamilton

Julyen Hamilton's approach to 'instant composition' has been introduced in Chapter 5 (5.3.3). For approaching his piece Fabula, it is important to mention that he is particularly interested in the use of "dialogue in a very physiological way, a very physiological musical way" (1995/i). He refers to his collaborations with Katie Duck and Tristan Honsinguer in which they have worked with dialogue extensively: "they are making words out of their body or instrument rather than out of an intellectual basis" (Hamilton, 1995/i).

In addition, Hamilton approaches visualisation in a distinct way which combines imagination with physical imagery. He explains:

The wonderful thing in the body is that it's not all separate, is that to image your spine puts you in a state which releases a certain imagination ... you can deeply be in a story about a horse in a field and you stretch your hand nearly as a joke to yourself to be front of the horse, and you feel the stretch coming up your wrist and that you
feel the stretch going down your back. So you lay down on your back and then the next bit is about the horse sleeping at the field ... there are memories, there are experiences and histories going on through the whole atoms of the body, so that the depth of doing work that in a class can be a physiological exercise to clarify and help understand the structure, the tool, the body is at the same time a key, a door to the imagination.

Hamilton 1995

Hamilton also believes that the ability to use the imagination has two aspects: the first one is to try to recreate real elements and the second to produce ‘fantasies’. He describes:

We use our imagination also in reality as well as fantasizing what’s not real. I’ll give you an example. When you get home and you put the key in the lock and it doesn’t quite work maybe you close your eyes to help it work because you know that your body imagines it working, it has the past history, now it’s not consciously going, a little to the left, a little to the right, wiggle two times and whatever, it’s just a coordination thing and that coordination is a memory pattern that is re-imagined to help in that very practical situation of turning the lock in the door. But it’s not fantasy. But it is for me imagination, or I’d like to call it that at the moment ... The other branch therefore is then fantasy, where you see an apple on the table and you say ‘that’s my grandmother’s dog’. A complete fantasy. It’s very clear it’s not real. Very clear it’s not in the tangible world what it is. And so you’re throwing in another world, and that’s also very very interesting and wonderfully absurd and wonderfully theatrical. That’s what theatre is playing with, making with something that is not real, very real because it’s real in its imaginary level right down to somebody killing somebody on stage. You know it’s not real but they try to link it to what they are fantasizing about so strongly that you are touched as if it was real. So those are the things in this imagination that interest me

Hamilton 1995

In his recent piece *Fabula*, he uses this particular type of language which [he] call[s] ‘fabula’ ... which is about letting stories evolve by creating scenes which pass from one to the next. The stories are exposed by movement, light and sound ... sometimes being an exchange of events and at other times more a continuum of atmosphere in which events could be imagined. Maybe you could call this ‘guided space’ for the public.

Hamilton 1996
In this piece, Hamilton collaborates with another dancer and two musicians. The way Hamilton works with the musicians is almost ‘choreographed’. Although there are no set steps or structures both musicians and dancers participate in the action travelling together through a number of stories or atmospheres. The musicians have been trained in spatial awareness: they use their instruments and move in space with relevance to their ‘imagined’ stories. There are no specific stories or atmospheres and, for this reason, the performers do not share the same stimuli for their work. Nevertheless, the skill consists in the ability to create images up from each other’s movements and sounds and work on these images. In addition, they must be able to recognise these moments when the ‘story’ can be transformed and collaborate to give birth to the next stage of this journey.

Two excerpts from the same performance of this piece have been included in Appendix II (excerpt 2). The first section takes place between the 12th and 17th minute of the performance and concentrates on the transformation of a ‘spoken’ solo to a typically ‘dancing’ part by Hamilton himself. Hamilton sitting on the chair on the left side of the stage has a kind of monologue as if he was thinking loud. After approximately one minute, the rest of the company join him around his chair: the dancer and the two musicians. The next part emphasises the possibility to use sound rather than movement, yet with full awareness of the spatial arrangement of the group. The dancer and the musicians gradually cover Hamilton’s voice and presence by both coming increasingly closer around him and creating louder sounds. His voice is finally dissolved in a crescendo of other sounds. Hamilton interrupts this noise by stamping on a piece of tube used by the percussionist to create a sound like wind. After this pause, a section of successively taking each others’ positions transforms this story to a duet between Hamilton and Renalias, the other dancer, which will soon lead to Hamilton’s next solo.

The second section starts on the 19th minute of the performance with Hamilton’s solo ‘dance’ now performed on the right side of the stage. Hamilton becomes again a point of attraction and both Renalias and the two musicians, Spirli and Neveu, join him but not very close. This time, Hamilton moves upstage and the percussionist becomes momentarily the focus as he plays another set of plastic tubes producing melodic references to wind and is soon joined by Renalias who moves
in the downstage area. In contrast to the previous section, the group comes very close together almost in slow motion while the lights have also dimmed to a kind of warm night atmosphere. Hamilton and the two musicians work mainly on the floor, while Renalias works in front of them. Finally, the percussionist sits on the chair and then Renalias joins the other two on the floor. The group separates and moves in space, Hamilton and Renalias, in relationship to each other, and then Renalias turns back to the chair to let Hamilton perform his next solo upstage right.

6.5.3 Sue MacLennan

Sue MacLennan's approach to improvisational performance has been also introduced in Chapter 5 (5.3.3). As mentioned in this section, MacLennan is not a regular improviser in the way Duck and Hamilton are. She prefers to work with specific structures and her pieces are usually combinations of set parts with improvised sections. Nevertheless, the piece Catching light was a 'totally' improvised piece, despite her attempt to convince the dancers to use structures. For this reason, it is more 'open' than Duck's and Hamilton's ones presented in the previous two sections and it is a good example of a very typical technique of improvisation. As MacLennan (1996/i) has explained, these dancers are very good improvisers (two of them, Buckley and Hampson have also worked with Hamilton) and consequently very competent with the technique of 'instant composition' in its very basic form, when there is absolutely no agreement or any preparation at the pre-performance stage of the piece. This technique can be described as a 'picking up' device: the performers 'pick up' from each other various elements: gestures, dance steps, energy qualities, spatial positions, rhythms, moods etc and they use them identical or in variation. This becomes a linking device which offers possibilities for developing material and creating sections.

In this particular piece, the electronic sound is also improvised during the performance. In this way, the two musicians have become part of the group and use the technique of 'picking up' in relation to the dancers, taking or giving ideas about the use of energy, rhythmic structures, atmospheres, speed etc. Excerpt 3 of Appendix II includes three sections. The first two are two trios performed by Hampson, Buckley and Fifield. They have been used to demonstrate two different
possibilities of building trio sequences by using each others bodies. In the first one, they keep the same 'cool' quality throughout the sequence. They pick up each other's flow of movement as if they become each other's echoes. This creates a very fluid quality with breathing moments of pauses mainly suggested by the electronic sound improvisation. In the second trio, the roles are more clearly defined. The concept is the same, in other words they all use each other's flow and bodies but two of them Buckley and Fifield are working closer together while Hampson 'manipulates' their shapes. This device gives to Hampson the possibility to extend the whole formation towards various direction and there is more of an effect of 'pouring' energy out and bringing it back to the centre of the group. In the last section the four of them work, starting by picking up gestures and 'theatrical' moods from each other's as the music facilitates this work by offering them melodic phrases of well known songs and scores. The lights join momentarily the dance and a pause follows when Hampson and Fifield form a duet by picking up hand gestures. As they establish a certain form of 'tension' in the area where they work by using sustained movement with pauses, the other two, Buckley and Lung join them in the same area and work around the same point of tension. The shape opens in space and all the dancers finally work on the floor picking up from each other's body positions. The piece finishes with a duet by Hampson and Buckley who move off stage as the lights fade out.

Chapter 6 explored the element of concept as a point of dispersion across which improvisational performance as discourse can be grasped. In this sense, it focused on possibilities of improvisational performance to transform in relation to its conceptual character. The importance of the American avant-garde art context has been pointed out in section 6.2 and two versions of improvisational work with emphasis on the 'conceptual' have been presented by means of comparison between Rainer's and Butcher's work. In addition, a range of movement and composition concepts have been discussed in sections 6.4 and 6.5. In section 6.1, it has been also emphasised that Foucault's notion of discontinuity is particularly helpful in accommodating a diverse range of information which belongs in the same discussion, without following an evolutionary line of development.
NOTES

1. For instance, Craig-Martin (1989) claims that "the critical art of the 60s: Pop, Minimal and Conceptual ... constitute an aesthetic realm whose radical challenge continues to the present" (in Francis 1989 p6).

2. The last group of answers was offered by Conceptual artists. This phase was exclusively dedicated to the cognitive: the works of the Conceptual artists became direct forms of investigating the nature of art. The major conceptual artist Joseph Kosuth claimed that

   art will replace philosophy (if it hasn’t already) because, simply stated, we know too much about the world to make the assumptions that traditional philosophy demands. Philosophy and religion collapsed together because science pushed man past a credibility gap. Art will take that intellectual area because it is only one endeavour left that is both theoretical and open.

   Kosuth 1991 p37

3. Wheeler (1991) offers a list of the most representative minimal artists including Donald Judd, minimalism’s main theorist and artist, Robert Morris who was not an exclusively minimalist artist, yet a significant part of his work could be classified within this idiom, Dan Flavin who combined with minimalism his nostalgia for Russian Constructivism, Carl Andre who established the importance of the 'sense of place", Richard Serra, Tony Smith, Ronald Bladen, Alexander Liberman, Beverly Pepper, Larry Bell, Robert Irwin who first coined the term 'site-specific' work, John McCracken, Ellsworth Kelly, Richard Artschwager, and Sol LeWitt who ultimately left minimalism for conceptual art.

4. Colpitt points out that "although minimal sculpture ... takes up space rather than time, time is spent by the spectator in apprehending the object" (Colpitt 1990 p91) while

   what unfolds in time is the experience: a series of changing perspective states based on the relationship of the viewer’s body to the object.

   Colpitt 1990 p97

Berger, discussing Robert Morris’s work, further explains the notion of temporality and links it with that of theatricality:

Morris’s earliest large scale sculptures, executed in 1961 and influenced by the stage sets and props of Forti’s early dances, often integrated the spectator into the temporal dynamic of the piece. Works like Passageway, Pine Portal, and Mirrored Portal - sculptures predicated on the passage of the viewer’s body through a channel or doorway - maintained a simplicity, literalness, and human scale that later would be extended to the Minimal sculptures. These theatrical explorations, by emphasizing the temporal experience over
the art object’s autonomy, contributed to Morris’s reevaluation of the self-contained aesthetic object.

Berger 1989 p49

5. Colpitt explains

The nature of spectator confrontation, beyond the traditionally passive aesthetic experience, encompasses the actual space in which such confrontation takes place, as the spectator responds to nonexhibited features such as presence, scale and architectural implications ... The meaning of these works of art is discovered not through formal analysis of internal relationships, but through the experience of them by the spectator.

Colpitt 1990 p67

This position was intellectually fed by the contemporaneous debates in the spirit of Merleau-Ponty’s phenomenology and supported further involvement with such issues as experience and perception.

6. Wheeler offers a list of the most representative conceptual artists including Joseph Kosuth who

was preoccupied with the mechanics of meaning, which in the world of objects involves linking a visual percept with a mental concept ... [and who] transformed analysis into art.

Wheeler 1991 p248

Other conceptualists were Piero Manzoni, Sol LeWitt, Daniel Buren, Robert Morris and Carl Andre (in some of their works), Douglas Heubler, Lawrence Weiner, and Robert Barry. Moreover, Joseph Kosuth with Terry Atkinson, David Bainbridge, Michael Balwin, Ian Burn, Charles Harrison, Harold Hurrell, Philip Pilkington, Mel Ramsden and David Rushton were the radical Art & Language group which founded the Art & Language Press. Other artists such as the Germans Bernd and Hilla, and the Southern Californian John Baldessari worked primarily with photography while Marcel Broodthaers, On Kawara and Hanne Darboven used language and writing.

7. A characteristic example of this extreme form of Conceptual art is Barry’s contribution to the exhibition Prospect 69 in Dusseldorf [which] consisted of the ideas in the minds of people who read an interview about the idea of the piece.

Colpitt in Colpitt 1992 p14

8. For more information on the ‘dematerialization’ of the artistic object see Lippard (1973). When the artistic object was transfused into verbal statements, a peculiar and unprecedented emphasis on the potential of language as an artistic medium in the context of the visual arts was revealed. The latter was further reinforced by the widespread impact of the Wittgensteinian theories on the priority of language. Intellectualism was becoming gradually more intense through an increased interest in such disciplines as philosophy, anthropology and semiotics and the constantly
open dialogue among such areas of knowledge as the Frankfurt School of philosophy including Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse and Theodor Adorno, the semiological investigations of Ferdinand de Saussure and Roland Barthes, the work of Michel Foucault on knowledge and power, those of Jacques Derrida in deconstruction and of Jean Beaudrillard on the power of the signs and the notion of seduction (Plous in Colpitt 1992 p65).

9. The extent to which dance had become an integral part of this common artistic space can be debated on the basis of two types of information. Firstly, the frequency and the way in which dance was included in the writings of the visual arts critics of the period, both manifest the respect and acknowledgement of the contribution of this art to the dynamism of the general picture. More specifically, see Kostelanetz (1968), Kulterman (1984), Battcock (1968 & 1973), Wheeler (1991), Colpitt (1990), Goldberg (1988) and Sayre (1989). Secondly, information pointing out the impact of dance in the work of artists such as Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Morris, brings to the surface an area of discussion rarely touched, since dance is usually considered as a small and closed creative space which borrows or gets inspiration from other arts rather than the other way around.


12. See Chapter 4 (4.3.2) and note 26 in particular for a discussion of the relationship between the use of the theme-variation approach in modern dance and postmodern choreographic practices.

13. Sylvia Hallett (1996/i) uses a similar approach in her music improvisations. Before the performance, she makes a number of compositional decisions and then she allows the 'present moment' to guide her during the performance. It is worthwhile noting that Hallett understands the experience of the 'present moment', the impulse in purely kinetic terms. She describes this state as the feeling that one cannot stop her/his body of playing on the musical instrument the particular thing s/he plays.

14. Similarly Julyen Hamilton contends: the work of the performer is that they try to notice those things in a way which does not disturb them, but which helps you to keep on it ... this state in which you don't question ... the right and wrong of it doesn't come into play. [as a member of the audience] you are making decisions but not through right and wrong.

Hamilton, 1995/i
Chapter 7  Ideology

7.1 The notion of the ‘avant-garde’
7.2 Avant-garde strategies in improvisational performance in dance
7.3 The politics of improvisational performance in dance

This chapter argues that ideology is another point of dispersion on the basis of which improvisational performance as discourse can be understood. In this respect, this chapter undertakes to reveal a number of transformations which have taken place in the area of the politics of this form of dance.

Ideology is a much debated term and, as Eagleton points out,

politics and ideology are [not] identical. One way one might think of distinguishing them is to suggest that politics refers to the power processes by which social orders are sustained or challenged, whereas ideology denotes the ways in which these power processes get caught up in the realm of signification.

Eagleton 1991 p11

In this chapter, the term ‘ideology’ has been used in order to stress the importance of the political character of improvisational performance in dance at the level of signification. As far as meaning emerges from any form of dance and "ideology is meaning in the service of power" (Thompson 1990 p7), improvisational performance in dance produces meaning in a way which challenges the power relationships between traditional and alternative forms of dance. The use of ‘instant composition’ becomes a political statement against the traditionally accepted superiority of these choreographic practices which celebrate the use of pre-determined choice and the genius of the choreographer. Julyen Hamilton mentions:

If you say to somebody ‘I’ve decided upon it, I’ve fixed it, I’ve named it, other people have seen it, I’ve put a package around it’ they suddenly believe that the ‘it’ is ‘it’.

Hamilton 1995/i

Avant-garde strategies are the specific artistic means through which improvisational performance in dance acquires its ideological character. In this respect, it becomes pertinent to examine the notion of the ‘avant-garde’ in the
context of improvisational performance in dance. Chapter 6 (6.2) has argued that the context of the American avant-garde art scene of the 1960s was the one which gave birth to improvisational performance in dance in the early 1970s. It remains to show that the subsequent transformations in the area of the politics of improvisational performance were about promoting alternative positions; in other words, reconsidering traditional assumptions in art making, which is one of the main tasks of avant-garde art.

The first section of this chapter introduces the notion of the 'avant-garde' in art theory and discusses the role of this approach within a reconsideration of the relationships between art and theory, more specifically artistic practice and theory. The second section provides an overview of avant-garde strategies within the practice of improvisational performance, examining in particular the method of negation, the 'aesthetics of dialogue' and the role of the audience as part of the work. Finally the third section discusses a range of political positions in relation to art and life as these emerge from the avant-garde character of improvisational performance in dance.

7.1 The notion of the 'avant-garde'

Herwitz discusses the notion of the 'avant-garde' in its link with philosophy within a "mentality which precisely intends to blur the distinction between art and philosophical theory" (1993 pxiv). He also describes this mentality as "especially theoretical" (1993 p3) and claims that "the art work should be designed so as to embody philosophical truth in its formal structure" (1993 p5).

Carroll (1995) is deeply sceptical of the notion of the avant-garde as theory. He contends that it is because of the style of criticism which has developed in relation to avant-garde art that these works are often considered 'theoretical'. He undermines the artist's voice and examines the problem from a directly philosophical perspective, arguing that these works "are not to be compared to full theories but only to the assertion of general propositions" (1995 p5). He recognises that, by subverting the audience's expectations, these works alert them to some theoretical considerations but he maintains that the avant-garde art work is not even "an example of theory ... it is rather an allusion to or an emblem of theory" (1995 p11).
Carroll's criticisms seem generally valid within his philosophically-oriented consideration until he expresses his final worries about "why the art world should be so obsessed with theory" (1995 p11). This perspective ignores the possibility of different ways of understanding the concept of 'theory', all equally valid from the postmodern perspective of multiple possibilities. Thus, the specific role of 'theory' within the philosophical discourse might be different from the one adopted within the creative process.

This aspect of the problem brings to the fore issues of theory and practice in dance and in particular the contribution of theory to the practice of improvisational performance. For instance, a mechanism of interrogating the controversial character of the improvisational performance in dance might facilitate the process of pinpointing specific practical procedures which will lead to the materialisation of the work. In this case, theory becomes a crucial parameter of the artistic practice. In its reflexivity, this process of interrogation is philosophical in character; yet, it does not necessarily rely on specific, named methodologies strictly located within the philosophical discourse.

Crane discusses the notion of the 'avant-garde' from a sociological perspective and identifies a set of dimensions on the basis of which artistic movements might be assessed in terms of their avant-garde character (1987 pp11-15). This set includes domains of the aesthetic and social content of the works and attitudes towards their forms of production and distribution. In all these areas an element of redefinition by means of questioning, criticising and suggesting alternative and innovative solutions is common. Change is sought in various domains so that traditional attitudes which are often ineffective can be abandoned.

Within the discursive analysis of the improvisational performance in dance undertaken in Part 2 of this research, the parameter of change has been discussed in Chapter 5 as an element inherent in both the nature and the history of the form. This chapter discusses change as a form of ideology. In this way, not only is change a constituent element of improvisational dance and its history, but the very form of improvisational performance in dance operates as a means of change towards a purpose which exceeds the 'internal' needs of the work. Improvisational performance in dance (like improvised performances in other media) fundamentally
seeks to change the audience's assumptions about what a dance piece might be. Thus, improvisational performance in dance adopts a number of avant-garde strategies which subvert traditional choreographic assumptions, while it also embodies a number of specific choices of social character.

Within the American context of the 1960s, the political movement of New Left developed the concept of 'personal politics' as part of the wider political climate of 'participatory democracy'. The emphasis on individuality and locality encouraged the artists to position themselves politically on the basis of their relationship to the artistic product. Aesthetic concerns became a manifestation of political attitudes in the form of personal politics. The reconsideration of traditional artistic practices became a form of reconsideration of traditional attitudes to life. The avant-garde American artists of the 1960s and, in particular, the Conceptual artists, did not only interrogate traditional assumptions about the artistic object through their work, they adopted the very element of interrogation as artistic material.

In this way, the American art of the 1960s became 'avant-garde' in two respects: as a form of 'philosophy', by adopting the method of interrogation within its creative processes and as a form of social practice by arriving at material instantiations (through the production of artworks) of specifically chosen and pursued attitudes to life.

It follows that the ideological character of improvisational performance in dance can be approached from two positions.

Firstly, the areas of interrogation are identifiable within the use of the materials, the nature of the creative strategies and the new relationship between artist and audience. These areas constitute the philosophical or theoretical character of the work and becomes the artistic means through which change takes place in the aesthetic realm.

Secondly, the politics of improvisational performance in dance are perceivable within the character of claims this form of theatre dance has put forward and the alternative attitudes (such as freedom of choice and the right to negate the establishment, 'de-commodification', alternative performance practices, and alternative performance spaces) it has promoted in the course of the last thirty years.
This aspect of the work becomes a form of ideology through which change operates within the social realm.

Both positions contribute to the distinctiveness of improvisational dance as a theatre dance form because they crucially modify the character of aesthetic choices within it. This form of dance requires a response adapted accordingly from both the audience and the critics. Butler's point of view that "postmodern art requires a quite distinct reorientation of our critical and psychological responses" (1980 pxi) seems equally valid in the case of improvisational performance in dance as a manifestation of postmodern dance.

7.2 Avant-garde strategies in improvisational performance in dance

It can be argued that the avant-garde strategies of improvisational performance in dance are mainly three: the method of negation (which is close to the Dadaist position of the early 20th century European and American art), and two options of alternative solutions. These solutions include, firstly, the emphasis on the element of dialogue (between performers, between performers and the audience and between the work and the audience) as a crucial feature of this type of work and, secondly, the new role of the audience as integral part of the work, in the sense that this has been suggested by theoretical considerations of minimal artists of the 1960s.

In his account on the character of avant-garde art since the publication of *Finnegan's Wake* (1939) by James Joyce, Butler differentiates between two kinds of work:

Those which are dominated by a theory of their own rule-dominated means of creation, and those whose method is antithetical to this, being irrationalist, indeterminate, or aleatory.

Butler 1980 pix

In improvisational performance in dance, it is possible to identify both these tendencies within a single work. It is the task of subverting, resisting, negating (without any intention of filling the gaps or reconstructing the discontinuities in smooth linearities) that has the character of permanent antithesis which fits in Butler's second category. It is the "tendency ... for disturbance, dislocation, and the breakdown of structure" as Herwitz (1993 p141) points out in his account in John
Cage’s contribution. On the other hand, it is the strategy of suggesting alternative possibilities, such as the conceptualisation of the work as an open dialogue between the performers or between performers and the audience that meets the requirements of Butler’s first category.

In Butler’s perspective, the right of negation has been directly related to ‘irrationalist, indeterminate, or aleatory’ artistic strategies which are indeed John Cage’s specialisation. In many cases, this tendency to ‘disturb’ becomes more of a manifestation of the right to negate rather than a specific attitude to compositional problems. Katie Duck contends:

I don’t want it to become a piece, that’s not my desire at all. Sometimes I get commission, now I have a theme ‘betrayal’ and I’m betraying Bach.

Duck 1995/i

A form of negation is also the artists’ tendency to resist definitions or characterisations, both for themselves and their work. For many years, Steve Paxton has refused to define improvisation (1980 p44 and 1981-82 p6) in the same way that Eddie Prévost, as an improvising musician, refuses to define his making of music by refusing to define himself. He argues:

The meta-musician works within the conceptual framework of I am not ‘that’. Experimenting and improvising, the meta-musician makes and places sounds within a whirlpool of potentiality. Sounds meet and collide: they coalesce and combat and fade away. The nature of sound is transient. We learn from its existence and its death.

Prévost 1995 p181

Prévost continues with a critique of ‘bourgeois art’, an art which welcomes the ‘new’ only after this has been commodified thus becoming another way of celebrating the establishment. Prévost concludes: "I am not that [bourgeois art]. The meta-musician refuses to own or to be owned. That is the struggle" (1995 p182).

This form of negation is an avant-garde strategy in its disturbing, almost Dada, attitude. Yet, it is also postmodernist in its tendency to resist fixed definitions and remain fluid in character, open to change by means of transformation. Foucault
(1972) adopts the method of negation repeatedly within his account of 'discourse', dealing with 'enunciative modalities' (p 55), 'concepts' (p 63), 'strategies' (p 70):

One is not seeking, therefore to pass from the text to thought, from talk to silence, from the exterior to the interior, from spatial dispersion to the pure recollection of the moment, from superficial multiplicity to profound unity. One remains within the dimension of discourse.

Foucault 1972 p76

He also refuses to say "who he is" and asserts that he has prepared "a labyrinth into which [he] can venture, in which [he] can move his discourse" (1972 p17). In the end, he requests that readers do not "ask him to remain the same" (1972 p17), because order should only concern the bureaucrats and the police.

Herwitz (1993) describes Cage's work as an act of disturbance, as a form of breaking down structure, as a negation of the conventions of the musical idiom. The link between Cage and the early American dance postmodernists has been pointed out by many theorists, in a positive way, namely as a form of practical knowledge which directly informed the first stages of dance postmodernists. Despite her negative position, Kisselgoff further argues in favour of Cage's definite contribution to the birth of postmodern dance.

Anna Kisselgoff (1979) criticises the early American dance postmodernists for having relied excessively upon ideas from other arts. She compares their work with the modern dance tradition which, according to her view, remained faithful to the discipline of dance. In particular, she refers to the work of Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown as the outcome of a music composition course, the one taught by Robert Dunn at the beginning of the 1960s in New York, which concentrated on John Cage's compositional ideas. According to this argument, the interdisciplinarity of the early 1960s within postmodern dance production resulted in an overstretched definition of dance which was unable to provide new notions of dance.

Kisselgoff (1979) underestimates Dunn's contribution. Contrary to her beliefs, Dunn was able to teach his composition course with direct relevance to dance compositional problems. This particular ability, supported by relevant material borrowed from visual arts, contributed to the mutation of the meaning of dance. Contrary to Kisselgoff's position, the 1970s did not see the end of the art
of dance; more new ways of conceptualising the art of dance became available through the contributions of the early American dance postmodernists. One of these possibilities was also improvisational performance.

In a way which is similar to Cagean procedures, improvisational performance in dance also negates structure as it refuses to operate on predetermined models and adopts the creative strategy of 'instant composition'. In addition, the very concept of 'instant composition' resists characterisation within the possibility of relying upon different notions of composition.

Herwitz also refers to Cage's attempt to challenge "our commitment to the idea of drawing distinctions between musical and nonmusical sound concatenations" (1993 p145). In a Cagean way, the improvisational performance in dance challenges the idea of distinguishing between 'structure' which emerges through specific decisions before the performance event and structure which emerges through the spontaneity of improvisation. In other words, there is always an element of structure in aleatory, chance or spontaneous events and this form of structure should not be misunderstood as a lack of structure or as a lower form of structure in a hierarchically oriented understanding of this term. Thus, a form of improvisational performance's politics is that the method of 'instant composition' structures the work in a way which is no less valid nor less interesting than that of traditional choreographic methods.

Crane (1995) contends that minimal art produces works which negate the traditional assumption for the necessity of 'meaning' within the character of the artistic object. Thus, minimal art concentrated on the immediacy of the artistic object beyond its potential for representation, reflection and symbolic interpretation. The object was meant to appeal to the perceptual abilities of the spectator and refused to transfer any ideas, thoughts or meanings, in an attempt to eliminate the traces of the artist's personality in the work. In improvisational performance in dance, meaning is also negated in those cases where no specific goals have been set before the performance event.

Indeed, the very act of negating meaning within the artistic object becomes in itself a meaning and an intention for the work. Moreover, in improvisational performance, meaning is also produced during the performance event because of the
particular way the interaction amongst the elements of the performance takes place. The improvising musician Eddie Prévost explains:

Many improvisors - for example those from various Indian musics, and from jazz - are concerned more to ornament and transform the given motifs and structures. Those involved in more ‘total’ forms of improvisation make the form and inject the meaning in the moment of making the music.

Prévost 1995 p 49

Besides the method of negation, improvisational performance in dance suggests a number of alternative artistic practices. The emphasis on the ‘dialogical relationships’ between the performers, according to Prévost’s terminology (1995 p172), the participatory role of the audience and the possibility of ‘art as life’, are all theoretically alternative possibilities and, by acquiring specific material forms, they radically modify and differentiate the character of the making of dance. Nevertheless, the possibility of ‘art as life’ is more a matter of politics than a specific artistic strategy and this is why it is discussed in the third section of this chapter.

When asked about the difference between setting working sections with a group before the performance and not preparing the piece at all, Julyen Hamilton mentioned the advantages of both and confirmed that "there are no rules; what is important is to be flexible and determined" within the dialogue taking place between the performers (1995/i). Yet, in the same interview, he also explained that structure (which holds the performance together) can be both spoken or unspoken and if unspoken the performers’ ability to operate on the same wave length is of primary significance.

According to other improvisers, such as Katie Duck (1996/i), this is a matter of ‘timing’ or of what is metaphorically described as ‘chemistry’. Robert Dunn’s (1987) notion of the ‘perceptual cues’ as described in Chapter 4 (4.1) comes to mind; it seems as though the ability to use these cues is not only a matter of training and technique but also a matter of keeping the dialogue open at the level of personality, body structures, types of spaces and other contextual parameters.

Katie Duck (1996/i) mentions a number of additional factors which can shape the dialogue between the performers: their ability to "push each other", to challenge
each other in such a way that each will use the others' suggestions in order to reach new areas beyond the habitual and the predictable. In this way, if the element of dialogue between the performers is always kept alive, working in unusual circumstances has much potential for new discoveries. Duck mentions that she tested this possibility during her second Festival on Improvisation, in the Netherlands in 1995, where she invited "many artists who had no reputation in dance improvisation" (1996/i). Because of these artists' ability to operate within a dialogue, the Festival became "a meeting place for some wonderful souls under the conditions of improvising" (Duck 1996/i).

In addition, Duck points out the advantages of setting up collaborations between artists with similar aesthetic concerns. This can deepen the dialogue. For example, the musicians Tristan Hosinger and Alex Maguire, with whom she has repeatedly collaborated in multidisciplinary improvised performances, are also strongly interested in "changing the concert hall" (Duck 1996/i), which is very close to her own concerns. Thus this operates as their common ground for their collaborative improvisational performances. For her pieces, Duck uses performers with 'timing', athletic possibilities and intuition because they fit to her own sense of what improvisational performance in dance consists of, thus increasing the possibilities for developing a dialogue according to her criteria. Finally, in terms of deepening the dialogue, she has noticed the benefits of having worked with them in the past:

The history of working with these people gets sharper ... Mark and Vincent had this whole history together, they made a piece together three years ago, me and Aileen have a history together. Cross histories give all this depth.

Duck 1996/i

Sue MacLennan in discussing the difference between improvisation for choreography and unstructured improvisation in performance and notes "the difficulty to get a sense of completeness" when more people are involved (1996/i) because of the difficulty to follow such a complex form of dialogue. She emphasises that, in the case of improvisational performance, every performer equally carries "the responsibility for forming it" and within this process some people push
certain aspects, thus leading the dialogue to areas they prefer or are more comfortable with (MacLennan 1996/i).

MacLennan also brings to the discussion the special conditions of solo improvisation in which she became very experienced during the 1980s. It seems that solo improvisation in dance is really another form of dialogue except that this does not happen between performers but between the dancer and other artists or between the dancer and other performance elements (such as space, costume etc) or between the dancer and her/his own body. The ability of the dance performer to be in an open dialogue with her/his dancing body is a special strength of movement improvisation in relation to music improvisation, where the musical instrument is more passively involved in this dialogue (or under control by the musician, in case of prepared instruments etc) than the 'thinking body' of the improviser.

MacLennan presents solo work as a "more personal [type of work] ... without compromises because nobody else is there with whom you need to keep a direct channel of communication open" at the level of movement (1996/i). She recognises though that she "always drags something in: a musician, an object, strange costumes" to keep a form of dialogue going.

Miranda Tufnell shares a similar concern for her improvised work:

In the last 7 years that I worked with Sylvia [Hallett], the interaction was in a sound landscape and the dialogue being of the inside movement and the sound and the light. Each time for me it was in the dialogue with somebody else that I developed work, 8 years with Dennis [Greenwood], 7 years with Sylvia [Hallett].

Tufnell 1996/i

Nevertheless, she gives particular importance to the dialogue with her own body:

For my pieces, I usually start to work as a way of meeting and looking at certain things in myself and it is not about the vertebrae, but the anatomy is a very good discipline to attend to, the anatomy gives a way to start from.

Tufnell 1996/i

Julyen Hamilton shares similar ideas with Sue MacLennan in relation to solo and group work. In the former "there is no average common denominator" on the basis of which the dialogue should be developed; "there are no external conditions to shape your ideas" (1995/i). What happens then is that "you do get the worst of
the worst but also the best of the best ... because you do go [really] into yourself" (1995/i). Hamilton also points out the difference between "creating en masse" and "doing it alone" (1995/i). Yet in both cases, he emphasises the importance of "transcend[ence and the necessity to] go to a different realm" (1995/i).

In addition, for Hamilton the necessity for "said structure" is not absolutely crucial (as for MacLennan) provided that there is enough potential for transcendence which partly relies on the performers' ability to operate on the same wave length (which means to be able to sustain the dialogue) and partly on the performers' perceptual skills (1995/i). Finally, in his last solo work 40Monologues, Hamilton notices another possibility for setting up a dialogue, in the sense that these monologues are meant to be made in front of an audience.

It is that while singular, the monologist is not alone but in the context of an audience: and this dynamic stimulates particular perceptions which might not otherwise emerge. Thus the result is a combination of private reflection whilst in communication.

Hamilton 1995d

Thus Hamilton brings the emphasis back to the presence of the audience, who in the context of improvisational performance in dance can play a wide range of participatory roles.

In a Contact Improvisation performance, Paxton notices the responsiveness of the audience, who "ahhed, oohed, they said 'all right'" and remembers that this is not a typical American one: "overtly polite, or repressed, or confused, or slothful" (1979 p11).

It is worthwhile to note at this point, though, that Contact Improvisation is a form of movement work not necessarily created for an audience. Throughout the last twenty years, contact has developed as a movement experiment and an independent practice fulfilling a number of 'internal' needs within the groups of people who practise it. It has not been primarily produced for a traditional audience, although many movement artists have used it in a variety of ways. On the other hand, the practitioner of Contact Improvisation also acts as a member of the audience, in the sense that the structure of the form allows for the participants to exchange roles between practising and observing other 'contactors'.
In contrast, the idiom of improvisational performance (which can nevertheless incorporate elements of Contact Improvisation in the use of movement material) operates mainly under the conditions of the presence of a 'proper' audience. This audience becomes part of the work in a variety of ways.

Firstly, the participatory role of the audience can be considered within a theoretical perspective. The very nature of the improvised performance of any kind relies on the presence of some sort of audience if this is meant to be a 'performance' in the way Western cultures understand it. Other forms of composition, such as choreographed work, can 'exist' without an audience, in the sense that they acquire specific material form during the rehearsals. In contrast improvisational performance has no material aspect whatsoever outside the performance event, which is primarily characterised as such because of the presence of an audience.

It must be mentioned at this point that the theory that the audience is an integral part of the work is not exclusive to improvisational artistic work. As aesthetic theory, it has been primarily significant within the work of minimal artists of the 1960s, as explained in Chapter 6 (6.2). Some of these artists maintained close connections with some of the early American dance postmodernists, such as Yvonne Rainer. Yvonne Rainer's essay A Quasi Survey of Some 'Minimalist' Tendencies in the Quantitatively Minimal Dance Activity Midst the Plethora, or an Analysis of Trio A has been included in Battcock's (1968) anthology on minimal art.

The presence of the audience can also fulfil specific practical purposes. Eddie Prévost conceives improvised performance in music as a permanent process of exploration, in which the audience has a clear role:

The effect of an audience’s presence upon AMMmusic gives this situation a sharp focus. The musicians are aware of a further refinement in their perception of the materials and situation in which they must work.

Prévost 1995 p27

Julyen Hamilton shares a similar view and provides further explanation about the way the presence of an audience affects improvisational work:

The presence of the audience puts one under a pressure and nothing is made without pressure. However relaxed one is about how things
come into being, things are born through pressure in the natural world. In the whole world there is certain element of pressure, as well as a process of relaxation that can let for change, from not being born to being born, take place.

Hamilton 1995/i

He continues by referring to another type of pressure, this one he himself as a performer brings to the work by means of his determination to perform it. Ultimately, all

those pressures help to get even more to the point, help me to be even on a sharper knife edge, help to make those instant decisions even more clear.

Hamilton 1995/i

For his recent solo work 40Monologues (1995), he identifies the contribution of the audience within the inherently paradoxical character of the monologue as theatrical form:

[These monologues] are the voice of a lone person, yet one who is not creating alone but involving the spectators' energy to expose the singular point of view.

Hamilton 1995d

In addition, Hamilton and Simson (1986) discuss the 'energetic' impact of the audience in a performance space. This is about the theory of the bad or good performance in relation to the type of 'vibes' the audience brings into the space. Hamilton notices that: "sometimes ... it is as if the audience has already warmed up the space" (in Hamilton & Simson 1986 p11). And although this effect is not exclusive to the improvised performance, it seems that improvisers "are more influenced by that because [their] pieces are not set" (Hamilton in Hamilton & Simson 1986 p11).

Duck (1996/i) also emphasises the audience parameter in improvisational work. For her, the very fact of "a gathered crowd" is essential for creating an appropriate space for the improvised performance. Duck is particularly attracted by small theatres in which the "excitability" of the space almost increases as the performers can be aware of the "audience's breathing" (1996/i). She recognises the spectators' right to detest this kind of work but she finds it absolutely necessary to keep doing it so that it can be available and people are sufficiently informed about
it. For her, the political side of this work is to be "there with your body involved in front of people" and keep this open to a wider audience (1996/i). Nonetheless, she admits that it is a difficult type of work to watch because "it really demands that you are 'on change', any preconceptions about what a dance piece is shouldn't be there" (Duck 1996/i).

Sue MacLennan (1996/i) perceives the audience as a group which has been denied the right to be present in the very moment of the creative process. Her group improvisational piece Catching Light was created as a direct impulse to share her experience of watching her dancers improvising "with form and structure ... and without previous agreement" with the spectators (1996/i). Once she saw such an ad hoc improvisation, she felt she was becoming selfish and decided "to organise the whole thing in a way that other people could share" (1996/i). She confesses, though, that during the 1980s when she was producing mainly solo improvised work, she did not overtly say that this work was improvised in order to avoid the criticism of self-indulgence.11

Paxton also discusses the role of the audience for "a new insight into your own state" and the impact of the audience's mood on the work (1981-82 p22). In addition, he notices that there is no one audience perspective because of the fact that an audience consists of individuals with different opinions. Finally, he describes his personal feelings as a member of the audience in a Contact Improvisation performance event.

To me there is no such a thing as a bad contact improvisation per se ... what we are seeing is interaction between two people and anything they do is an interaction ... and so I watch it with great attention. I'm not bored because the interaction is consistently slow or something. I realise that they are stuck in a certain mode of interaction. The thing I'm watching is a manifestation of two people in intimate contact even if it's quite withdrawn and withheld and they are using very limited physical vocabulary. It's like watching the garden ... one likes to see the whole thing in riotous flower, that's the top moment ... [but] I might be just as interested in why a certain plant is not doing well.

Paxton 1981-82 p22

It is worthwhile noting though that while a Contact Improvisation performance offers something specific for the spectator (namely to focus on the way
the technique of contact is used), Grand Union work has been described as problematic for the audience. Lober (1973) notes that sometimes spectators would succumb to their desire to participate actively in these works. This was not welcomed by the Grand Union artists and the audience was consequently confused. Lober complains that this work was essentially about process, within the informal atmosphere of a workshop but with a conventional "audience format" (1973 p34). In this article of 1973, Lober expressed his wishes for a solution of this problem in the future.

It seems that the main reason for this confusion, at that point, was the lack of an aesthetic reason which would provide for this work a specific compositional character. It was probably sufficient for the Grand Union artists to articulate in dance terms their attitude to life and art on the basis of freedom and democracy. By contrast, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the method of 'instant composition' became more widely adopted by the artists of improvisational dance and this provided their works with more specific aesthetic concerns. A member of the audience would no longer get the wrong message that these performances are open events for the public. The new element is that the level of development of the skill of 'instant composition' requires specially trained people and this is an obvious aspect of the work.

Reitz (1991) discusses another problematic aspect of the relationship between the improviser and the audience. She refers to difficult audiences, audiences which pull back while watching the interactive process of the improvisational performance. In such cases, Reitz uses her structured material as a safety valve and treats the whole thing as a 'party':

There's one jerk you just don't want to talk to and you're not going to and you go off somewhere else and that's true with major audiences.

Reitz 1991 p30

Finally, Anna Halprin completely displaces the traditional role of the audience, not only in theory but primarily by means of her recent work. She contends:
I don't want spectators ... I want witnesses who realize that we are dancing for a purpose - to accomplish something in ourselves and in the world ... The role of the witness is to understand the dance and support the dancers who have undertaken the challenge of performing. Spectators often come with their own personal aesthetics. They sit back and watch and judge to see if what is done lives up to their preconceived notion of a particular, very culture-bound idea of a certain kind of 'art'.

Halprin 1989b p71

In this way, Halprin introduces a new role for the audience by bringing together Western and non-Western notions of performance in the form of "contemporary theatre rituals" (Halprin 1989 p71). This means that she adopts an overtly political position: during the late 1980s, through her particular use of the improvised performance, she rediscovered the necessity of eliminating the gap between art and life as this was the case in the different context of the American avant-garde art of the 1960s.

7.3 The politics of improvisational performance in dance

As mentioned in Chapter 2 (2.4.1), the politics of American avant-garde art of the 1960s prioritised the idea of 'art as life'. This attitude manifested itself in the rediscovery of the body and the quotidian and through a re-visited notion of freedom and democracy; a wide range of aesthetic means and methods was used to fulfil this purpose.

In the context of early American dance postmodernism, improvisation became a privileged strategy because of its direct connotations of freedom. Both the experimental work of the Grand Union and the idiom of Contact Improvisation became embodied forms of democracy within the art of dance. In relation to Grand Union work, Paxton states: "Improvisation seemed the form in which all could participate equally without employing arbitrary social hierarchies in the group" (1972 p130). He adds:

To me, Grand Union seems only the current manifestation of a decade-long exploration of social formulations in theatre aimed at producing freedom for individuals of a group and spurring them on to new awareness ... The head of the group evolves from the freedom
of interaction in the social set, rather than from the performers striving to realize the aesthetics of the director.

Paxton 1972 p131

In the same article, Paxton discusses the importance of 'trust' and the atmosphere of "no expectations, no disappointment, no blame, just results" in the context of the Grand Union work (1972 p132). The element of 'contact' appears frequently in this article in relation to notions of freedom and democracy, but it remains an abstract idea, since, chronologically, this was the very beginning of his experimentations with this form of movement work which later became the technique of Contact Improvisation.

It seems that, in the late 1960s and early 1970s, what was important in the American postmodern dance context was the ability to produce 'work as statement'. Yet, there were no specific purposes or issues investigated in clearly defined areas. Not unexpectedly there were no strategies developed for direct political action through dance and for dance.

In contrast, in the British context of the middle and late 1970s where New Dance gradually emerged as the British version of postmodern dance, it became possible to focus on more clearly defined areas and to develop strategies for pursuing a basic form of dance politics. And, although this context did not produce a large amount of improvisational work, it did make available a form of ideology and a number of accompanying political attitudes which could be helpful in the politics of the current British improvisational dance.

The X6 Collective, the ADMA Festivals and the dance journal New Dance became an active space of interrogation in relation to the character of this new form of theatre dance, the British New Dance (Huxley 1988). Gender issues and other similar concerns gradually emerged through the involvement of artists with new attitudes to dance making. In addition to being an embodied form of freedom and democracy, improvisation became a consciously adopted strategy within a process of creating a state of 'equal opportunities' in dance. The informality and relaxed atmosphere of the X6 Collective as described in Chapter 5 (5.3.3) and the ADMA Festivals, where all forms of improvisation were welcomed, was a specific form of
politics seeking an emancipated space of dance making, liberated from elitist criticism.

As both the literature (Huxley 1983 & 1988) and the accounts of currently active dance artists (Butcher 1995c/i) confirm what did not happen was official support. During the 1980s, in the middle of a series of international economic crises, the British funding structures failed to meet appropriately the needs of the British New Dance. This resulted in a number of serious losses such as the end of the Dartington festivals and the work at Dartington College of Arts, the departure of many British and other artists (such as Mary Fulkerson, Katie Duck, Julyen Hamilton, Kirstie Simson and many others) abroad and the deep disappointment of those who stayed in Britain (such as Rosemary Butcher, Miranda Tufnell and others).

Nevertheless, in the mid 1990s improvisational dance can benefit from thirty years of experience both in the area of artistic practice and the domain of politics. It possesses these powerful tools to set up clear objectives and methods for pursuing such objectives. Some of its most productive representatives have already started working in this way.

In the American context, Anna Halprin remains a pioneer, linking the unfocused spirituality of her early career with the most painful issues of the current world: the struggle against AIDS, cancer and environmental destruction. She pursues these objectives within the strong spirit of a "community engaging with an idea, seeking to accomplish something" (Halprin 1989b p71). In Britain, Miranda Tufnell remains faithful to the politics of the body:

There is a politics in being what you feel, each of us needs to stay in their own bodies, if we stay in touch with sensation with the body we are more able to live from our centre, our sources than if we are alienated from them.

Tufnell 1996/i

Duck, American in origin, but currently a leading figure of the improvisational European dance scene, shares Tufnell's concerns. Yet Duck (1996/i) also investigates the case of improvisational dance as commodity. She hopes her audiences are not becoming cold consumers and works hard to make improvisational dance more available to a wide public.
Similar to Duck, Tufnell (1996), Reitz (1991) and Hamilton (1995) have all raised the problems of the promotion of this form of dance which, in its fluidity, cannot be categorised and, consequently, commodified. Prévost (1995) joins the debate from within the improvised music scene and brings issues of property and ‘bourgeois art’ into the discussion.

Yet, during the last thirty years, the British improvised music scene has been more resistant to the ‘bourgeois’ values of the establishment. It has remained constantly alive since the 1960s producing a vast range of improvisational work despite the lack of support from the official funding structures. In this way, the British improvised music scene can make available to current British improvisational dance a huge amount of information in terms of strategies of survival.

Based in Amsterdam, Katie Duck currently leads improvisational dance’s struggle for survival by activating a mechanism which might solve some of its problems. In June 1996, she organised an international conference with the main concern of developing networking structures for improvisational dance. In this way, she hopes to arrive through collaborative work with other artists, critics and promoters at an appropriate formula which will facilitate the promotion of this form of dance (Duck 1996).

The discussion undertaken in this chapter in relation to the element of ideology brings to an end the study of improvisational performance as discourse, which was the purpose of Part 2 of this research. In Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7, the elements of choice, change, concept and ideology have been studied as points of dispersion on the basis of which improvisational performance as discourse can be approached. Following Foucault’s theory of discursive analysis, it has been argued that, since the 1960s, the practice of improvisational performance in dance has undergone a number of transformations in a number of domains characterised by the notions of choice, change, concept and ideology.

Thus, the material presented in Part 2 prepares the ground for the issues discussed in Part 3. The knowledge emerging from an examination of improvisational performance in dance as discourse contributes to an understanding of this form of dance without constructing a fixed model of the form. The contribution of this work to the main objective of this research (which is to approach
the skill of performing improvisationally as a learning object) is that it provides a
logic for selecting appropriate practical procedures. The effective performance of
these procedures is meant to demonstrate practical knowledge of improvisational
skill. In this respect, Part 3, which focuses on the practical project of the research,
discusses both the process of devising these practical procedures (on the basis of an
understanding of the notions of choice, change, concept and ideology as these have
been examined in Part 2) and the theoretical questions accompanying the practical
involvement with this work.

NOTES

1. Carroll has criticized the avant-garde artworks for "lack[ing] the logical devices for
specifying their range of generality" (1995 p3).

2. As mentioned in Chapter 1, Part 3 of this research becomes this form of
interrogation.

3. See Aronowitz in Sayres et al. 1984 p39 and Chapter 2 (2.4.1) of this research.

4. It must be noted though that the element of the ‘political’ manifested itself in
different ways within different contexts. There is a crucial difference between the
European avant-garde of the beginning of the 20th century, the members of which
were directly involved with particular political parties and the American avant-garde
of the 1960s who focused on ‘personal politics’ and usually avoided any direct links
with political parties. For more details, see Armstrong & Rothfuss (1993) and

5. This is what also happened with the Dada movement of the beginning of the 20th
century.

6. Herwitz identifies a philosophical character in it: "John Cage’s musical attempt to
make performance in sound [is] an essentially sceptical text" (1993 p141). He
compares constructivism, Mondrian and Cage and identifies a common element:
"Their artworks exhibit the same stylistic differences as those that can be found in
the philosophical texts of the epistemologist" (1993 p141).

7. See, for instance, Banes 1987 p9-10.

8. In note 24 of Chapter 4, it has been mentioned that Cunningham’s contribution to
postmodern dance was to make available those artistic practices by means of which
movement was used on the basis of its own value. In this way, the purpose of the
work was to become a statement of the possibility that the artistic product can also
have no purpose. Similarly, the meaning of both minimal art and improvisational

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performance resides in their role as statements of the possibility that an artistic product can also have no meaning.

9. In the attempt to understand this difference, it is crucial to point out the importance of conceptualisation. Prevost continues:

   Conceptualization is of course the trap into which we all fall (the author perhaps more than most). Our frames of reference, the tools we use to see and to get a grip upon the world, are themselves embedded in ways of thinking, for which they act as conduits. One of the deep paradoxes facing us may be that we need to keep us free from the paralysing force of unquestioned conceptualization.

   Prevost 1995 p5

10. There is a reverse way in which energy can circulate between performers and the audience. Simson brings to the fore the possibility of "making the spectators feel involved in the act of performing" (Parry 1986 p5). This is about the presence of the physical energy of the dancing body and the performer’s ability to stimulate physical responses in the spectators’ bodies.

   This perspective is very similar to sense of ‘corporeality’ of German postmodernist Pina Bausch. Her work focuses on ‘what might make people move rather than how’ and amongst other reasons, she uses movement in order to create physical responses in the bodies of the spectators. For more information see Servos (1984).

11. Julyen Hamilton discusses the same problem:

   There is no less self-indulgent set choreography than there is self-indulgent improv. And there is terribly self-indulgent improv. But it's a trick of the mind. If you say to somebody 'I've decided upon it, I've fixed it, I've named it, other people have seen it, I've put a package around it' they suddenly believe that the ‘it’ is ‘it’. And, what year is it now? 1995, it’s just an agreement, it isn't written anywhere, I mean, it isn’t written on the tree, the world doesn’t have like a little clock inside, all it is, is an agreement.

   Hamilton 1995/i

12. For a detailed account of the various ‘schools’ in the current British improvised music scene, see Couldry (1994).
Part Three: The action - Improvisational performance in dance and processes of destabilisation

Introduction

Part 3 presents and discusses the practical project of this research, namely the selection and materialisation of a number of practical procedures which led to an improvisational performance event. According to Carr's theory of practical reasoning, as presented in Chapter 3, the successful performance of these practical steps can demonstrate the practical knowledge of the improvisational skill. Nevertheless, it is an indispensable condition of practical knowledge that these practical steps be related to each other logically, in such a way that it becomes evident "how particular ends are logically related to specific means" (Carr 1981a p60).

In approaching improvisational performance as discourse, Part 2 undertook the task of constructing a logic which can support the selection process of these practical steps. More specifically, Part 2 concentrated on providing an understanding of improvisational performance in dance, as the necessary stage which precedes this selection process. This understanding though has not been approached by means of formulating a definition or arriving at a fixed model of the form, but by means of investigating improvisational performance's processes of transformation, following Foucault's theory of the discourse.

The argument has been based on the assumption that to discern the areas within which transformation has taken place in improvisational performance in dance is also to provide the parameters which constitute this form of dance. It follows that the practical procedures, the successful performance of which can demonstrate the practical knowledge of the improvisational skill, can be devised on the basis of these parameters. Yet, at this point, theory confronts practice directly and, given the postmodern perspective of this research, a number of new issues become part of the discussion. In this context 'theory' should be understood in the conjoint way the term has been introduced in Chapter 1 (1.1). In other words, the studio experiments of the research problematise, on the one hand, the outcomes of an abstraction of the experience of improvisational performance in dance in the form
of such elements as choice, change, concept and ideology. At the same time, the input of such extra-disciplinary theoretical discourses as Carr's notion of practical reasoning from within 'action theory' in philosophy and Foucault's poststructuralist tool of the discourse are also assessed.

Having criticised such forms of understanding as causality, linearity, progress and development, postmodern discourse positions theory in relation to practice in a way which is non-causal, non-hierarchical and non-dichotomous without, however, implying that theory and practice can be fused in a dialectically homogenised consideration. The relationship between theory and practice is far more complex than the linear or causal models suggest and, from a postmodern perspective, it can be better grasped as an ongoing dialogue.

Following these guidelines, Part 3 argues that the problem of how the practical knowledge of improvisational performance in dance can be approached and achieved cannot be resolved, nor even sufficiently articulated, only by means of selecting appropriate practical procedures which must be performed successfully. Even if there is a firm logic behind the whole process, this moment of crossing the border from theory to practice gives birth to a whole set of new problems.

The contribution of postmodern critique is that it has revealed the discontinuous character of this moment and, by these means, emphasised the fact that practice does not necessarily follow theory within a smooth one-way process. This non-hierarchical understanding of the theory-practice relationship also brings to the fore the non-dichotomous character of this relationship in the sense that it acknowledges the potential of a dialogue between the two.

Despite the fact that Part 2 approaches Carr's epistemological construct under the terms of the postmodern tool of the Foucauldian discourse, the transition between this theoretical step and the studio work is not an easy one. Within a process which seeks to remain permanently open, the practical involvement with such elements as choice and change becomes extremely difficult. A fundamental conflict emerges between the attempt to define parameters within which these elements might be used and the necessity to keep the whole process open. As a consequence, while the dialogue between theory and practice unfolds, both the practical procedures and their conceptual approaches are repeatedly reformulated.
Ultimately the task becomes more manageable within a closer examination of the notion of ‘instant composition’.

At this point, a specific approach to improvisational performance in dance is suggested, which should not, however, be considered as a set of rules according to which successful improvisational performances can be created. Rather it is an instantiation of a group of elements which emerge, are transformed and disappear across a number of experiments conducted at a particular time and space and which can be modified by further research.

This practical project originated in July 1994 in the form of ‘totally’ open solo improvisations in the studio, following Grand Union’s guidelines:

without plan, without script, without a single preplanned structure. There was no focal climax, no particular order, no illusions that were allowed to stand for more than a moment.

Banes 1987 p215-216

The work, alternating between more focused and more ‘unfocused’ periods, evolved through different stages suspended between the struggle to locate a number of intentions within this ‘totally’ open process and the necessity to keep it open. It became increasingly evident that a number of other processes and activities, some of which took place almost as parallel journeys without direct connections with them, were able to feed into these studio experiments indirectly. The theoretical work undertaken in Part 2 of the research in order to approach improvisational performance as discourse was one as was the information on the specific strategies of the avant-garde American art of the 1960s. In addition, aspects of relevant practical knowledge in the form of workshops in the wider area of improvisational practices in both movement and music informed this practical research. The studio work eventually led to a inter-disciplinary improvisational performance event (including movement, sound and visual elements) which took place in May 1996.

The degree of personal involvement, assumed by the nature of the practical project, poses questions in relation to both the use of personal experience and the role of the ‘I’ in the context of academic research. Within postmodern theoretical debates, ‘I’ occupies an increasingly significant position. Feminist discourse in particular has largely theorised the validity of women’s position at the level of the
individual voice. Moreover, feminists have severely criticised the avoidance of the 
'I' as an unreliable approach to knowledge because of its biased and partial 
character. Unfortunately, and despite the fact that this awareness has stimulated 
processes of interrogation and reconsideration within the methodologies of a number 
of other disciplines (Okeley, 1992), it remains unclear how this tool could actively 
contribute to the practice of academic research.

It must be noted that the problems of practical research in the arts are 
idiosyncratic. In other disciplines, the practical aspect usually coincides with 
conducting projects or experiments with materials borrowed from the 'real world', 
and the theoretical one makes theory out of this experience. Yet, in researching 
processes of art making through a practical methodology, it is also possible that the 
materials be provided at the level of the experience of the researcher who, in this 
case, adopts the role of an artist. Thus, the use of the 'I' not only becomes an 
integral and significant part of the research but seems to impose a number of 
unfamiliar, or even unacceptable, rules for the game.

In the long tradition of Western philosophical thought, the polarised 
relationship between academic and artist, emerging from the assumption that they 
were fulfilling two diametrically opposite roles, reverberates across the dichotomy 
between objectivist and subjectivist approaches to knowledge. The first seeks 
knowledge as absolute truth. The second, operating on the basis of individual 
subjectivity, is concerned with giving material form to some sort of 'personal' truth. 
Stated as baldly as this, their interests and approaches could only be viewed as 
incompatible.

Reconsidered in the light of postmodern sensibility, this polarisation faces 
both incredulity in relation to absolute truths and the acceptance of the partial 
perspective of the 'I' as a possible approaches to knowledge. On these grounds, it 
is possible to conceive of the researcher as artist. Moreover, the possibility of 
expanding the creative process into a form of self-referential interrogation, assisted 
by the open dialogue of academic methodologies and artistic practices, brings to the 
surface issues of reflexivity and allows for the discussion of the notion of 
subjectivity. The danger of replacing research with artistic practice, or reducing the 
former to the level of a description of the latter is thus avoided.
Chapter 8 discusses both the process of devising and materialising the practical steps which led to the performance event and the issues emerging within this enterprise. Chapter 9 presents the outcome of the studio work, namely the final performance event, initiating in this way a theoretical discussion in relation to the problems of analysing and assessing this form of work. This last part of the debate concentrates on issues of subjectivity, undertaking in this way a process of interrogation in the Foucauldian fashion. As the discussion unfolds, the notion of authorship becomes increasingly problematic thus revealing the controversial character of the assumption that the improviser operates from the position of a fixed subjectivity. In this way, within its final stage, the research meets Foucault again, this time not by means of his discursive analysis in the domain of history but through his emphasis on the dispersion of the subject, which is a major area within postmodern critical discourse.

In comparison to Parts 1 and 2, Part 3 faces two distinct problems, the particular character of which ultimately affects the internal structure of the chapters and the general layout of the text. The first problem in this part is that it concentrates on a practical project and the second is that this project is about a personal process. The fact that it is a reference to a practical project creates difficulties firstly in the area of documentation and secondly in the process of transferring/integrating this material within a written text. On the other hand, the fact that this Part is about a personal process creates difficulties for both the description and analysis of the material.

As mentioned in Chapter 1, this project has been documented with video recordings, personal diaries and notes. In the sense that the written word is the only form of evidence which can be integrated in the written text of this thesis, material from the diaries and the notes has been used extensively. At the same time, a selection of video recording excerpts, included in the videotape accompanying the thesis, illustrates some of the points discussed within the text. Nevertheless, extracts from the diaries and notes, or even ‘essays’ belonging to older phases of the research process, are much longer than usual quotations and more discontinuously incorporated into the main text. The ‘essays’ are part of the practical aspect of the research rather than the theoretical one, because although they appear as written
texts, they only aim at organising the material of the diaries and notes in a way which could be helpful to the practical project according to its own terms rather than using an academic style. There are three ‘essays’ of this kind written during June 1995, October 1995 and May 1996. Whenever quoted in the main text of Chapters 8 or 9, the dates will be cited next to the title of each extract included. Normal cases are used for the body of the ‘essay’, italics for the diary quotations and bold for quotations from written texts by other artists. The video excerpts illustrating the material presented in Chapters 8 and 9 are included as Appendix II in the videotape of the thesis.

Referring to a personal process blurs the borders between analysis and documentation as they each include elements of the other. In the sense that documentation is an act of description and description cannot take place outside some form of interpretation, documentation becomes a primary form of analysis. It follows that, in the case of dealing with a personal process, to analyse further the documentation material requires the ability of the analyst to objectify the subjective process. This position becomes in itself dichotomous and reflects the controversial character of including personal processes in academic research.⁴

In this respect, it has been considered appropriate to let the text bear this conflict visibly and unfold within the co-existence of two different languages: the personal and the academic, nevertheless coming from the same person about the same personal process. This position has been motivated by an additional reason. These diaries and notes, although they are written material, are crucial elements of the practical project of this research in the sense that they have directly contributed to the studio experiments by shaping them in particular ways. To let them occupy a reasonably long part in the following chapters is a unique chance to let this studio experience become an integral part of the theoretical body of the written text of the thesis - nevertheless discontinuously.⁵

NOTES

1. See notes 1 and 2 of Chapter 1.
2. From her feminist point of view and with strong interest in issues of the relationship between theory and practice as well as in the notion of experience, Brown also characterises theory as a way of organising and making sense of the experience (1994, p 7).

3. A choreographic academic research, for instance, includes choreographic practices alongside its theoretical tools, possibly culminating in a piece of choreography.

4. See note 24 of Chapter 1.

5. For the same reasons, Chapter 8, in particular, has been divided to subsections on the basis of the 'essay'-chapters included in it.
This chapter reflects on the process of bringing the outcome of the theoretical consideration on the notion of improvisational performance as discourse presented in Part 2 directly into the studio work. In this respect, following the postmodern perspective of the thesis, this chapter problematises the elements of choice, change, concept and ideology in the very moment of selecting and materialising the practical steps (the successful performance of which will demonstrate the practical knowledge of performing improvisationally) according to the logic constructed in Part 2 of the thesis.

The major difference between approaching theoretically the elements of choice, change, concept and ideology in the work of other artists (as in Part 2 of the research) and approaching them practically by means of undertaking a personal process is the parameter of the 'I'. It is not only that personal experience becomes more central, but, because of the practical nature of the undertaking, the balance between bodily and intellectual perspectives of the problem also changes.

In Chapter 3, the problem of the 'I' has been briefly discussed from the perspective of the philosophical discourse. Ryle has described the elusiveness of the 'I' with the metaphor of the shadow from which "I can never get away ... [and which] endow[s] 'I' with a mystifying uniqueness and adhesiveness" (in Cassam 1994 p42).

In researching practically the nature of the element of choice by means of a personal process, this mystifying quality of the 'I' becomes further emphasised. A practical study of the ability to choose in the context of 'total improvisation' originates from the improviser's effort to locate her/his pool of available choices.
This task is theoretically supported by the position that there are no totally open ways of performing improvisationally, even in Grand Union's case (see section 5.3.2 of Chapter 5). In this respect, the improviser’s pool of choices is constituted from a combination of individual movement and other relevant experiences and such physical parameters as bodily structure. Nancy Stark Smith characteristically points out:

"Even when you say 'totally open improvisation' that's relative ... you have all of your history of your way of working. That's a lot. ... there was a lot I did know that I didn't even realize I knew, that I was assuming."

in Dilley 1992 p45

In conducting totally open improvisations within the attempt to let the body reveal its practical knowledge in the area of movement experiences, the improviser runs the risk of approaching the improvisational process as a space for subconscious material to emerge. The perspective of the 'thinking body', which is liberating on other occasions, can be easily misunderstood and the tendency to allow the body to express itself might trap the improviser within a movement involvement which is closer to therapy than to creative research.

By contrast, this work should be undertaken critically, but without forcing the body into consciously predetermined decisions. The balance between endlessly letting the body do its own thing and shaping its movement by anticipation is very delicate. The whole point is to allow the improviser's already acquired forms of practical knowledge in the areas of both generating and structuring movement material to become present through the body, in other words make this experience consciously available through physical ways. Ultimately, this information is different from that which emerges within a theoretical study of one's technical background, for instance. The outcome of this practical research can be subsequently used in further experiments in the form of expansion expansion or conscious transformation.
8.1 Ballet technique as my body story (June 1995)

Sometimes I have a very clear sense of how I wish to move. For a long period of time I was focusing on my upper torso - the chest then the head - previously also the head - the neck - the head in opposition to the chest through the neck an exposed neck 1/6/95

(see excerpt 4, 4/4/95)

Then I discovered that I had no speed and I wanted to work on it 1/6/95

I came back to my study of stillness. I wanted to work with my method of imagining the pathways of the movement of my body parts before this was taking place. I thought I could increase my speed by accelerating this thinking process. If I could imagine my next movement while doing the previous one I could be quicker. And if I could imagine more than one movement which superimposed new beginnings to previous ends I could probably be quicker.

activity - how to develop a very active dance

How to be risky in order to discover and not get injured?

How to follow the body flow of the moment and go beyond that?

3/4/95

I wanted to see how far one can push the body, and how far it will adapt away from the pedestrian norm that I studied for so long; how far it would adapt to extremes without any problem; how it would be a full, pleasurable, inventive study without it being damaging.

Paxton 1981-82 p11

My awareness of the upper torso was gradually leading me to feelings of ‘upwardness’, defeat of gravity and expansion in space.

Extension is a base for work
to the point it rebounds
3/4/95

I then rediscovered the history of my ballet technique as this had been inscribed on my body. I could see the nature of this experience with new eyes and without guilty feelings. Ballet is somehow damned. It is romantic, it is graceful, it is inconceivable that the dancer can enjoy it as a corporeal event. I do not believe I ever managed to deny the pleasure my body was getting by practising this technique. I had just forgotten about it.

I discover ballet for me is not grace
but power/the sense of being in control
of playing tricks on the audience
to be exceptional
to be expanded expanded in lines 6/4/95

and I got obsessed with lines 1/6/95 (see excerpt 5, 6/4/95)

...the body has become a network of extended lines, all linked together through peripheral centres towards more and more central ones
All the lines meet somewhere between the end of the sternum and the navel
Every part of the body can be more or less connected with this area
-the arms can start from the basis of the shoulder blades and the end of the sternum
-the legs from the top of the pelvis
and the head deeply from the thoracic area of the spine
outwards as an arrow that points and tends upwards
Now we can add volume to these lines...
12/5/95

8.2 The problem of music/sound and space (June 1995)

During all this period, I was struggling with my two permanent questions:

1. how do I use music/sound?
2. how do I treat space?

To answer my first question, I tried silence, I tried to work against music, with music, with the memory of the music, breaking down music by long gaps of silence, by juxtaposing fragments of different pieces, by introducing speech as sound, using Greek texts during my group sessions, thus forcing them to treat text as sound. There is still a long way to go.

I tried to use sound - as an element of space - as if it could attract me, trap me. I manage to go away. I come back, I am curious, I want to explore it - It is like a machine with opening/closing platforms like jaws. But in between I lose my concentration, I visualise this space with various unspecified materials falling, rolling, moving vertically upwards, like tubes, like sand, like pieces of steel. I try to follow the movement of the falling/moving material as if I were part of these 'masses'...
3/8/94

To answer the second question, I organise my 'stage' area using light or manipulating other elements (the back curtain) and I try to move in full awareness of these forms, to integrate my moving body into these environments and let them determine the mood of my movement. One of my aims
in this search which has not been yet achieved is to create a ‘movement installation’. (see excerpt 6, 25/10/94) A kind of still movement, in the sense of movement that does not determine time, that has no time, movement only as space, as part of these visual spaces.

8.3 The context of my available choices (May 96)

Quite early it became obvious that a certain approach, method, system should be identified/followed/located before anything ... takes place as thought or movement (1/6/95). My readings on relaxation and release techniques, visualisation and ‘ideokinesis’ as well as my involvement with the improvisational practice of ‘authentic movement’ shaped the form and character of these early improvisations; these forms of movement articulation were more easily available to me because I had the opportunity to practise them in various movement courses which were offered at the time.

Relaxation, release techniques, visualisation, ‘ideokinesis’ and other similar improvisational practices, are different conceptions of the mechanism of movement. They deal with how movement operates and they all relate in one way or another to the physicality of movement. I am still interested in what movement production can be.

The way I was originally instructed to approach the technique of ‘authentic movement’ was based on kinetic explorations of imaginary spaces. These explorations were meant to take place through moving with closed eyes while special attention to the body’s physical state during these moments was required. For me, what was interesting in this approach was the character of these spaces as environments rather than as locations within which stories could develop.

This anti-narrative element remained constant in my work although it was finally explored through very different pathways. In a sense, this element has been also partly responsible for my predilection for creative strategies, approaches and conceptual frameworks which essentially belong in such primarily anti-narrative artistic manifestations as music and the visual arts. In the last phase of the project, my work eventually concentrated on improvisational performance practices which draw together movement, sound and visual elements in a cross-disciplinary mode.

Nevertheless, during the first phase of the work I faced the problem that the elements of physicality and space, as these were manifested in the improvisational practices of release techniques, authentic movement etc. were not specific enough to help me clarify the intentions and therefore the strategies of the project.

8.4 The (my)different body (June 1995)

The problem of the warm-up (how do I warm-up my body so that I can bring it to a suitable physical state for the improvisation? which are the criteria for
this state?) gradually gave birth to my concept of the different body (1/6/95). My body was different every day. It was very difficult to define the parameters of a suitably warmed-up body, but even if I could do so, my physical state was never the same.

I feel that often what happens when I come into the studio is that I'll not know where to start and I'll resist going to my journals and books to find a starting point, because I want to try to be a little bit more true to how I am feeling and true to my spontaneity than going to my book and choosing an idea from a different day.

Nicholls 1991 p32

On the basis of this discovery I developed my theory of the different body. Improvisation is a tool that enables the dancer to take advantage of the difference of the body. Each time I move, there is something different in my physical state. If I work on this difference then I can change my movement and, by pushing the difference to the extreme, I can enhance my technique - the body has a method to develop its eloquence. There is a long way to go but I wish to pursue this question further because I am persuaded that movement technique can be developed in this way, in the sense of 'virtuosity'.

I'm interested in our ability to be ever more articulate and responsive in the moment - to each other and to the environment within and around us.

Appel in Temple 1987 p42

when I improvise I test myself, and I celebrate my ability - our ability - to be able to change

Appel in Temple 1987 p43

According to this theory, my warm-up is not a routine any more but an improvisation based on how my body parts need to move each day.

(see excerpt 7, 6/4/95)

By means of the ‘different body’ the notion of discontinuity is manifested in dance practice and training. Traditional techniques such as ballet and modern dance primarily focus on controlling this problem through discipline to their systems. Even current ‘alternative’ techniques, such Contact Improvisation, have their own ways of shaping the production of movement in particular ways. Contact Improvisation and release techniques aim at a certain degree of relaxation which is unavoidable within the structure of their movement systems.

The relationship between the ‘different body’ and the problem of choice in improvisational dance is a peculiar one. If the body is ‘different’ every day then the
pool of choices is also different. The tasks of both locating this pool and consciously transforming it become thus a matter of grasping the moment, each time, each moment, each second infinitely. In this way, the element of the ‘present moment’ comes to the discussion, but without illuminating the problem of choice in the sense of suggesting any guidelines.

It seems though that by means of the concept of the ‘thinking body’ as a body which can operate on the basis of the full range of possibilities between physical and mental events, the areas within which the pool of choices can be located could be specified in relation to this spectrum. At first glance, this method appears capable of avoiding the trap of the different body, a body which is different at the level of its physicality. Unfortunately, there is no evidence that the state of the ‘different body’ is necessarily a physical one.

Yet, the problem of the ‘different body’ is still about the voice of the body, an emphasis on the notion of the body which parallels the multiplicity of discourses on the body currently available in postmodern discourse.1 Despite the confusion that the ‘different body’ creates in relation to the problem of choice it can contribute to the improviser’s process by showing the way to the next stage of the improvisational skill, which is the ability to change. In this respect, the state of the ‘different body’ can make available to the improviser unexpected areas of change, just by clearly stating its preferences of the moment. It follows that it relies strongly upon the improviser’s ability to receive these messages; in other words the improvisational skill strongly relies upon a highly developed skill of physical awareness.

Another way of investigating the possibilities of the available pool of choices, which is also a more focused one, is based on setting loose parameters borrowed from the work of other artists. It becomes particularly interesting and creative to work on the basis of written material by these artists, as there is much space for interpretation in what these available conceptions might become at the level of movement practices. In such cases, the connections between the available concept, which is not in this case accompanied by any form of practical knowledge, and the improviser’s own pool of choices are so malleable that there is no danger of anticipation within the generation of the material. In contrast, the ideas borrowed
from the work of other artists through their written texts can offer a kind of conceptual tool which might enhance the possibilities for the improviser to achieve a degree of 'change' on the basis of her/his original material.

8.5 Stillness and movement (June 1995)

At that time, almost a year ago, I had just to keep moving/improvising (1/6/95). Then, I thought it could be helpful to go back to my reading materials. I tried to introduce Mary Fulkerson's notion of 'stillness'.

Stillness
Standing still or lying still?
Points in space to catch or twist around from before
Landscape of the torso - with breath
Ambiguity - hands - they have a story
Torso - has cracks
opposition - crossings of the body (parts)
Only certain types of movement with eyes closed

This is not working. Looking back at it, I now feel I can try this again.

Yet, at that time, I felt there was only one way I could relate to stillness: short stillnesses between movement sequences. These moments were waiting times (probably not in terms of real time - there was probably no pause in my movement) during which I imagined pathways. With closed eyes I could imagine different pathways my body parts could follow.

I can't focus on an idea or a problem -
I tend to focus with my eyes
or use different parts of the body
in particular arms - hands - extremities
I don't manage to discipline myself into
stillness - movement - impulse for movement and
movement feelings / body mood take over
but I tend to use slow motion or still tension
while images of movement come freely to my mind
they are not exactly anatomical, they are paths of moving masses within a surrounding
mass of different density - it could be colour

This sense of stillness did not seem to me very close either to Fulkerson's or to Paxton's.

Stillness is my starting point. I remain still for a period of time and then allow thoughts to emerge from the stillness. In emerging,
thoughts are made up of both movements and ideas. There is no separation of movement and idea within this process, as both are known together in a state of being. These are thoughts without words.

Fulkerson 1982 p5

I've noticed that standing has dropped away from contact improvisation. People have stopped standing still... for somebody who was just coming along to see a show, to watch a group of people standing still for fifteen minutes was odd to say the least. No there was not a great upsurge of interest in standing still, and I doubt if there will ever be, but I think it is that kind of contrast that gives the other stuff, the movement, its values.

Paxton 1981-82 p16

Because of the closed eyes, I had stopped relating to my surrounding space, I could only feel my body as a whole of body parts which could follow pathways. This was the motive of my movement. I never saw my body as a whole and I still experience it as a sum of co-existing parts. This phase gave me the opportunity to define my own notion of 'inner' and 'outer' space. Inner was my 'personal' space, the space within which my body parts could exist in the coherence of my body and outer space was the surroundings, the room, the studio.

In the third ‘authentic movement’ weekend I learned how to wait for something to happen in movement 21/3/95

I don’t see minutes in stillness at all ... I use the word stillness to describe that territory of receptive waiting and openness to possibility.

Fulkerson 1987 p20

In the end, this was the only form of stillness I could relate to.

The problem of 'change' is directly related to the problem of choice, in the sense that if a strategy of change can be devised, habit will be confronted more efficiently within the decision-making process and, at the moment of choice, the improviser will be offered a wider range of options. At the same time, although the problem of 'change' is indeed closely linked with that of habit and, for this reason, one of the most important concerns in the work of the improviser, an additional
aspect of the question is that 'change' is the act of changing something specific and, also, changing it in relation to something else.

As discussed in Chapter 5 (5.2), Steve Paxton specifies his 'movement palette' as an area where he wishes to achieve change. Similarly, the tools of Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Body-Mind Centering (BMC) mentioned in the same section of Chapter 5, offer methods of analyzing movement within possible constituent elements and change can take place as a modification of these parameters. Paxton is also fully aware of the necessity for a 'paradigm change' which also provides him with a personal reason for the process of change. In contrast, BMC and LMA are only analytical tools, available to the improviser to use them provided that s/he has specified her/his reasons in relation to this change. Thus, to clarify the reasons of the will to change becomes a crucial aspect of the process because it indicates what it is that the improviser does not like and by these means it also implies what it is that the improviser wants to achieve by means of change. This is the point when the problem of 'change' becomes reasonably manageable regardless of its direct connection to the problem of habit. In this way, discovering a 'pool of preferences' at the level of movement conceptions and compositional approaches facilitates the task of the improviser to change because it offers a goal to be achieved.

8.6 The pool of preferences (May 1996)

The following elements repeatedly attracted my attention during the theoretical involvement with the material and supported my effort to compile a list of elements in relation to which I could pursue the development of my own work.

From the practice of dance, I was particularly inspired by:

1. Anna Halprin's biological approach to movement (Halprin 1967-68).
2. Lulu Sweigard's emphasis on anatomical principles and use of the imagery in her method of 'ideokinesis' (Sweigard 1974).
3. Miranda Tufnell's predilection for site specific work and her notion of the landscape, as a physical state of the body, as a space for ideas or as an aspect of the environment such as sound, for example 'soundscapes' (Tufnell 1993).
4. Rosemary Butcher’s notion of the ‘physicality of space’, which refers to the way energy is redistributed through space by the movement of the dancing body, her emphasis on the element of ‘weight’ as a reference to earth, awareness about the body’s balance points and its location in space, the notion of the ‘language of the piece’ as an element which differentiates one piece from another (Butcher 1995a).

5. Daniel Lepkoff’s mathematical sense of structure as the answer of a specific question (Lepkoff 1986).

6. Lance Gries’s notion of presence and absence of the body in performance in which the direction of the energy through the body is of major importance, his understanding of the environment is a ‘habitat’, and his predilection for strategies of subversion through which ambiguity is pursued as an artistic goal (Gries 1995).

7. Pina Bausch’s perspective of the physical aspect of the emotion (Servos 1984).

8. The phenomenological approach to movement which is inherent in the ‘authentic movement’ method, namely the emphasis on the mover’s perception of her/his movement.

From the practice of the American avant-garde visual arts of the 1960s, I was attracted by:

1. Robert Rauschenberg’s use of fragments of ordinary reality in his pictures, predilection for surfaces which invited a constant change of focus, heterogeneity and non-hierarchical simultaneity (Rauschenberg 1976).

2. Robert Morris’s idea of the self as perpetually divided and unstable, and his notion of anti-art as primarily defined by the element of temporariness (Berger 1989).

From the practice of music, I found particularly interesting and relevant to my own artistic attitudes:

1. John Cage’s attention to the activity of the sounds and his use of chance procedures (Cage 1968).

2. Eddie Prevost’s understanding of improvised music as ‘meta-music’ which is essentially mobile, emerging from the dialogue between the improvising musicians and injecting meaning in the moment of making (Prévost 1995).

At the crossroads between my personal parameters and the above elements, are some major areas of interest which can be identified in a variety of forms in my studio experiments:

1. emphasis on space in a primarily anti-narrative approach, site specific work, emphasis on the visual aspect of the work and work with different theories of space
2. study of the mechanism of movement, its physicality, the character of virtuosic movement, the physical/bodily aspect of the emotions, the use of imagery and anatomical principles

3. experiments with interdisciplinary work combining the use of movement, text, sound and visual elements

4. explorations along the spectrum within which such notions as 'structure' and 'material' are located, experiments with the possibility of creating structure out of the nature of the materials and alternating between playing with processes of stabilising and destabilising the material

5. use of the method of developing work through following many different processes at the same time and letting them meet when appropriate as instantiations of particular experiences

6. use of strategies of interrogation both as part of the creative process and the work itself

7. using strategies for creating ambiguity: reframing pedestrian movements, installing and subverting images by deconstructing their atmosphere

8. seeking meaning within a multiplicity of approaches such as strategies of attending to, noticing, reflecting upon the material. This is essentially about introducing commenting elements as part of the work and dealing with various kinds of 'gaps': gaps in the technique, gaps between performer and the audience, gaps inherent in the arbitrariness of making up systems within which we choose to work, gaps between the conceptual aspect of a movement technique and the way it is actually practised

9. applying devices for changing the 'ways of seeing' dances from the perspective of the audience: make the audience mobile and/or interactive with the performance

10. applying strategies for seeing (conceptualising) dance in new ways from the perspective of the performer: use of meditation, moving with closed eyes, applying new theories of space such chaos and quantum theory, changing perspectives

This is not a comprehensive list of elements simply because there has been no point of crystallisation within the constantly changing process of my work, in which a fixed character becomes identifiable. Rather this list is almost a statistical accumulation of various points included in my notes, which were not meant to be either comprehensive or objectively accurate. Thus elements emerge, are
transformed and disappear in the course of my experiments and there is no way to link their original starting point with the last phase of the work in the form of a linear development. The work develops within the space of an arising discourse, almost as a landscape within which a number of articulations become possible. Miranda Tufnell's dancing metaphor of the 'landscape' seems very relevant within a space of theoretical considerations.

Habit is usually treated as a negative element within the improvisational skill. Nonetheless, its character is a far more controversial insofar as it becomes an interesting parameter in relation to issues of subjectivity as these emerge in the context of the improvisational performance.

Habit is an aspect of the body's intelligence, the ability to activate movement responses which have been successful in similar circumstances during the past. This guarantees quickness and efficiency but it prohibits innovation. Within this perspective and given that one of the major aims of improvisation is the 'openness to the unknown', it is difficult to discern the difference between the negative and positive effects of habit.

The improviser's pool of choices can expand by means of particular exercises which might offer to her/his dancing body a range of new movement experiences. This could be considered a method of disturbing the body's tendency to perform habitual movements, and therefore as a remedy to the problem of habit. Yet, for these new experiences to become fully available during the performance, the body needs to become familiar with them; to a certain extent they will play the role of new habits. On the other hand, even if the performer develops such a strong skill of selecting the most non-habitual options possible, it is difficult to specify the perspective from which this element of the 'non-habitual' is defined. Is it from the perspective of an audience who would normally expect different solutions? Or is it from the perspective of the performer and in relation to her/his conceptualisation of the decision-making process? These different possibilities can radically affect the nature of the answers to this question.

In addition, the fact that a performer is skilful enough to make non-habitual decisions in either of these perspectives relies upon her/his skill of practising choice. Therefore, although the choices can be non-habitual and, for this reason, seem
unpredictable, there is an underlying way of making choices responsible for this
effect, which is, in this sense, more fixed than it appears to be.

Within this perspective, the performer's subjectivity is simultaneously
destabilised at the level of the materialisation of the choices and restabilised at the
level of the attitude or conceptualisation of the process. And yet, there is an
additional aspect to this problem: unpredictability can also take place as an
innovative combination of movement elements which could be separately considered
as habitual. This is when change takes place at the process of conceptualisation as
the performer realises the new possibilities of the movement material. It is exactly
at this point, when habitual choices and fixed attitude to ways of choosing both
collapse and the subjectivity of the performer faces instability at both levels.

The problem of conceptualising the improvisational skill is also closely
linked with the decision-making mechanism insofar as the character of these choices
is directly affected by the improviser's understanding of what it is to improvise and
what one is expected to do in this position. Dance making is often understood as
the two-part process of generating and structuring movement material and this is a
conceptual pattern which can be probably traced back to the character of traditional
choreographic practices. Approaching the problem within the perspective of a
variety of movement concepts rather than movement techniques or vocabularies is
indeed a wider form of understanding, which can accommodate the improvisational,
almost 'anti-step' character of some aspects of current dance production.

8.7 Further thoughts on the nature of movement concepts (October 1995)

Why is my movement now better?
What kind of criteria it does it fulfil?
Why is this better? 18/7/95

Still the question of what 'better' means and 'why is this better' remains
unanswered. 23/7/95

Our concepts of movement have to do with
how we perceive movement
what we look for in movement  august 95

I can now add a third element:
Our concepts of movement are shaped by what we think movement is, what we think the body is.

doctober 95

What is the body? It seems to me reasonable that I understand my body at the crossroads of a number of direct and indirect sources of information. I understand it directly by means of what I am told the body is, according to its contextually available definitions. On the other hand, the ways I have been using my body both in everyday life and as artistic medium are indirectly responsible for a number of assumptions about what I think my body is.

I gradually free myself from the feminine image of my body that I was trying to create through my dancing. I become more and more familiar with the athletic aspect of my body in movement, my skin and my bare legs in dancing.

23/7/95

The following vicious circle operates: I assume a certain notion of the body, according to how I have already used it and the subsequent use of my body draws directly from this information.

Why do I look like Kylian dancer? More like a male than a female, rather asexual very often.
By Kylian body I mean a very elastic body consisting of small parts through which the movement flows.
For ten days now I have been obsessed with the Kylian body - in particular the 'Stamping Ground'.
My body is still in fragments. They are just much better linked together by now and movement flows from one to the other as a liquid - but I don't always like this.
Do I need more movement stimuli, classes, performances?
This may also have to do with my concept of movement - what concept of movement do I have by now? (released?)
Can I change it?
How can this affect my movement style/vocabulary?

18/7/95

My training in ballet and Graham-based modern dance technique is the route through which I have been able to trace the origins of the disciplined, hard-working and spectacular body in my movement. These techniques aim for an exceptional body, a body which will ultimately be able to transcend as many physical limitations as possible in order to become miraculous. The character of ballet or Graham-based movement vocabularies has been largely based on the miraculous.

After all, my movement research is physically oriented. It occurs to me to use technical movement of specific dance vocabularies and this should not be a problem. I should rather clarify how I use them, when and their 'beyond them' potential - also their 'ambiguity' potential

30/7/95
Eventually I had the following thoughts: The presence of such parameters, the spectacular and the miraculous, mould accordingly the ethos of the performer in both choreographed dance and open improvisation. In the first case, the responsibility of choosing the specific material form in which this ethos is ultimately incorporated relies on the choreographer, yet the performer is the one who embodies it on stage. In the second case, the whole system of making choices must be located in terms of the degree of 'virtuosity' which is allowed or aimed for in an improvisation; the degree of the spectacular, the exceptional and the miraculous which become part of the movement.

These parameters shape the quality of the relationship between the performer and the audience; they reflect the balance between their differentiated degrees of power. In ballet and modern dance, the miraculous body of the performer becomes the dominant element of the relationship: it is an extremely powerful body, a tool of seduction. It can be arrogant and narcissistic. It perpetuates the passive role of audience. The latter has relinquished its claims for equal distribution of power and has surrendered to seduction in return for some temporary space of self-identification with impossible yet highly seductive acts. The performer provides the audience with the opportunity to experience visually something which cannot be done under everyday circumstances and emphasises the exceptional. On the other hand, in ballet and modern dance the virtuosic body is not provided 'for free' to the performer. It has been exchanged for extremely long periods of personal work, a large amount of labour tailored in terms of strict discipline and control of such basic human activities as eating; inherently it carries a high risk of failure because of its competitive character.

In the terminology of the current improvisational practices, the element of the physically exceptional has been often described as 'physicality'. Julyen Hamilton's workshop in Liverpool during September 1995 was advertised by the company Physical State International as a course "for the advanced dancer and very physically oriented". The term 'advanced dancer' carries implications of technical training, whatever this may be. Indeed the people who participated in this course were at the time members of such companies as Rosemary Butcher's, CandoCo, Julyen Hamilton's and others and they were highly efficient dancers in a variety of contemporary dance techniques, release technique, contact improvisation etc. In such cases, the study of the exceptional in the production of movement is more complex. Despite the fact that the spectacular does not seem to be a priority (as this is often the case in ballet for example) in current improvisational practices, movement possibilities are definitely explored beyond the ordinary. At the same time, the term 'interesting' movement usually refers to the degree of originality of the combination of its components; thus movement can be unusual but does not necessarily rely on the virtuosic body.

In current improvisational practices, the search for 'interesting' movement or new movement possibilities is largely based on the development of physical awareness and perception. Again, another leaflet, which advertises another workshop by Julyen Hamilton, states:
Each day begins with a morning technique class: a process of investigating and deepening the kinaesthetic sensing of the body, focusing on its ability to direct energy. Spatial awareness, memory and a sense of form are stimulated through exercises which have a physiological base and which are aligned to the body in motion rather than to aesthetic form. The afternoon workshop will focus on the study and practice of the art of improvisation, "where the physically intuitive body is tuned for discovery, creativity and performance all at the same moment". This session will encourage participants to develop their understanding of perception, timing and weight in the body and the role these elements play in intuitive movement.

Greenwich Dance Agency, Autumn 1995

The important role of physical awareness brings to the surface the performer's relationship with her/his body, the healthy character of this relationship, the idea that the potential of the body for movement should be developed and invested rather than abused. This approach emphasises in a positive way the physically effective, which is often accompanied by pleasurable bodily sensations. The physically exceptional (which can be also interpreted as spectacular or virtuosic) is possible in this framework, not as a means of controlling the audience through seduction but as a legitimate aspect of the performer's journey towards a pleasurable and self-rewarding movement discovery. This can offer to both the audience and the performer the chance to witness one more material and physically present form of the 'intuitive body', of the 'thinking body'.

Nevertheless, the understanding of current postmodern dance production in terms of movement concepts and compositional approaches still polarises the relationship between the two. The problem has been very briefly mentioned in both Chapters 4 and 6, insofar as it appears that some of the movement concepts introduced cannot operate outside a reconsidered notion of composition and, in particular that provided by the work of Robert Dunn.

In a way which is similar to the problem of the relationship between theory and practice, emphasised in the introduction to Part 3 as a form of an ongoing dialogue, improvisational performance becomes an appropriate context for studying the interactive relationships between generation of movement material and compositional approaches. It is pertinent though that a new concept is suggested, one which can accommodate the complexity of this relationship without arriving at a dialectically homogenised whole. In this respect, the intention of the improver becomes the focus of the discussion as well as the basis on which an alternative notion of the dance piece can be provided (see Chapter 9).
The use of the concept of the intention also re-establishes a direct connection with the theoretical foundations of this thesis. Chapter 3 (3.1.4) has presented Carr's perspective of dance as "an intentional human action", within which the relationship between intention and action has been characterised as a teleological one. This approach reconsiders the place of intention which becomes a necessary stage for the action to be fulfilled and displaces the traditional causal explanation of the links between the two.

In this way, the skill of performing improvisationally is an open space in which the intention of the improviser and her/his performance (action) become aspects of the same process. This conception does not rely on a dichotomous relationship between movement material and compositional approaches, neither does it undermine their differences. Instead it provides a wider framework within which both choice can be exercised and change achieved.

In addition, it offers a new perspective for an understanding of the use of avant-garde strategies as these have been presented in Chapter 7 in relation to the ideological element within the consideration of improvisational performance as discourse. Thus, by means of the improvisational skill, the use of avant-garde strategies (both as negation and suggestion of alternative solutions) does not need to be linked either to the character of movement choices or to the ways movement might be composed. Improvisational performance offers a unique opportunity for an examination of the role of 'avant-garde' intention in dance making within both the possibilities of negation and alternative solutions.

In some cases, it becomes extremely problematic to clarify whether the avant-garde intention of the improviser is manifested as a will to negate or to suggest alternative movement concepts or compositional approaches. Yet, it might be a clear intention insofar as it becomes a clear statement of what the improviser thinks the improvisational skill is and what s/he aims to achieve. In addition, the improviser's work in improving her/his skill is to elaborate on the intention on the basis of his/her available practical knowledge in terms of the pool of choices.
8.8 Temporary goals and other preferences (October 1995)

Despite the fact that my sessions are always predetermined in terms of some unavoidable parameters (the space, the quality of the sound, the type of sound I choose from my music sources), many other elements operate randomly. Sometimes it seems though that temporary goals emerge during the improv; I follow them to a certain extent and then I abandon them. These goals, apart from originating in my criticisms of previous videotaped improvisations, also relate to thoughts which emerge from what happens physically in my body as I move, or thoughts related to written sources on improvisation or other theoretical problems relevant to my thesis.

Working in this way, I gradually discovered that my interests could be located in terms of two elements: 'visuality' and movement character.

I invented the term 'visuality' to refer to the character of the visual effect the whole movement event can have in its space. The notion of energy lines through space, of 'cutting through space', has been widely used by Rosemary Butcher:

I think, what is physical space is this particular focus or force or energy ... that almost cuts the space through its energy and physicality. In itself is what you see the body about - what you see it doing...
I am talking about something that divides, cuts through and generates energy through space and that's what I call physicality in space...

Butcher 1995

For my purposes, the event should have what Carolee Schneemann calls 'visual intensity', "the logical outgrowth of a painter's sensibility" (Schneemann 1979 p32). The visual experience should generate physical responses in the spectators by bombarding their perception visually. Relevant to this is the performer's relationship with her/his surrounding space, her/his role as an integral part of the given environment. 'Environment' does not only refer to space, it can also refer to sound, general context, group of other performers etc. For instance, the integration of the performer(s) within a sound environment reveals the full possibilities of interaction with sound, of following it, ignoring it, attacking it and all the consequences that this approach can bring to movement itself or to the co-existence between improvised movement and improvised sound.

Movement improvisation can be also linked with the problems of presence/representation in the arts. In an attempt to push the movement towards a more presentational than representational state during the improvisation, I noticed my fascination with the 'undefinable'. This is a term borrowed from the vocabulary of other artists such as Rosemary Butcher, Deborah Hay or Lance Gries. From my point of view, a way to fight the tendency to become representational as a mover (i.e. imply stories, objects, follow narration, fall into miming) is to subvert representation during the moment it fixes itself. ³
On the whole, such an attempt while improvising ends up with a general atmosphere of something unidentifiable, yet concrete because of the accurate articulation in movement terms. I noticed that while engaging with such problems, I came across new movement experiences in terms of rhythms, use of energy, undiscovered possibilities of the body, emotional states and thoughts. An example of a method to study this problem is the attempt to follow different narratives at the same time, stories that interrupt each other or fight for co-existence.

On the other hand, my interest in the mechanics of movement concentrates on the idea of intense physical activity.

I tend to consider better a way of moving that reveals more movement possibilities of the human body. Why is this? Why do I like a more capable body?

18/7/95

For my purposes, high/intense physicality is an important aspect of the movement I am interested in producing. Nevertheless, it is still rather vague how this could be achieved without eliminating the possibilities for something new. Elaborate physical tasks require long periods of preparation which shape in particular ways (or vocabularies or technique tricks) the production of movement. I am exploring the possibilities of 'intense physical activity' through the study of 'out of the vertical axis of the body' positions, levels etc. It is a kind of pushing the edges of the balance of the body and keeping it under some kind of control within the destabilising effects of gravity in order to create sufficient momentum for the reaching of a new, 'out of the vertical axis' position and so on.

What I saw on the tape convinced me that there is much more to pursue as an effort to avoid the vertical position. I have to try to move swapping between the possible "out of the vertical" positions of the body within my personal space. Thus a task can be probably devised in this way. 12/7/95

The idea of the 'out of the vertical axis' can be better formulated now as an attempt to catch oblique axes of the body.

30/7/95

In discussing the discontinuous character of the practical project in relation to the logic which supports it, this chapter has introduced some forms of approaching the improvisational skill through practical research. In this way, a discussion has been started in relation to the unstable character of improvisational performance and can be further explored in the next chapter within the specific circumstances of creating an individual improvisational piece. This final stage of
the debate will bring to the fore issues of destabilisation in the wider context of postmodern dance.

NOTES

1. See Chapter 3 (3.1.1)

2. See note 3 of Chapter 5.

3. It seems that other artists who work as free improvisers with other media have often adopted a similar approach. The veteran improvising musician Derek Bailey (1992) describes the kind of work he did as member of the groups ‘Joseph Holbrooke’ and MIC (Music Improvisation Company) and as solo player.

   The first of the above groups existed from 1963 to 1966 and had three members: bass-player Gavin Bryars, percussionist Tony Oxley and Derek Bailey himself as a guitar player. The second one existed from 1968 to 1971 with Evan Parker in saxophones, Hugh Davies in live electronics, Jame Muir in percussion, Derek Bailey in guitar and for the last period Christine Jeffrey as voice.

   Some of the strategies they applied in ‘Joseph Holbrooke’ was to break down "the feeling of a regular pulse ... to move away from a set of harmonic sequence [through] modal playing ... [and], in order to escape the constant threat of the eternally suspended resolution we turned our attention to intervallic manipulation of pitch" (Bailey 1992 p87). As a consequence they

   turned to a more atonal, non-causal organisation of the pitch. Much of [their] language now was arrived at by the exclusion of the elements we didn’t want, which very often turned out to be mainstays of our previous tonal language, and by a much more consistent use of the more ‘dissonant’ intervals.

   Bailey 1992 p88

   Hugh Davies describes as ‘mutual subversion’, a method widely used in MIC according to which other player of the group "would react to you in a particular way, without necessarily playing the sort of thing that you might have expected them to play" (in Bailey, 1992, p 95). In relation to the type of work developed with MIC, Bailey also points out the importance of "the attitude of the player to [the] tactile element, to the physical experience of playing an instrument, to the ‘instrumental impulse’ which establishes much of the way he plays" (Bailey, 1992, p 97). Bailey explains the character of intense physical activity in playing an instrument and the way this can be relevant in free improvisation:

   Quick motion is not merely is not merely a means to a musical end but almost an end in itself which always connects with the fingers, the wrists and the whole of the body’ [as Curt Sachs defined in The Wellsprings of Music]. That would serve as a description of one of the underlying forces in free improvisation.

   Bailey 1992 p97
Chapter 9  The performer in front of the audience or a 'moment' of improvisational performance

9.1 The role of the intention at the pre-performance stage of the improvisational dance piece
9.2 The audience parameter, the element of dialogue and issues of subjectivity during the performance event
9.3 The post-performance stage of the improvisational piece
9.4 Conclusions

This chapter focuses on an alternative notion of the 'dance piece', one which emerges directly out of the unstable character of improvisational performance. The technique of instant composition is further explored within the task of producing distinct improvisational dance pieces. This discussion is illustrated by a simultaneous presentation of the last part of the practical project of this research, and includes the examination of three different stages of the improvisational piece: firstly, the pre-performance stage of the piece and the role of the improviser's intention within it, secondly, the performance event as a moment of dialogue crucially affected by the presence of the audience and, thirdly, the role of the post-performance stage of the piece as a destabilising factor of such processes as traditional methods of analysing, appreciating and evaluating dances.

9.1. The role of the intention at the pre-performance stage of the improvisational dance piece

A number of burning questions emerge as soon as the method of 'instant composition' is examined in the context of a specific dance piece. As explained in Chapter 1, the very use of this term emphasises the essential role of the decision-making process within improvisational dance. Chapter 5 (5.3.3) has introduced 'instant composition' in Julyen Hamilton's work; Hamilton seems to have coined the term by directly using it as a description of his approach to improvisational dance.

The resistance of this research to arrive at definitions or fixed models of improvisational performance in dance creates particular problems in relation to suggesting specific guidelines for the use of 'instant composition'. While no
'recipes' can be detected in terms of how various improvisers use 'instant composition', it is possible to discern particular ways in which these artists understand it. At the same time, there are many problems in identifying how this method is used in the making of distinct pieces of work. In this respect, the improvisational dance artist needs, firstly, to devise a personal approach to 'instant composition' and, secondly, to clarify how this can be used for the production of distinct pieces of work.

In improvisational work, it would be a solution to consider each performance event as a distinct piece, yet this is not always accurate. For instance, Julyen Hamilton's solo piece 40Monologues is one piece, yet with different versions. Each performance includes only three of these monologues and the piece can be considered complete only after the 40th monologue is presented to an audience (Hamilton 1995e). Although this piece is not necessarily an example of some form of model that Hamilton uses in his work, it could be argued that he tends to operate on the basis of a distinct concept that he creates for each piece. In this sense, the group piece Fabula, introduced in Chapter 6, is based on the idea of a journey through different stories "by creating scenes which pass from one to the next" (Hamilton 1996).

The practical project of this research explores an alternative solution: the possibility of approaching the problem of what constitutes the nature of the dance piece in improvisational performance from different perspectives which can also change through time. Each of these perspectives can become a clear 'moment' within a range of transformations within the improvisational work of a single artist, exposing her/his attitude towards the notion of the 'dance piece' during that particular moment.

The type of work underlying my first performance event is more a 'moment' than a 'model'. I consider this an instantiation of a variety of practical and theoretical procedures which met with each other at a particular point in time and space.

The 'moment' primarily consists of the idea of choice/selection. The task for the performer is to become fully aware of this possibility in the context of 'instant composition', to widen the range of options and develop the skill of making conscious choices.
Working for movement, the body must be exposed to diverse movement experiences so that these can become part of the performer's repertoire. This work includes participation in movement classes, improvising, the personal movement work of the performer with her/his body etc. This is the main part of the training but in order to reach the full potential of this possibility one has to have access to different body and movement concepts. This is the theoretical aspect of the work.

At the level of composition, the compositional ability must be kept fresh. This skill relies very little on intuition. Rather it requires specific work with existing compositional models, studying "how the world is composed" as Julyen Hamilton often says in his teaching. It can eventually lead to the point of questioning the nature of composition through the process of giving specific material form to the work; it seems to me, this is the approach Robert Dunn has suggested.

Working with composition can be undertaken through conceptual involvement, namely by analysing one's own work and other people's work, reading, thinking, assessing. But at the same time this can and should also emerge in the course of experiencing movement. By letting the body move, the opportunity to ask more questions arises. The ability to keep the questioning process open during the performance event seems crucial.

In an improvisational performance event with many participants, a range of compositional attitudes confront each other within a common space. They do not have to be the same, agreed or clarified. Rather trusting each other's abilities is the only common element amongst the participating artists which seems critical for the materialisation of the performance event. This is why, as Katie Duck (1996) says, forming a group with particular performers is half of the composition.

This brings to the discussion the problem of different levels of choices and their character as predetermined or non-predetermined. For my piece, I chose a particular musician and a particular visual artist. This means that I count on the particular kind of dialogue and the potential of this dialogue in the context of this trio. This is definitely a predetermined choice. On the other hand, we can have an agreement on a number of things that we would like to try during the piece. But in the context of open improvisation, this can operate only as starting point and should be rejected during the performance if it turns out to be inappropriate. Artists with skill and training in this area should primarily trust their perceptual abilities of the 'present moment' and introduce change at any point if this is necessary. The new element or idea should be treated with the same commitment. This is the risk of improvisation but this is also about undertaking the dialogue. In the end, this is probably a more manageable form of the rather elusive notion of 'touching the unknown'. This might be also close to what Hamilton (1995) calls transcendence, Paxton (1995) means by the state of the body going its own way and Foucault (1972) and Duck (1996) sees to as transformation.

8/5/96
The element of 'choice' comes again to the fore. This time decision-making procedures operate at the pre-performance stage in order to create a field of possibilities for a distinct improvisational piece. The practical project of this research has explored two areas in which pre-performance choices can take place. Firstly, specific studio work has been suggested within the prospect of widening the artist's pool of choices on the basis of her/his pool of preferences. Secondly, the moment of selecting improvisational artists for a performance event, either through individual or collective initiative, becomes a moment of major compositional decision-making in the sense that specific artistic possibilities become available as soon as this group of people go on stage together.

**Expanding the pool of choices (May 1996)**

By the end of the second phase of my practical project, my preferences were gravitating towards movement which is primarily anti-narrative and integrated in the given environment as an 'installation', movement which is non-referential with a tendency to what other artists such as Rosemary Butcher, Deborah Hay and Lance Gries call 'undefinable'. For my purposes, 'unidentifiable' is probably a better term because by pretending to re-present something that it does not, it subverts the notion of re-presentation. Such movement can be produced by means of specific avant-garde strategies, those of negation and subversion as well as through suggesting alternative solutions.

In the course of the 7.5 months (October 1995 - May 1996), between the end of the second phase of my practical project and my first performance event, I concentrated on experiments which dealt with such creative problems as:

1. the notion of disruption by means of switching on/off ideas, movement phrases, tasks etc
2. the possibility of following different narratives of space
3. the attempt to 'unstudy' expressive movement through subversion and negation
4. the possibility of installing and subverting the atmosphere of the music
5. manipulation of space parameters (floor, backdrop etc)

During the same period, namely the third phase of my practical project I also developed a strong preference for particular movement ideas or qualities, such as the use of unusual combinations of energy, the possibility of working with specific images, the production of movement as reaction rather than reflection, the possibility of creating emotion through movement and not the opposite, concentration on physical conceptions (such as the roundness of the torso), the potential of 'extension' and the idea of the 'different body' in relation to different frames of mind.
This list does not include everything I was interested in at the time nor all the areas I finally worked with. Rather it is an accumulation of points included in my notes and diaries which nonetheless constitutes the general atmosphere within which I continued my practical research during the third phase and which culminated with my first publicly performed event.

Some of the studio experiments I conducted during this period in order to approach some of the above goals were the following:

13/11/95, use of popular music as accompaniment with an effort to hearing it ‘differently’ (see excerpt 8)

13/11/95, concentrating on movement with the back following a workshop with Miranda Tufnell (see excerpt 9)

23/11/95, use of visualisation, work on selected images (see excerpt 10)

26/11/95, following the atmosphere of the music in terms of creating shapes, with music or after having listened to the mus (see excerpt 11)

15/12/95, study of ‘unidentifiable’ arms (see excerpt 12)

18/12/95, working with music I know from previous choreography (Mahler) (see excerpt 13)

21/12/95, use of Greek songs with ‘meaningful’ text (see excerpt 14)

27/12/95 study of extensions and ‘out-of-vertical-axis’ positions and special attention to movement habits, without sound (see excerpt 15)

18/1/96 collapsing/catching movement with the feeling of an imaginary partner based on Contact Improvisation movement experience (see excerpt 16)

11/4/96 use of table, falling, dropping, folding (see excerpt 17)

13/4/96 use of costume and improvised music (see excerpt 18)

17/4/96 outdoors settings (see excerpt 19)

During the same period, I attempted to approach the idea of composition by posing a number of questions, some of which were the following:

1. what follows what?
2. what co-exists with what?
3. what excludes what?
4. what prepares what?
5. what dominates what?
6. what undermines what?
7. what emphasises what?
8. how can I replace/remove these questions?

My approach developed as primarily Cagean and postmodern. John Cage (1968) undermines the fact that the work must have a reason. In this way, he has made acceptable works which operate within non-causal conceptions and which have been also produced through non-causal processes. One of my goals which has not been achieved is to combine improvisational performance with live chance procedures so that parts of the work could become randomly accessible to an invited audience. The latter should be mobile so that they could follow movement activities taking place in different spaces (probably located in one building) either directly or through live cameras.

The element of randomness can be related to the idea of the ‘present moment’ and the emphasis on the ‘temporary’ which is a major parameter in improvisation. By undermining the fact that the work has a preconceived concept visible in the way it evolves through time, my studio work operates on the basis of the strategy of negation. Nevertheless this is still a form of structuring the material.

On the other hand, structure is also a form of rhythm, both in terms of spatial and temporal elements. Robert Dunn (1987), who taught most of the Judson Theater group members the Cagean approach to art making, emphasised the advantages of analysis. By analysing a (creative) problem, structure becomes evident and a process of restructuring can be based on this material. Yet restructuring means reorganisation of the material, re-arrangement of the material according to a new rhythm. In improvisation, the element of analysis must be integrated in the process of ‘instant composition’ so that the artist/performer can base the decision-making process on her/his awareness of the existing structures at each moment of the performance.

My preferences in terms of creating structure include asymmetry and the sense of the ‘unresolved’, states of dialogue between different media (such as movement, sound and visual elements) or between the ‘internal’ and ‘external’ space of the performer.

**Forming the group: a compositional decision** (May 1996)

The idea of ‘instant composition’ was not specific enough to provide precise articulations through which the work could be materialised. This task became a major part of the third phase of the project; the development of a more definite attitude was accelerated by a major decision I made during
this period, which was to proceed with more interdisciplinary work, namely working improvisationally with musicians and visual artists. I was hoping to introduce in my work the challenge of crossing over with other artistic disciplines, while at the same time keeping open the possibility of working separately with the element of dance. This very specific decision affected in particular ways the type of choices I finally made at the level of composition.

Led by the circumstances, namely the fact that I was regularly practising with musicians and I had chosen to perform with musician Sylvia Hallett and visual artist Gina Southgate in a space primarily considered as a music venue, I conceived the character of my contribution in a very 'musical' way. Quite early, I decided to treat myself as an instrument. This was an idea I was already working with by participating in a weekly improvisation session with musicians.

For the performance, I added one more element, also inspired by the context of the improvising music scene: the idea of the ‘movement agenda’. In the British improvising music scene, most of the musicians become ‘metamusicians’ in the way Prevost (1995) introduces the term, namely they explore their instruments beyond the traditional ways of using them, sometimes adding parts to them or altering them, or even constructing new instruments. In this way, when they participate in improvisations, each of these musicians brings a different sound ‘agenda’ based on the explorations they have made about the possibilities of their instruments. They deliver this material as an on-going dialogue with each other on the basis of their individual theories of composition.

Within this perspective, I saw myself as somebody who would add to this dialogue of ‘music agendas’ my ‘movement agenda’ constructed by a selection of movement ideas I was particularly attracted to working with at the time. For example:

1. falls
2. short sequences of dancing steps with pedestrian intervals
3. throwing weight with the body as a whole or through the use of body parts
4. suspension
5. combinations of throwing weight with suspension
6. uneven rhythmical structures of long duration
7. turning movements with released upper body and ending with suspension
8. unusual combinations of ways of using the energy

The importance of locating the movement in space with an awareness of the character of this environment was an additional parameter. Insofar as the environment of this piece was meant to include both sound and visual elements, I was further tempted to work with the possibility of integrating those into my dancing in selected occasions. The two other members of the group, Hallett and Southgate, would be responsible for the construction of this ‘audio-visual’ space in a way which had not been discussed in much
detail in advance. Hallett primarily works with violin and voice but she could also use some of her prepared objects, such as bowed bicycle wheel or saw, which present both a sonic and visual interest. Southgate started her career in the improvising music scene as a painter working on stage in real time during the improvised music concerts. She gradually expanded this work three-dimensionally and concentrated on building and demolishing installations, integrating herself to the action as a performance artist. These explorations also revealed to her the sonic potential of manipulating her diverse range of materials and she gradually included in the work a variety of found objects for their ‘audio-visual’ qualities. Finally, she became involved in also playing traditional percussion instruments, such as congas.

For me, the main challenge of this work was the possibility of transformation of this complex space. I chose two ways to approach the problem: on the one hand I could work carefully with how and where my movement was located in space in relation to how and where sound was produced in space. On the other, I could develop strategies of functional interaction with the three-dimensionality of the set and the large number of mobile objects that Southgate could make available to me.

**Practising with musicians**  (May 1996)

Three months before the performance, I started participating in an open music group, the members of which practise free improvisation once a week led by vocalist, keyboard player and tap dancer Maggie Nicols. This experience emphasised further the importance of the use of space in my work.

Having the opportunity to move in a room organised without any sense of an ‘upstage’ or ‘downstage’ arrangement, and in which the musicians were placed in a more or less circular fashion, I realised my need to transform this space in ways which were more relevant to me. I developed patterns of pulling the emphasis towards different areas, rotating my notion of ‘upstage’ and ‘downstage’ around the room and occasionally treating some parts of the group as an audience rather than as participants. In addition, I had the opportunity of literally working with the sound as a spatial element, since the extent to which I was able to hear particular instruments varied according to my distance from these musicians.

This work offered me the possibility to treat myself as a musical instrument, participating through motion in a sound space, and developing methods of interaction with the sound. Occasionally, I worked on following or subverting particular musical atmospheres but primarily, I concentrated on supporting, negating or ignoring rhythms, and other musical patterns, alternating between paying attention to selected instruments, introducing new patterns to the group and juxtaposing the development of my movement ideas to the development of musical ideas which was taking place around me. Finally I was consciously trying to avoid the cliche’ of ‘interpreting’ the music with movement.
In this loose space, the idea of entrance and exit became also very challenging together with the fact that sometimes there was not ‘enough’ space for me to dance in (within the preconception that dance is about the ability to expand in space). Moreover, the floor was not a ‘dance floor’, yet it was possible to dance on with bare feet. On few occasions I also used different shoes (trainers, high heel shoes etc) to study how the overall movement was affected and what was possible in terms of working with balances, turns, jumps etc.

In these sessions, the degree of interaction between the musicians and myself varied greatly and depended upon the synthesis of the group. On rare occasions some musicians moved in the space; more often I played percussion which was very useful as I realised the different type of concentration required by an improvising musician.

In approaching a ‘moment’ of improvisational dance by means of expanding the pool of choices and making decisions about the synthesis of the group, the improviser defines the grounds of the work. A specific attitude is constructed and a domain within which choice will be exercised gradually appears. This method aims at shaping the potential of the improvisational piece rather than defining the limits of the exploration. It is about creating specific possibilities rather than offering guidelines.

The concept of the ‘thinking body’ becomes very relevant in this instance, almost in a metaphorical sense. The improvising dance artist, who works in this context, can make choices across a full range of intellectual and physical parameters. The ‘thinking’ body of the improviser can make suggestions across the full spectrum of movement concepts, compositional and general attitudes to the work. The concept of the intention is pertinent in this case, not only because of its non-dichotomous character (as has been explained in Chapter 8, 8.7) but because it can accommodate the complexity of levels at which choice takes place.

In this way, there is the possibility of grasping the particular character of the improvisational piece at this pre-performance state. Although the piece has no material form at this stage, a field of possibilities has been defined by means of the intention of the improviser. It is possible to argue then that, at the pre-performance stage, the nature of the piece resides within this intention. Moreover, if the intention remains the same, the field of possibilities remains the same and therefore, the piece does too.
In group pieces though, where the work emerges from the dialogue of a number of ‘performing’ contributions, at the pre-performance stage, there are as many pieces as there are contributors. In addition, that an improvising group remains the same does not necessarily mean that the intentions of all the performers remain the same. The piece might be the same or different according to the attitudes of individual contributors.

9.2. The audience parameter, the element of dialogue and issues of subjectivity during the performance event

The already unstable nature of the improvisational piece is further destabilised during the performance event in two ways: by means of the presence of the audience and through dispersion of the improviser’s dancing subjectivity. As described in Chapter 7, the fact that the crucial factor for the materialisation of the piece is the presence of an ‘audience’, radically changes the character of the relationship between the audience and the piece: the former becomes integral part of the latter.

At this stage, the element of the intention of the performer loses significance as a major parameter of the character of the improvisational piece. Within its capacity as a non-hierarchical formation, the piece is materialised as a simultaneity of diverse perceptions: those of the contributors and those of the members of the audience, in equal terms. These perceptions confront each other within a dialogue and the piece unfolds through time on the basis of this exchange. This is why, during the performance event, what constitutes the improvisational piece is the nature of the dialogue between all the elements of the work, namely the interaction among performers, members of the audience and performance conditions (space, duration etc.).

Choice is exercised both from the position of the performers and of the members of the audience. The performers operate on the basis of their individual intentions, as does the audience. The intention of a member of the audience resides in her/his perspective in approaching and experiencing the piece. And although the same argument might be used for any other case of performed work including those produced by means of traditional choreographic practices, in improvisational dance,
the presence of the audience is the only parameter which determines the materialisation of the work.

Cooper (1992) discusses the difference between the role of the ‘plan’ in visual arts, and the role of the score in performing arts. In the first case the ‘plan’ is "a plan for the creation of the work", in the second, "the notations specify not how the work is to be created, but instead, how the created work is to be instanced" (Cooper 1992 p321). It is worth noting that in improvisational performance both processes take place at once. Because the concept of the piece (or better, the intention of the performer) also fulfils the role of the score in this case, the piece can be considered as both already created before the performance and ‘instanced’ during it.

Because of the importance of the element of dialogue in improvisational performance, there are implications in the area of subjectivity. In traditional choreographic practices, the choreographer is usually presupposed as a unified subject. The dance piece derives from the coherence of her/his particular position, a position located in space and time on the basis of specific experience and ways of understanding in the area of dance making. This position becomes the source of a particular kind of meaning, which, by means of the choreographer’s specific choices within the medium of dance, is presented to an audience. By contrast, in improvisational performance meaning emerges through the shared act of a group of subjectivitities which are those of the performers and the members of the audience.

Indeed the desire of the improvisational performer to present a process rather than a product to the audience is in itself a form of meaning. Yet, in prioritising the element of dialogue, this aesthetic choice becomes more of a statement, and a politicised one, in the sense that it aims directly at changing the audience’s assumptions about what an artistic product might be. In this way, improvisational work seeks its completeness at the level of signification within the very act of being performed in front of an audience; this is where it draws its ideological character as discussed in Chapter 7. In this way, the emphasis on the element of dialogue implies the crucial role of a multiplicity of subjectivities (including those of the audience) in the production of meaning. It is possible to consider this aspect of
improvisational work as the source of its intersubjective character. Yet, further research is needed in this area to unveil the specific conditions of this possibility.

At this point it is worth noting that the element of dialogue becomes absolutely crucial in the constitution of the character of the improvisational piece during the performance event, because this multiplicity of subjectivities operates within a commonality of space and time parameters. It is impossible to argue that this dialogue also exists at pre-performance stage, because there is no common space and time component which brings together the intentions of the contributors amongst themselves as well as in relation to those of the members of the audience.

As Chapter 7 (7.2) also discusses, the presence of the audience directly affects the decision-making processes of the performers. A sympathetic, hostile, curious or knowledgeable audience can drastically alter the form of the work.

My interpretation of what I think they are expecting from me changes what I do as well ... you do have to judge what people are able to accept and pick up.

Hallett 1996/i

This is a major area of difference between improvisational and choreographed performance and carries an inherent element of danger in the practice of improvisation. The performer can be easily distracted or seriously disoriented in relation to her/his ‘agenda’ for the piece because of the reactions of a particular audience.

To confront this problem, one is not necessarily forced into retreating from the idea of improvisation as performance mode. Developing further her/his perceptual skills, the performer gradually learns to include the parameter of the audience in the ever changing environment of improvisation and devises methods of coping with it, without losing contact with her/his ‘agenda’.

Yet, in improvisational performance, the parameter of the presence of the audience, during the decision-making process, raises further issues of subjectivity within the very character of this type of work. It is possible that the artist exercises her/his ability to choose on the basis of two criteria. Firstly, according to her/his experience of the ‘present moment’ which offers guidelines in relation to how the artist can contribute to the overall condition of the dance as this appears during that
particular moment. Secondly, the artist might choose from the position of an imaginary audience, something which plays the role of an external 'eye' which follows the dance without direct involvement.

This second element is not exclusive to improvisational performance. Artists can make choices at different stages of the creative process in traditional choreographic practices by similarly taking into account the suggestions of this external 'eye'. Nevertheless, the crucial difference in improvisational performance is that this happens during the dance. This is why the performing subjectivity of the improviser can be considered as dispersed. It appears that the ability of the performer to operate within this duality becomes a crucial parameter of the improvisational skill as far as it provides safety valves against the possibility of self-indulgence within the moment of choosing.

You don't need to be involved, because then you have to be able to take it somewhere else ... I was calling it my 'bird' which is a dream image that can see everything and makes no value judgements. The bird can see because it is not attached. It's not stuck with this fantastic music ... you can break it any moment ... Because I am standing here it doesn't mean that I can’t go over there ... If you get stuck the bird is able to take you out ... I don’t see myself from out there but from up here ... Sometimes I can carry on with something for ever - and then I think I’d better stop - this could go on for ever but it's not appropriate for this occasion.

Hallett 1996/i

There are further issues in relation to the performing subjectivity of the improvisational dance artist. In dance, the dancing subjectivity of the performer is constituted within the coherence of an attitude to the act of dancing. A unified subject is presupposed, located in space and time, by means of specific dance training and other dance experiences. It is possible to consider movement habits in dance as a form of dancing subjectivity which has been trapped in fixed positions.

Nevertheless, in improvisational dance, destabilising factors affect the coherence of her/his subjectivity. This problem can be re-formulated in two ways. According to the first one, the dancing subjectivity of the improviser cannot be considered as fixed because it is a fundamental aspect of its character to be in constant flux, namely to be constituted through and during the improvisational dance. Even after the end of the improvisation, this subjectivity cannot be
considered as fixed because there is no space for it to be constituted as such, since there is no longer an act of improvisation within which it can be located.

The second approach, based on the idea that the mechanism of decision-making presupposes a certain type of coherent subjectivity, supports the idea of 'temporary subjectivities'. Thus improvisation is a process which operates within the constitution of a series of temporary subjectivities which are not necessarily coherent with each other within a unified whole. Thus a process of installing and subverting possible subject positions might become visible within this perspective.

The very concept of the 'different body' is an additional destabilising factor within improvising. Yet, the fact that the 'different body' acquires temporary instantiations through decision-making processes tends to the reconstitution of stabler forms of subjectivity.

The improviser can also consciously use various strategies to affect the state of her/his dancing subjectivity. For instance, such techniques as the Alexander Technique, Laban Movement Analysis (LMA) and Body Mind Centering (BMC) which can be used against developing 'habits' as explained in Chapter 5, have a destabilising effect for the dancing subjectivity of the improviser. As much as aspects of the 'different body' and the use of the Alexander Technique, LMA and BMC affect the dance during the moment of its materialisation (namely during the performance event), the element of the presence of the audience remains a crucial parameter according to which the dance is constituted as a dialogue by means of the dispersed subjectivity of the improviser.

In addition, the audience factor can be taken into account in a way which further clarifies the field of possibilities for a specific piece. More specifically, to confront a particular audience on the basis of its history as such is to provide aesthetic positions through the piece in relation to an already existing 'agenda' by means of previous forms of improvisational work which have been presented to this audience.
The special character of an audience (May 1996)

Another problem with my first publicly performed piece was the character and history of the events regularly taking place in the particular venue, which I did not want to ignore. The performance took place at the ‘upstairs’ space of the pub ‘Dolly Fossetts’ situated in London in the Kentish Town area on the 21st of May 1996 as part of a mixed programme of improvisations, which included a quartet of British and German improvisers (electric guitar, trombone, extended drums and saxophone) and a German duo (saxophone and voice). This space is regularly used as a venue for a diverse range of activities such as a cinema club and music clubs. One of three clubs is called ‘Club Orange’ and takes place every Tuesday as one of the main London forums for improvising musicians.

I gradually realised that I was trying to take into consideration the particular type of audience who were expected to attend the presentation of my work. I discerned three major elements in relation to which I had to adopt particular attitudes; not in the sense that I had to follow similar performance practices but in the sense that I had to provide a clear position in relation to them.

The first one was the fact that these musicians (‘meta-musicians’ in Prevost’s (1995) terms) primarily use ‘extended’ instruments. I decided I was not planning to work with my body within their notion of ‘extension’, namely by adding to my movement a compulsory use of other objects, except on the occasions where it would seem to me absolutely necessary to use Southgate’s materials. The second characteristic is the intense physicality through which these musicians play their instruments: they are passionate, absolutely absorbed by this activity, almost theatrical in their efforts to use their ‘extended’ instruments in the most unusual ways. For me, this operates as a strong spatial element providing interesting energy fluctuations, and reminds me of the potential to work with energy through space so that travelling points of focus can emerge. The last element I had to face was the introverted character of playing those instruments; these musicians achieve high concentration to the sound by minimising their involvement with visual stimuli.

Consequently, this results in very limited visual connection amongst them and almost complete lack of eye contact with the audience. I decided I could challenge myself in this area by introducing the performance practice of confronting the audience with direct eye contact. In dance, using the eyes either as focus or gaze is a major parameter which affects the production of meaning. Operating in a clearly music space and having directly borrowed from music a number of crucial elements, I decided I could try to bring into this dominantly musical space, a new element directly drawn from my practical knowledge as a dancer.

The intention of the piece was thus constituted within the general guidelines that the audience would be more or less the usual audience of an improvised music event, that is, other improvising musicians, sometimes with their partners or maybe friends and a very small number of non-musicians who
are in connection with this context mostly because of its political character in terms of non-conformity and avant-gardism.

In the end, my performance event was also joined by an additional number of people (8) who were my friends and who would not normally be part of a traditional London audience of improvised music. Nevertheless, the members of this group were more or less connected with the event through their professional link with music or dance, (movement) improvisation and visual arts. All of them white, Europeans and Americans, middle class and professionally involved with such domains as teaching or studying in higher institution, publishing, practising medicine or an art form. Their reaction to this form of work, which they had not seen before was varied and unexpected. On the whole it seems that they were the only ones who mostly enjoyed the comic aspect of the whole event.

In improvisational performance, the traditional role of the audience as observer of a finished product is destabilised. The audience is never invited to experience something complete; rather they constitute the crucial factor so that, when brought into the picture, the whole attempt reaches a certain degree of completeness. Thus the audience of the improvisational performance becomes an integral part of the work ultimately affecting from this distinct position the dialogue taking place amongst performers and other performance elements. To pursue this dialogue with commitment is the main responsibility of the performers and it involves a much wider range of skills than being competent in creative solutions with a number of tasks chosen as the focus of a given piece.

When it works, it is a journey, a kind of mythical one. You start at a point of here and now and if you take the audience with you you went to the forest, deep dark forest ... good improvisation really takes you through this journey and you can transcend through that - it becomes something else and then you come back to reality ... the expectation from an audience is that you are going to transform their perception in some way so that they come out seeing the world differently.

Hallett 1996/i

9.3 The post-performance stage of the improvisational piece

At post-performance stage, the piece rediscovers its fragmented character of the pre-performance stage, for a similar reason; after the performance event, there is no commonality of space and time within which the dialogue of the different
perspectives can take place. Nevertheless, these perspectives do operate independently of each other, not only within the performers' different perceptions of the performance event but also within new spaces where further activities in relation to the piece (such analysis, appreciation and assessment) might take place.

Firstly, as far as the performers are concerned, the piece is constituted by means of their memory (both intellectually and physically) and in relation to their individual intentions. At the post-performance stage, as there is no common space and time parameter for these individual perspectives to come together in a dialogue, the 'piece' appears again as a fragmented formation. Improvisational work further manifests, in this way, its discontinuous character in relation to the two previous stages. Nevertheless, this new fragmentation emancipates the various perceptions of the piece from each other and, in interdisciplinary work, the individual contributions of the diverse 'performing' elements almost become self-sufficient.

For instance, a dance performer with clear and strong intentions almost creates an independent piece of work; the rest of the piece operates as context. And similarly, for the rest of the contributors. This perspective does not represent separatist attitudes in the interpretative methods of interdisciplinary work. Rather, it emphasises the special character of improvisational work, in which the notion of collective authorship does not emerge as the result of any common intention. In contrast, it is the strength and completeness of each individual contribution which makes possible the non-hierarchical character of this collective authorship which ultimately operates on the basis of trust in each other's intentions.

What is interesting is the differences in styles, approaches to improvisation and to the instrument. If you work from a position of strength ... and do not get drawn into 'you've got to be the other' -like somebody else - then it will work... when we started working together [with the ARC improvising music trio] we were more tentative. Now we trust each other more and go into an area and explore it.

Hallett 1996/i

Secondly, the special character of improvisational performance poses a number of fundamental problems in relation to such post-performance endeavours as analysis, appreciation and assessment. Before any of these activities can be undertaken, an understanding of what constitutes the improvisational piece is essential.
If I know it is improvised, I listen to it differently, I listen for different things. So if we have three musicians and they hit a chord at the same time and then they do another one, it's fantastic! Not only they all hit it at the same time but they registered it ... It's also the thinking process ... This in a composition, it would be nothing - it would be very contrived ... These processes bring out completely different things ... what you have to appreciate is how it is working - it's not about self-indulgence ... how people deal with things is extraordinary ... For years I used to struggle with the fact that I am a composer and an improviser at the same time. Now I think there are some things that are appropriate some times and some things that are appropriate other times - and it really doesn't matter to me. The process gives a different result.

Hallett 1996/i

According to Adshead's (1988) model of dance analysis, the task of analysing dances includes a descriptive part at the beginning and some form of evaluation at the end. Between the two there is an interpretation, the most creative part of the attempt, where a form of theory is produced about the dance. The description largely relies upon the perspective, the tools and the aims of the researcher, in other words, her/his possibilities, options, potential and reasons for analysing. The interpretation becomes the specific use of all these elements. The evaluation though is directly linked to the nature of the context which gave birth to the dance. As Pauline Hodgens notes,

The aim is to point out the aspects of the culture which are the source of the relevant values in relation to which dances are evaluated, and to identify the kind of thing that is valued in the context of dance.

in Adshead 1988 p90

The descriptive part presupposes the awareness of the context of the dance, yet it can always remain within (and most probably cannot even escape from) the assumptions and conceptualisations of the observer; the interpretation is a specific instance of conceptualising the dance, articulating this theoretically. Yet, the evaluation makes no sense outside the conceptualisations of those who made the dance and their value system. Robert Dunn comes to mind: "If we are wishing to perform our improvisations ... we must first define our own considerations about performance" (1987 p31). There is much relevance in extending Dunn's position.
in relation to the kind of value system within which improvisational performance in
dance has been located through the practice.

As Katie Duck says, her work demands "that you are 'on change', any
preconceptions about performance shouldn't be there" (1996/i). Amongst others,
Duck has been primarily concerned with changing the "concert hall", implementing
her wish to change the audience's assumptions about what they expect to find in
such places. As has been argued in the Chapter 7, improvisational performance in
dance becomes political at the level of signification. It uses a number of
avant-garde strategies to change the audience's assumptions about what a dance
piece might be.

To take for granted then that the purpose of the improviser is to change the
audience's assumptions about the possible forms of theatre dance within dance
postmodernism means that the character of the value system which prioritises the
notion of change must also be addressed. Furthermore, in response to Dunn's
position that "considerations about performance" must be done by the dance maker
before anything else, the problem of the necessity of a social context which validates
these considerations is an additional area of enquiry.

From a postmodern point of view, the element of 'value' has been much
debated; often it becomes very problematic to express opinions about values. The
question of 'who speaks on behalf of whom' is critical in this case, since the position
of the observer might be antagonistic to the one of the observed. The element of
power comes back to the discussion and Michel Foucault could be quoted again in
various stages of this argument.

The strategy of evaluating the dance only according to the parameters defined
by its own context attempts to redistribute power relationships from within the
domain of dance theory. Those on behalf of whom others have frequently spoken
in the past can thus validate the consequences of their choices on the basis of
appropriate criteria. This part of the task faces a number of problems as far as
improvisational performance in dance is concerned.

In the way this type of work has been presented, it seems that if 'change' is
achieved both in the piece itself and from the point of view of the audience, the
purpose of the work has been fulfilled. Nevertheless, the artist is the only one who
has a full sense of the 'change' s/he wants to achieve and can probably evaluate, from within, the 'change' in the piece, in a way that nobody else could do from the outside. On the other hand, the members of the audience are the only ones who have experienced the process of 'changing' their assumptions and the artist cannot make the evaluation on their behalf according to her/his standards. Thus, the obvious common ground between audience and performers remains the fact that such work "is [at least] happening". As Duck says:

What I find political is that you are there with your body involved in front of people, the political is the fact that it's happening, not something I say or I do ... I think the body is interesting ... I feel the whole 20th century has been such a tough thing on the body.

Duck 1996/i

With this notion of the political and the emphasis on the body, the argument comes back to Foucault full circle, while it appears that analysing improvisational dance becomes problematic beyond the stage of interpretation.

Taking into account the controversial character of analysing improvisational work, the specific piece included in the practical project of this research can be approached analytically in a variety of ways. The first crucial point in this enterprise is to point out that the relationship of the analyst to the piece significantly affects the nature of the analysis. If the analyst happens to be one of the participants, this analysis becomes part of the improvisational process, in the sense that it informs the improver about the quality of her/his improvisational skill. With the assumption that the performer will take into account this information to improve her/his standard of the improvising, analysis contributes to the development of the skill. It follows that the focus of this analysis is shaped on the basis of the performer's intentions for this piece. In this way, this analytic work also becomes a form of assessment from the perspective of the performer, namely an assessment of how far her/his intentions have been fulfilled. In the context of the interdisciplinary character of the performance event included in the practical project of this research, the 'dancing' contribution can be analysed and assessed separately from the perspective of the improvisational dance artist.

To analyse this piece from the position of the observer became thus a challenging experience for me and significantly contributed to my efforts of
working further theoretically with my approach. Some of my major areas of inquiry were:

1. The process of making choices under the pressure of a present audience and the way particular movement ideas prevail from a large pool of movement experiences, given the specific parameters of space and time in which the event takes place.

2. The idea of transformation firstly in terms of space and secondly between different elements, such as kinds of movement, states of theatricality and abstraction, dance sequences and pedestrian movement, different media. The latter was also about exploring areas of crossing over between movement, sound and visual elements.

3. The problem of composition as an element which can be conceptualised in different ways and as an area where a process of interrogation can be kept alive.

The analysis of the piece as this has been recorded on video revealed the following points:

1. My range of movement choices was not particularly wide, which was partly due to the lack of free space and the complexity of the available space. On the other hand, some of my attempts to integrate visual and sonic objects to my movement were successful. In particular, my contribution to the very last section of the piece (39:00 - 42:08) was a well balanced double action treating movement and sound under equal terms.

2. My concept of transformation has been approached in a number of ways not all them equally effective. Firstly, the objective of transforming the space energetically through movement has been constantly pursued throughout the piece but not with enough clarity. On the other hand, some of my moments of transformation between theatricalised and abstract scenes have been effective to the point of radically affecting the development of the next section of the piece. In particular, on one of the occasions when I come back to my pattern of following my finger (26:50), Sylvia probably recognises the possibility for a new story and abandons her own sonic space to follow me with a romantic dreamy tune.

3. My interest in transformation is not irrelevant to my compositional strategies. It seems though that my main tendency was to attempt transformation with very abrupt, almost violent changes. In addition, my major emphasis on transformation often guided me into quick changes therefore preventing the possibility of focusing on one element for a longer period of time and developing the material. On the other hand, observing the piece as a whole, I realised that my contribution offered an intermediate possibility between the two extreme approaches undertaken by the other two performers. Hallett spent very long periods of time with the same instrument sometimes
exploring very narrow areas of their sonic possibilities. In contrast, Southgate mainly operated through quick changes from one object or element to the next, some of which she only used once, for a single sound or an isolated, momentary visual effect. It is probably only the very last section (39:00 - 42:08) which kept us all focused on a single idea for a reasonably long period of time.

Facing the problem that my work with transformation primarily depended upon the use of abrupt changes, my theoretical explorations of the notion of composition were significantly facilitated. I realised that even within the prospect of transformation, one can vary the use of compositional choices. Structures can be supported, developed, subverted or even ignored within the major perspective of transformation, provided that there is a tool available for understanding these structures. It seems that Robert Dunn's analytic approach can be very relevant in this attempt. In improvisational performance, though, the process of analysis is an integral part of the process of 'instant composition'. Appropriate training of perceptual and physical abilities assists the performer in coping with the process and requirements of analysis.

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If the analyst attempts to approach the improvisational piece of this research as a whole from the position of an external observer, the relationship between the theoretical context which gave birth to this piece and the piece itself has to be taken into account. This endeavour also provides some guidelines in relation to how the piece could be assessed on the basis of whether the purposes set by the research have been fulfilled.

The tendency to analyse the piece as a reflection of the theoretical debate manifests a hierarchical understanding of the problem. According to this position, it appears that the piece is justified as part of the research only if it can operate as a metaphor for the argument or as an example of theory articulated through the artistic medium. Yet, this perspective brings to mind Carroll's (1995) attitude in relation to the theoretical aspect of avant-garde art, introduced in Chapter 7. Carroll maintains that avant-garde works "are not to be compared to full theories but only to the assertion of general propositions" (1995 p5) and, furthermore, that they are not even "an example of theory ... they [are] rather an allusion to or an emblem of theory" (1995 p11). This interpretation places theory in a privileged position in such a way that practice emerges by reference to theory.

As explained in Chapter 7, this opinion underestimates the possibility of both different relationships between theory and practice and different roles that the
concept of 'theory' can play in different contexts. In the case of this research, the fact that involvement with theoretical material has been used as part of the creative process does not necessarily mean that this theoretical consideration should be traceable within the meaning of the piece. This is necessary only if the subject matter of the piece focusses on these theories, in other words, if the piece is 'about' these theories. By contrast, if theory is used as part of the creative process, it becomes one parameter amongst others which stimulates a number of transformations, the last of which becomes the materialisation of a particular work.

In this way, this research suggests that by introducing theoretical procedures into the creative process the attitude to this process might change. Consequently, the character of the practical steps involved in the creative process might also change. This is the main contribution of the 'theory' to the piece which has been presented in detail throughout Chapters 8 and 9.

In this instance, another example of the discontinuous character between the theory and practice of improvisational performance in dance becomes available. Part 2 of the research explored a theoretical aspect of improvisational performance. It has been argued that studio experiments presented in Part 3 relate to this theoretical construct in a discontinuous way. Similarly, the final result of this practical project, the improvisational performance event, does not manifest causal or linear links with the theoretical material which has supported its birth. On the other hand, there is an obvious "overlap of concerns" between the character of the argument and the nature of the piece, as Hutcheon could have said (1988 p14). This overlap can be noticed in the emphasis given to such elements as discontinuity and disruption, non- hierarchy and transformation both in the theoretical argument and the artistic product.

Hutcheon provides a different perspective, introduced in Chapter 1, which can accommodate the special problems of this discontinuous relationship, which is nevertheless still a relationship: "the interaction of theory and practice in postmodernism is a complex one of shared responses to common provocations" (1988 p14). On the basis of this suggestion the similarities between the nature of the piece and the theoretical considerations of this research can be discussed with more relevance. Under Hutcheon's guidelines these similarities are not an outcome
of linearity or hierarchy between theory and practice, they simply manifest an "overlap of concerns" (1988 p14).

In addition, this position is a non-dichotomous one, in the sense that it does not polarise the relationship between theory and practice. In this respect, it brings to mind the problem of the dichotomous understanding of the relationship between movement concepts and compositional approaches in improvisational dance, which has been briefly discussed in Chapters 4 and 6. Within this framework, if certain movement concepts are only relevant in the context of particular compositional approaches, then it could be argued that when theory becomes part of the artistic process, only certain aesthetic choices can be relevant in the context of particular theoretical attitudes to the artistic product. Further research is required in this area to reveal the specific conditions of this claim.

A videotaped version of the improvisational performance event of the research (excerpt 20) is included on the videotape (Appendix II) accompanying this thesis. In addition, Appendix I provides a 'descriptive analysis' of the piece. The problems of analysing a personal process have been pointed out in the introduction of Part 3. In this respect, this descriptive work has taken place from my own perspective as a dance performer and researcher who is more competent both theoretically and practically with the medium of dance rather than with practices manifested in other art forms such as music and the visual arts.

An emphasis on discontinuity and disruption becomes evident in the practical project of this research throughout the whole period preceding the performance as has been described in this Chapter. Discontinuity and disruption appear in various experiments which deal with generation of movement (such as the search for some form of representational movement which is, at the same time, unidentifiable) or the relationship between sound and movement. The overall Cagean approach to structure and composition adopted for the 'moment' of this improvisational performance is also an avant-garde strategy of negation and disturbance.

Discontinuity also becomes an aspect of the piece. Sound, movement and visual elements have been placed together in a common space and time. The interaction between these media is unavoidably discontinuous, in the sense that they operate on the basis of different practices and there has been no pre-performance
work to bridge these gaps smoothly. At the same time this co-existence is also non-hierarchical; in the context of this improvisational work there is no dominant art form nor a leading one which the others follow.

Disruption is also one of the intentions of the dancing contribution. The way the dance operates in the interdisciplinary context of the visual and sonic character of the piece is primarily discontinuous in the sense that it seeks to disturb existing structures; it seeks to subvert particular moods (see in particular 3:40, 7:42, 16:15, 16:24, 21:47, 26:50, 29:32). In this sense, the dancing contribution is particularly geared towards possibilities for transformation as discussed in detail in the descriptive analysis of the piece included in Appendix I.

In this way the focus on transformation within the study of improvisational performance in dance as discourse parallels the interest in transformation manifested within the perspective of the dancing contribution in this piece. There are many elements available to be transformed within the piece, nevertheless the focus remains on space, both visual and sonic. The ‘descriptive analysis’ of the piece becomes the narrative of the constant effort of the dancing contribution to ‘fill the empty spaces’ (see 2:30, 4:16, 7:55, 12:50).

A similar emphasis on the element of space is shared by the music contribution of the piece, namely the musician Sylvia Hallett. Hallett has repeatedly collaborated with choreographers throughout her career both in improvisational contexts with Miranda Tufnell (in the late 1980s, early 1990s) and the group ‘Still Mauve’ (late 1970s and early 1980s) as well as providing music scores for choreographers such as Emilyn Claid (Hallett 1996/i). She conceptualises the relationship of music and dance as a relationship between ‘energies in space’.

Ultimately, it is about energy, whether it is dance or music, it doesn’t make any difference ... it is about interaction of energies. I think when I work with dancers I am not looking at what they are doing. I’m sort of looking somewhere three feet away so that I am aware of the energy of what they are doing and I am not getting too literal ... What is interesting with musicians moving in space is not how the musician moves but the relationship that suddenly you become like a prop, or a sculpture in the space. You are something that defines the space ... that space is no longer blank, it has this point in it, you’ve got this tension, it creates very different kind of energy.

Hallett 1996/i
It is possible to pursue this analysis further in terms of how improvisational material is transformed moving from one medium to another or how, from the perspective of the 'audio-visual' contribution to the piece (namely the work of the visual artist), everyday objects are permanently transformed from sonic to visual and vice versa (Southgate 1996/i). It is also possible to mention the non-hierarchical relationship between traditional musical instruments and found objects such as a bicycle wheel which supported the music contribution on equal terms. Finally, the transformation of the act of playing an instrument through the body of the dancer and the transformation of the act of dancing through the body of a visual artist can be also emphasised (see 23:50 and 39:00 to 42:08).

The list of similar observations could continue, especially if the piece is examined in great detail. Nevertheless, in the context of this research such detailed analysis is not necessary, in as much as this piece is not expected to reflect or justify the theoretical claims. This position emancipates both the artistic project and the theoretical endeavour from each other. In this way, the artistic product is allowed to be constituted within its own terms and not as a reflection of something else and the theory does not seek to be justified by means of an example. Nevertheless, in the context of this research, the reason why these two have been juxtaposed was the prospect of achieving a specific learning task: the skill of performing improvisationally. This is the special framework within which the discontinuous relationship between the theory and practice of improvisational performance in dance can be placed and subsequently assessed.

Evaluating the piece on the basis of the requirements of an artistic task does not coincide with evaluating the piece in relation to the learning task set by this research. Using artistic criteria, which have emerged from the very character of the creative enterprise means evaluating the use of artistic means. By contrast, assessing this dance from the perspective of a learning activity means assessing the fulfilment of the requirements of an educational task.

In this sense, because of the fact that this learning skill has been defined in relation to the use of a number of theoretical tools alongside the artistic means, the assessment must be made in relation to both. In cases of purely artistic tasks the evaluation can be undertaken by a member of the audience. By contrast, in the case
of this research the evaluator must also be familiar with the theoretical parameters of the task. At the same time, the work must be also assessed from the perspective of an artistic product, in the sense that it also operates fully at the artistic level.

At the post-performance level, an improvisational piece of work is not only destabilised from the perspective of its discontinuous character in relation to the performers' individual perceptions and memory factors. It is also destabilised at the level of its analysis, appreciation and evaluation. Improvisational performance in dance suggests in this way an alternative notion of the 'dance piece', one which is constituted within the intention of the dance artist, within the dialogue of the performance event and at the post-performance stage both in the memory of the performer and at the level of interpretation by third agent. This is the framework within which tensions between the theory and practice of improvisational performance in dance can be discerned.

9.4. Conclusions

This research has undertaken an examination of improvisational performance in dance as introduced by the American performance group Grand Union during the 1970s and subsequently transformed in the ensuing years to the present time. In the 1970s, the members of Grand Union conceptualised their performance mode as a totally open improvisational process. Chapters 2 (2.4.2) and 5 (5.3.2) have discussed the contextual character of this understanding and the whole of Part 2 of the research has documented the multiplicity of artistic practices through which dance artists have articulated their notions of 'instant composition' during the last thirty years.

It has been revealed, in this way, that the ability to choose is a fundamental parameter of the improvisational skill and it has become such in a multiplicity of ways. This discovery is very important in order to challenge theoretically the traditional notion of choreography, according to which the decision-making process is the unique province of the choreographer. Not only the hierarchy between choreography and improvisation is, in this way, subverted but also the strict notion
of the performer as vehicle through which somebody else's artistic meaning is constituted is also questioned.

This research has provided the means to present within a theoretical framework an alternative notion of choreography. This term can be thus considered as a wider concept of making dances beyond the limits of the traditional choreographic practices which prioritise the production and structuring of 'dance steps', in whatever loose sense these steps can be considered. Thus it has become possible to articulate at the level of theory some of the conditions which constitute the diversity of manifestations of postmodern dance as these expand across the whole spectrum between traditional choreography and improvisation.

The theoretical route by means of which various forms of 'instant composition' within the idiom of improvisational performance in dance have been approached is the concept of the discourse, in the Foucauldian sense. This perspective was particularly advantageous for this research because it offered a versatile tool for working with historical information without, at the same time, arriving at definitions or fixed models of improvisational performance in dance. By contrast, it became possible to grasp the nature of this form of dance from the perspective of its processes of transformation.

This discursive analysis has been supported by the main methodological thread of the research which is the postmodern strategy of interrogation - another tool indebted to the French post-structuralist, Michel Foucault, often referred as problematisation. The ability to perform improvisationally, namely to develop artistic strategies for 'instant composition', has been examined as a learning skill under the guidelines of Carr's theory of practical reasoning. In this respect, problematisation has been used as the methodological route to explore the relationship between the theoretical position of the research and the practical work of numerous studio experiments.

Carr's claim that practical knowledge can be demonstrated by means of successfully performing a number of practical procedures relevant to the learning task, provided that there is a logic to support the selection of these procedures, has motivated the exploration of improvisational performance in dance as discourse.
This theoretical work has been subsequently problematised in its relationship to specific studio experiments which were expected to follow it in a linear way.

By means of this problematisation, the theory and practice of improvisational performance in dance have been juxtaposed to each other and a number of tensions has been revealed. With the discussion of Part 3, this relationship has been demonstrated as non-linear, and consequently non-causal, discontinuous. The studio experiments which were expected to follow smoothly the theoretical construct of improvisational performance in dance as discourse did not do so. As soon as the work was transferred from the concepts to materialisation, more parameters became involved and further issues had to be dealt with. In this way, practice did not negate theory, but simply presented an additional aspect of the problem. This position makes more obvious the necessity to support the dialogue between theory and practice in the study of dance.

In addition, this research has revealed a number of postmodern considerations within the very nature of postmodern dance. The discontinuous character of the relationship between the theory and practice of improvisational performance is an instance of non-hierarchical understanding within the study of dance. If the relationship between theoretical and practical aspects of dance is discontinuous, it is also a non-linear one. In this way neither theory nor practice can precede or follow each other. They are placed in an interactive framework, relating to each other in a permanent state of dialogue.

If such a relationship is non-hierarchical, then it is also a non-dichotomous one. If it appears that there is no relevance in considering theory and practice separately within the study of dance, but rather use them in dialogue, then their relationship is not a polarised nor dichotomised one. The emphasis on the element of dialogue and the possibilities of transformation both at the level of conceptualisation of the art of dance and its artistic practices resists the tendency to operate on the basis of fixed models of understanding. It prioritises the possibility of offering alternative suggestions every time this is more relevant to the nature of the material. As an example of this method an alternative notion of the dance piece, in the form of the 'piece within a piece', has been introduced by means of examining the specific character of interdisciplinary improvisational work.
Postmodern dance practices have considerably destabilised the notion of dance as an art form in making available a multiplicity of manifestations by constantly transforming attitudes to the 'dance piece'. Similarly, this research destabilises dancing at the level of theory by means of providing a conceptual framework within which dance can be grasped by reference to its processes of transformation rather than as an accumulation of fixed concepts.
Interdisciplinarity is a tool of destabilising the traditional role of methodology in academic research. In a postmodern, poststructuralist climate, perspectives belonging in different disciplines are 'composed' together to redescribe research problems not with the intention of producing "an adequate model or replication of some outside reality, but rather ... to 'make it new'" in the way Fredric Jameson presents Lyotard's use of the notion of the 'performative' in his critique of the great metanarratives (in Lyotard 1984 pix).

In this way, interdisciplinary research operates in this unstable space in which there is the possibility for different disciplines to meet. Such formations cannot be totally unproblematic since a number of methodologies with different histories suddenly confront each other. The degree of consensus which is required in the course of this enterprise carries the danger of hidden hierarchical relationships between the disciplines or methodologies involved. This problem is not insuperable, yet it is still present in the sense that interdisciplinary research is very young and, therefore, lacks experience and history.

One of the main problems the researcher faces in interdisciplinary research is to devise a system of using terms and concepts which have traditionally been isolated within distinct disciplines (and for this reason develop different connotations) in an interdisciplinary way. This is an extremely difficult task because it requires the ability to refrain from creating easy agreements by means of negotiating superficially the originally distinct uses of the terms or concepts.

Nevertheless, meanings and functions of terms and concepts within disciplines also emerge, transform and disappear as forms of politics. This is why when different disciplines come together in interdisciplinary discourse there is an inherent competitiveness amongst them which can result in those hidden hierarchical relationships.

At the level of theory, this problem can be offered multiple solutions in the sense that to clarify the specific disciplinary origins of the use of terms would make things easier. Nevertheless, interdisciplinary research, in many cases, still takes place from within specific disciplines, in an attempt to widen and refresh their
traditional conceptions. This means that the perspectives adopted cannot but surrender to the politics of the main discipline involved.

In this way, in undertaking interdisciplinary research clearly rooted in the distinct academic domain of dance studies, the history of this discipline should be taken into account for a better understanding of the use of terms and concepts. More specifically, dance studies is a very young academic discipline which had to go through a stage of emphasising the theoretical and its potential to be involved with abstraction in order to legitimise itself as a full member of the academy. In Britain, this aim being well accomplished during the 1980s, has recently lost its priority as a main objective of academic research.

This discussion illuminates the problems emerging in interdisciplinary research when such terms as the ‘thinking body’ or ‘theory’ seem to be used in debatable ways. Chapter 3 of this research has suggested that the term ‘thinking body’ is more convincing than body/mind in bypassing a dichotomous relationship between mental and physical aspects of dance as art form. It can also be seen that, linguistically, this term undoubtedly prioritises the ‘body’, a body which besides everything else is also capable of thinking. The political origins of such an emphasis have been briefly exposed.

Nevertheless, this research has been extensively involved with discussing the crucial role of conceptual processes in relation to specific material instantiations of the ‘thinking body’. It has emphasised the fundamentally contextual character of dance production, using as example the improvisational performance in postmodern dance, and argued that the dancing body of the performer/improviser is a fully ‘thinking body’. In this way, this research has exposed the crucial role of mental processes in the making of dance which has been underemphasised by the presence of the word ‘body’ in the construction of the term ‘thinking body’. Briefly, it has been claimed that an improvising thinking body is impossible outside contextually specific conceptions of what body, movement or dance could be. In addition, the term has been also problematised from the perspective of the current discourse on the dispersion of the subject in the sense that there should be no static way in understanding a non-dichotomised body of dance by means of legitimising it on the grounds of an assumed unified subjectivity of the improviser.
As explained in Chapter 1 (1.1), the term 'theory' also faces a number of problems in the context of this research which claims interdisciplinarity as its main methodological thread. Again, from the perspective of the recent politics of the discipline of dance studies, historically it became necessary to problematise ‘theory’ as a dangerous form of abstraction with a strong tendency to ignore the materiality of the dancing body. Starting from this position, the research has suggested a state of non-dichotomy between theory and practice in dance, aiming in this way to redistribute power between the two in a non-hierarchical way.

Nevertheless, non-hierarchy does not necessarily mean a well balanced relationship. The tensions between theory and practice have been manifested in many cases during the process, each taking over at the expense of the other whenever the conditions were favourable. This means that the non-hierarchical character of the relationship between theory and practice does not emerge from a strategy which guarantees constantly an equal distribution of power between the two, rather it reverberates in the potential for a constantly open dialogue in equal terms between the two.

As a final conclusion it is interesting to recognise that, although this research has overtly addressed the practical and material aspect of improvisational dance in an almost political spirit, from a clearly interdisciplinary point of view, it finally becomes a piece of ‘theory’ on the whole, in Culler’s terms:

'Theory' is a genre because of the way its works function ... As instances of [this] genre, [such] works exceed the disciplinary framework within which they would normally be evaluated and which would help to identify their solid contributions to knowledge. To put it another way, what distinguishes the members of this genre is their ability to function not as demonstrations within the parameters of a discipline but as redescriptions that challenge disciplinary boundaries.

Culler 1982 p9

Not only has this research focused on redescribing dance from extra-disciplinary perspectives but it has also explored the possibility of redescribing dance theory from the perspective of dance practice. In this respect, it has shifted the traditional boundaries between theory and practice in dance and by these means it has destabilised dance at the level of theory in a way which manifests an "overlap[ping] of concerns" (Hutcheon 1988 p14) with the current production of postmodern dance.
APPENDIX I

A descriptive analysis of a cross-disciplinary improvisational piece

Group WITS, CLUB ORANGE, London, 21 May 1996

Sylvia Hallett violin, voice, found objects
Sophia Lycouris movement
Gina Southgate audio-visuals

Title of the analysis: 'Connections/transformations'

00:00 First attempts to come out of our positions. I am almost stuck in the left upstage corner, Sylvia is trapped in her sustained violin note and Gina allows the paint to run out of the bottles she has fixed upside down at the top of her backdrop installation. When I arrived earlier that afternoon to the space, she had already covered a big area of the back wall and some of the windows, with transparent and semi-transparent layers of plastic screens which were meant to shape the light coming from the pub's signpost through the windows. At the last minute, I fixed a few house lamps in front of this backdrop so that more light could be reflected, this time from the front of the set thus producing a shiny effect. By opening her paint bottles and emptying in front of the audience another one with paint powder, Gina was trying to get out of her position as painter to concentrate on the making of sound.

01:55 I am creating a common space occupying in the middle area of 'stage' between Sylvia and Gina and confronting the feeling that they both perform actions which affect my presence. Going back to my original position,

02:30 I perform a 30 seconds long locomotive movement phrase with the activity concentrated on the upper torso, arms and hands as if I was trying to provide a moving-through-space-very-busy-in-the-upper-body figure. Observing the character of my movement and the form within which my short phrases evolved throughout the piece, I identify an obsessed effort of filling with movement every empty area of this space already overloaded with sounds, objects and people space.

03:23 My next locomotive mood uses the diagonal more evidently as I attempt to cut through space and sound, which eventually leads me downstage right, where Sylvia plays her violin.

03:40 The atmosphere becomes gradually more theatrical but my gestures follow the pattern of the 'unidentifiable', while all of us work in separate vertically defined spaces.

04:16 While Gina establishes vertical movements by playing her balls on the drums, Sylvia produces sharp voice sounds as if she was sending them directly to the ceiling above her head. At this point I undertake to fill with movement every empty space in all directions.

04:58 While Sylvia pauses, both Gina and I provide individualised staccato instances of movement and sound.
This sequence is about making noise, any kind, therefore visual, sonic and kinetic, while in the middle the section, I decide to drop engaging in a more theatrical section.

This idea is also quickly abandoned and momentarily replaced by the possibility of becoming an observer. Immediately after I undertake various attempts to extend my body within the narrow space upstage right operating as an exit towards an uncovered window.

This is my first direct connection with Gina's backdrop materials as I join her in her attempt to work sonically with it. This is again about making noise, but Sylvia introduces her calm singing, which after having pushed Gina up the ladder, gradually becomes a vibrating letter 'N'. Gina squeezes her plastic paint bottles, and I try to squeeze myself in the space behind Sylvia's back. My body shapes are very distorted. Then everything vibrates in the room, even the backdrop screens, while my left leg performs repetitive swinging movements between its possible vertical and horizontal positions.

I interrupt the sequence by pausing and add more swinging with body parts on the spot.

In the sonic pause, I kneel just before collapsing and cross the entrance space upstage right. Then I start performing turning movements with my usual obsession to fill both the sonic and spatial empty areas. Finally I establish a rhythmic pattern. Gina picks up my beat in beating the steps of the ladder with two iron sticks. In the meantime Sylvia gradually introduces a blurred background sound working with her bicycle wheel. Gina has stopped. There is only an echo from the way Sylvia scratches the bicycle wheel on a piece of styrofoam. Sylvia now plays the wheel with her bow and Gina scratches a paper plate with her iron stick. For me this is a waiting moment, a suspended moment culminating in suspended movement. I do not feel it necessary to fill the space in any particular way.

During one of Sylvia's long suspended sounds on the wheel, I cross the space tentatively and continue by accelerating these crossings from right to left and vice versa on the diagonal between upstage left and Sylvia's area. Then I pause and fall on the floor letting both Gina and Sylvia produce horizontal sustained blurred sounds which get immobilised as a thick cloud above my head. My attempts of getting out of the floor are like movement echoes. Sylvia's sounds are also fragmented and Gina backs her up with choked percussion sounds. This is another attempt to fill the empty areas of the space with movement. Pause. Then Gina starts scratching the drums and I approach her ladder. Sylvia's bicycle wheel produces a sustained sound while I keep the ladder in suspension.
Gina presents her aluminium trays with slow movement. I wave the folded ladder and it slides out of my hands. While I catch it, Sylvia reconsiders her sounds towards a further sustained quality.

I add an accent to this change by hammering the ladder open on the wooden floor. Immediately after, I surrender to a moment of theatricality performing a hand gesture close to my chest and head. Gina picks up this swing with her aluminium trays arranged together like a fan and Sylvia concentrates on a new sound which seems moving from right to left and left to right across a straight line.

Sylvia’s sound becomes very sharp, Gina lets the paint run out of the trays and I use the backdrop for its sonic qualities beating it with the ladder.

Sylvia’s sound is now extravagant, ghostly. Gina’s work with the paint becomes almost ritualistic and I decide to join her from underneath. Gina transfers the paint from the trays to the backdrop and I cross the space under the open ladder.

Pause and then Gina starts beating the backdrop again with her two multicolored feather-dusters. Sylvia makes clarion sounds with a piece of metal beaten against the wheel and

I have moved to another ‘unidentifiable’ moment of theatricality pulling my trousers while sitting on a chair.

This is followed by an even more ‘unidentifiable’ sequence taking place in the entrance space upstage right. My movement is both distorted and imitating the automaton gradually enriched by a multiplicity of circular pathways followed by different body parts. Gina beats with her sticks the aluminium trays placed on her drums and introduces metallic rings of different sizes.

I integrate the use of rings into my movement. I start playing with the rings. Sylvia joins this game.

Sonic pause. Then Sylvia introduces a duet between her voice and a wood saw. Gina joins this sonic effect with unfolding meters of beige adhesive tape. The space is very full, the floor is also full with all sorts of objects.

I am at the window waving to the people on the street. Gina fills up the rest of the free space with barriers made from adhesive tape.

Sylvia is sitting in a very theatrical mood still working with her duet of voice and saw. I leave the window, and while passing underneath the ladder I plunge my finger to some paint and then I follow it travelling through space. Gina wants to bother me with a stick full of colourful paper ribbons. After this fight,

I change the expression of my face and move next to Sylvia, whose sounds have become very whistling.

I interact with Gina who throws objects to the floor from the top of the ladder.

Then I start a sequence of ‘unidentifiable’ gestures which become like a pantomime while Sylvia accompanies me with appropriate sound
effects. At the top of the ladder, Gina behaves like a clown adding occasionally sound elements to Sylvia’s basic work.

23:36
At the end of this section I fall on the floor and
23:50
a demolition phase starts. We collectively destroy and mess up this ‘prepared’ space, throwing objects all over. Sylvia goes back to her original position. A moment of suspension follows and then I go close to Gina who wears as a hat an ‘unidentifiable’ object like a small saucepan with curved bottom. I rest my arm on the handle of the ‘saucepan’ and this becomes a theatrical moment of pleasure and then irony. Sylvia performs very funny vocal sounds and I decide to play the drums. I cannot avoid proceeding with this drumming as if this was a dance involving the whole body. Gina moves fast to the front area and starts her own dance in response to my drumming and mimicking my movements.

25:00
I pick up the duster and attempt to develop a dance while Sylvia pretends she is scared with such an object flying around her and continues the funny singing.

26:00
In the meantime, Gina produces single drum sounds and keeps mimicking my movements while I fix my T-shirt. Then I throw myself into a consciously funny and extremely distorted short dance. The sound becomes more bouncing. I also bounce my whole body upwards and then my arms as if I was playing with a ball. I pause with irony. Gina mimics again this movement.

26:50
I pass to a new ‘unidentifiable’ theatrical episode following my pointed finger again. It is as if I am trying to catch a flying object. Sylvia picks up a romantic tune with the violin and I ‘lose myself’ turning on the top of numerous objects which fill the floor completely while Gina demolishes the back drop.

27:49
Then she initiates a new sonic effect by one of the removed screens. I start crossing the space repeatedly in my diagonal, the violin becomes more and more irritating, Gina keeps demolishing the backdrop and I throw out my limbs performing circular movements and conclude with tracing a circular pathway. Sylvia is creating circular sounds with the violin and Gina is performing circular movements with a rucked up piece of screen.

29:32
Gina is totally involved with her act of demolition and I start a new ‘pantomimic’ sequence wiping my face. This gradually becomes more of an abstract gesture.

29:37
Gina squeezes a mass of destroyed screens underneath her T-shirt and Sylvia scratches with a metallic plate her piece of styrofoam. I am still in the last position of my previous sequence.

30:31
Gina wraps her head with a strip of screens and I perform a circular gesture above my head following Sylvia’s rhythmic suggestion. Then I pause.

31:18
This is another ‘unidentifiable’ pantomimic sequence of gestures initiated with the whole body and then moving through the right arm to my fingers. Gina wrapped in her screens picks up this gesture and mimics it. I touch her screens and Sylvia creates a huge environment
of noise. I perform a balletic unfolding of the front leg with simultaneous back bending of the upper body and extended arm above my head (*développé cambré*) and let the strip of the screens free.

32:36 Gina puts paint on the screens and I spin in the style of a dervish adding a full stop to my phrase by fixing my falling trousers. Sylvia supports me as dervish with an appropriate rhythm beating a wooden chair with two of her bows.

33:18 Sonic pause. I move my shoulders and Gina mimics this movement. Then I ‘half-lie’ on the top of her three drums. While Gina is next to me on the top of the ladder, Sylvia joins us with her violin and voice. Gina proposes a rhythmical pattern bouncing her body on the ladder, beating her abdomen which is still protected by the mass of the destroyed screens she has squeezed underneath her T-shirt. I provide a visual echo to Sylvia’s melodic sound while Gina removes another part of the backdrop. With my body placed in the middle, I attempt to establish connections between Gina and Sylvia.

36:35 I reach a new pause, Sylvia keeps singing and playing the violin, Gina uses the heels of her shoes on her ladder’ stairs to create a quick beat.

36:58 I leave them and then I cross the diagonal dragging the soles of my bare feet on the floor which is covered with objects.

37:52 Keeping my torso parallel to the floor I raise my left leg to the back (*arabesque*) and Gina mimics this movement from the top of the ladder. I grab her strip of screens and move retrogressively from back to front and vice versa.

38:24 Now I hold the mass of the screens which I whirl around my right arm. Gina performs a less spectacular *arabesque*, I move on the diagonal for a while and Gina starts drumming. Sylvia goes back to her original position and works with the violin. Then I grab Gina’s ‘saucepan’ and a ‘sonic’ toy racket from the floor and start playing percussion.

39:00 The last three minutes of the piece are finally dedicated to sound while both Gina and I join Sylvia with percussive sounds. Nevertheless, my sonic sequence gradually develops to a dance while the movement is integrated with my playing of the two objects.

42:08 Sylvia pauses, I throw the two objects behind my back and Gina throws one more object on the floor.

1. This is not visible on the videotape but I remember this moment very clearly.
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