YES, NO, MAYBE

THE PRACTICE OF ILLUSION

in
Dance Theatre Performance

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YES, NO, MAYBE
THE PRACTICE OF ILLUSION

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INTRODUCTION

Hungry - playful - boyish - juicy - hunting - desiring - spicy - passionate - powerful - delicious - mysterious - piercing - pleasurable - I can imagine applying these textures when performing, to draw an audience’s attention. Questioning - curiosity - excitement - wonder - submission - recognition - mystery - laughter - tragedy - joy - I can imagine applying these characteristics as a spectator, watching an engaging performer. Why does her dancing set imagination flying? What is it about him that feels so good? Why does a spectator want more? What, who is that image there on stage? What evokes the multiplicity of meanings and sensations at the site of a performing body?

As a dance artist and performer, this writing has offered me a luxurious opportunity to theorise certain aspects of my practice. The aim of Yes, No, Maybe: The Practice of Illusion is to investigate one particular feature of this collaboration between theory and practice, namely, the notion of seductiveness for the female body in live dance performance and how seductive relations might be evoked between performer and spectator.

Every dance theatre performer, male or female, needs a performing ‘presence’ in order to engage an audience. However, this issue seems particularly relevant to address in the late 1990s. Yes, No, Maybe focuses on the crisis facing female bodies in dance performance, for it certainly appears now, at the turn of the century, that the male performing body has come to signify as the seductive force in dance theatre, removing the female from her traditional role.

The twentieth century has witnessed vast shifts for the female dancer in relation to performing presence. Romantic ballet portrays her as a mysterious, ethereal, ‘always-out-of-reach’ object of sexual desire. Reacting against Victorian attitudes to dancing and sexual acts, early modern dance finds her a meaningful, emotive but chaste personality. Feminist postmodern parody finds her installing and subverting her seductive role as object of desire in conventional ballet and modern dance, while physical theatre portrays her as a hard, slick, high-heeled body of muscle and fibre.
There have been many different engaging female 'presences', and my own practice over the past 20 years has taken me through a range of different styles and dance scenarios, which have changed according to different social and political climates, countries and contexts. Reimagining and refiguring the potential of 'seductive' relations as a positive interactive force of engagement between spectator and performer in the art form of dance has never been high on either my own or other 'female' artistic agendas. Rather, the emphasis has been on the deconstruction and negation of seduction, bringing the female body to a place where she can become subject, not object, of her own performance. Only now, after this great feminist achievement, does it become apparent what that achievement has cost. While 'she' has struggled successfully over the past 20 years to assert her empowered, embodied, subjectivity in dance performance, her conventional position centre-stage as mysterious object of desire has been usurped by the seductive charms of 'his' dancing body. In this way, reclaiming or refiguring seductive relations can be considered as an urgent investigation on the part of female (and male) choreographers and performers.

However, this thesis did not begin with a theoretical interest in seductiveness, it did not begin theoretically at all. This thesis began with the performance piece Witch One (1992), ideas for which came from my sexual practice. Taking the form of a short solo, Witch One explored a play between 'masculine' and 'feminine' desiring in one body. It appeared to me that this piece might be considered as an interpretation of androgyny but, observing the signification of androgyny in Western culture, this solo did not seem to match conventional interpretations. Consequently, my theoretical research began as an exploration into the theme of androgyny and an attempt to refigure its erotic potential for the female body in performance - which, in turn, initiated an investigation into seductive relations.

Initial research for Yes, No, Maybe is grounded in feminist, psychoanalytical and gender studies. French philosophy, spanning feminism and psychoanalysis, which aims to bring the previously invisible, real, embodied, sexual female body into the realm of patriarchal language, sets a contextual framework. Particularly relevant is Kristeva's body of work regarding the clash of semiötic drives into symbolic language (1984), which has helped theorise the necessary conflict required to impassion female art practice.
Her argument, that women should own phallocentric language in order to change that language, supports the notion of there being a 'problem' for feminist dancing bodies and establishes a context for discussion of eroticism. The philosophies of gender theorists, such as Butler (1990) and Grosz (1990), help to contextualise the constructed nature of gender and sexuality, while lesbian and gay writers of performance, such as Case (1988) and Franko (1995), provide a background on which to refigure the potential of androgyny as a seductive force. Feminist theoretical dance writing also infiltrates the text, exposing the position of the female body as phallic fetish in a patriarchal metanarrative of ballet (Foster 1996), and following her political, social and artistic shifts to becoming empowered and independent, maker and performer of her own work (Adair 1992).

The main 'problem' to be investigated, pertaining to seductive relations for the female body, reveals a conflict between real embodiment and surface illusion in performance. Consequently, a second strand of research emerged, directed towards post structuralist philosophers and theorists whose agendas to deconstruct metanarrative in Western culture and logocentrism hardly mention the human body at all. Concepts from the philosophies of writers such as Baudrillard, Derrida, Barthes and Deleuze and Guattari have been manipulated quite freely and applied to help conceptualise the themes of this thesis. Unlike gender and feminist studies, which often refer specifically to male/female embodiment and subjectivity, the knowledge that these post structuralist writers' projects rarely have any bearing on identified gendered bodies has been particularly useful, as the abstract nature of their writing becomes amenable to transposition. Their philosophical 'play' with notions of 'Truth', 'Being' and 'Presence' appears to offer imaginative analogies to illustrate the illusive nature of seductive relations.

Derrida's project, to deconstruct the meaning of 'Presence' within metaphysical textual narratives, has been freely lifted from philosophical abstraction and applied as analogy to illustrate various points in the thesis, including androgyny in dance languages and the role of spectator in live performance. Baudrillard's theories on 'seduction' (1979), which are directed towards the hyperreality of objects in a technological universe of late capitalism, have been transposed to theorise the seductive space between
real and illusion on a dancer's body in performance. Deleuze and Guattari's motifs (1988), such as 'BwO', 'strata' and 'becoming', which conceptualise a desiring body freed from its constrained relationship to loss within psychoanalytical and phallocentric contexts, have been applied as analogy for the embodied play of eroticism, even though BwO has little bearing on real flesh and blood bodies.¹

To provide a link between the embodiment of feminist theories and the ambiguity of post structuralist philosophies, a third strand of research is employed, that of my practice as performer and spectator of live dance theatre performance. Yes, No, Maybe draws from a wide range of theatre performance work, ballet, butoh, dance theatre, physical theatre and body art practice. Purposely, the project does not focus on analysis of one or two particular artists or choreographies. Different moments from a variety of work, including my own, have been drawn out and manipulated throughout the writing to initiate and illustrate theoretical concepts. Occasionally, the same piece of performance work is reinterpreted, such as Witch One (1992), to embody different theoretical perspectives. Illustrations from my own practice do not follow a linear forward direction throughout the writing - there is no direct line from early work to later work. It is not possible to say that later performances come closer to characterising an erotic androgynous figure than earlier work, there is no sense of 'getting better' at something.

Throughout the making of this project, practice has influenced theory, theory has influenced practice, and the interaction of all three positions, performer, spectator and writer, has been fundamental to developing the themes.² With the exception of Yvonne Rainer's Trio A (1966), I have been physically present, either as performer or spectator, at every dance performance mentioned in this project, linking practical experience from both positions of live performance to the theoretical research and writing. As a practitioner, I can argue that no words written after the event, or written at all, can pin down the multiple experiential events of live performance interaction. Live interaction in real time does not appear to be representable on the written page and this is, of course, part of writing's seductive appeal. The performance writing offered here attempts to
embrace myself performing, myself watching and myself watching myself and others perform. In this way, positions of spectator and performer, writer and reader can be thought of as being no longer fixed. There is a constant switching between who is active and who is passive, in the same way as the writerly text, which

is a perpetual present, upon which no consequent language (which would inevitably make it past) can be superimposed; the writerly text is *ourselves writing*.

Barthes 1975 p.5

As live performance relations have come to the forefront of academic frameworks, writing and reading, like performing and watching, have also become a live interactive physical event. Considering the challenge posed by writing about interactive seductive relations between spectator and performer, post structuralist philosophy certainly seems to provide a scene of play, within which it is possible to keep the study of performance energised and alive within academia.

Instead of accepting to textualise and then ‘read’ live performance, ... we might more productively *stage and perform writing*, pointing out that complex writing *used is always already a performance*.

Melrose 1997 p.4

Following research in three different directions, feminist agendas for subjectivity, post structuralist deconstruction of ‘Truth’ and live performance practice, it becomes apparent that the layering of all three situate this thesis within another research context, that of queer theory.

Perhaps because the context of queer theory is by no means a fixed category, opening itself to a multiplicity of interpretations, both positive and negative, it offers a possible context for this project. While post structuralist theorists and philosophers such as Derrida, Baudrillard and Deleuze rarely sexualise their writing (Grosz 1995), physical interpretations of their principles can be considered to fall into the category of queer theory. Rethinking seductive relations for the female body in performance requires a different consideration of how desire plays between spectator and performer. Assuming the performative cultural construction of gender and
sexuality as its theoretical basis (Foucault 1980, Butler 1990), the importance of queer theory is in ‘freeing desire from its location’ to ‘render queer the relations between images and bodies’ (Probyn 1995 p.9, emphasis mine). For Butler (1993), the term remains a discursive site, ‘the point of departure for a set of historical reflections and futural imaginings’ and as such should not be ‘fully owned’ (p.228).

If seductiveness is suggested by a game of ‘be there/not there’ (Baudrillard 1979 p.84), eroticism and androgyny aim towards a movement between the game’s rules and, while it may be possible to define the rules, the terms seduction, androgyny and eroticism slip between, refusing to be contained. By examining these three terms, it becomes possible to identify a crossroads between a conventional history in patriarchal and feminist discourses and a subversive ‘futural imagining’ which destabilises their conventional interpretations.

A Summary of the Argument

Yes, No, Maybe is structured in three parts: An Illusion of Androgyny, A Strategy for Seduction and A Practice of Eroticism. Each chapter is prefaced by a short summary and conclusions are made throughout as the thesis develops. Part One begins with an examination of the myth of androgyny, tracing its classical origin to Plato’s Symposium and suggesting that the concept of a ‘union’ between male and female has emerged from a homoerotic (gay) context (Foucault 1985, Waterfield 1994). Attention is drawn to the representation of androgyny on the male body throughout Western culture and its signification as a transcendent spiritual union of sexual desires (Walters 1978). Parallels are drawn between androgynous representations in art and the dance culture of the 1990s. Barthes’ semiological approach to reading myth (1973) is applied to analyse the work of Russell Maliphant (Unspoken 1996) and Matthew Bourne (Swan Lake 1995), in order to demonstrate the seductive appeal of androgynous representation on the male body for dance audiences.

A feminist deconstruction and reappraisal of androgyny points to an ideal feminist utopia on the one hand (Heilbrun 1974), and a patriarchal negation
of female autonomous sexuality on the other (Weil 1992). An alternative interpretation follows, which challenges both classical and feminist directions, proposing an embodied movement play between gender significations. This refiguration uses the performing figures of Marlene Dietrich (Studlar 1990), Stormé Delarverie (Drorbaugh 1993), Sigourney Weaver (Bell-Metereau 1993), The Artist Formerly Known as Prince (Fuchs 1996) and 'Barbette' (Franko 1995) to illustrate how androgyny can span the divide between gender characteristics.

Chapter 2 examines androgyny in dance, exploring the argument that the combined trainings of ballet and new dance forms, such as contact improvisation and release technique, might create an illusion of androgyny in dance languages. References are made to the conventional version of Swan Lake (1985), White Man Sleeps (Siobhan Davis 1988) and Virginia Minx at Play (Claid 1993) in order to illustrate how the ideas of vertical and horizontal layering can be applied to dance performance as androgynous signification.

Applying Derrida's interpretations of 'khora' and 'differance' (1995) as analogies, androgyny is theoretically and imaginatively considered as a potential place/space of play, which neither ballet nor new dance is able to achieve on its own. In this way, androgynous illusions in performance might be created which cannot be fixed or defined, opening to a play of ambiguity, evoking seductive relations between spectator and performer. However, this imagining of androgyny in dance languages also introduces the 'problem'. Observing the performers of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company, and the Siobhan Davies Dance Company, it is argued that an androgynous dance language has emerged as a fixed, cohesive, recognisable language where the female body and the language conflate, bringing the female body to a place of androgynous 'wholeness' which can read, not as transcendence and ambiguity, as it might on male bodies, but as a 'fixed' anatomical presence.

Part Two investigates, in more depth, the elements which have contributed to the loss of seductive presence for the female body. To initiate this inquiry, Chapter 3 proposes that seductive relations in dance performance are evoked not by depth of meaning, but by surface appearances or illusions
(Baudrillard 1979). A strategy is suggested, the application of which provides a method for analysing the problem. This strategy, from perspectives of performer and spectator, is illustrated with aspects of ballet, butoh and my own performance work. Derrida's notion of presence and absence (1981) provides an analogy for the spectator's role. Parallels are drawn between the reader's desire for presence and meaning in written language, and the spectator's desire to identify presence and meaning at the site of a performing body. Within the fixed binary context of theatre performance, the feminist psychoanalytical theories of Benjamin (1988) and Phelan (1993) offer a depth to the inquiry into why a spectator may find the play of real and illusion seductive.

Returning to the issue of seductive relations for the female body, the argument is located in a wider cultural context and draws a parallel between Baudrillard's theories of hypereality (1997) and the Bolshoi Ballet's visit to Las Vegas (1996). It is argued that, for the female body in new dance performance, the space between real and illusion has closed, and consequently, seductive relations have collapsed.

Applying this new strategy for seduction, Chapter 4 explores the extent to which the loss of seductive relations for the female body is a response to new dance languages. The notion of 'illusion' contradicts important historical moments of negation proposed by postmodern minimalist and feminist agendas in dance which seek to deconstruct and displace metaphysical universals of ballet and modern dance. Drawing on writers such as Banes (1977), Novack (1990), and Adair (1992), it is argued that a consequence of these historically important moves has been the establishment of the real female body without illusion on the performing stage. The work of Yvonne Rainer, Rosemary Butcher and Eva Karczag provide illustrations for this argument. Chapter 4 proposes certain ideas, as possible ways forward, to initiate thinking about how to create seductive illusions for the female dancing body, without returning her to conventional representations of desired object.

Chapter 5 considers the performing appeal of male bodies in dance theatre during the 1990s, suggesting that the problems pertaining to seductive presence for female bodies do not occur at the site of the male dancing body.
Drawing on the performance work of Matthew Hawkins, Nigel Charnock, Russell Maliphant, Mark Morris and Javier de Frutos, four possible elements of seductiveness for the male performing body are proposed; the significance of drag parody, the male performer's 'gaze', feminine qualities of abstract dance on male bodies and lastly, a gay perspective of physical 'pleasure'. A theoretical context for analysing these seductive elements of male dancing bodies is provided by writers such as Bersani (1988), Dyer (1992/3) and Franko (1995).

Analysis of male dancing bodies suggests that the embodied play of 'masculine' power and 'feminine' pleasure might provide the starting points for considering seductive relations for the female body. As characteristics available for any body to appropriate, the three terms play, pleasure and power are explored as an embodied practice, with reference to the Cruising workshop, Diane Torr's Drag King for a Day workshop and the performance piece Witch One (1992). Particular attention is paid to the role of playing, not being, masculine/power and feminine/pleasure, as an act of illusion for performance (Derrida 1978).

This embodied practice of power and pleasure returns the thesis to the theme of androgyny, arguing that to evoke seductive relations in dance, androgyny for the female body cannot be simply a play with dance language, but must involve an androgynous illusive play at the site of the real desiring body. On this argument, the term erotic androgyny is introduced to characterise a possible practice whereby the female body can evoke seductive relations for performance.

Part Three explores the androgynous possibilities of eroticism and Chapter 6 begins by defining eroticism as the practice of desiring, embodying the play of power and pleasure. It is proposed that there are many different figurations of erotic practice, from which emerge a wide variety of performing figures. The play between these different figures can be considered to evoke illusions of erotic androgyny. Deleuze and Guattari's motif, 'body without organs' (1988), is applied as a parallel analogy for erotic androgyny, suggesting a network of desiring movements between referents.
Attention is drawn to the ease with which BwO can be applied to describe abstraction in dance performances and to the necessity of rooting the concept of erotic androgyny in the site of real performing bodies. Consequently, figurations of erotic practice are characterised, to emphasise how erotic practices have deep ontological histories on the one hand, but can become horizontal surface-constructed figurations for performance play on the other (Braidotti 1994). Kristeva's concepts of the semiotic and symbolic (1984) set a psychoanalytical contextual framework in which to consider erotic practices. Drawing on De Lauretis (1984), Bataille (1962), and references to my own history as a ballet dancer, erotic practices of the Oedipal narrative are described. Illustrations from ballet, physical theatre performances of DV8 and LaLaLa Human Steps, Eurocrash, body art performances of Franko B., Orlan, Ron Athy serve to expose and subvert the 'bataille-esque' erotic practice, which is so much a part of a ballerina's life.

Feminist practices of eroticism are the next to be identified, which react against Oedipal and bataille-esque scenarios, encouraging the erotic expression of internal semiotic drives of jouissance. Lorde's famous essay on eroticism (1984) sets a theoretical context for female erotic practice. With references to French feminist Cixous (1981) and Deleuze and Guattari (1988), Venus Hurtle (Sue MacLennan 1990) is described in order to illustrate how the erotic force of jouissance finds its expression in dance language. Drawing on Juno and Vale (1991), who suggest anger as an erotic force for political change, early feminist performance work at X6 Dance Space is discussed. Laughter, as an erotic force, combined with anger, can be considered to express itself through feminist stereotyped figures of parody in performance (Kristeva 1984, Lorde 1984, Freud 1905). Parody in dance often refers to ballet, and Bleeding Fairies (Claid 1977), Raw Hide (Claid 1984) and Laid Out Lovely (Claid 1994) are sketched, in order to illustrate the erotic practice of parodic performance.

Following a description of Grace & Glitter (1987), a performance piece which offers a range of feminist erotic figures, Chapter 6 acknowledges that identifying and defining specific figures does not necessarily evoke seductive relations. Pausing to identify them at this point in the thesis is to recognise
their interior depths and their performing potential.

Chapter 7 identifies lesbian erotic practices, exploring the masquerade with binary models of gender and sexuality (Butler 1991, Hart (1997). The erotic figures of butch and femme are used to argue that lesbian erotic practices play between these two identities (Case 1988). Witch One (1992) and Le Flesh (1995) illustrate the erotic play in one body between identifiable lesbian desiring roles. Freud's 'Fort/Da' (1920), manipulated by Derrida (1985) for a game of deconstruction, is abstracted and reappropriated as a parallel analogy for the throwing/retrieving of lesbian gaze in performance. Analysis of these performances suggests once again that performing identifiable positions and images from any one erotic figuration does not necessarily evoke illusions of erotic androgyny. Consequently, Chapter 7 applies Deleuze & Guattari's motif of 'becoming' (1988) to consider how the figures from Oedipal, bataille-esque, feminist and lesbian narratives might become shadows, points of reference between which the illusion of erotic androgyny can be imagined. Describing Did I Speak? (Claid 1996) from the position of performer, The Millenarium (Wayne McGregor 1997) and We Set Out Early ... Visibility was Poor (Bill T. Jones 1998) from the position of spectator, reveals the seductive potential of erotic androgyny as a practice of illusion.

Setting the Scene

Before embarking on the main text, there are several contextual formulations which can be introduced at this stage. The first refers to the theatrical setting in which this fiction takes place. Yes, No, Maybe is limited to seductive relations within the conventional dance theatre arena of Western culture, a darkened auditorium where spectators sit and watch bodies dancing on a lit stage. This arena is a fixed binary construct, and the project situates itself within that binary performance framework. The thesis does not concern itself with site-specific performances, nor those in galleries, street or studio spaces or performance of different cultures, nor with performers of theatre, installation and media art practices, except where parallel issues and comparisons are informative to the project.

Within this conventional theatre context, the area of definition becomes
even more specific. Seductiveness is focused onto the presence of the body itself, in a direct relationship with the spectator, not through the choreographic forms and structures, nor through the choreographer's 'style' of work, group dynamics, content, sound accompaniment or visual design. Just the body moving in theatrical space, its image, gesture and expression.

The project attempts to separate, for the purposes of discussion, choreographic forms and structures from the body's presence on stage. It can be argued that this separation is an impossible task to fulfil when the site of the choreography is the body itself. However, an attempt is made to focus directly on a performer's body in relation to the spectator, not in relation to the choreography.

In writing about live theatre performance, I acknowledge a confusion regarding the use of the terms 'performativity', 'performance' and 'performing'. For Butler (1990), the word performativity is used in a cultural/political sense, and describes the day-to-day repetition of cultural constructions of gender and sexuality, which, through repeated 'performance' on the body, come to be recognised as 'normal'.

There is no performer prior to the performed ... the performance constitutes the appearance of a "subject" as its effect.

Butler 1991 p.24 5

Butler's use of performing and performance is not be confused with 'performance' in a dance theatre context, which refers to the live event happening between dancers and spectators. Nor is it to be confused with 'performing' enacted by dancers at each performance event. In order to avoid misunderstanding, performativity and performative acts will be applied when referring to embodied enacted constructions of gender and sexuality in a cultural context. Performer, performing and performance will be applied when referring to a body in the context of live theatre practice.

The video which accompanies this thesis is a compilation of extracts of performance work and has been compiled chronologically, rather than in order of appearance in the text. Watching the video could be considered to contradict the underlying theme of the thesis, which focuses on seductive relations in the context of live performance. The readings and
interpretations of my performance work, within the text, are a consequence of thoughts, actions, imaginations, feelings at the time of making, watching and performing. The video extracts cannot capture the live interaction between performer and spectator. However, it has been included with the thesis as another layer of information and reference, not to provide any visual 'truth' to verify the written text.\footnote{6}

Perhaps the most obvious source of material for research, which has not yet been mentioned, is that derived from the physicality and fantasies of sexual practice, which I have always considered to be a highly skilled 'performative' act. However, identifiable sexual acts, (who does what in bed and whether or not heterosexual, lesbian and gay bodies can be identified for participating in particular sexual acts), are ultimately not relevant to this project. While there is an underlying assumption, in queer culture, that heterosexual women or gay men might have 'lesbian' sex and lesbians might have 'gay' or 'heterosexual' sex (which displaces any clear identification of 'true' normality), discussion of these acts themselves is not the focus of this thesis.\footnote{7} Instead, roles, actions, qualities, expressions and dynamics are abstracted from different sexual practices and discussed as free-floating significations available to any performing body, on which to build seductive relations. In other words, sexual practices and their many expressive manifestations remain as shadows, but are always there. They infiltrate the theory, rooting the performance of dance to the site of an erotic body, but without restraining that body to a particular identification.
1 Deleuze and Guattari (1988) use the word ‘bodies’ in its broadest sense: ‘applying to any formed content’ (p.86). Deleuze (1983) interprets body not as an individual human body, but rather an ‘event’ (Tomlinson in Deleuze 1983 p.xi). Body is described as ‘chemical, biological, social or political. Any two forces being unequal constitute a body as soon as they enter into a relationship’ (Deleuze 1983 p.40).

2 During my final year of research, writing has taken priority over performing, the consequence of which has been a shift of my performance work to a place which is purely an imagined future.

3 The ‘futural imaginings’ of queer theory are positive on the one hand, but also evoke negative connotations on the other, a danger which is implicit within queer theory’s subversive potential. Butler (1993) draws attention to the ‘temporality’ of the term, how it has been used as a derogatory degrading ‘slur’ (p.223) in the past and yet is now used to formulate positive future directions. The expansiveness of the term queer is also its limitation. Butler suggests that queer theory/practice is a ‘predominantly white movement’ (p.228). Sedgwick (1993) contradicts this, stating how ‘queer’ cannot be contained under the headings gender and sexuality. She asserts: ‘artists of colour whose sexual self-definition includes “queer”... are using the leverage of “queer” to do a new kind of justice to the fractal intricacies of language, skin, migration, state’ and in this way, ‘the gravity ... of the term “queer” itself deepens and shifts’ (Sedgwick 1993 p.9).

4 For Lorde (1984), the erotic, as an ‘inner force’, has been suppressed and corrupted by constructed and gendered sexualities of heterosexual patriarchal culture. Lorde claims women have either been encouraged into a superficial mask of eroticism or have been made to feel inferior because of its existence. Similarly, Irigaray (1985) writes of the suppressed female erotic in a culture which encourages ‘phallomorphism’, only by suppressing the erotic in herself does woman enter the phallocentric community. ‘Her entrance into dominant scopic economy signifies, once again, her relegation to passivity: she will be the beautiful object’ (p. 101). Lorde’s ‘superficial mask’ and Irigaray’s ‘beautiful object’ define, from a feminist perspective, the constructed artificial feminine gender performance of erotic woman within patriarchal culture.

5 Phelan (1993a) distinguishes between two positions of writing, that of ‘constative’ and ‘performative’. Referring to Modleski’s writing (1989), Phelan describes ‘constative’ as a reliable description of a past event and the performative position as one which appears to suggest a movement of always shifting and becoming something else. Phelan uses the example: ‘I worry she won’t come’, where ‘I worry’ is part of the activity of worrying (p.18). Phelan claims this as performative, because the speaker and the spoken about cannot be clearly separated as subject and object, they displace each other, ‘each mimics the other; each expresses, conveys and represses the other’ (p.18). Performative writing suggests an active moving, in the present position. To write as an event is happening is obviously not possible, it is only possible to write after, to attempt to recreate, reappear, invent, repeat it as if it is happening now, to make it come alive again in imagination and fantasy. As Phelan suggests, while it is only possible to re imagine, re fantasise the erotic, at least it ‘attaches us again to Hope’ (Phelan (1993a p.21). Phelan refers again to Modleski, who considers all feminist writing to be performative, in that it ‘promises and, in the act of promising, brings a feminist future closer’ (Phelan 1993a p.16). Modleski (1989) sees performative writing as utopian, a notion which is echoed in Doane’s critique (1989) of Haraway’s A Manifesto for Cyborgs (1989). Doane claims Haraway writes performatively: ‘a staging of an uninhabitable feminist position’, but that it is a position to be desired, and that possibly ‘all feminist positions are in some sense uninhabitable or only uncomfortably habitable’ (Doane 1989 p.209).
The video clips are copied from personal archive tapes, they are not for promotional use and unfortunately the quality is often poor.

Grosz (1995) claims that many people adopt the term 'queer' in order to 'set themselves outside both the heterosexual as well as the gay communities' (p.216) and, by the same token, identifying as lesbian, gay, or straight does not necessarily define a person as queer. Many heterosexual couples practice perverse queer notions of desire, while many gay and lesbian couples attempt to duplicate 'normal' heterosexual practices. 'Being straight or being queer, in itself, provides no guarantee of one's position as sexually radical: it depends on how one lives one's queerness, or renders one's straightness, one's heterosexuality as queer'. (Grosz 1995 p.217)
Chapter 1
Refiguring a Myth

*Romantic Phallus/y* explores the classical myth of androgyny, briefly tracing its representation on the male body through Western culture. Attention is drawn to androgynous signification as transcendence from sexual desire towards spiritual beauty and perfection. *Boys Transcending* suggests parallels can be made with male androgynous representations in 1990s dance culture. A feminist deconstruction brings the myth down to earth - *Girls Grounding* offers one interpretation of androgyny as a feminist utopia and another as a patriarchal negation of female autonomous sexuality. *Spanning the Divide* argues a refiguration of androgyny for the female body which follows neither classical nor feminist interpretations. Drawing on various film and live performance personalities, androgyny is refigured as a movement which spans between masculine and feminine gender characteristics, rooted in, rather than transcending, embodied sexual play.

1.1: *Romantic Phallus/y*

‘Myths of origin represent an attempt to render the universe comprehensible in human terms’. (*Encyclopaedia Britannica* 1994). Fraleigh’s phenomenological approach (1987) offers, ‘Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell and Friedrich Nietzsche all hold that myth has its origin in the human body’ (p. 145). For Lévi Strauss (1963), ‘Mythical thought always progresses from awareness of oppositions towards their resolution’ and ‘the purpose of myth is to provide a logical model for overcoming a contradiction’ (p.229). Myth encourages, through language, the desire for ‘truth’, a drive towards completion and resolution. This view is supported by Coupe (1997), who defines the purpose of myth in terms of ‘paradigm, perfection and possibility’ (p.9). Within a logocentric culture, myth has held the privileged position of providing the metaphorical tools for the resolution of conflict. Holding such a position has enabled myth to shape both history and culture,

the religious beliefs, social customs and linguistic commonplaces of each age are reaffirmations of, and elaborations upon, primitive mythic patterns.

Coupe 1997 p.120
The myth of androgyny is an attempt by western culture to represent an ideal, through language (philosophy, art, literature), of a 'truth' regarding the basic mysteries of human life, mortality, procreation, nature, sexuality. The particular 'paradigm' that androgyny attempts to embrace, through a union of male and female gender/sexuality, offers a resolution to the ancient enquiry into the conflict between sexual desire and spiritual purity.

There have been many early appearances of the myth androgyny. Walker (1983) describes how many Indo-European religions attempted to embrace the concept of a union between male and female sexes as the primal Androgyne, both sexes in one body, often with two heads and four arms ... experiencing constant sexual bliss and spiritual completeness.

Walker 1983 p.32

Singer (1989) approaches the theme as a Jungian psychologist, focusing on the search in each person for her/his inner androgynous being. 'The androgyne will not be discovered by turning outward into the world, but by turning inward into ourselves' (1989 p.8). In Singer's view, masculine and feminine have always existed in every person and wholeness of the human being can only be achieved if nothing is left out. She considers androgyny to be 'the oldest archetype of which we have any experience' (p.5). She applies the term archetype as 'it indicates the presence of an archaic or primordial type, a universal and collective image that has existed since the remotest time' (p.5). As such, it is buried in the 'deep unconscious realm that all humans collectively share' (1989 p.8). Singer draws on the ancient and spiritual influences of Kabbalistic literature, astrology, Jungian philosophy, ancient Greek history, Gnosticism and Taoism to support her view of the androgynous inner being.

Singer (1989) tends to focus on androgyyny as a 'secret knowledge ... the very nature of it is that it can't be shared or taught or even spoken about' (p.233). As the concern of this project is the physical representations in and on performing bodies rather than silent, unconscious and spiritual notions of androgyyny, the starting point is not the ancient spiritual texts of the Kabbal or Taoism, but the appropriation of the myth by Plato. Early Greek philosophy has been influential in constructing Western metaphysics and
the hierarchical dualism between sexual desire and spiritual perfection. Early Western philosophical concerns can be considered to have a more direct influence on today’s postmodern feminist and queer sensibilities than the ancient spiritual texts.

A well-known illustration of the myth appears in the text of Plato’s Symposium. The context within which the Symposium takes place is that of the homoerotic world of Athenian culture around 500BC. This world is described by Foucault (1985) as being one which encouraged homosexuality, where the Greeks ‘practised, accepted, and valued relations between men and boys’ (p.97). Greek culture did not cast moral judgments on, or distinguish between, the sexual practices of homosexuality and heterosexuality so much as differentiate ‘a moderate, self-possessed man from one given to pleasure’ (Foucault 1985 p.187). Homosexuality, or the ‘purposeful art of love (the love of boys in particular)’ was an important element in the early Greek inquiry into the meaning of true love (Foucault 1985 p.229).

Waterfield (1994) describes Plato’s Symposium as ‘an institution of upper-class Athenian life’ (p.xiii) The guests would all be men of leisure, women were excluded, alcohol would be consumed in quantity, the men would lounge on couches, leaning on their left arms,

so that their right hands were free for eating and drinking from the table in front of them, and for whatever other activities might occur later on.

Waterfield 1994 p.xiii

This particular symposium was concerned with the discourse of love. These men of leisure, the early philosophers who gathered at Plato’s Symposium, met to discuss a popular topic of the time, ‘what is love in its very being’ (Foucault 1985 p.233). Philosophical concepts fundamental to the Symposium were later to become some of Plato’s main concerns.¹

the Symposium glorifies physical - homosexual - love, as a basis for a higher love which aspires beyond the body to contemplate divinity. In his later work the dualism is much sharper. The body is relegated to a lower sphere and only the spirit counts.
Plato, speaking through Socrates at the Symposium, speaks of man's ascending struggle away from the sexual and physical, in the search for the purest form of beauty.

And the true order of going, or being led by another, to the things of love, is to begin from the beauties of earth and mount upwards for the sake of that other beauty, using these as steps only, and from one going on to two, and from two to all fair forms, and from fair forms to fair practices, and from fair practices to fair notions, until from fair notions he arrives at the notion of absolute beauty, and at last knows what the essence of beauty is.

Socrates in Hofstadter and Kuhns 1976 p.76

This is the context of the Symposium, where classical Greek homoerotic love was considered to be the first step to a higher truth. 'Homosexuality is associated, not just with physical and military prowess, but the highest achievements of Greek civilisation' (Walters 1978 p.47).

Aristophanes' speech at the original Symposium (ed. Waterfield 1994) expounds on the theme of love between males, centering on origins of love and desire. Within this context of homoerotic love, Aristophanes describes the mythical concept of androgyny. He tells the story of three original genders, each one being two unified and complete bodies, two males together, two females together and the androgynous coupling, male and female together. Their strength and power threatened Zeus and so he split each of the three beings into halves. The result was that each half desired and searched for the other half. In this way, love and sexual desire were born. 'It was their very essence that had been split in two, so each half missed its other half and tried to be with it' (Aristophanes ed. Waterfield 1994 p.27).

Aristophanes continues by ascribing moral value to these three different couplings. The females together he dismisses as almost non-existent, saying that 'female homosexuals come from this group' (1994 p.28). However, about the androgynous coupling he says

Any men who are offcuts from the combined gender ... are
attracted to women, and therefore most adulterers come from this group; the equivalent women are attracted to men and tend to become adulteresses.

Aristophanes in Symposium 1994 p.28

Besides this, very little is spoken regarding the heterosexual coupling, while the coupling of two males together is expounded at length.

Their actions aren't prompted by immorality, but by courage, manliness, and masculinity. ...There's good evidence for their quality: as adults, they're the only men who end up in government.

Aristophanes in Symposium 1994 p.28

The Symposium, which clearly reflects Athenian philosophical concerns of the time, emphasises that boys who are attracted to other men (particularly older men) are inspired to become greater and better men in adult life.

Although the concept of androgyny, as a heterosexual union, is not explored in depth, no doubt because of the homoerotic context of the Symposium, the myth has been appropriated by artists, throughout the centuries of Western patriarchal culture and used to illustrate and represent an ideal beauty of form as the ‘feminised’ male body. The sensual and erotic nude sculptures of Classical Greek art and later Renaissance art were almost always male, ‘a Greek Apollo or a Renaissance David express men’s enjoyment of the male body’ (Walters 1978 p.14).

The mythical feminised male signified ‘sense of wholeness ... pattern of perfection ... the denial of original sin’ (Walters 1978 p.34). The union of female and male in a male body provided the Greeks with access to transcendence through a much ‘safer sex object than a woman’ (p.15). Avoiding association with the adulterated sexual act between men and women, the androgynous male figure allowed access to a woman’s smooth curves and hairless features without having to consider a woman’s ‘disturbing difference’ (Walters 1978 p.15). To express mythical concepts of transcendence and divine unity, concepts of the mind rather than the body, the represented image had to be disassociated from notions of real mortality, flesh, procreation, mother, aging, of which the female body would
be a constant reminder. The feminised male body provoked a shadow of sex and mortality while signifying transcendence from those concerns.

Narcissistic adoration of the naked young beautiful boy continues to reappear throughout the history of art, particularly in eras when homosexuality has not been shunned. Although conceptual meanings of masculine and feminine have changed according to different eras, the myth, as the idealisation of perfect and transcendent beauty, continues to appear through the image of the feminised male. The Renaissance, for instance, the time when 'masculinity' as we know it was defined (Walters 1978), was also an era which favoured homosexuality - after centuries of Christian disapproval. Michelangelo, Donatello, Verrochio and Leonardo da Vinci were all rumoured to be homosexual (Walters 1978). There was a rebirth of the classical feminised male form in art, particularly in Florence. The neo-platonists celebrated homosexual love in their lives, art and writings, and ascribed to the platonic view that men loving men was vastly superior to men loving women.

Narcissus, the effeminate adolescent ... was intellectualised by the neo-platonists into a symbol of reconciliation; his fragile youth holds together flesh and spirit, masculinity and femininity.

Walters 1978 p.116

The artworks of Quattrocentro Florence, such as Ghiberti's Isaac, Donatello's David, Perugino's Apollo and Marsyas, Botticelli's Mars and the Pollaiuolo brothers' St. Sebastian, all depict the androgynous youth idolised as a figure of celestial beauty. Michelangelo concentrated on depicting beautiful young men who were both powerfully muscular yet also restricted and 'bound' (Walters 1978), an ambiguity which helped create an erotic fascination. The extremely athletic bodies, for instance, painted on on the Sistine Chapel are also posed passively with their power confined. 'He identifies with their helpless passivity, and insists aggressively, even sadistically, on his own artistic and sexual power' (Walters 1978 p.137).³

William Blake considered the androgyne a symbol of equality and harmony, representing his own dream of utopia, a 'perfected and bisexual humanity' and a 'paradise that transcends civilised division' (Walters p.241)
The androgyne is equivocal, uncommitted - and that is where its appeal lies...It allows us... to remain in a timeless world in which everything is still possible.

Walters 1978 p.117/8

Later in the 19th century the myth of androgyny was given a misogynistic twist. The artist Burne Jones was one the first to depict the fragile and feminine male helplessly pitted against an aggressive and often monstrous female in his paintings such as The Depths of the Sea and The Wheel of Fortune. The androgyne, signifying perfect beauty, was still represented but ‘only’ in contrast to the virile woman who is portrayed as lascivious, perverse, bestial and disgustingly animal’. (Walters 1978 p.244) The concept of androgyny that the Decadents depicted around 1885 was an image threatened by a looming Victorian era of repression and misogynistic sexual division, a threat which appeared to be represented by the terrifying female sexual body. The image of the androgyne had come to signify weakness and effeminacy within a heterosexual context.

Incestuous, narcissistic, adolescent, it implies a rejection of all mature sexuality; in the end, it is an image with only one meaning - sterility and death.

Walters 1978 p.245

In the Victorian era, when sexuality was established as a power discourse with the Christian heterosexual puritanical stamp of approval (Foucault 1978), the feminised male no longer signified perfect beauty of spirit. Masculine heterosexual images of power were reasserted by objectifying and owning cultural representations of the female body, and homosexual images went back into the closet.

Homoerotic images of male androgyny as a transcendent ideal did not disappear, but provided escape for artists in the Industrial Age where ‘transcendence became a psychological need’ (Ritter 1989 p.175). Spiritual ascent characterises Romanticism; a performance context which inspired writers and artists in the 1920s was that of the circus and, in particular, aerial acrobatics. Ritter (1989) and Franko (1995) refer to Cocteau’s obsession with the performance of aerialist ‘Barbette’, a Texan man (Vander Clyde) who performed a trapeze act in drag. Cocteau, for whom the
theatre expresses the 'essential idea of art as illusion' (Ritter p.182), idolised Barbette, who could transcend his flesh and blood body to a place of pure beauty. 'Calling Barbette Apollo-like, he clearly heroizes the ability of the artiste to shed, like a god, his given gender' (Ritter 1989 p.181). Cocteau's subsequent involvement with Ballet Russe, his passion for the dancing of Nijinsksi and the ballets he consequently wrote, can be considered a continuation of his fascination with androgynous transcendence (Ries 1986).

Androgyny appears in the hippie movement of the 60s, as a symbol of sexual liberation, in the emergence of gentle young men with long hair, flowers and robes. In the hippie movement, perhaps through the sexual liberation offered by 'the Pill', the androgynous image of a young male hippie appeared to signify that the act of heterosexual sex itself could be an act of transcendence, a male and female spiritual union no longer tied to reproduction and family life. Androgyny appears again in pop music - David Bowie and Mick Jagger, Boy George and The Artist Formerly Known as (Prince) - but these last two figures can be considered to represent a different 'queer' interpretation of androgyny, which will be considered later.

These briefly mentioned examples of androgynous representations confirm the myth as a concept reliant on representational codes in art and language for realisation. The aesthetics of beauty formulated by the early Greeks, which have been paramount in influencing Western philosophy and culture, emerged from within a homoerotic environment in which gay sexuality was considered to be a more distinguished, or higher, form of love that either heterosexual or lesbian love. The androgynous figure, the feminised male, has been passed down through the history of a phallocentric patriarchal culture as a signification of classical perfection, beauty which transcends that of the flesh. The metaphysical appropriation of the myth encourages a release from the corporeal concerns of the body to imagine a higher and more exquisite existence. This conceptualisation of androgyny denies the reproductive earthly sexual desires of men and women, and worships the notion of a spiritual union of desire - therefore non-desire - at the transcendent level of platonic love rather than reproductive sex. In this way androgynous representations in art, literature and theatre offer a
patriarchal culture the opportunity to worship the beautiful young male
body without fears of any embodied homosexual relations.

1.2: Boys Transcending

Parallels can be drawn between classical androgynous representations in
art and the dance culture of the 1990s. One element of the seductive force
of men dancing can be traced to their androgynous images, the illusion of a
union between masculine body and feminine dancing. Applying Barthes'
semiological approach (1973) to deconstruction of myth, this section
considers the work of Russell Maliphant and Matthew Bourne, whose
androgynous performances seem to have taken on mythical proportions in
the late 1990s.

Although Coupe (1997) points out that Barthes' deconstruction refers more
to an exposure of Bourgeois ideology than to mythology, his investigation
into myth as a cultural construction, rather than a natural phenomenon,
has been useful in defining the androgynous qualities of bodies in
performance. Androgyny demythologised allows recognition of the embodied
sexual conflict from which the myth draws nourishment.

For Barthes (1973) myth is a 'type of speech' (p.117) and therefore a
textual concern, and, as such, can be analysed by a semiological system
that of signifier, signified and sign. However, as Barthes points out, myth is
a 'second-order semiological system' (p.123). The first term (the signifier) of
the mythical system is already a complete sign within the first semiological
chain, that of language or, as Barthes calls it 'language object' (1973 p.124).
Applied to androgyny, this first sign is composed of its signifying image, that
of the white Western feminised male body (also with its own name, history,
age) together with its signified meaning, that of an imaginary union in one
body of the sexual desire of male and female.

When myth gets hold of this full sign of the first semiological chain, it
becomes an empty signifier, 'raw material' (p.123) for a greater system,
that of myth, or, as Barthes calls it, 'metalanguage'.(1973 p.124). The
whole first triad, that of image, meaning and sign of androgyny is reduced
simply to 'the status of mere language'. (p.123). As a new signifier, it is 'at the same time meaning and form, full on one side and empty on the other' (p.126). On the one hand, as a 'sign' in the first semiological system, the androgynous image is full of meaning signifying the union between male and female. On the other hand, the image is an empty form ready for myth to fill with a whole new set of significations. In this instance, the empty form is filled with significations of ideal beauty which transcends sexuality, mortality and procreation of the real body. The feminised male dancing body becomes an empty form, surface appearance, illusion, evoking mythical aspirations towards a spiritual and higher state.

In this way, sexuality and sexual identity for male dancing bodies is held as 'secret' through the ambiguous illusion of androgyny. However, dance is an embodied art form, and this empty form of illusion is continuously shadowed by the real of sexuality - heterosexual and homosexual - at the site of the male body. For Barthes (1973), the meaning of the sign in the first semiological system (imaginary union of male and female sexuality provided by the feminised male body in this instance), is still present in its absence once the sign becomes an empty form for myth - in fact, myth depends on its first meaning.

One believes that the meaning is going to die, but it is death with reprieve; the meaning loses its value, but keeps its life, from which the form of the myth will draw its nourishment... It is this constant game of hide-an-seek between meaning and form that defines myth.

Barthes 1973 p.127-8

Similarly, the inspiration evoked by androgynous male dancing bodies is nourished by the union between the masculine anatomical body and feminine dance significations.

Although Franko (1994) draws attention to the androgynous qualities of Louis XIV in his performance as the rising sun in Ballet de la Nuit (1653), androgynous signification in dance theatre for the purposes of this project can be traced to the gay male dancing body of Vaslav Nijinski in the 1900s. Nijinski's muscular yet feminised body signified as transcendent, otherworldly, spiritual, airborne beauty (Kirstein 1975). Nijinski's dancing
body becomes mythical and legendary as much for his feminine qualities of gesture and expression as for his muscular masculine strength.

Maliphant's *Unspoken* (1996), is a duet for two male bodies with similar body shapes - bald-headed, tall and elegant. Maliphant appears first, dimly lit, moving silently, wearing a sleeveless loose T-shirt, loose-fitting baggy trousers, head shaved. He moves with soft, lyrical, loose-limbed but centred movement, he appears to be aware of the pleasure of moving and slightly self-consciousness of his body's gestures. His body language shows influences of a classical technique, movements balanced and geometrical, combined with influences of new dance techniques, such as release, contact improvisation and body alignment. The movement expresses 'feminine' qualities, fluid multiplicity of directions, non-linear fractured phrasing, languid physical enjoyment of undulating gestures, silence of the upward falls, soft slow-motion downward lifts, sculpted athleticism without bravura, understatement of gesture, silent footfalls. Throughout the piece there is no eye contact between the two performers, no face to face contact. All the partnered lifts are initiated from the back or side, there is no interaction as sexually identified bodies, the bodies pass each other as shapes in space. The unifying significations of masculine bodies and feminine textures allow their identifications as 'men' to be ambiguous and understated.

As spectator I watch and interpret. I see two muscular, athletic, physically 'manly' men performing, who also have bald heads, bare sculpted arms, soft loose clothing and a movement language of fluid, non-linear 'otherness'. I see that their gaze is directed internally, or out and beyond. Even without mythical signification, the full sign of the first language system, that of a union of feminine/masculine qualities on a male body, engages me as the spectator. Vacancy of look and loosely shaped clothes negate any defining individual human characteristics. These bodies appear as illusion, silent, cool, hardly sweating throughout, the fluidity of the language appearing to compensate for body fluids. There is no play of sexual desire between these performers or between them and the audience, which will disturb the empty 'wholeness' of the union.

However, as 'signifier for the second language system, that of myth, the full meaning of the 'union' becomes an empty form for the myth of androgyny
Maliphant’s body becomes art object, signifier for classical androgyny, where masculine and feminine qualities unite and therefore cancel each other out. His dancing body signifies Truth, Unity and Beauty in Western culture.

Yet watching Maliphant dance, the realness of his mortal, muscular body, his physical presence as male, constantly feeds the illusion of transcendence. Inseparable and dependent on each other for signification as mythical, his male body doing ‘feminine’ dancing creates the illusion of a ‘union’ between male and female. The ‘union’, it must be emphasised here, represents a union of sexual desires, i.e. no sexual desires. In this way, Maliphant’s dancing body, as an empty sign, becomes the signifier for the second semiological system, the ‘metalanguage’ of mythical androgyny.

The male swans in Matthew Bourne’s (1995) adaptation of Swan Lake (1895) appear with bare torsos, bare legs and feet, wearing feather-covered pantaloons. Their heads are shaved, or their hair cut very short, chest hair is painted white and each has a strong black beak painted on his forehead. As in the original ballet, the swans group and regroup, following each other in long curving running lines and coming to rest in ‘flocks’. The movement language is balletic, long lines of arms and legs, flighty leaps, with stretched legs and feet, yet also grounded with the power and shifts of weight of contemporary dance movements. Arm gestures are emphasised, bird-like, wings in flight, graceful and strong but also vicious at times, with sharp cutting gestures. The male swans retain a fluid lightness of movement but have an added advantage over the female swans - greater freedom of...
movement and ability to cover space. They are not wearing pointe shoes. This freedom gives the swans a wild and powerful character to juxtapose with their graceful feminised flexibility. Movements combine clear classical lines, representing birds in flight, with raw, awkward weight, resembling birds on the ground. In this way these swans do not resemble the camp travesty dancers of Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo in their version of Swan Lake Act II.

Bourne's swans dance to Tchaikovsky's clichéd tunes and rhythms, music that, for many spectators, is already mythologised by the images of female bodies in tutus and pointe shoes. The famous dance of the four cygnets and the dance of the big swans from Act II of the traditional ballet are here being danced by male bodies. For many spectators the past memory and the present vision cannot help but overlap. Many spectators have prior knowledge of the mythical story ballet of Swan Lake before going to see Bourne's adaptation and already know that Swan Lake represents the unattainable search for perfection and spiritual love. Audiences already acknowledge the transcendent signification of the ballet itself, with its upward aesthetic inherent to its technique and style. Many have prior knowledge of the fairy tale mythological connotations of the image of the swan. Consequently, as male bodies appear to be doing what female bodies have been doing for one hundred years, the men become feminised and mythical, in the minds of the audience, even before they begin to move. Seduced by the prior knowledge, spectators then simultaneously enjoy the postmodern parody, the gay connotations and the deconstruction of ballet.

This way of looking at Bourne's Swan Lake can be theorised by Barthes' third method for deciphering myth (1973) which is linked to 'the duplicity of the signifier' (p.138), as full meaning and empty form. The first method of reading myth focuses on the latter, without considering its duplicity, allowing the concepts of myth to fill the form 'without ambiguity' (p.138). Running parallel, the image of the male swan can be read as 'empty form' to be filled by mythical concepts, accepting without hesitation that the male swan represents the higher spiritual state of beauty and perfection of classical androgyny. Barthes describes this method of reading myth as similar to 'the journalist who starts with a concept and seeks a form for it'.
(p.139) Reading Swan Lake in this way, suggests why the original ballet persists in its popularity. Audiences are prepared to suspend their disbelief, fill the empty form with mythical fantasy, fulfilling personal aspirations to transcend earthly pains and passions.

Barthes’ second way of reading myth focuses on the full meaning distinguished from the empty form, recognising the ‘distortion which the one imposes on the other’ (p.139). Here the spectator recognises the full meaning behind the image, that the myth is a fallacy, inviting analyses and deconstruction. These swans are young men dressed in swan costumes, with whitened skin. Each one has a sexuality, a name, history, a body - tall, thin, stocky, muscular - a body which struggles to attain dance skills, sweats, eats and breathes and is quite possibly married with children. These are bodies which, in real life, have absolutely no connection whatsoever to the mythical concept of transcendence. To read the myth in this way is to ‘undo the signification. The myth becomes an ‘imposture’ (p.139), androgynous significations can be deconstructed. Barthes describes this type of focusing as ‘that of the mythologist: he deciphers the myth, he understands a distortion’. (1973 p.139)

This second method of looking invites deconstructions from feminist, postmodern, gay, lesbian and black perspectives. Bourne identifies as a (white) gay man, which, no doubt, influences his ideas. He reconstructs the ballet from a gay postmodern perspective, producing a number of subversive meanings at every twist of the tale. As an outcome of his deconstruction of the original ballet, he decides to employ male bodies instead of female bodies as swans, to instigate a relationship of desire between swan, adolescent boy, adult prince and his mother. He decides to include a mock travesty ballet where the heterosexuals are portrayed as camp, theatrical representations. The female performers, in particular, appear as camp, male, drag parodies of ‘women’ who flaunt their heterosexual desires excessively. All these elements can be considered an indication of an openly gay/queer perspective. However, this is a reading to which neither Bourne nor any critical coverage cared to refer (Foster 1997).
Barthes’ third method for reading myth focuses on the duplicity of meaning and form together, as an ‘inextricable whole’ (1973 p.139), accepting the game of hide and seek as inherently present in myth. The third method includes both the other readings as part of myth’s ‘ambiguous signification … the reader lives the myth as a story both true and unreal’ (p.139) With this reading it is possible to decipher both the semiology and the ideology of the myth: ‘it is the reader of myths himself who must reveal their essential function’. (p.139) This offers the most recognisable method of reading Bourne’s Swan Lake, as audiences recognise both full meaning and empty form. They are prepared to accept the mythical aesthetic of transcendence as inherently present in the recognisable image of the swan, although this image is personalised by a ‘jumble’ of differently shaped, hairy, muscular men. Audiences deconstruct, simultaneously with suspending disbelief, as a dynamic of postmodern parody.

The swans, vacant in gaze, without emotion or desire, become the ideal empty form which the myth of androgyny fills with its concept. The image of a young male body, feminised by his dance gestures, costume and whitened skin, now signifies once again as transcendence from earthly pursuits. In the pas de deux between Prince and Swan, there is no sharing of sexual desire between them, no parodic play. Their faces are neutral, movements are controlled through musical phrasing. Lack of physical desire and sexual display between the two men, while there is clearly a homosexual agenda, suggests that the prince dreams through homosexuality to a love and beauty beyond earthly pleasure. A theme revealed by Socrates’ speech in Plato’s Symposium is once more reiterated. Platonic erotics, embodied as Greek men’s love of beautiful young boys, signify the first step towards a higher knowledge of spiritual beauty, where physical human corporeality must be relinquished to realise the higher state (Foucault 1984). Reading in this way, Bourne’s adaptation of Swan Lake can be thought of as reiterating the original platonic myth, but from an openly homoerotic perspective.

Acknowledging that the prince appears to go mad rather than die does nothing to diminish the powerful significance of the androgynous swan as a symbol of transcendence. Even the Swan’s murder by the other swans appears to be punishment for a ‘transcendent’ being who has been
contaminated by earthly humanity and sexuality. There is little visual signification to encourage an alternative reading of Bourne's *Swan Lake* (1995) - for instance, a politically subversive interpretation which reflects on a violent homophobic culture and AIDS. Bourne's adaptation may have 'outed' the homoerotic elements of Platonic transcendence but has done nothing to shift them. It may, in parts, be a fabulous parody and a subversion of the traditional, and it may deconstruct the myth from a gay perspective (Foster 1997). It may also be an unveiling of the constructed 'truth' behind the making of the original ballet: that it has *always* been a creative fantasy of men, a narcissistic expression of their own homoeroticism. However, using Barthes' third reading of myth, I suggest audiences are seduced by the image of the swan and its classical androgynous signification as transcendent beauty, even while they are aware of the reality of the male bodies and the postmodern parodic potential to deconstruct that signification. Popularity with a wide range of audiences suggests that spectators (including myself) accept postmodern, feminist and gay deconstructions and still take pleasure in the original mythical androgynous significations. Traditional mythical properties of *Swan Lake* still persist, even though, in fact more so, now the swans are male.

The classical myth continues to be seductive. The image of a male dancing androgynous body appeals to the conventional aesthetic conditioning of Western culture which, once again, points to the urgency of this investigation. I am persistently reminded that it is the *male* dancing body that seduces, plays a game of hide-and-seek with full sign on the one hand and empty signifier on the other. Masculine body and feminine qualities of dance language and imagery together merge as the empty form for androgynous illusion. The identity of the male body becomes an ambiguity, a secret, seductive as a shadow, all of which displaces and disguises conventional 'truth' about man while his maleness remains unquestioned.

However, this is not to infer that all male dancing bodies signify as androgynous. Interestingly, the androgynous illustrations chosen in this project, (Maliphant's own body and Bourne's male swans) identify for the most part as heterosexual, or at least not openly gay. This observation reveals how the myth, although originating within a 'gay' context, has been
appropriated by the patriarchal heterosexual culture to signify as transcendent of sexual desires. In contrast, the performances by openly gay/queer-identified dance artists such as Javier de Frutos, Nigel Charnock, Lloyd Newson and Michael Clark engage the audience through their play with the conflict of masculine and feminine desire. They consciously counteract notions of union and transcendence from sexual desire. While classical androgyny signifies 'denial of original sin' (Walters 1978 p.34), Charnock titles his solo show Original Sin (1993). Other gay male artists, such as trapeze artist/dancer Jeremy Robins (Slippery When Wet 1996) and Brenton Surgenor (Written With the Body 1996), present another image of a male dancer - a big, muscular, athletic body, who also desires to play the pleasure of sexual object but as a macho body, sexualised and not at all transcendent.

1.3: Girls Grounding

The classical myth of androgyny, which encourages a transcendent union of sexualities, is unlikely to be enthusiastically embraced by feminist agendas seeking to establish female sexuality as different from that of male. For Lorde, the paradigm of androgynous imagery, the male body feminised, is far removed from the concept of the erotic, therefore 'female' body. Lorde (1984) proposes that the high art aesthetic represents a denial of the erotic, declaring that

> the ascetic position is one of the highest fear, the gravest immobility. The severe abstinence of the ascetic becomes the ruling obsession. And it is one not of self-discipline but of self-abnegation.

Lorde 1984 p.57

A feminist critical analysis of classical androgynous representation is thoroughly documented by Weil (1992), who deconstructs Plato's original myth, arguing that it has been passed down as a myth of Universal Man, representing a union between the spiritual and material world. Weil describes how the classical statues of ancient Greece which were later praised and idealised by romantic artists, represent 'the most pure manifestation of ideal beauty' (1992 p.2). However, as Weil points out, pure has been interpreted as Grecian and masculine and is an ideal which is still
perpetuated as a metaphysical ideal of universal beauty.

Weil (1992) claims that the androgyne has been identified as male in union with his 'other' female, in order to make his knowledge complete, and therefore denying the bodily and psychical difference of a feminine autonomous sexuality. Weil argues the importance of bringing this excluded body to the forefront of the scene of representation in order to

dislodge the androgyne and the sexual, aesthetic and racial hierarchies it establishes from the universal, revealing its givens to be constructions of patriarchal ideology and not the results of divine or natural law.

Weil 1992 p.11

Weil quotes Showalter (1977) who, in writing about Virginia Woolf, asserts,

androgyne was the myth that helped her evade confrontation with her own painful femaleness and enabled her to choke and repress her anger and ambition.

Weil 1992 p.149

Weil refers to The Androgyny Papers (1974), in which various articles claim not only that the androgyne is persistently portrayed as a male body, but that the myth encourages and perpetuates heterosexuality and is derivative of homosexuality, 'focusing on the complementarity of genital differences and promoting the oppressive institution of marriage' (p.151). This points to a confusion between the classical original and feminist interpretations. The classical myth of androgyny represented by the feminised male, signifying a sophistication and transcendence from mortality and reproduction, has emerged from a homosexual context, albeit within a patriarchal culture. 1970s feminist interpretations appear to ignore the gay genealogy of the myth and focus on the androgynous ideal as it has been appropriated by heterosexual patriarchy, a transcendent union of male and female gender differences. Consequently, it seems obvious why feminist political and social agendas to establish a separate female identity for the female body cannot be recognised through the mythical fantasy of androgyny.

The whole volume of Women's Studies (1974) is dedicated to The Androgyny
Papers, providing an important 1970s critique. It was published in response to Heilbrun's (1973) androgynous manifesto, which was enthusiastically supported and severely contested. For Heilbrun,

androgyny suggests a spirit of reconciliation between the sexes; it suggests, further, a full range of experience open to individuals who may, as women, be aggressive, as men, tender, it suggests a spectrum upon which human beings choose their places without regard to propriety or custom. Heilbrun 1973 p.x-xi

Heilbrun's book focuses on androgynous representation in literature. She charts a path from Oedipus in Greek literature to the Bloomsbury Group and Virginia Woolf. She considers the androgynous qualities of female characters such as Diotima in Plato's Symposium, Sappho in Plato's Phaedrus and Antigone. She writes at length regarding Shakespeare's 'androgynous ideal' (p.29) particularly in the plays As You Like It and Two Gentlemen of Verona, where

a boy plays a girl who plays a boy who pretends to be a girl ...but few realise that the beautiful ease of the passage from boy to girl is part of the point. Heilbrun 1973 p.29)

Heilbrun (1973) devotes a whole chapter to 'The Woman As Hero' (p.47-112), considering the androgynous characteristics of writers such as Charlotte and Emily Bronte, George Eliot, Jane Austin and Georges Sand and how androgyny comes to be represented through the female characters of their books. Of Katherine and Heathcliff's tragic relationship in Charlotte Bronte's Wuthering Heights, Heilbrun writes

the miracle consists in her ability (Bronte's) imaginatively to recreate in art the androgynous ideal which she perceived within herself on the loneliness of those moors. Heilbrun 1973 p.82

For Heilbrun, androgyny is a liberation for men and women, allowing each a wide range of experiences and human impulses which hitherto have been constrained to one or other sexes, and, in so doing, offering a reconciliation between the sexes. Positive enthusiastic response, in the 1970s, to the
concept of androgyny for the feminist body, is based on the notion of wholeness, equality of masculine and feminine traits in one body, a socialist utopian union of male and female characteristics. Several articles in The Androgyny Papers (1974) focus on the androgynous vision, where masculine and feminine unite ‘for the Rebirth of the new human being and the new society’ (Bazin and Freeman 1974 p.212) and for ‘psychic unity’ (Gelpi 1974 p.152). Heilbrun (1974) envisions an androgynous world where ‘we would stop referring to the minds of brilliant women as masculine’ (1974 p.147) and where a range of possibilities are open to any individual body regardless of sex. For Heilbrun, androgyny appeared to provide an ideal answer to the feminist proposals for social and economic equality - a political utopia, suggesting a ‘human ideal’ (1973 p.xx), which encouraged female empowerment and male gentleness. The tone of her book suggests an almost religious enthusiasm, that humanity needs androgyny for our ‘future salvation’ (p.ix), and that through the androgynous vision, the jealousy and lust of the world can be redeemed and there will be forgiveness.

Side stepping, the feminist ideal of the androgyne in the 1970s can be thought of as occupying a similar position to that of the cyborg in the 1980s. Heilbrun’s androgyne (1973) and Haraway’s cyborg (1989) both, in their own ways, represented a utopian vision, an imaginative construction of a positive future feminist female body which goes beyond duality. Just as Haraway’s paper received both positive and negative criticism (Doane 1989, Crosby 1989), so Heilbrun’s concept of a feminist ideal which would ‘transcend’ sexual stereotypes was put to the test within a socialist feminist framework. Both works are fictions of imagination, myths which, once consciously imagined, exist and function as cultural influences, no less real than scientific facts. As Heilbrun suggests,

> perhaps it is only by casting people in new roles that we will find the new concepts we are looking for. Myths are invented to explain rituals, rather than rituals to embody myths.

Heilbrun 1974 p. 149

Negative feminist responses to the term androgyny appear also to be based on this notion of wholeness and unity. For Secor (1974), also in The Androgyny Papers, androgyny represents an ideal utopian image with no means of getting there. While images of the witch, Amazon or lesbian
'suggest energy, power, and movement; they are active, self-actualizing images,' the concept of androgyny only offers 'images of static completion'. (Secor 1974 p.165). Her apprehensive observations include the notion that androgyny sets personality structures as givens for man and woman, that the 'constant reference to femininity and masculinity functions subtly to keep the focus on genital differences and on sexual union' (p.166). For Secor, androgyny focuses on heterosexual love, which inhibits women bonding with women, and its focus on union between man and woman hinders women fully identifying with themselves. Finally, Secor suggests that the harmony and 'marriage' that androgyny offers does not take into account men's fear of woman/mother which is 'one of the central motivations of our oppression' (p.168). For Secor, at least the images of witch and Amazon take men's fear into account by facing it head-on.

Weil (1992) summarises Heilbrun's project as being 'inappropriate for women wishing to advance themselves or to promote the new discipline of women's studies' (p.151), and says that The Androgyne Papers (1974) salvage the ideal of androgyny 'only by reinstating the mind/body dualism and the concept of wholeness that have constituted the underpinnings of patriarchal ideology' (Weil 1992 p.152).

In a later paper, Heilbrun (1980) finds herself frequently counteracting the negative criticisms that emerged after her book (1973) was written. She mentions the writer Adrienne Rich, who wrote a poem called The Stranger which included this verse:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{if I come into a room out of the sharp misty light} \\
\text{and hear them talking a dead language} \\
\text{if they ask me my identity} \\
\text{what can I say but} \\
\text{I am the androgyne} \\
\text{I am the living mind you fail to describe} \\
\text{in your dead language} \\
\text{the lost noun, the verb surviving} \\
\text{only in the infinitive} \\
\text{the letters of my name are written under the lids of the newborn child.}
\end{align*}
\]

Rich 1971-72

Rich then negates this view of androgyny, removing the poem from her
future publications and asserting that

androgyny has recently become a "good" work (like "motherhood" itself!) implying many things to many people, from bisexuality to vague freedom from imposed sexual roles. Rarely has the term been accompanied by any political critique.

Rich 1976 p.76

Heilbrun (1988) attempts to defend her position by comparing her utopian political vision of androgyny with the physical realities of transsexualism. In her opinion, transsexualism is committed to sexual polarisation and stereotypical sex roles, while androgyny offers a freedom from such roles. Defending herself, she writes of a certain male-to-female transsexual who 'became more of a woman as she was treated as a woman' (1980 p.263), becoming incompetent, small, neat, childlike and passive as the result of being treated like, and enjoying being, a 'woman'. Heilbrun suggests that the transsexual male-to-female becomes more woman than any 'real' woman, buying in to the binary sex roles that culture constructs.

Transsexuals may stand for those of us caught in stereotypical roles, caught, yet wishing to escape. For such people, at such a moment, the concept of androgyny is liberating.

Heilbrun 1980 p.265

This offers an interesting contradiction in the light of Kate Bornstein's criticism of androgyny 14 years later (1994). Bornstein is a transsexual, once heterosexual man, now identifying as neither male, female, gay or straight, but as a transsexual lesbian. For Bornstein (1994) 'androgyny could be seen as a trap of the bi-polar gender system, as it further establishes the idea of two-and-only-two-genders' (p.115).

Bornstein's interpretation of androgyny from a transsexual perspective, and Heilbrun's interpretation of transsexualism from an androgynous perspective, appear to fall into the same binary trap and between them they offer completely opposing views on androgyny. 8

Heilbrun (1980) also draws parallels between the mythical concept of androgyny and the physical realities of bisexuality, focusing attention on
the French feminists who, in her opinion, 'support “bisexuality” for everyone' (p.260). For Heilbrun, bisexuality

not only retains the definitions of masculinity and femininity, but reinforces them as binomial, emphasising rather than diminishing the sacred “dichotomy”.

Heilbrun 1980 p.260

Finally, Heilbrun (1980) withdraws to a defensive position, stating that androgyny may only be a ‘necessary stopping place on the road to feminism’ (p.265) and that the liberating place of androgyny which seeks to abandon the binary rigidity of sex roles will inevitably be overtaken, when a woman 'has become her own person and found her own voice, her self' (1980 p.265). This statement seems a contradiction of her previous conviction about the utopian and imaginative unity of masculine and feminine qualities in one body.

Acknowledging that androgyny can be simultaneously praised and criticised for its unifying idealism, interpreted as both unity and division between genders, illustrates the seductive ambiguity of the term and its representations. Both positive and negative feminist criticisms seem to accept inevitably that androgyny is a stage to go through, a movement towards a new world of wholeness for the human being. Heilbrun (1974) points out that, as a term, it will possibly be discarded when the ‘anti-androgynous’ world is replaced.

Without it we cannot break from the stage in which we now are, but with it, I think, we can move into other realms where the term may no longer be either useful or appropriate.

Heilbrun 1974 p.149

Androgynous image in a feminist culture appears to lose its mythical properties as an imaginative and fantastic constructed illusion represented in language codes of art and literature. Feminism has brought the myth down to earth, tending to deconstruct and manipulate androgyny for political and social agendas which focus on visibility for female subjectivity and sexuality in patriarchal culture. Imagining the female body as ‘transcending’ gendered sexuality is problematic when socialist feminism focuses on real anatomical, sexual and gender differences of man and
woman and the inequality which exists there in a patriarchal culture. From a feminist perspective, the 'different' lived sexual and social reality of heterosexual women’s position cannot be represented through the ambiguous images of androgyny. In the 1970s, feminist art focused on female mythical images, represented in art as images of feminine sexuality, a recognition of the feminist ideals of woman's power. A famous illustration is offered by Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party* (1979), which Chicago describes as 'a symbol of our heritage' and 'goddess worship, which represents a time when women had social and political control' (*The Dinner Party* 1979 p.53). The long triangular dinner table is set with ceramic dinner plates, each one illustrating a different three-dimensional design. For Chicago, this work of art is a celebration of the achievements of women both historical and mythological, each woman being symbolically represented by an image on a ceramic plate. Chicago writes that she used the iconography of the butterfly, together with 'blending of historical facts ... symbolic meanings and imagination. I fashioned them from my sense of the woman' (p.53). The plates of women such as Virginia Woolf, Georgia O'Keefe and Emily Dickinson can be thought of as explicitly sexual, the female anatomical imagery of vagina, labia and clitoris being closely represented through butterfly iconography. *The Dinner Party* can be considered as an example of feminist essentialist art practice through the obvious connected identification between ‘woman’ and her ‘different’ female sexuality.

On the one hand, feminist notions of androgyny are represented as a static union, a centering, a neutral harmonising between masculine and feminine. On the other they represent a liberation for male and female bodies from fixed gender roles, but suggest there are no visible strategies for getting there. Neither of these offer a positive futural imagining for the female body. However, feminist concerns do root androgyny to the site of embodied sexuality, for male and female bodies, which lays the groundwork for another interpretation which signifies neither transcendence nor union of sexual desires.
1.4: Spanning the Divide

As the conventional myth was imagined from within a male homosexual culture, then most likely a refiguration could emerge from a queer sensibility. However, it may appear questionable at this stage why and how the myth of androgyny might be refigured at all, for representation on the female body. Still and Worton (1993) refer to Foucault’s reappropriation of conventional concepts, and point out how many gay men in recent years have taken offence at Foucault’s use of vocabulary. Apparently many gay men resent the use of such terms as ‘androgyny’ which they see as merely rehearsing the ‘third sex’ theories. Still and Worton (1993) read Foucault differently, asserting that

it is crucial for him to employ/redeploy ... By re-inserting into contemporary discourses on homosexuality the terms and concepts of the past, he challenges us to scrutinise all terms that we might use, re-appropriate or invent to describe ourselves or others.

Still and Worton 1993 p. 54

Mythical terms which have such power within phallocentric language can be continually redefined as imaginative concepts which influence contemporary existence. The androgynous vision itself has continually been refigured through the centuries, as mystical, classical and feminist interpretations clearly illustrate. Even feminist negations of the myth encouraged a new definition of androgyny.

We use a term that has its roots in the past because we too have been shaped by the past, but just as we must go beyond our own past, we must go beyond past definitions of androgyny.

Bazin and Freeman 1974 p. 185

Refiguring androgyny for the female body in 1990s dance culture cannot aspire to transcendent spiritual signification. As the body which represents sexual desire, mortality and reproduction in western patriarchal culture, these transcendent significations are impossible. The thesis does not argue for a ‘union’ of masculine and feminine, or, rather, not for a union that excludes separation and difference. One of the most relevant points in
Singer's project (1989) is her description of the androgyne as one who ‘does not try to submerge differences ... (who) knows that the separation is as essential to life as the union’ (p.238), that it was only when the ‘one-body’ of the ‘primordial androgyne’ was dismembered that ‘the world of Creation came into being’. (Singer 1989 p.238).

Neither does this refiguration of androgyny refer to a feminist idealism which seeks to destroy sexual stereotypes. Wittig (1981), suggests the possibility of replacing phallocentrism with a new representational language, a lesbian feminist utopia, in order to finally liberate the female body. Although she does not mention androgyny, Wittig (1981) had an idealistic dream of ending the oppression caused by constructed heterosexuality and gender, declaring that

'a new personal and subjective definition for all humankind can only be found beyond the categories of sex (woman and man) and that the advent of individual subjects demands first destroying the categories of sex, ending the use of them, and rejecting all sciences which still use these categories as their fundamentals.'

Wittig 1981 p.53

Butler (1990), in her critique of Wittig's project, suggests that Wittig's strategy 'to offer an experience beyond the categories of identity' (p.127), depends on an assumption of lesbianism for all, a 'kind of separatist prescriptivism' (Butler 1990 p.127). Butler questions what would replace the heterosexual/homosexual binary power system if not another in reverse, where lesbianism would require the excluded heterosexualism to establish its own existence. For Butler (1990), a more creative force for displacing the binaries of gender construction might be

'a thoroughgoing appropriation and redeployment of the categories of identity themselves, not merely to contest "sex" but to articulate the convergence of multiple sexual discourses at the site of "identity" in order to render that category, in whatever form, permanently problematic.'

Butler 1990 p. 128 9

Negating classical and feminist interpretations, the refiguration of androgyny offered here is that of a physical play between gender characteristics, a crossing, playing the extremes of both and neither
masculine and feminine sexualities and genders in one body. This is a notion of androgyny which considers a performance of spanning the divide between male and female, not finding a balanced union as an end goal, nor a negation of difference, but an opening of the space between. This refiguration does not attempt to deny sexual embodiment nor attempt a utopian union, nor attempt to transcend sexuality. It is an interpretation of androgyny with no static identifiable image. It is a movement of change over time.

Attention has already been drawn to a point of tension between classical and feminist interpretations, and there is another between feminist and queer interpretations of the myth. Seventies feminism criticises the myth for negating the female body and deems it, therefore, unsuitable for reappropriation by the female body. Queer perspectives, which focus on the performativity of sexual significations and identities (Sedgwick 1993) suggest that feminist agendas are still, to a large extent, focusing on the essential differences between 'man' and 'woman', a specificity of genders within a heterosexual matrix. Consequently, this feminist view also implies that female bodies cannot appropriate masculine sexual significations for performative play because masculine belongs to male bodies. Queer perspectives, however, encourage the view of masculine and feminine as free-floating signs, that 'phallic' and 'feminine' do not refer to specific anatomical bodies. For Sedgwick (1993), queer 'seems to hinge much more radically and explicitly on a person's undertaking particular performative acts of experimental self-perception and filiation' (p.9).

According to the heterosexual feminist agenda, the female body, in a phallocentric matrix, is positioned as the site of sexual desire, a constant reminder of sex, reproduction and mortality. From this feminist perspective, appropriating androgynous illusions appears an impossibility. First of all, she would have to reposition herself outside the allotted position as sexual object of desire. This would not only require giving up conventionally constructed 'femininity' of phallocentric binaries, but also surrendering feminist claims to a female-identified, different, separate sexuality that is specifically female. Seen from a queer perspective, however, a female body can move sideways and beyond these concerns and recognise both masculine and feminine significations of sexuality as qualities with which to play, regardless of gender. In this way, a female body appropriates
androgynous characteristics, yet still signifies as a sexual body within patriarchal culture. A conflict is consequently exposed for the female body, providing an ambiguous site of contradiction and controversy which is potentially seductive in its play between sexual embodiment and androgynous illusion.

Heilbrun (1973) was writing prior to the emergence of postmodern conceptual theories, that gender and sexuality are culturally constructed, and before the emergence of 'queer' theory. If Heilbrun's project had been read from a 1990s queer, rather than 1970s feminist, perspective, response to her work might have been less negative. Her utopian dream of masculinising the female and feminising the male ascribes to the 'unfixing' of fixed gendered bodies, while queer theory takes as its basic premise the non-fixed performative fluidity of gender (Butler 1991).

Queer perspectives focus on the performative action of the play between significations - where it goes and how it means (Grosz 1995). However, there are many feminist and lesbian feminists who

are conscientious objectors to the idea of gender, who refuse to take sides, refuse to empower the whole system by their participation, who have lived and continue to live beyond gender.

Jeffreys 1997 p.275

For these 'conscientious objectors' a queer 'play' with gender is still located and trapped in the cultural phenomenon of patriarchy, and, by playing gender, only holds to 'male supremacist duality' (Jeffreys p.276). The point being missed by this feminist perspective is that 'queering' is not a play with binary identifications of gender, but a play between genders. 'Queering' as a verb (Goldstein 1997), becomes the action of moving between, over time, opening desires and imaginations to other possibilities between 'man' and 'woman'. Androgyny, refigured in this thesis as an illusion for performance, can be considered as a fabrication of the activity of queering.

A queer reading of androgyny as illusion for performance has its most accessible representation in theatre, film and pop music culture, the signification being literal and easier to visualise than that of abstracted
movement language on the dancer's body. Marlene Dietrich's film performances in Sternberg's films, such as *Blonde Venus* (1933), provided illustrations for early research into the theme of erotic androgyne. Her excessive fetishistic masquerade with phallic femininity combined with her direct erotic rapport with the spectator, her 'male gaze', was useful as a literal and theatrical example of what might be possible in the more abstract medium of dance performance.  

Studlar (1990) refigures Mulvey's (1975) and Kaplan's (1983) theories of the 'male gaze' of feminist film theory. For Studlar, Mulvey's theory claims that 'dominant cinema speaks neither for women nor of women, but rather speaks a discourse of male Oedipal desire' (p.230). Relying on psychoanalysis and Freud's essay on fetishism, Mulvey positions women in film as visual fetishistic objects, a process whereby

woman is objectified by the male's controlling gaze, constituted in film as a relay between the camera, the spectators (assumed to be male), and the male hero who often aggressively seeks to investigate the woman's mysterious sexuality.

Studlar 1990 p.230

Studlar (1990) describes two forms of male looking asserted by Mulvey, and later Kaplan - one being 'sadistic voyeurism' and the other 'fetishistic scopophilia' (p.232). In the second, narrative process is stifled 'in favour of a woman-centered spectacle' where the look alone holds erotic intent. Mulvey observes that the latter form of looking allows the spectator a 'direct unmediated erotic rapport' (p.232) with the female star, where 'the powerful, controlling look of the male protagonist who usually anchors spectatorial identification' is missing (Studlar p.232). Studlar argues that this is missing from most Sternberg/Dietrich films. As Studlar refigures Mulvey's notion of 'male gaze' she refers not to Freud, but to Deleuze (1971) and his theories on masochism, asserting that the masochism of the male spectator, not sadism (as Mulvey suggests), positions Dietrich as a powerfully sexual androgynous presence.

Deleuze regards masochism as an oral stage phenomenon in which the subject's sexuality is fixated at an infantile level ... The masochist does not desire to despoil or destroy the
Playing into the notion of male masochistic pleasure, Dietrich turns the male gaze right back on itself, she holds the gaze, the male subject becomes masochistic object and the act of androgyny is initiated. She plays between her 'phallic' power, portrayed through her look, language, body language and her position as object of pleasure in narrative film.

Studlar (1990) proceeds by analysing Dietrich's fetishized costuming in the films, which encourages the pleasures of masochist looking by playing on the "striptease" or as Barthes says, the "staging of an appearance-as-disappearance" within a strategy of continuous masquerade, or erotic metamorphoses in the service of desire.

Dietrich manipulates her masquerade through costume, gender and character transformations. The extreme fetishism of costuming, both masculine and feminine, suggests a cross-dressing, which Studlar refers to as 'a particularly important type of masquerade in the masochistic dynamic' (p.237). Dietrich's movements between disguises contribute to the ambiguous, androgynous illusion, while the real woman Dietrich remains a mystery.

Feeding, then teasing, the masochistic desires of the (male) spectator, Dietrich acts an elusive ambiguous presence. She remains aloof, refusing to invest in her femininity. She is self-consciously aware of her use of 'masculine' and 'feminine' as she plays the parodic edge of the femme fatale. Her sexual body and androgynous illusion interact, her embodied sexuality becoming all the more desired in its game of hide and seek, setting up a game of seduction. Watching Dietrich's powerful gaze, the spectator pleasurable submits, becomes empowered and again pleasurable submits. Dietrich disturbs the subject/object binary of the gaze, her game between performer and spectator cannot be fixed.

Dietrich's presence appeals as much to women as men. Absence of a male protagonist in the films allows Dietrich a direct active gaze to the spectator,
a gaze which is 'masculine' in signification, thereby opening her performance to gender ambiguity while remaining a sexual figure. This, combined with the androgynous crossings of images and characters, encourages an erotically charged female spectatorial looking (Marcalo 1997). Dietrich's ability to open a non-fixed subject/object space, by playing into masochistic desires for pleasure with a direct 'masculine' looking, provokes a male and female 'desire for the powerful femme fatale. (Studlar 1990 p.248).

Drorbaugh (1993) describes Stormé Delarverié as a cross-gendered theatre performer, (an 'invert') 'who in the early twentieth century, was pathologised as homosexual' (p.120). According to Drorbaugh's critique, Stormé resisted any gender reading on and off stage. She performed with The Jewel Box Review, which toured America in the 40s, 50s, and 60s as a troupe of twenty-five female impersonators and one male impersonator. Not only were audiences 'transfixed by what was impossible to comprehend, even though they saw ... a man, and read a woman' (p.137), but, in trying to identify 'her' off-stage, were told 'they could rely on whatever perception would put them at ease'. (Drorbaugh 1993 p.137) Stormé, whose striking image is depicted on the front cover of Ferris' Crossing The Stage (1993), is of mixed race and mixed gender, positioning herself outside any normal category or 'truth', and is quoted as saying 'I model myself after me' (p.136). Drorbaugh exclaims, 'We long to stabilise who she is in order to read her, but she refuses to define herself for us, to give us her autobiography' (p.136).

From a queer perspective, this is her seduction. 'The fascination with the illusion begins to supersede the real even as it depends on it' (Drorbaugh 1993 p.138). While a heterosexual specular position seeks to identify, a queer perspective is one of erotic engagement with the ambiguity itself. Drorbaugh quotes the lesbian writer Nestle (1987), who considers the ambiguity of male impersonators such as Stormé to have 'an erotic allure and challenge that makes them compelling ... I think their invisibility is not an accident' (Nestle in Drorbaugh p.138). In a similar way to Phelan's notion of 'unmarkedness' (1993), Nestle seems to be suggesting disguise as a conscious seductive strategy for female performers in their relations to the spectator. Androgyny, as an illusion for performance, which plays the space between masculine and feminine, spanning the divide, can provide such as disguise.

mimesis in gender impersonation positions spectators to recognise and verify the “truth” of the sex-gender system’s reproduction while it also elides the system.

Drorbaugh 1993 p.138

The androgynous play between genders that is portrayed by Grace Jones in *A View To Kill* (1985), Jaye Davidson in *The Crying Game* (1992) and, perhaps most obviously, Sigourney Weaver in the *Alien* films (1992, 1996), invites a chaotic blurring of spectatorial desires. Here the real lived sexual genders of the performers become shadows for the illusions of androgyny. Weaver, heterosexual mother, becomes Ripley in *Alien*, becomes a masculinised, machine mother and remains sexual in those shifts. In her next film, *The Ice Storm*, she becomes a heterosexual lover but, after her role in *Alien*, her appearance reads as a travesty, a drag act. Weaver does not embody a union nor a transcendence, she embodies the divide between masculine and feminine desires and identities. Bell-Metereau refers to Garber (1992), who discusses the erotics of role-playing and cross-dressing.

Part of the pleasure and danger of decoding - is in determining which set of referents is in play in each scenario. For decoding itself is an erotics - in fact, one of the most powerful we know.

Garber 1992 p.161

Weaver's image, movement language and characterisation might invite lesbian, gay, heterosexual or transgender speculations of desire, but the only recognisable element is the queer *movement of desire between* identities, not the identities themselves. Although most of Bell-Metereau's book (1993) focuses on identifiable cross-dressing, she concludes by stating,
the films that merit greater individual study are those works that present new versions of personal identity - possibilities that take us outside the limits created by our culture.

Bell-Metereau 1993 p.297

Pop stars Madonna, Sinead O'Connor and Annie Lennox (mentioned in Bell-Metereau 1993) offer a similar play between identities. However, the pop star who perhaps most ‘fits’ the ‘non fixable’ queer sensibility of androgyny is ‘The Artist Formerly Known as (Prince)’. Fuchs (1996) describes the effect of (Prince’s) new symbol/name.

The uncertainty of ♂ as a marker for a post-Prince identity, extends and complicates what was already visible in then-Prince identity, extends and complicates what was already visible in then-Prince’s performances, his differences from a variety of bodies, selves and identities, including male and female, black and white, queer and straight.

Fuchs 1996 p.140

His new name is the symbol for androgyny, a term which Fuchs (1996) refers to as ‘so allusive and complex, simultaneously reaffirming and refuting familiar boundaries and identities’ (p.139). Fuchs describes (Prince) performances as ‘gender-vexed narratives, where his image-as-performance is a site of transgression and appropriation. (p.143). She frequently reiterates the multiplicity, illusiveness, incoherence and instability of his images. ‘Prince insists on a range of performativity rather than an “expression” of a fixed identity’ (p.144). Clearly Prince’s appropriation of androgyny favours a queer rather than classical figuration of androgyny. His is an androgyny of ‘expansiveness and excess’ (Fuchs 1996 p.146), not wholeness and neutrality, provoking Ferris (1993) to question, ‘does the erotic rely on clear definitions between male and female? Or is the blurring of these distinctions its very source’ (p.9).

To visualise bodies in this way is not easy in a patriarchal culture which depends on stable identifiable categories to secure its normality (Garber 1992). Effort is required, imagination, ability to change, living with chaos, constantly letting go of ‘secure’ identities (Fuchs 1996). It requires rethinking androgyny, not as a static image, a photograph, but as movement which spans between identities over a period of time. Franko (1995), who approaches a refiguration of androgyny not fashioned on sexual
transcendence, refers to this chaos in his analysis of the aerial performance of 'Barbette' (Cocteau 1926). Franko draws attention to Cocteau's fascination with Barbette's transformation from off-stage 'man' to on-stage 'woman', and consequently to his performance representing the divide between the ground and the high wire. Referring to Cocteau's essay (1926), Franko (1995) describes Barbette's performance as one in which

his androgynous high-wire suspension is the phantasmic product of two active voices that remain apart from their projected actions: the male voice says "I play woman" the female voice says "I am man". The androgyne is asserted in a "no man's land" by no one. Barbette's "truth" is the deathly indeterminacy between the two lines of gender polarity.

Franko 1995 p.106/107

Barbette's androgyne is made apparent as 'the middle ground to be traversed' (Franko 1995 p.96), the feminine side occupying the space on the ground, while the masculine space is that of the trapeze. The moment of androgyne is in the space between, as 'an imaginative leap away from theatrical realities'. Androgyne becomes a 'death defying leap across those boundaries' (Franko 1995 p.99). Following Barthes' (1973) semiological approach to myth, it would appear that Franko takes the full mythical form of androgyne, with its sexually transcendent significations evoked by Barbette's high-wire act, and applies it as an empty form to refigure androgyne as a chaos, a 'no man's land', a 'deathly indeterminacy' that is evoked by the crossing between man and woman.

The danger of death is the challenge of performance that explores sexual ambiguity before a society (that is, an audience) unwilling to recognize, let alone openly endorse, that ambiguity.

Franko 1995 p.100

Yet this way of looking, evoking the 'deathly' chaos of a play between genders, is seductive in its ambiguity.

The fantasy I've been calling performative queerness is not only about sex, sex acts, or even sexual identity; it's also about the unexplored spaces between expressions, the possibilities of movement, the non-names not yet imagined.

Fuchs 1996 p.150
Androgyny is an illusion, an imaginary construct. As such, its representations as performance creations should not be mistaken for an identifiable sexuality or gender. Androgyny cannot be compared or exchanged with bisexual, hermaphrodite, transsexual, heterosexual and homosexual in the reality of sexual behaviour (Singer 1976, Epstein 1990). Sexual imagination of a queer theory/practice context can reclaim androgyny as an imaginative representation for the female body. Androgyny becomes a verb, 'to androgynise', the moving between gender, which on a female body in performance problematises the conventional myth. Not only does a female body 'androgynising' reveal the conflict between the body with its 'lived-in' sexual physicality and the ideal illusion of aesthetic beauty. It also problematises the female role as sexual object of desire in patriarchal culture, by creating an ambiguity of gender characteristics while retaining sexual significations.

Chapter 1 has followed an investigation of androgyny from a classical interpretation of male bodies in art and dance, through a feminist deconstruction as utopia or negation, and subsequently to a refiguration of androgyny from a queer perspective. Rather than dismissing the concept of androgyny as being inappropriate for a female body in a postmodern post-gender culture, an alternative interpretation to those of the classical and the feminist has been proposed - one that is embodied and rooted in, (rather than transcending), sexual play. This interpretation is based on androgyny as 'action', a movement between masculine and feminine qualities, between identities, rather than a union of male and female. Androgyny comes to span the divide, opening performing space and time to a play of multiple possibilities of gender not constrained to the subject and object of a static binary code. In this way an illusion of androgyny can be appropriated by the female body in performance which suggests, but does not fix, gender identification.
Chapter 1 Refiguring a Myth  End Notes

1 Platonic metaphysics is based on an assumption that speech offers a higher form of truth than writing. Speaking comes closer to a dialogue with the soul, as 'the living work of knowledge of which the written word is no more than an image' (Plato in Kearney 1994 p.118). The true subject is the one who speaks. Symposium is told and retold through speech. The prologue sets the scene, someone asking someone else to tell him what happened. That someone else heard the story from another someone else who was present at the party itself. The Symposium is a documentation by Plato of the speeches given by the guests, one of whom was Socrates.

2 See Plato's Republic and his description of 'Good' as being 'beyond being ... the Good can be sensibly compared to the "sun" of the sensible world' (Caputo 1997 p.93).

3 Michelangelo's own body was not beautiful; his nudes expressed a fantasy of his own ideal masculine self. He struggled to transcend his own sexuality, his own body, to a spiritual purity of true platonic love (Walters 1978).

4 Attention has been drawn to visual codes rather than literary codes. The androgynous writings of Coleridge, Dante, Spencer, Balzac, Shaw and Wilde all deserve attention. For a comprehensive guide to the concept of androgyny in literature see Bazin's bibliography (1974).

5 See for instance, Leda, in Greek legend, Lohengrin in German Middle Ages folk lore, Deneb, one the 20 brightest stars. (Encyclopaedia Britannica 1994/98)

6 The lack of critical coverage from a gay perspective was a comment voiced at the Preservation Politics Conference at Roehampton Institute 1997, papers of which are yet to be published.

7 The programme notes for Cheek by Jowl's brilliant all-male adaptation of As You Like It (1994) describe how the origins of theatre are derived from 'primitive religious rituals. These rituals tend to conform to one of two patterns ... One feature that both rituals share is the representation of androgyny ... In order to represent their gods, the human actors would have to desex and depersonalise their bodies and their movement ... Dionysus was one of the oldest double-sexed deities, originally represented with the sexual characteristics of both genders. These dramas were enacted by male, masked players taking both male and female roles' (Cheek by Jowl 1994).

8 Issues concerning transgender can be seen as both irrelevant and useful to this project. On the one hand, transgender involves genital surgery in order to 'pass' as closely as possible as the opposite gender. Male and female bodies undergo surgery when they consider their anatomically defined sexuality conflicts with their 'real essential' gender self. For many transsexuals, genital conversion surgery becomes the only way to be at peace with one's real self (Bornstein 1994). For Bornstein, transsexuality is a term coined by a doctor, transsexuals are 'diseased', have an illness, transgender is a medicalised phenomena. Transsexuals must invest in this description in order to receive surgery paid for by insurance companies. However, the word disease suggests the word cure, and the cure, according to cultural authority, is the giving up of one gender for another. Western culture makes this 'goodbye/hello' option the 'only option' for transsexuals, and in this way the transsexual perpetuates the "war" between the genders (Bornstein 1994 p.120). The medical profession's objective is to surgically correct men and women who feel they are 'gender dysphoric' (Bornstein 1994 p. 118), as society requires there to be only two genders, man and woman, and bodies must be corrected to fit one of those categories. Nataf (1996) quotes Auchmuty 'they (the government) would rather have people living the gender role they want than to have people who are one sex, but are stretching the limits of that sex beyond what they...
would want. In other words they would rather have transsexuals than lesbians and gays (p.43).

On the one hand this essentialist argument for transgender genital surgery appears to contradict the theme of androgyny as illusion. 'Passing' as a particular gender surface of the body. On the other hand, Bornstein, herself a transsexual through genital conversion surgery, encourages another option, suggesting, ‘anyone whose performance of gender calls into question the construct of gender itself' (1994 p.121), can be considered transsexual. Visibly trans-gendered people are 'just the tip of the iceberg' (Bornstein in Nataf 1996 p.58). For many transsexuals, the aim is not being the opposite gender, but becoming a third gender, one becomes two makes three, and if ‘more transsexual people were able to identify as transgendered and express their third gender category status, instead of feeling forced to slot into the binary because of the threats of punishment and loss of social legitimacy, that third category would be far more populated than one might imagine’ (Nataf 1996 p.58). Nataf speaks of pansexuality as an imaginative and creative outcome for a surgically transgendered female to male. In defining her own sexual life she says, 'With a heterosexual woman I can be a pretty hetero male; or if I perceive her as a fag hag, I can be a faggot with bi tendencies. With a lesbian top femme I can be a high heel worshipping boy bottom or a third sex butch, a lesbian man ...With gender ambiguous bi men and women and sexually ambiguous transgendered people maybe I can just be myself (Nataf 1994 p.32).

Although real sexual acts are not the focus for this project, this imaginative approach to the play between sexual roles comes closer to the illusion of androgyny as a range of performance qualities. Transgender issues offer endless argument. If personal political reasons/results for undergoing genital conversion surgery are the experience of a third gender pansexuality, then the question arises as to the need for firmer bonding with one's 'essential' sex through genital conversion surgery. If the chaos and ambiguity of third gender is the desired outcome, it would appear that this already exists by being in conflict with one's anatomical gender in the first place. Could it be that the ambiguity of pre-surgery sexual anxiety is a result of outside forces and powers, while the post-surgery ambiguity is of one's own construction? Or does the act of transsexuality itself, and the practice of living as a transgendered body, open up the possibilities of a third space where desire to 'pass' as one of two sexes becomes no longer of primary importance? 'If you really believe in the possibility of being non-gendered, multi gendered, then why change? That's where most feminists get lost in the argument' (Smyth in Nataf 1994 p.42). Yes, the argument is difficult to resolve.

How the categories of man and woman can be replaced within phallocentrism without another binary system of opposition and difference is taken up by other feminist philosophers. Whitford (1991) describes the necessity for Irigaray to situate her writing within the discourse of male philosophy, in order to disrupt it and reveal its constructed existence. 'What she sets out to do in her work is to expose the foundations of patriarchy ... In the process the conception of what philosophy consists of (or should consist of) is profoundly shaken. (p.10)

The 'cruising' workshop (Chapter 5 Play, Power, Pleasure) is introduced with a discussion regarding Dietrich's performances and her theatrical manipulation of phallic gaze and femininity. The workshop explores, through improvisation, a physical abstract translation of these qualities, which become the tools to initiate, devise and develop content, applied to dynamics of movement vocabulary as well as encouraging a performing 'presence'.

* anatomy limits the possibilities of a conflicting multiplicity of signs on the
Chapter 2
Androgyny in Dance Languages

*Upward Thrust/Downward Fall* depicts androgyny in dance languages as a layering of significations of two extremes, the vertical language of ballet and the horizontal languages of new dance forms. *Playing a Space* applies Derrida's concept of 'khora' to characterise androgyny in dance languages as a place/space between phallic/vertical and feminine/horizontal characteristics. *W/hole* exposes the ongoing dilemma for dancers, concerning the co-existent relationship between internal drives and language representation, introducing the problem from which this thesis draws its arguments. Making a comparison between the movement qualities portrayed by dancers in the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company and that of dancers in the Siobhan Davies Dance Company, it is argued that an homogenised identifiable dance language has emerged in which the play of 'differance' between extremes of phallic and feminine, vertical and horizontal, is lost.

2.1: Upward Thrust/Downward Fall

This thesis traces the emergence of androgyny in dance languages to two opposing styles of dance and performance discourses. One of these styles can be thought of as 'classical', that of ballet, contemporary dance and Cunningham technique. The other style of dance can be thought of as new dance, derived from a collection of techniques: contact improvisation, release, martial arts and body alignment techniques. Androgyny in dance languages can be said to emerge from the layering of these two contrasting technical trainings on a dancer's body.

Dance theatre in Western culture is still dominated, to a large extent by ballet, a language situated in and expressive of, classical metaphysical philosophical principles, symbolising the 'universal' aesthetic of beauty in phallocentric culture, the upward transcendent line.

Only in ballet do we possess all aspects of the vertical in its exact mathematically formed, universally perceptible expression ... everything ... is the direct heritage passed down to us by the sublime, proud, and pure antiquity.

Volinski 1925 in Copeland and Cohen 1983 p.257

Ballet is dependent on the construction of bodies which conform to this ideal
of beauty. The training is focused on defying gravity, rising above and away from the humanness of the ground, and therefore away from sexuality and bodily functions. Young bodies are constructed through the training to be taut, muscular and pliable, with straight legs which unfold to a great height and a straight back which arches upwards and backwards away from the centre of the body, lengthened neck and pointed feet. Even the hair is pulled up and away from the face to accentuate the upward line.

Supporting, underlying, founding this phallic identity is the ballet's perpetual upward thrust. Everything lifts up, moves towards height rather than depth; everything gestures out and up, never in, never down.

Foster 1996 p.14

An ideal body for ballet is one where sexual features are invisible, where both male and female bodies appear castrated and genderless. They are bodies trained as instruments with which the choreographer expresses himself, bodies on which the ballet can be realised. Stripping away any identifiably female sexual signs, such as roundness of hips and breasts, is essential in order for ballet to perpetuate its mythical status in aspiring to a higher Truth and Beauty, the classical aesthetic. Static pose, set vocabulary, virtuosity of the language are reflected in this image.

The years of bodily disciplining have refigured fleshly curves and masses as lines and circles. Geometric perfection displays itself at both core and surface ... Via this geometry her movements turn mess into symbol.

Foster 1996 p.14

The aesthetically linear, vertical, ordered and rational ballet language, stripped of feminine artifice, can be compared to the abstract metaphysical properties of classical philosophy.

The Greeks clearly set the vertical in opposition to the bent and crooked ...To see straight, to speak straight - all this is at once pictorially sensible and heroic.

Volinsky (1925) in Copeland and Cohen 1983 p.256

Lechte (1994) refers to the abstract imagery of the vertical to describe the thought of philosophers such as Hegel and Kant, as it elucidates the notion of fixed identity, concepts of Absolute Knowledge, Truth and Beauty, which
encourages the hierarchical binary opposition of subject/object, mind/body, thought/feeling, form/expression. Although every philosopher must be read for her differences, other philosophers that can be considered on the vertical axis would be Plato, Descartes, Baumgarten, Schiller and Kant. Descartes’ famous phrase, ‘I think, therefore I am’ which introduced dualism in the era of Enlightenment, provides a textual paradigm for the vertical ideal (Beardsley 1966).

Ballet language marks the body itself, in a way similar to Kafka’s punishment machine (1969), described by Grosz (1994) as

an instrument of writing, as a material means of inscription through which propositions, texts, and sentences are etched on the prisoner’s skin, and through it, his subjectivity.

Grosz 1994 p.137

Beneath the fetishistic performative gender traits, beneath the stylised choreography, the body image and movement of the female ballet dancer is symbolically phallic, holds the upward aesthetic and linear muscularity of ‘masculine’ phallic signification. Take away the pointe shoes, jewels, costumes and stylistic gestures of ballet and look at the language as a physical training: it is mathematical, geometric, balanced, centred - the female body is extremely muscular, powerful and boyish in shape. The language lives in the female body even off-stage. Ballet is not a performance which she masquerades at night, ballet training changes and constructs the body itself as a performativity which the female body enacts day and night. These dancers are recognisable as they walk down the street - extremely muscular calves and thighs, small hips and breasts, flat stomach, turned out legs. As power systems construct the subjects over which they have power, so the power system of ballet constructs a particular, erect, muscle-bound body of upright stance which characterises and embodies its own system.

Side-stepping, Schulze (1990) describes how female body building ‘threatens not only current socially constructed definitions of femininity and masculinity, but the system of sexual difference itself’ (p.59). Although ballet training does not develop muscles in the same way as body building, the well-defined muscular female dancer’s body, through its phallic
significations, definitely has the potential to confuse cultural definitions of feminine, ‘opening up a site of contest and conflict, anxiety and ambiguity’ (Schultz p.59). It is a very small step to read the ballerina’s body as masculine and phallic off stage. Like a body builder’s female body, no wonder there is ‘an attempt to pull her back from a position outside dominant limits into a more acceptable space’ (Schultz 1990 p.59) by adorning her with fetishistic femininity.

Considering the female ballet body in this way suggests an interesting interpretation of classical androgyny for the female body. Because the ballerina’s anatomical body is stripped of female sexual signs, is masculine in shape, with a language that signifies as phallic, the union between this ‘masculinity’ and the knowledge that her real body is ‘feminine’, can read as transcendent. Certain independent dance theatre performers have taken advantage of their classical androgynous balletic physicality and specifically subverted it to focus on raw sexual energy. The classical/rock dancing of Karole Armitage, Ellen van Schulenburg and Julie Hood who have danced with Michael Clarke (and Michael Clarke himself), expose this conflict between the upward aesthetic and their sexual female bodies.

In order to develop this theory for androgyny in dance languages, the qualities of classical ballet, its images, training and vocabulary are being marked with the term vertical. The vertical (phallic/masculine/power) significations of ballet are temporarily abstracted from the ballet dancer’s body, and from the context of ballet, and held as a network of free-floating qualities that can possibly be appropriated by any dancing body. Verticality is shifted to one side for a moment, in order to consider the other force, that of new dance languages.

Reactions to ballet and the traditions of contemporary and Cunningham techniques came in the form of a political and a physical revolution in this country in the 1970s. Letting go of the classical vertical line, the upward thrust of power, hierarchies, representations of the dancer as phallic tool, emerged as a radical movement, strongly influenced by socialist feminism (Adair 1992).

The new dance movement in Britain consisted, in the first instance, of two
strands, one which stressed a new movement training for the dancer and one which sought to deconstruct but not abolish the classical traditions, through the political emphasis of feminism. These two strands overlapped and interacted to create new styles, structures, languages and dance cultures which continue to influence the independent dance scene 20 years later, as well as infiltrating the traditional dance cultures, such as ballet and contemporary dance (Jordan 1992, Mackrell 1992).

The physical movement strand, which is the concern at this moment, emerged at Dartington College in Devon, and was strongly influenced by the work of postmodern dance artists from the Judson Church era in the United States in the 1960s. The dance department at Dartington was run by Mary Fulkerson and a frequent visiting lecturer was Steve Paxton. Both were initiators of post modern dance in the United States.

Incorporated into the training at Dartington were release technique, contact improvisation, body mind centring and postmodern structuralist techniques, such as minimalism, chance procedures, improvisation and use of pedestrian movement and timing. Emphasis was directed towards

the centre of the body (the torso), the weight and momentum or energy flow of the body, and the ability to lose one's balance, to fall off the vertical.

Novack 1990 p.129

Fulkerson's teaching methods emphasised a stripping away of styles and mannerisms, releasing muscle tension, letting go of the upward line, to find each student's authentic physical movement and from there allow her/him to develop a personal movement vocabulary. Paxton taught contact improvisation, a duet form, where partners support each other's weight while in motion.

Interest lies in the ongoing flow of energy rather than on producing still pictures, as in ballet; consequently, dancers doing contact improvisation would just as soon fall as balance.

Novack 1990 p.8

Studying these techniques encourages functional, anatomically determined movement, and internally focused body image, while ballet depends on set
movement designs and external gaze. New dance languages read as non-linear, fragmented and fluid, qualities which will be discussed again in relation to feminism and sexuality in Chapter 4 and again in Chapter 6 in relation to eroticism. Movements are physically sensual to perform rather than metaphorically sexual to watch as in ballet (Novack 1990).

New dance languages describe a physical translation of a horizontal axis, another philosophical principle of aesthetics, offering an alternative to the upward dominant aesthetic of the vertical line. Lechte (1994) refers to the horizontal axis when discussing the work of such philosophers as Nietzsche and Bataille, describing how the horizontal does not represent the opposite of the vertical, where thought would become identified as democratic, but rather ‘it cannot be put on a scale: for horizontal thought is the thought of difference, not of identity’ (Lechte p.217). In this way the vertical can be thought of as form on the horizontal axis, as masculine power (vertical) becomes a form of feminine pleasure (horizontal). Characterised as repetition, chance, fluidity of boundaries, deconstruction, the horizontal axis recognises the instability and multiplicity of difference, which renders the binary hierarchical relationship of subject/object, mind/body problematic. Other philosophers whose projects can be considered on a horizontal axis include post structuralists such as Derrida, Delleuze and Baudrillard (Lechte 1994).

Continuing with the theory for androgyny in dance languages, new dance significations on a dancer’s body are being marked as horizontal (feminine/pleasure). These fluid, fractured, non-linear, improvisational, inward-looking qualities of 1970s/80s new dance are abstracted from any natural affiliation to the dancer’s body and held as free-floating horizontal characteristics to be appropriated by any dancing body.

The free-floating qualities of vertical and horizontal aesthetic principles, inherent to ballet and new dance techniques, when appropriated by one body, can be considered to initiate the possibility of androgyny in dance languages.
2.2: Playing a Space

A point of departure for the emergence of androgyny in dance languages can be traced to the interactive concerns of Dartington College and X6 Dance Space in the 1970s. Alongside the exploration into new movement at Dartington there was another strand of radical reappraisal happening at X6. Here the focus was not on new movement techniques so much as on a radical deconstruction of classical forms through a socialist feminist perspective. X6 never claimed 'new dance' as a movement style so much as a political framework for dance.

New dance is not: baggy trousers, rolling about, Chinese shoes, contact improvisation, ballet to rock music, release work, image work, outside performances, post-modern dance, martial arts, self indulgence, stillness, American, non-narrative ... New dance does not exclude: formal choreography, tap, ballet class, baggy trousers, rolling about, Chinese shoes, jazz shoes, no shoes, army boots, self indulgence, contact improvisation, rock music, virtuosity, stillness, narrative. Early 1987 p.10

X6 artists were not so concerned to discard the conventions of theatrical performance nor the traditions of ballet, but explored ways to subvert, shift, realign and restructure traditional training in a manner that was healthy and empowering for the dance artist. X6 provided a political feminist framework for the movement languages of new dance, focusing particularly on radical subversive experiments in performance and the performer as a political being and subject of her own work. 3

Two strands of British new dance, Dartington, which explored a radically new body training, and X6, providing a political feminist context within which the dance artist could work, influenced each other through the Dartington Festivals (1978-87), as a layering of elements one over the other.

X6 and Dartington shared two main objectives which are particularly relevant to this thesis. One was to establish the dance artist as subject of her/his own work, foregrounding the 'choreographer as performer' explosion of the independent dance scene in the 1980s/90s. The other was the
development of a different movement aesthetic which moved away from the upward thrust of ballet towards the downwards fall of weight. X6 applied the techniques emerging from Dartington, incorporating release and Alexander techniques into ballet practice, while Dartington students were influenced by the feminist politics and theatrical parody of X6.

Subversive feminist politics and person/political empowerment of X6 performances (discussed further in Chapters 4 and 6), together with the internally directed anatomical non-hierarchical performances of new dance language at Dartington, influenced a new generation of creative artists who required a political framework and both extremes of language forms to meet their choreographic needs.

Choreographers such as Siobhan Davies, Lloyd Newson, Michael Clark, Janet Smith and Ian Spink can be considered to have been influenced by the new dance movement and conventional classical techniques, requiring dancers who have a strong classical technique or conventional disciplined training together with a political voice. These choreographers also required dancers who have no fear of the ground, can improvise and take an influential role in the creative process. As a consequence, new demands are asked of the training establishments, to train dancers who can meet the demands of the choreographers, dancers who physically understand the vertical and the horizontal aesthetics, who have a highly disciplined technique and pedestrian movement, classic and broken line.

By applying movement techniques such as release, contact improvisation and Alexander technique, it becomes possible to strip ballet language of its performative mannerisms, applying body alignment awareness to the technique itself. Focusing on the anatomical framework of the body rather than muscular tension to execute ballet movements, a new system of teaching and practising ballet has been developed, which does not harm the body. In this way it has been possible to recognise ballet's technical strategies for providing a balanced efficient way to train a body. 4

Ballet, stripped of its performative affectations, offers a wide range of movement through the use of 'turn out'. The emphasis, in the training, on
strengthening and lengthening the legs and feet provides the dancer with the ability to jump high in the air. The lift of weight out of the hips facilitates fast intricate foot work and the ability to travel fast through space. Coordinated use of legs and arms around an upright spine allows for a centred efficiency and economy of movement that is precise and clearly defined.

New Dance techniques such as release, aikido and contact improvisation provide the dancer with downward skills, flying horizontal through the air, catching another body while falling to the ground, working upside down, balancing on hands and head rather than always on the feet, using the weight of gravity, dancing from an awareness of the balance of bones and joints rather than the muscles. Kirstie Simpson, Yolanda Snaith and Laurie Booth favour horizontal aesthetics in their performance practice. New dance improvisational techniques provide methods for the dancer to explore a 'personal' style and quality of movement.

At the interface between the vertical qualities of ballet/contemporary dance and the horizontal elements of new dance, it becomes possible to feel the weight of the body on the floor while simultaneously experiencing the upward lift. It is possible to breath from the belly instead of from the chest during strenuous jumps, lead movement from the centre of the body instead of from the chin, extend legs high with minimal muscle tension, combine long upwardly moving lines with fluid falls to the floor and lift another body by working with, rather than against, gravity (Novack 1990). A new movement style emerges which moves between the powerful hierarchical qualities of long upward lines, exact positions, erect balances and the pleasurable qualities of fluid, loose limbed multiple gestures. 5

Combination of vertical and horizontal qualities allows dancing bodies a far wider range of movement possibilities, appropriating many aspects that were traditionally defined as masculine and attributed to the male body. Dynamic attack of directed movement and muscular strength in the arms and back, combined with contact improvisation skills, allows female bodies to lift, catch other bodies and take their own weight on their arms when throwing themselves to the floor, falling, lifting and catching on the
horizontal as well as jumping high on the vertical. One outcome of this work became increasingly popular in the mid-80s and came to be labelled 'Eurocrash', becoming a familiar mark of companies such as LaLaLa Human Steps, DV8, Vim VandeKebus, Motionhouse and V Tol dance company. Eurocrash is addressed again in Chapter 6 as a figure of erotic practice.

A layering of vertical (phallic) and horizontal (feminine) in the language itself describes an ambiguity, an arc of movement possibilities between the traces of classical line and pedestrian movement. Merce Cunningham's dancers employ a particular interpretation of vertical and horizontal in their dance language. As Novack (1990) observes, a dancer may be executing phallic balletic stretched legs one moment, pedestrian walking and sitting on the floor the next. This double intention engages the spectator in a play of questioning, actively engaged in finding meaning in Cunningham's performances. His dancers illustrate the downward aesthetic, weighting the body towards the floor with a fluidity of non-hierarchical movement, while also retaining elements of the upward aesthetic, such as linear clarity, lightness and speed.

The play between vertical and horizontal is particularly relevant to the manipulation of movement in space on a theatrical stage. Philosophically, the vertical dynamic is associated with fixed binary identity while the horizontal incorporates the vertical in a play of difference. The use of horizontal and vertical within stage space, together with the play of language significations, can contribute to an androgynous illusion.

The vertical use of stage space is a particular characteristic of ballet. In many versions of Swan Lake (1895), for instance, the 'King' and 'Queen' make their entrance down centre stage from back to front on a straight vertical line. The formal court dances in the third act are choreographed in lines of dancers who travel up and down stage, coming down the centre and travelling back up the side of the stage. The vertical use of space encourages a sense of hierarchy, formality, order, security and solid subject/object relationships simultaneously with notions of transcendence and 'universal' Truth through central perspective.
Siobhan Davies' work, White Man Sleeps (1988), can be thought of as an example of work on a horizontal axis, where dancers cross the stage from one side to the other. This use of space allows the spectator to observe dynamic flow rather than static image, functional movement elements of the work rather than metaphorical identities. The horizontal use of space opens the stage to energy dynamics, shapes and qualities of movement. The identity of the character or the performer does not carry such importance, and audiences tend to identify with the movement language, rather than the person performing it.

These principles can be exposed and subverted for androgynous illusion. For Play, the opening episode of Virginia Minx (1993, video 5a), employs horizontal and vertical axis in order to introduce an androgynous character. The dance takes place on clearly defined lines, from centre-back upstage to centre-front down stage, and across the stage from one side to the other, describing a 'T' shape. Moving downstage centre, the space of formal (vertical) hierarchy, the movement is improvised, minimal, broken, fractured, small movements with sudden stops, fluttery fluid gestures, language which signifies as horizontal, not vertical. This movement style displaces the formal erectness of spatial directions up and down centre stage. Moving across the stage, the movement style changes, the choreography is set, long extended legs and arms, classical lines and positions geometrically attacking the space. Androgynous dynamic is introduced by the displacement of horizontal and vertical aesthetics and language significations, spanning the divide between the two. In this way the power of the vertical is played within the pleasure of the horizontal and vice versa, emphasising an androgynous play of aesthetic concerns.\(^5\)

This project proposes androgyny in dance languages as an imagining on the dancing body which is not a central merging of two extremes where the specificity of each is compromised. Instead, the language can be described as a layering of one on the other, a play between two/many, and the multiple layering one on the other suggests the androgynous textuality.

To characterise androgyny in dance languages, an analogy can be drawn with the term 'khora', which Derrida (1995) lifts from Plato's text, Timaeus.
and upon which he plays his deconstructive analysis (discussed in more depth in Chapter 3). Derrida (1995) differentiates the philosophy of Plato from the text of Plato, a distinction which Caputo in his secondary reading of Derrida’s *Khora* (1997) describes as ‘dominant-reproductive and transgressive-productive readings’ (p.82). For Derrida, the philosophy of Plato, ‘Platonism’, has been over simplified as a classic text, and the text itself is far more complicated (Silverman 1983). Similarly, androgyny on the dancer’s body should not be read as a classic ‘dominant-reproductive text’, simplifying the concept to a philosophical conflation of opposites which establishes a merged state of being. Androgyny on the dancer’s body can be recognised, (by both the dancer doing and the spectator watching), as ‘transgressive-productive’, a textual play which is ‘complex and heterogeneous, a multiplex of innumerable threads and layers’. (Caputo 1997 p.82).

In the process of deconstruction, Derrida (1995) highlights the two opposing worlds of Platonism, one of paradigm, ‘immutable and intelligible’ (p.91) and the other being the ‘process of becoming and sensible’ (Derrida 1995 p.91). Running parallel, the former can describe ballet, while the latter suggests new dance forms. Derrida is not searching for a ‘concrete universal’ (Caputo 1997 p.84) between these opposing worlds, but looks in the text itself for

some untruth, or barely true remnant, which falls outside the famous distinction, which the truth of either separately or both together fails to capture, which is neither and both of the two.

Caputo 1997 p.84

Similarly, androgyny in dance language as imagined here, refers not to a merging or meeting in a higher place of two opposing styles and techniques, but to a constant layering of one over another, one opening to the other, an androgynous space/place emerging from both. A space/place which both extremes of technique fail to capture.

This place is ‘khora’, to which Derrida is loathe to attach a meaning, although he does allow the figures ‘place’, ‘receptacle’, ‘abyss’, always following these definitions with phrases such as ‘these figures are not even true figures ... The dream is between the two, neither one not the other’
Derrida refers to Khora as 'her/it', which encourages the impossibility of definition. While androgynous dance language on the male body is susceptible to signification as 'a concrete universal', a classical transcendence, khora as a her/it more successfully characterises androgyny on the female body, suggesting hidden tensions and conflicts as a complex, layered yet empty state of being, which is impossible to situate as a true 'logos'. Dutoit (1995), the translator of Khora, introduces the essay, describing the term as

her who is the intangible, the ungraspable, the improbable, totally near and infinitely far away, her who receives everything beyond exchange and beyond the gift.

Dutoit 1995 p. xvi

A female dancer's body 'androgynising' can be described as a body which has a history of many languages, full of stories which have been played, yet which can become a body which is empty and ready to receive new stories. 'Each tale is thus the receptacle of another' (Derrida 1995 p.117). Playing in the place/space of androgyny, a female dancing body does not identify as any particular story, text or gender but contains all and none of them.

If khora is a receptacle, if it/she gives place to all the stories, khora herself, so to speak, does not become the object of any tale ... A secret without secret remains forever impenetrable on the subject of it/her.

Derrida 1995 p.117

As a futural imagining, this thesis proposes that the practice of androgyny in dance languages can bring the female body to an active physical place from which play becomes possible, offering a state of readiness from where a multiplicity of movements could happen.

2.3: W/hole

At this juncture a question might be asked as to what exactly is the problem. The illusion of androgyny in dance languages would certainly appear to offer a female body the place/space between phallic and feminine, vertical and horizontal significations, with which to evoke seductive
relations in performance. However, this possible solution also introduces the problem which forms the basis of the inquiry. Whether androgyny, as it has emerged in the independent 1990s dance culture, can be considered as a play of movement spanning between masculine and feminine significations, may be a futural imagining. Androgyny in dance languages can read as the ‘androgynous dance language’, appearing as a conflation of vertical and horizontal, phallic and feminine, into an homogenised, cohesive established dance language. For a spectator looking at a female performer, the language can appear identifiably fixed, female body and language collapse into one another. This suggests a closing back into the classical ‘universal’ of the text, dominant-reproductive, where the play between extremes of phallic and feminine is lost, an impassivity is established where the language on the body becomes devoid of playful dynamic contrast. Androgynous dancing as a merged union does not necessarily signify as seductive on the female body and does not evoke ambiguous significations of mystery or transcendence, as it might on a male body.

A point of tension arises here between androgyny as a mythical ‘textual’ concern and androgyny as embodied action, in time and space. Derrida’s ‘dream’ of khora as a space/place is a textual imagining, a philosophical wandering, not an embodied practice. At the site of a female dancing body, the futural imagining of khora is not so easily appropriated. Up to this point, androgyny in dance has been referred to as a language concept, and as such has been considered as a theoretical and aesthetic concern. Considering a body playing androgyny requires a focus on embodied expressive play of desires as well as external language concepts: androgyny as a sexual and textual concern. Just as vertical and horizontal signify as ‘markers’ of androgynous dance language, so phallic power and feminine pleasure signify as ‘markers’ of androgynous desire.

Whether or not the body’s internal drives and desires existed prior to its construction as a subject within language has always been problematic for dance theory/practice. Foucault, considered as a post structuralist theorist at the forefront of ‘emancipatory politics’ (McNay 1992 p.1), emphasises how power systems themselves have constructed the subjects over which they have power and prevalent power systems in Western culture work through discourse.
Sex was not something one simply judged; it was a thing one administered. It was in the nature of a public potential; it called for management procedures; it had to be taken charge of by analytical discourses.

Foucault 1976 p.24

For Butler (1990), subjects are regulated by power structures and 'by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of these structures' (p.2). Butler (1990) and Grosz (1994) speculate that any naturalness or essentialism of the male or female subject is suspect, preferring to speculate on the construction of male and female subjects by systems of signification, language, social and historical effects. Butler (1993) points to the difficulty of discussing 'a materiality outside of language, where that materiality is considered ontologically distinct from language' (p. 68).

Dance finds itself caught in this paradox between embodied materiality and language representation. On the one hand, discussing the existence of internal drives or essences separate to their identification in language is problematic, as they can only be recognised in and by language. On the other hand, the site of dance language is the body itself, and the body or elements of its physical feeling and actions can be thought of as the only 'real' left to human beings. Many new dance languages appear to emerge from a process of listening to the interior body, both anatomical and 'expressive', in order to allow the interior drives to direct the movement of the body. In this way the interior drives appear to pre-exist the movement language. However, these drives only become recognisable as expressive through their appearance as language, suggesting a two-way process whereby 'drives and their representation are co-extensive' (Butler 1990 p.88). However, a dancer can also learn a pre-existing language and, in so doing, experience internal drives which might consequently affect and change the language (Grosz 1994). This suggests another option that 'representations pre-exist the drives themselves' (Butler 1990 p.88). For a dancer, all three options theorise the practice. For the purpose of discussion and in order to consider different androgynous elements in dance, this thesis has perhaps made a false division between language and interior drives, a linear demarcation for the written page, while recognising the in/dependent
Chapter 1 (Spanning the Divide), suggested that a refiguration of androgyny for the female body does not require a negation of the role of 'object of sexual desire'. Rather, it requires a manipulation of that role as a play between masculine and feminine characteristics of desire. It can be argued that the union of dancing body and language has emerged as a result of the negation, absence of a desiring body, a state of non-desire. For many dancers doing the language as a 'whole' is of primary concern, 'whole' as a union of male and female characteristics and 'whole' as a merging of body and language. There is little concern to play the space between their own desiring bodies and the language of androgynous illusion, nor to play the extremes between phallic and feminine illusions within the language.

In order to avoid sexual objectification of their bodies, female performers may adopt an expressive attitude which turns in on itself, deletes itself, in the effort not to express desires because of appropriation into the economy of the binary code. The performing presence that many female dancers have appropriated is not one that signifies a play of desires, but one of vacancy. If androgyny in dance language can not be considered as a play between embodied 'phallic' and 'feminine' significations, it can become an established movement language performed in its 'wholeness' and 'union'. In this way, the desiring body as a play of power and pleasure also becomes 'whole', and reads as a non desiring body. A female body in its unified wholeness does not read as transcendent, nor necessarily as ambiguous, fractured, secret, chaotic, multiple, playful or seductive.

The choreographic languages of Siobhan Davies (Bank 1996) and Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane (We Set Out Early ... Visibility was Poor 1998) can both be considered as androgynous. (These works are described in Chapters 3 and 7 respectively). Davies' language appears as a harmonised union of vertical and horizontal principles and her dancers can be described as dancing behind the choreography. Conversely, the movement language of Bill T. Jones appears as a play between the extremes of vertical and horizontal, and his dancers can be described as dancing in front of their choreography. This is not to infer a clear-cut opposition between the two,
more an emphasis of style.  

In Bill T. Jones’ work the choreography appears to emerge from the performers’ desires to express some personal statement, which chooses its own particular forms and structures. In Davies’ work the choreography appears to be superimposed onto the dancers’ bodies; different dancers could perform the same material, they appear to ‘wear’ the choreography like apparel. Rarely do the dancers engage with the audience or assert themselves individually. Even when they are dancing solo, their neutral gaze allows the shape of the gesture centre of attention. Another way of describing the difference might be that Davies’ choreography appears comfortably to harmonise with each dancer’s performance of the material and falls smoothly, like a cosy bed cover, over each dancer. When Bill T. Jones’ dancers perform, their real bodies and the language created appear to clash, stimulating conflict and theatrical tension, evoking an ambiguity of meaning as to what is real and what is illusion.

The site of dance performance is the body, the language is written on the body, therefore this language can reside on the body, not as androgynous illusion but as ‘one’ with the body. In this way, androgynous dancing loses its significant play between the extremes of phallic and feminine, vertical and horizontal. This thesis suggests that dancing androgyny must be considered as a play with language, there is a body separate to the language doing the playing, creating the illusions of phallic and feminine, not by merging the androgynous elements, but by opening a ‘khora’ between them at the body site.

Derrida rarely embodies his theories, raising a conflict between post structuralist theories and dance which will be explored in more depth in Chapter 3. However, he does refer specifically to gender relations in his application of ‘khora’ (1995). Caputo (1997) describes how Derrida marks heterosexuality and homosexuality, male and female, as ‘fixed containers’ (Caputo 1997 p.104), two ordered imprisoning hierarchies of binary opposition, ‘trapping men no less than women within one place’ (p.104). For Derrida, the way to get beyond this is to open up all the other spaces through the play of ‘differance’ which
make it possible to get beyond (or beneath) two kinds, not just to three, but to the "innumerable", that is, to the indefinitely new, because differential, possibilities that are opened up once you acknowledge the contingency of "two".

Derrida's concept of differance, like khora, cannot be defined. The play of differance in language makes identifying 'presence' impossible, opening up each and every language term to a displacement of truth (Derrida 1978). For Derrida, differance is an open-ended play between all possible meanings, before all language definition, preceding identity, institution, meaning, truth and gender and cannot be defined by any of them. Khora goes hand in hand with differance, as the 'sur-name' of differance (Derrida 1995). Derrida applies the metaphor of 'choreographies' (1995b) to illustrate his notion of innumerable genders, described by Caputo as 'khora-ographies', that is, the joyful, dance-like marking off of places, multiplying the places of sexual spacing (Caputo 1997 p. 105). Derrida's concept of 'differance', similar to that of 'khora', can be applied here as metaphor for dance, pertaining to the ambiguity of gender possible at the site of a female body through a play of androgyny as a play of differance.

Androgynous illusion, as a seductive element in performance, can be described as a play of 'differance'. In this way, the body site in performance is opened to interpretations as a multiplicity of possible genders, meanings, desires, qualities and identities between the signifying extremes of masculine and feminine gender, vertical and horizontal aesthetics. As a play of differance, the futural imagining of androgynous illusion in dance languages signifies more as 'hole-ness'; empty space not 'wholeness' or completion.

The problem now to be confronted is how these theoretical and metaphorical concepts can be translated for the embodied presence of the
dance performer. On the one hand, androgyny in dance languages offers a space for an illusive play of potential imaginings between extremes. It has been suggested that a dancer can discover this space through the language trainings of both classical and New Dance techniques, not by simply merging, but by a performance play between extremes, layering and interweaving. On the other hand, an interpretation of androgynous dance language has emerged for the female body, from a union rather than an expressive play between vertical/active/phallic/power and receptive/feminine/pleasure of desire.

The existence of the question as to why and how the female body dancing in 1990s dance culture has come to signify as ‘whole’ and ‘real’ rather than as a seductive play of illusions, suggests a necessity to explore the ‘real’ body’s potential for illusion and illusion’s potential for the ‘real’ body. It suggests a necessity to ‘androgynise’ the real in such a way as to contest the meaning of ‘real body’ and make the body itself a site of playful ambiguity. To initiate this inquiry, Part Two turns its attention to a strategy for seduction, exploring the relationship between real and illusion at the site of the dancing body in performance.
Chapter 2 Androgyny in Dance Languages End Notes


2 Authentic movement is a form whereby one person witnesses another person moving. The mover responds to 'a sensation, to an inner impulse, to energy coming from the personal unconscious, the collective unconscious, or the superconscious' (Adler 87 p.20). Her movement is observed by the witness and discussion follows each session. The roles of both people are of equal importance and parallels can be drawn between this 'therapist-client relationship and that of audience and dancer' (Adler 87 p.21).

3 The founding collective (Jacky Lansley, Fergus Early, Maedée Duprès, Mary Prestidge and myself) were dance artists who had already established careers in professional dance performance contexts, ballet, contemporary dance and gymnastics. X6 produced New Dance Magazine (1977-87), encouraging dancers to write about their own and each other's work. The collective took charge of dance management, funding applications, initiating and organising activist pressure groups for dance artists, such as the association of Dance and Mime Artists (1978-84). As the feminist movement of the 70s played an influential role in empowering women, so X6 housed consciousness-raising group and, women's theatre groups, (run by Anna Furse and Jacky Lansley) encouraging female performers to make and perform their own work. We explored devising methods for making work, deconstructing the hierarchies of director, choreographer and dancer, dissolving the power imbalance between these roles. X6 dance artists (re)learned all aspects of the profession, and this learning required much experimentation and experimental performing, which might, on many occasions, have appeared from outside to be 'indulgent' (Nugent, seminar 1997 University of Surrey). However, success and failure was not initially part of our vocabulary. In a sense, X6 became a research laboratory, we persistently struggled against those external judgments to pioneer new and liberating ways to make, perform and construct a dancer. Work at X6 is well-documented by Adair (1992)

4 Using methodology developed at X6, Fergus Early taught ballet at London Contemporary Dance School. I taught ballet at the Laban Centre and, later, at Extemporary Dance Theatre.

5 Applying hierarchy to dance movement ascribes to a style of dancing whereby held static positions, such as the arabesque in ballet, have more importance than the movements which connect them.

6 For reviews of 'For Play' and other episodes of Virginia Minx at Play (1993), see de Marigny (1993) and Brown (1994).

7 Kristeva also applies the term 'chora' (from Plato's Timaeus) to describe her notion of semiotic. For Kristeva, chora is 'receptacle, unnameable, improbable, hybrid, anterior to naming, to the one, to the father, and consequently maternally connoted' (Kristeva 1980 p.133 in Grosz 1989 p.44).

8 This debate, whether the dancing body can be read as 'in front' or 'behind' the choreographic language, is obviously a provocative one, but not one to be discussed at length in this thesis. Talkback! is a project developed at The Place Theatre, in conjunction with yearly Resolutions and Evolutions dance programmes, whereby young choreographers are given feedback on their choreography. In 1997 this project was developed to include feedback to the performers themselves. To support this new project, I led two discussions to raise issues of performance. This theme, as to whether a performer performs 'in front of' or 'behind' the choreography, which was part of a wider discussion regarding different work processes, raised heated debate
amongst participants.

9 For Derrida, the term 'neutral' is a term of 'differance'. Derrida is certainly not referring to its Oxford English Dictionary definition, 'not helping or supporting two opposing sides ... not strong or positive... neither positive nor negative ... sexually undeveloped; asexual...' Neutral, as it appears in Derrida's text, refers to a place of departure, a place from which to play, from which to move in multiple directions, a place of energy and readiness. In a similar way, the same term can be applied to the state of a dancing body. Neutral does not refer to a 'neither/nor', impassive and impartial, which would translate onto the dancer's body as dull, still, non-energised, waiting. Instead, neutral is the state of an energised body in readiness, holding a place between directions. Neutral describes the space of an active centre, active before moving.
Chapter 3
Seductive Relations in Live Performance

A problem has been introduced which forms the crux of the inquiry and which can be traced in dance performance during the past 20 years. The problem lies in what might be said to be a loss of seductive presence for the female body. To initiate the inquiry, a strategy for seduction is proposed, suggesting that seductive relations between spectator and performer are evoked, not by the interior depth of meaning of a performance, but by the surface appearances and illusions created by the body performing. Real Becoming Illusion examines the strategy from the perspective of performer, Presence Becoming Absence from that of the spectator. Illustrations from ballet, butoh and my own work are considered, in order to embody elements of the strategy from both perspectives. Closing a Space focuses on the problem for the female body, locating the argument in a wider cultural sphere. Drawing a comparison with the Bolshoi Ballet's visit to Las Vegas, Baudrillard's theory of hyperreality offers a parallel analogy in reverse. For the female body in new dance performance, collapse of seductive space has occurred, not through loss of the real but through loss of the illusion.

3.1: Real Becoming Illusion

Seduction ... an ironic, alternative form, one that breaks the referentiality of sex and provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance.

Baudrillard 1979 p.21

A strategy for developing seductive relations between spectator and performer is the initial concern in the attempt to refigure a seductive presence for the female body. 'Seduction' in Western culture signifies a variety of elements relevant to sexual activity, without being the sexual act itself, including flirtation, temptation, artifice, superficiality, allure, capture, wickedness and manipulative wiles undertaken by both men and women in a strategic game to win each other as sexual conquests. Seduction also suggests a narrative, a subject who seduces and an object who is seduced, a kind of linear story familiar to most sexual scenarios, with a goal of conquest. Placing these interpretations of seduction to one side, but not negating them, seductiveness pertaining to live dance theatre performance can be thought of as an interactive interchangeable pleasurable play of ambiguous desires and meanings between performer and spectator, where identifying who is seducing or who is seduced, who begins and who ends is
secondary to playing the game of seduction itself.

The strategy for seductiveness suggested in this thesis emerges from a theory that engagement with live performance is triggered by surface appearances or illusions of reality, not the depth of meaning, truth or reality behind the appearance. Baudrillard's writing (1979) prompted the initial thinking regarding this notion of seductive presence.

All appearances conspire to combat and root out meaning and turn it into a game, into another of the game's rules, a more arbitrary rule, or into another elusive ritual, one that is more adventurous and seductive than the directive line of meaning. Baudrillard 1979 p.54

Approaching the writings of Baudrillard, at once fascinated and wary, has led to a manipulation of the fringes of his ideas without entirely submitting to his pessimistic future imaginings. Only certain fragments of his project have been chosen, which, with simple imaginative translations into physical dynamics, can feed the strategy for seductive relations.

For the most part, Baudrillard's project focuses on image reproduction technologies (both digital and analogue) in a capitalist hyperreality where 'the origin of things is not an original thing, or being, but formulae, coded signals and numbers' (Lechte 1994 p.235). Within this pessimistic perspective of late capitalism, contemporary arts are referred to as being in a state of 'aesthetic disillusionment'. For Baudrillard, contemporary culture is experiencing a 'process of mourning the death of the image and the imaginary' (Baudrillard 1997 p.7), whereby, due to the advances of technology, the space between real and illusion has been closed. ²

The seduction that Baudrillard defends can be characterised as the difference remaining between original and copy, meaning and appearance, object and its image. For Baudrillard, seductiveness is evoked by the 'aesthetic illusion' of reality, what he calls 'enchanted simulation', which is created by the surface appearance in its relations to the original. As Butler (1997) asserts in his reading of Baudrillard's work, 'The copy only resembles the original in so far as it is different from it' (1997 p.51) and it is the difference as illusion that evokes the play of seduction.
According to Baudrillard (1979), everything operates through the seduction of the empty sign, 'what if everything, contrary to appearances - in fact, in accord with a secret rule of appearances - operates by seduction?' (Baudrillard p.84). Production itself is no longer a reality, it is the greatest illusion of a reality long gone, which is now simulated through the reproduction of elusive empty signs, signs which become all the more seductive for their empty form, their non realness. 'The attraction of the void lies at the basis of seduction' (1979 p.77). 3

If the term seduction, which Western culture considers superfluous and frivolous, directs the action of all production, as Baudrillard suggests, then by extension, it might be argued that it is the superfluity and frivolousness of seduction that directs dance performance: a provocative and somewhat extreme statement, perhaps. However, the immediate parallels between Baudrillard's project and the physical context of a live dancing body in performance can be seen in the space of seductiveness that is opened between the real body doing and the illusion the real body creates in performance. By 'real' I am referring to a 'living body', the physical real of being, doing, seeing, feeling and thinking in the world at the moment of doing these things, even if these actions become perpetual repetitions. 'Real' also applies to the body itself, embodiment as anatomical presence, a breathing flesh and blood corporeality with an experiential history. In the same way, real applies to real time, within which a body lives a daily life, real moment to being alive in the present moment now, real emotions to feelings felt as reactions to experiential events. Within the context of a performance, 'real' refers to the physical anatomical body dancing, thinking, feeling and being in the physical act of the performance at each moment of that performance.4

By illusion, I am referring to a surface appearance, the transformation that the real body creates/reproduces through physical actions, exertion of energy, emotion and desire, manipulation of skill, body image, language, technique, style and theatrical image. Appropriating Baudrillard, the real body acts as the original, the body's created illusion as the surface appearance or empty sign. The space that is opened between the real doing
and the surface appearance of illusion is where seduction plays. The more wondrous a space the performer can create and the more capable the real body is of transforming itself while remaining a real body, then the more potential there is for seductiveness. The oscillation between what is real and what is illusion characterises the initial part of the strategy for seduction, the potential site of seductive relations between performer and spectator. Writing 'real becoming illusion' offers a linear progression on the page, yet the physical activity of real becoming illusion is an oscillating movement between both.

In dance performance, perhaps the most obvious conventional illustration of real becoming illusion would be the fetishistic appearance of a ballerina. In the context of ballet, the real body, a body that feels, thinks and breathes, becomes an illusion in the practice of performing. The real female body becomes a surface appearance through a physical manipulation of technique, style, expression and artifice of ballet. The interweaving relationship between full and empty, real and illusion provokes a seductive engagement, not the illusion alone, nor the real body alone, but in the oscillating space that is opened between them.

The actual physical manoeuvres that a ballerina must execute when performing an arabesque on pointe offer an example of the real body becoming illusion.

Stand on left leg, turned out from hip, knee and thigh pulled up, hips, shoulders and head balanced symmetrically on spine which is centred over left leg, weight evenly distributed through centre of left foot. Right leg prepares by unfolding out in front of body, parallel height to floor, turned out, foot stretched and pointed, right hip parallel with left hip, spine straight and shoulders centred above hips, neck relaxed, arms moving forward delicately curved, hands spaced apart by width of dancer's head while leg unfolds, weight still over left leg. Left leg bends in preparation, knee over centre of foot, push off left leg, using stomach, buttocks, back, pelvis, thigh, calf and foot, thrusting whole body forwards and up in one piece over right leg, taking weight of body over tip of pointe shoe. Hips, shoulders square over right leg, stomach lifted, chest lifted, knee and thigh pulled up, both legs turned outwards, left leg is now high in the air behind, lifted using muscular strength in back and buttocks and under thigh, left foot is stretched and pointed, leg stretched outwards and upwards. Arms are delicately placed, right arm in front, left arm behind, right higher than left, making a diagonal line from right hand to left hand, balance in this position, head
and eyes turned to face the audience, chin lifted ...

This familiar ballet gesture of ‘flight’, recalled from my own ballet experiences, requires intense physical and mental concentration, a kinesthetic awareness of body centering, coordination and aesthetic line, demanding enormous output of energy force which must be contained within the body. There can not be a careless moment of forgetfulness or distraction, it demands a total physical ‘being there’ in order to achieve the illusion of ethereal ‘not being there’. The body is involved in an exacting, exhausting, demanding, fully concentrated action, in order to generate its effortless illusion, its surface appearance.

Certain ballerinas and dance performers engage an audience, while others do not. It can be argued, with certain performers, that the fullness of the real seeps through the brilliance of the empty sign - that through the empty illusion a personalised ‘real’ can still be recognised. The illusion is not a perfect simulation, it is not a completely empty body, a code of signs with no original. There is a real body doing and the empty illusion appears full of traces or shadows of that real. In the space between real and illusion, experiences, passions and feelings of the real body are evoked, and this oscillating play of real becoming illusion engages the spectator.

Baudrillard (1979) writes of the reversible process of seduction, where all ‘truth’ of production reverses itself through the empty surface appearance. The art form of butoh developed in Japan, has a history steeped in deeply felt physical and emotional personal experience. The origins of the dance form were ‘born out of the dark post nuclear years of a devastated Japan’ (Holborn 1987 p.15), an artistic endeavour arising from a generative desire to restore the emotional and physical psychic health of a whole culture. 'We shake hands with the dead, who send us encouragement from beyond our body; this is the unlimited power of Butoh’ (Hijikata in Holborn 1987). Fukuhara describes his use of butoh in the Space Dance Body of the Future Workshop (1997),

Butoh is a step from within. Butoh is self-realisation through the body of the individual, direct, original and free from any kind of dance technique. Butoh is the recovery of the wild in mankind and the rebirth of the body intoxicated somehow lost
The challenge of butoh resides in finding a personal dance through one's full body of emotion, physicality, intelligence, and then removing the 'I' or 'ego' from that dance, allowing the emptiness of gesture to become illusion. The dance form usually involves the excruciating slow execution of movement through space, based on the notion that slow movement, quite often simply walking, allows the mind and body to observe thoughts and feelings which flood the body when it is physically quiet. Consequently, slow movement allows these images and emotions to pass through the body without consciously directing the action. 5

Midway through Fukuhara's performance Space Dance, Body of the Future (1997), Tombo performs a short solo. She kneels, sitting back on her heels, downstage centre, facing upstage. She wears a kimono. Very slowly she lifts her right arm, brings it in front of her body and undoes her kimono. She opens her arms backwards to allow the kimono to fall off her shoulders and reveal her naked back to the audience. Slowly she stands up, the kimono falling to the floor. Naked, painted with a shadow of white, Tombo begins to walk upstage, very slowly, quietly and softly. Her body is small, thin, boyish, straight lines, no feminine curves, close-shaven head. Facing upstage, her face is never seen. The movements are incredibly simple, she is not attempting to express or emote with her naked body.

Having experienced this performance as a task in Fukuhara's workshop (1997), it becomes possible to recognise the real body effort involved in evoking the appearance of vulnerable simplicity. Moving so slowly, each muscle movement, each tiny effort needed to stand up, how to balance the body, does not go unnoticed. There is muscular energised inner tension which wants to explode just under the skin's surface, yet moving so slowly it is contained within an intensely concentrated physicality. Emotions arise and move across the body at an alarming rate, yet by the time their expression begins to physically take shape on a slow-moving body, the emotions have shifted - therefore, no gesture can ever materialise to identify any particular emotion. The illusion of Tombo's performance appears to lie in her ability to create a gestural ambiguity through the real
doing of intense slow-moving actions and her ability to move from full body to empty body which is again a full body.

Butoh is a movement art form which offers an experience of full meaning on the one hand, and the empty surface on the other, an emptiness of illusion which fills with meaning once again. As a practice, butoh requires enormous physical effort, not to define a particular and recognisable shape such as the ‘arabesque’, but rather to let go of all shapes that can be universally identified. Yet the empty gesture is not a gesture of no-thing but becomes empty through a fullness of real body doing.

A similar physical intensity, full body generating empty body, real becoming illusion, I have experienced when performing the solo show Virginia Minx at Play (1993). The penultimate episode, ‘Portrait’ (video 5d), described a narrative, a journey through a life, young girl to old woman. The objective here is to analyse how the illusions were fabricated to draw the audience into the narrative. The aim was to find gestures derived from emotional experiences which, reproduced in performance, appeared as empty gestures, suggesting but not revealing the real, enticing the audience to refill the gesture with meaning. I hoped the audience would feel and identify with the narrative through observing slow-moving shifts of empty gesture.

The process in the studio began by re-experiencing emotional responses to a series of past experiences and imagined stories.

First an experience was re-imagined, remembering body language, age, discovering how it made me move, what gestures, energy level, muscle tension, body posture conjured the emotional experience, made me feel the experience again. This process was repeated over and over, finding the gestures that felt ‘true’ to the memory.

Having experienced the event fully, the emotional state and its experiential history was then extracted and discarded, keeping the empty shapes of the gestures. The challenge in performance was to recreate the body language of the experience with every muscle, eye movement, angle of head, placement of fingers and toes, without emoting the experience on stage, so that a narrative was suggested but not realised. I wanted the audience to feel the experiences themselves, which could not happen if the gestures were already performed with their original emotions. This challenge proved to be an intensely concentrated kinesthetic exercise, to remember and feel the ‘real’ but
instantaneously transfer it to the empty reconstructed gesture. Performing the reconstructed empty gesture then told me if the effect I had achieved would engage the audience.

This was not the reproduction of a technical formula, in every performance the shape of the gesture had to carry a shadow of the real in order to engage. It became a reversible process, repeatedly letting go of a real to reconstruct an illusion which in turn provoked a real.

These illustrations in ballet, butoh and my own work reveal the performer's embodied actions in a process of real becoming illusion. However the spectator's actions also need to be considered, to analyse how this relationship between real and illusion becomes seductive for the spectator. The next section switches from the position of performer performing to that of spectator watching, to consider how she becomes involved in seductive relations with the performer. This switch takes place for the purpose of writing the theory of a strategy for seduction, to emphasise the two-way game between spectator and performer.

3.2: Presence Becoming Absence

In this section the notion is articulated that a performer's act of 'real becoming illusion' triggers an activity of desiring meaning on the part of the spectator watching. A spectator is engaged by the surface appearance, while also acknowledging that this illusion is created by a real embodied person. Watching illusion in its embodied relationship with real, engages a spectator in an act of desiring to place meaning and identity on to the performer and possibly a desire to identify herself through the performer. As the performer's tactics of real becoming illusion prevent identification ever taking place, live performance is opened to a play of multiple meanings, where the act of desiring becomes a seductive play.

Derrida's ideas can be applied again, to theorise the spectatorial perspective on seductive performance. Particularly relevant are the references to presence/absence of Being in Derrida's project to deconstruct the metaphysical implications of classical narrative. In his deconstruction
of Plato's *Phaedrus*, Derrida (1981) focuses on problematising the metaphysical logocentric bias of speech over writing. As Norris (1987) points out, Plato's writings are important to Derrida, as they inaugurated the metaphysical approach to 'Presence' and 'Origin' which, with its bias on spoken over written word has passed down through the history of Western thought. Derrida first establishes how metaphysical logic assumes that speech provides access, through the speaker speaking, to the soul, essence, single truth and Presence. However, as the deconstruction proceeds, Derrida reveals how

Plato is inescapably condemned to writing, even as he seeks to denounce its effects and uphold the authority of self-present (spoken) truth.

Norris 1987 p.33

Derrida discloses that only through writing can speaking be preserved, that only through representation does presence exist, that writing represents presence in its absence (Kearney 1994). For Derrida, both writing and speaking function by a process of differing and deferring, where the notion of presence 'sustains itself by differing from itself and that, as such, presence is always deferred' (Kearney 1994 p.119). For Derrida, then, presence becomes a goal rather than an origin and a presence which only defines itself by its absence. As such, it becomes a goal that can never be attained.

Furthermore, Derrida argues that because presence or truth is always deferred, Plato (and Socrates) are persistently drawn to search for It, to search through the writing for the Ultimate Truth of Presence.

Only words that are deferred, reserved, enveloped, rolled up ... only hidden letters can thus get Socrates moving. If a speech could be genuinely present ... offered up in person in its truth, without the detours of a signifier foreign to it, if at the limit an und deferred logos were possible, it would not seduce anyone.

Derrida 1981 p.71

By extension, when a dancer's identifiable presence is consistently deferred through the play of illusion, then the search for that presence becomes seductive.
Parallel to Derrida's references to a person 'speaking', in performance the person is dancing. Seductiveness in performance lies in evoking the spectator's desire for the unattainable goal of presence/meaning, stimulated not by the real body (dancing/speaking) but by the illusions (writing) created by/on that real dancing/speaking body. In this way, a performer offers an artificial real to the spectator, offers absence of presence, through which presence is designated, where presence, in its absence, remains an unobtainable goal and is more desirable for being so. Presence becomes embodied in signs and symbols performed on the real body, as the surface appearance of illusion, a signification of absence through which presence restimulates the desire for itself.

Derrida's concept of seductiveness in language certainly offers a parallel to that of the dancing body in performance. He suggests similarities between writing and dance, their appearance being also their disappearance. 'We would have to choose then, between writing and dance' (Derrida 1978 p.29). For Derrida, however, dance becomes a metaphor for language, turning dance into discourse, his focus is the written text, he does not actually refer to dance as an embodied experience. Derrida's project focuses on presence/absence in written language, not on the presence/absence of an embodied subject. This has become a point of contention for dance writers who wish, on the one hand, to deconstruct the metaphysical fixed binaries and hierarchies of dance, but who do not want to lose the real embodiment of the dancer, on the other (Franko 1995).

Yet Derrida's reference to a seductive relationship between reader and writer of the text has been useful to the development of this thesis, offering a parallel to seductive relations between spectator and performer. While Baudrillard's theories of simulation have been applied to discuss the relationship between real body and performed illusion, Derrida's project assists an understanding as to how real/illusion of a performing body becomes seductive to a spectator through its play of presence/absence.

For Derrida, the seduction of reading written words is the desire/search/pleasure to play with presence/truth within the text. The seduction of reading the dancing body in performance is the
desire/search/pleasure to play with identity and meaning within the body text. In both instances the activity of searching and desiring is seductive, not the meaning itself.

Clearly, the discussion so far has considered the HOW of seductive performance. Seductiveness has been explored as a crisscrossing surface network of presence and absence between spectator and performer without questioning WHY the desire for meaning exists. Why a spectator desires 'Meaning' or 'Identity' from a performance/performer can be considered through a psychoanalytical perspective, which roots desire for meaning deep within the Oedipal narrative of lack/loss, in the separation of child from mother and the resulting search for the ever lost object of love, constantly deferred to other objects (Lacan 1973). Although there is no intention here to dwell long with psychoanalytical theory, certain elements of the scenario help to root the strategy for seduction in the site of embodied subjects and consequently in the bodies of spectator and performer.

Benjamin (1988) claims that the breakdown of 'inter subjectivity' between mother and child in Freudian scenarios has created the desire for continual self-recognition through another.

The mother is the baby's first object of attachment, and later, the object of desire. She is provider, interlocutor, care giver, contingent reinforcer, significant other, empathic understander, mirror ... yet she is rarely regarded as another subject with a purpose apart from her existence for her child.

Benjamin 1988 p.23/24

For Benjamin's theory of inter subjectivity, child and mother need to see the other as separate from the self in order to recognise each other mutually as subject meeting subject. Particularly the child, who 'has a need to see the mother as an independent subject, not simply as the "external world" or an adjunct of his ego' (Benjamin 1988 p.23). Benjamin's notion of inter subjectivity proposes a state of 'necessary tension between self-assertion and mutual recognition that allows self and other to meet as sovereign equals' (Benjamin 1988 p.12), a state which is neither encouraged nor developed within psychoanalytical theories which conventionally refuse the mother the position of equal subject. Freudian psychoanalysis has not
encouraged this view of ‘mutual recognition’ in the mother/child relationship, mother being seen simply as an extension of baby and not an independent subject (Grosz 1990, Benjamin 1988).

Benjamin suggests that the breakdown of mutual recognition and constant tension which inter subjectivity requires, results in the need for continuous assurance from another to achieve independence. ‘at the very moment of realizing our own independence, we are dependent upon another to recognize it’ (Benjamin 1988 p.33). On this argument each subject is continuously desiring self-recognition through identifying with an other. Benjamin’s project moves on to focus on the ‘interplay between love and domination’, dominance and submission in power relations being an inevitable result of the breakdown of inter subjectivity between mother and child.

Phelan (1993), in her exploration of the politics of performance and the seductive power of the ‘unmarked’ body, (which will be returned to later in this section), also links the desire for meaning to the need for self identity. Drawing on Lacanian theory, she states that

> the relationship between the real and the representational, between the looker and the given to be seen, is a version of the relation between self and other.

Phelan 1993 p.3

Like Benjamin, Phelan describes how one’s own origin of self is both real and imagined, that one looks continuously outside of oneself for verification of one’s own identity, saying ‘self-identity needs to be continually reproduced and reassured precisely because it fails to secure belief’ (Phelan 1993 p.4). Phelan parallels Benjamin’s notion of ‘constant tension’ by discussing the necessity to accept

> the impotency of the inward gaze. If we could accept that impotency and loss, we would not have to press quite so hard on the visible configurations of the other.

Phelan 1993 p.26

Looking for one’s identity in another always requires the loss of ‘self-seeing’, since looking ‘both obscures and reveals the looker’ (Phelan 1993 p.16).
Both writers suggest that the inability to accept the primal loss and acknowledge that there is perpetually an ‘always-lost moment’ that can never be replaced, gives rise to the constant search for self-realisation and self-recognition through an other. Both writers also recognise that inability to accept the always-lost moment has become associated with binary polarisation of gender roles.

Male and female each adopt one side of an interlocking whole. This one-sided character of differentiation evolves in response to the mother’s lack of subjectivity, with which the girl identifies and the boy disidentifies.

Benjamin 1988 p.85

Phelan’s project (1993) situates the search for self identity into the arena of performance art, recognising, as does Derrida, the impossibility for representation in any language (writing, art, dance) to identify a single Truth, Meaning or Identity. Limitations of both language and vision prevent recognition of oneself in the other, encouraging desire in its relationship to loss, institutionalised by conventional psychoanalytical theories and embedded in the binary code of subject and object. Most importantly, however, Phelan proposes that the impossibility of realising self-identity/presence/meaning, ‘maintains rather than cancels the desire for it’ (Phelan 1993 p.14, emphasis mine). Desire to seek but not to find ‘identity’, clearly appears to be an engaging element in spectator/performer relations. ‘Mimetic correspondence has a psychic appeal because one seeks a self-image within the representational frame’ (Phelan 1993 p.5).

Returning to spectator/performer relations in dance performance, both the why and how of seductiveness emphasise the necessity to create illusion on the real body of a performer, thereby evoking a desiring play of presence and absence for the spectator. Phelan and Benjamin’s explanations of the WHY of seduction, rooted in psychoanalytical narratives of self in relation to other and the perpetual search for the ever lost Original Object, suggest the possibility of searching as a constantly seductive activity. Likewise Derrida’s references to a HOW of seduction and the notion of accepting the always-lost Original Object do not cancel the desire for It, but rather verify the possibilities of playing for It.
There will be no unique name, nor even the name of Being. It must be conceived without nostalgia; that is, it must be conceived outside the myth of the purely maternal or paternal language belonging to the lost fatherland of thought. On the contrary we must affirm it ... with a certain laughter and with a certain dance.

Derrida 1973 p.159

To accept that there will always be an original loss of self (presence), allows the play of desire for presence to become an engaging activity in itself, freed from the linear binaries of fixed subject and object. Once it is recognised that the meaning of a performer's presence will consistently slip away, the act of desiring, rather than having or losing meaning, evokes the play of seduction for a spectator. Desiring, as an act in itself, teased and tempted by a presence that is suggested but never obtained, potentially defines seductiveness in performance from the spectator's position. Consequently, if spectator and performer are engaged in this strategy for seduction, 'real becoming illusion, presence becoming absence', where the play itself and desire for meaning is in constant motion, then who is seducing whom cannot be identified and the static subject/object binary becomes disrupted.

On this argument, strategic manoeuvres for the performer would be to acknowledge, through creating an illusive presence, that identification does not/should not ever take place - like a panther who emits a scent in order to fascinate and lure her victims, while she herself hides (Baudrillard 1979). Consequently, the spectator becomes actively engaged in a game of hide and seek with identity and meaning.

Admittedly, the ballerina is not necessarily the subject of her own seductiveness, being a pawn in a grand hierarchical power system of metaphysical signification which constructs a phallic fetishistic femininity. However, there is no doubt, whether ballet's illusion is interpreted from a conventional phallocentric or a feminist perspective, as sylph or phallic fetish, that the ballerina evokes a play of presence/absence for the spectator. Chapter 2 (Upward Thrust/Downward Fall) discussed the phallic aspects of ballet training and the ballerina's muscular boyish body aesthetic. Here the focus turns to the illusion of feminine beauty and stylised theatrical images of conventional female erotica. She is given stage
make-up, elaborate hair-dos, jewellery, white fitted tutus, and, of course, the infamous pink tights and pink pointe shoes, while her taut stretched legs, pointed feet, upward arched back and neck, long linear movements of arms and legs, all signify as phallic. She appropriates soft expressive gestures of submission, passionate fast flowing movements towards and away from her partner as gestures of love and loss, indications of a constructed illusion of femininity and ‘female-ness’ from a phallocentric perspective. Simultaneously, this illusion of femininity is undercut by her breast-less hip-less muscular strength, boyish shape and precise erect movement skills, which create an illusion of masculinity on a real female body.

For lovers of romantic and classical ballet there is, without a doubt, an engaging quality about the ballerina as she coyly slips away from under her partner’s arms, peers from under her wings with doleful expression, dominates her partner with wily charms and wicked smiles while displaying her strong straight phallic upwardly lifting legs and back. The audience is drawn to her as she plays a complex game of ‘yes’ and ‘no’ with her partner. Her delicate hand gestures provoke, her jewels, make-up and glitter fascinate, while her colt-like, long, thin, muscular legs powerfully stab at the air.

The ballerina’s performance opens wide a seductive space between presence and absence, wherein the real female body of the woman dancing remains a mystery, and therefore desired. The further the representational image of the ballerina’s body has been fetishized (whether read as illusive sylph or as phallic substitute), the further the real female body slips away to become a shadow. The illusions created by phallic and feminine signification on the ballerina’s body allow the meaning and identifiable presence of the real female body to remain hidden, the surface appearance becoming all the more seductive for holding the real female body secret. Yet the illusion is even more fantastic because there is a real live body doing the performing. The spectator sees this and knows this, which in turn encourages the act of desiring to identify between real, illusion, presence and absence.

Like ballet, the seduction of butoh emerges from empty gesture in its relation to the hidden real of a performer's body. Unlike ballet, the illusion
itself does not conform to Western cultural aesthetics of beauty. Everything and nothing can be evoked for the spectator through the empty forms of a butoh performance. The spectator fills the slow-moving gesture with meaning.

You feel unceasingly something arising through the dancer's body, from centre to extremities. But arising from where, indeed? Nobody knows, and it does not go anywhere either, it does not come to definite movements or attitudes which would give an end to it. It just goes down inside us watching, often strongly evoking impressions given by our most modern world... but they are just impressions, nothing definite.

Tenenbaum reviews Fukuhara 1992

Tombo's seductive presence in *Space Dance, Body of the Future* (1997) is not created by an illusion of phallic femininity, as in ballet, rather, her naked body's surface appearance becomes like an empty form of itself, behind which the concept of real female body is hidden. This hidden real is like a secret, another metaphor employed by Derrida (1995a) to describe the seductiveness of presence/absence, whereby the meaning of the secret is only desired as long as it is never revealed. Derrida (1995a) refers to the seduction of literature's play with presence/absence as

a chance of saying everything without touching upon the secret... when it is the call of this secret, however, which points back to the other or to something else, when it is this itself which keeps our passion aroused, and holds us to the other, then the secret impassions us.

Derrida 1995a p.29

Tombo herself is hidden behind the emptiness of her body's stylised gestures, the image of her body and the slowness of her walk. Her naked body appears vulnerable and childlike, yet untouchable and ancient like a fragile glass crystal. She appears as neither girl nor boy, woman nor man, yet her body evokes images of all four. Her body becomes an empty illusion which the spectator can fill with fast-moving thoughts, playing for meaning, searching for the secret, searching to reveal the woman, yet Tombo reveals only an absence of presence. The simple act of taking off the kimono, performed as a task without sexual provocation, suggests a seduction free from any stereotypical image of the stripper. Her performance seduces by
drawing the spectator's desires to reveal her 'secret' presence, a secret suggested by her surface nakedness, even if, as Derrida provokes, 'the secret is no secret, even if there has never been a secret, a single secret. Not one' (Derrida 1995a p.30). 10

Butoh performer Kazuo Ohno's cross-dressed performance (Suiren 1988) is described by Franko (1995) as

fashioned from the death of both genders, their "blended voices", ... Ohno appeals to a theoretical interfacing of sexual identities without engaging a "discourse" of desire.

Franko 1995 p.106

Franko (1995) describes this performance as 'a through - rather than a cross-dressing', claiming that 'through' dressing 'bypasses the lateral model of binaries because it avoids both parody and prestidigitation' (p.107). In a similar way, Tombo does not parody or enact gender desires, she moves through gender, emptying the body of notions of gender. Consequently, Tombo's body can be considered as androgynous, evoking for the spectator a movement of inquiry, a movement of identifying between boy/girl, as she, naked, walking slowly and directly, suggests masculine and feminine as empty signs, a memory of the real.

As the performer of 'Portrait' (Virginia Minx 1993 video 5d), I cannot discuss its seductiveness from a spectator's position. I could sense when I had engaged the spectators, had drawn them with me on the journey, and the following review reveals its effect on an audience.

First she is a child, half spastic, uncontrolled, awkward. The staged body moves from exhausted embryo on the floor to a chewing, and spitting teenager, trying hard to project her unused sexiness. We have to watch....The emotionally disturbing piece moves from make-believe kiss to the image of penetrative sex, complete with pelvis thrusting hard. Overeating, vomiting, rape, pregnancy, drinking and the senile shivers of an old hag: we get it all.

Kuppers 1998 p.56

'Portrait' was one episode in Virginia Minx at Play (1993), a solo show which presented a variety of characters, stereotypical masquerades of gendered
personas, such as a Latin lover, suburban housewife, opera diva. From a performing perspective, the show provided a strategy to retain a real body feminist subjectivity while also engaging the audience through the creation of character illusions (Brown 1994). The range of characters presented over the length of the evening’s show evoked a play of presence/absence for the spectator wherein the real ‘woman’ of Emilyn Claid remained absent.

The contradiction presented in Virginia Minx, whereby a female body can retain her own subjective power while also presenting herself as illusive object of her performance, echoes Phelan’s (1993) strategy of ‘unmarkedness’. Phelan’s project (1993) concerns the subversive potential of the female body to remain unmarked in order to disrupt static binary codes of subject/object spectatorship. Turning to ‘performative politics operative in photographs, painting, films, theatre, political protest and performance art’ (p.27), Phelan refers to performance artist photographer Cindy Sherman, proposing that she retains her subjectivity in performance through ‘disguise and displacement’ (Phelan 1993 p.60). Each of the photographs represents Sherman in a different disguise, whether it be as young girl, housewife, film star, an image of herself situated within parodic reproduction of an old master, or as a mutilated body within the horror genre. All these disguises serve to encourage a multiplicity and ambiguity of identities regarding the real body of Sherman, while the artist herself is very much in control of her real body as subject. ‘The performative record of the disappearance of Sherman’s body is the lure which keeps the spectator looking for Sherman’ (Phelan p.68).

Sherman manipulates her skill as a photographer and performer to create illusions wherein her real body can remain disguised and displaced. Yet, her trace of real remains within every photograph, ‘like a ubiquitous ghost, she continues to haunt the images we believe in, the ones we remember seeing and loving’ (Phelan 1993 p.6). Although the characters were drawn from aspects of personal histories, the images which engaged the spectator in Virginia Minx (1993) were those where ‘I’ was disguised by a conflicting array of surface appearances. Even the title itself suggests an element of disguise, an ambiguity between virgin and whore, mother and child.
There is a relevant point to be reiterated at this juncture which develops the theme of dancers being 'in front' or 'behind' the choreography, introduced in Chapter 2 (W/hole). A comparison can be made between the seductiveness of VirginiaMinx and that of Siobhan Davies' choreography. It can be argued that the illusive surface appearances evoked by Davies' finely tuned choreographic language, form and structures, describe the seductive element of her work, while the seductive element of VirginiaMinx is evoked by the juxtaposition between theatrical character illusions and the real body. Davies' choreography suggests the moulding of shapes around and within an empty space which, in its seductive surface appearance, invites its own enquiry into meaning (Preston 1996). In Bank (1996), spectators are seduced by intricate weaving shapes of the choreographed movement, intricate partnering work, the detail of gestures, the close proximity of darting bodies shifting and changing the overall shape like a kaleidoscope of patterns, and by the relationship of movement to sound. A metaphor of an intricate sea shell is suggested for Davies' choreography, the inside of which might be empty, an intriguing curiosity. This is its seduction, shapes in space becoming seductive for their very emptiness. Into this emptiness spectators put their own interpretations and images.

Davies knows how to make pure movement into theatre. So when we watch six dancers coiling and thrusting through fiercely muscular manoeuvres, while at the same time moving in formations so tight that they have to wheel and dodge each other with the skill of Italian footballers, we feel the exhilaration of lives being lived dangerously.

Mackrell Guardian May 17th 1997 p.6

For the purposes of this thesis, the seduction of choreographic languages and structures is not of primary concern. Whereas in the solo performance work of Nigel Charnock (Human Being 1997), Wendy Houston (Haunted 1995) or myself (VirginiaMinx 1993), there is a clash between the real body and the illusions performed, the individual expressions of the performers in the work of choreographers such as Siobhan Davies or Trisha Brown tend to be filtered through the choreographers' established style. Whether or not it is possible to differentiate between these two definitions of seductive relations is a provocative argument which must be addressed at another
time. As previously stated, this thesis attempts to focus on one aspect of dance performance, the real body and the illusions created at the site of that body, a direct interaction between performer and spectator.

Consideration of a variety of performance work, from butoh and ballet, to Davies’ and my own work, from perspectives of both performer and spectator, has acted as an introduction to the concept of a seductive strategy for dance performance. It has been suggested that seductive relations are evoked through the oscillating space between the performer’s real body on stage and the illusions that body creates while performing. This play of real and illusion provokes an act of desiring on the part of the spectator, a desire for identifiable presence which refuses, through the play of real and illusion, (absence), to secure fixed identification. Illusion seduces by suggestion of the real, teasing without revealing, evoking possible passions, histories, desires, moods for the spectator, without establishing a fixed identity for the performer. The desire to know the surface appearance or secret of illusion on the part of the spectator and the performer’s skill in presenting surface appearance as a secret which is never revealed, provides a basis for an energised physical interaction between spectator and performer (reader and writer). Within the traditional theatre context, (darkened auditorium and lit stage), this strategy potentially displaces conventional static binary codes of seduction between objects and subjects of desire.

3.3: Closing a Space

The strategy of seduction proposed by this thesis requires an interactive engagement by both performer and spectator. This demands a certain amount of physical energy and imaginative play by the spectator, as well as the performer, and is specific to seductiveness in live performance. This is not everybody’s idea of a good night out, as Channel 4’s television programme, ‘The once-feted Bolshoi Ballet’s disastrous trip to Las Vegas in 1996’ (1997) clearly illustrated. The Bolshoi’s visit to Las Vegas illustrates how the sophistication of technological hyperreality, according to Baudrillard, can supersede the interactive space of seduction between real and illusion in live performance. As the loss of ‘real becoming illusion’ and a
closing of seductive space is the next concern of this project, the description of the Bolshoi's visit is relevant as a sidestep, in that it offers a parallel illustration, in reverse, of how that space collapses.

Las Vegas is the American city where the perfect simulation of reality is available, whether at casino, game machines, or the computerised virtuality of every possible form of entertainment. The city offers a total virtual experience of the real, sensations of thrill, fear, exhilaration, intoxication, erotica, sex and death through perfect simulations. Bodies can experience what appear to be real sensations knowing them to be completely hyperreal and therefore never effectively touching their organic bodies.

If there is a single truth about Las Vegas, it is that nowhere on Earth so efficiently evades truth. In a city whose ... gambling business is to serve up pleasure, reality doesn't sit so well as fantasy. Las Vegas is a city in denial of facts ... Reality is Las Vegas's Mrs Rochester, its shameful hidden secret.

McGrath Guardian 1998 June 6 p.34

Closing of seductive space between appearance and meaning and consequently the loss of aesthetic illusion in art production, influences all Baudrillard's later writing. Although not opposing technological developments, he persistently points to what has collapsed in capitalist attempts to create a hyperreality of digital virtual systems that is more real than the original real.

Virtuality tends towards the perfect illusion. But it isn't the same creative illusion as that of the image ... It abolishes the game of illusion by the perfection of the reproduction, in the virtual rendition of the real. And so we witness the extermination of the real by its double.

Baudrillard 1997 p.9

There is a controversy, which emerges from watching the Channel 4 documentary, between the seduction of virtual technology as a capitalist hyperreal and the imaginative interweaving of real and illusion as artistic endeavour. The Bolshoi Ballet was not appreciated in Las Vegas, the trip became a nightmare for the company and a financial disaster for the organisers. At first glance, why the company should fail so disastrously
seems puzzling. After all, ballet can also be thought of as a coded system, a system which is reproduced again and again, each time attempting to be more perfect, more skilled, more athletic, where the realness of the human body is being superceded by a machine-like body. Ballet has become an object of status, where one ballerina, one company, one production or perfected technique is exchanged and valued against another (Baudrillard 1993). A ballerina, like a football player and a race horse, can be exchanged and ‘consumed’. So why, when ballet appears to have created a hyperreal simulation of itself, should the Bolshoi fail?

Possibly its failure can be traced, to some degree, to the fact that ballet is not yet a hyperreal simulation. Ballet still offers an entertainment as embodied art form, not as the virtual entertainment of Las Vegas. Entertainment offered by ballet is still performed by living people who feel, express on their faces, breathe, sweat, feel pain. The subtleties of seductiveness in the relationship between real and illusion have not been erased by the forces of hyperreality. An active relationship of imagination between the real bodies of both spectator and performer is still required to engage with live performance of ballet.

Sitting, watching the oscillation between real and illusion offered by ballet bodies on a theatre stage, compared to the complete hyperreal illusion of virtual entertainment, is clearly not what Las Vegans have in mind for a good night out. Why would they want to sit in a darkened auditorium and watch what appears to be real bodies striving for the impossible, when the impossible is available to them in more perfect form? Why sit in a darkened auditorium and watch real people in the first place, when simulated versions are available on screens, close-up, and where you do not have to sit still? Perhaps the ballet’s illusions, aesthetic appreciation of beauty, art and spirit, transcendence over earthly struggles, ballerinas embodying unattainable desire, remind them too closely of their own mortality, death, life, age, pain and that is exactly what they are escaping from in Las Vegas (McGrath 1998).

The television programme offers a fine piece of editing which illustrates the dilemma of the real versus the hyperreal. The scene divides its attention between the final pas de deux in Act IV of Swan Lake (1895) and the
simulated entertainment of Las Vegas. The scene cuts between the ballerina promenading with her leg high in second position and an animated film image of a lion tamer promenading a lion, the ballerina in penche arabesque on pointe cuts to a video film of a naked woman hanging upside down being whipped. The ballerina being lifted high in the air cuts to a scene of superb acrobatics and trampoline. The ballerina jumping cuts to a virtual experience of bunji jumping. Even though the ballet was performed exquisitely, technically perfect in every respect, coming close to a coded simulated hyperreality of its own, its associations with the real body and the subtleties of seduction inherent in the relationship between real and illusion makes the ballet no match for the hyperreal entertainment available in Las Vegas. Summing up this visit, Vladimir Kokonson, the Bolshoi's director exclaims,

in Las Vegas they have an artificial New York, an artificial Cairo, an artificial Rome ...But now has arrived the real Bolshoi, and people won't go to see it. Why? Crazy world.
Kokonson Sunday Times 1996 October 27th

The Bolshoi's visit draws attention to Baudrillard's negative view of virtual reality. Here the original is bypassed, the difference between the real and its representation is erased, the principle of generation itself becomes the next real, constantly able to reproduce itself and create another perfect 'original', and hence the emergence of an age of simulation and a closing of the space of seduction (Lechte 1994).12

This consideration of real versus hyperreal may seem a diversion from the main project of the thesis. After all, the real live flesh and blood body of a dancer on a performing stage is not suffering a hyperreal fate. The site of the art form is the real body itself and there is no fear, as yet, of the performing body in dance becoming a total simulacrum, unlike bodies in film and television.

Nonetheless, there is a dilemma for the female body in live dance performance now at the turn of the century, since her seductive presence is in danger of elimination. The dilemma is not generated by the hyperreality of technological production, as the real body is very much present at the site of dance performance. Quite the opposite, for the female dancing body,
it is not the loss of the real that closes the space of seduction, but the loss of illusion. Whether the ballerina’s ‘feminine’ illusion be interpreted as sylph or phallic fetish, it is still an element of her seductiveness. Her performance opens a space between real body dancing and surface appearance, which allows the play of seduction to happen. With the development of new dance languages over the past 20 years that space of seductiveness has tended to collapse. Not through a hyperreality of which Baudrillard speaks, the overdose of illusion which has become more real than the real itself, but an overdose of the real. While virtual hyperreality, through its advanced systems, comes too close to the original, swallowing the original into itself and becoming the new real, the feminist postmodern minimalist dancing body does this in reverse.

The strategy for seduction proposed in Chapter 3 as ‘real becoming illusion, presence becoming absence’, suggests that a female body’s negation of artificial codes of appearance might be a cause for the collapse of seductive relations between spectator and performer in dance performance.
Chapter 3  Seductive Relations in Live Performance  End Notes

1  Baudrillard's work is aptly described by Coulter-Smith (1997). 'The post structuralist register in Baudrillard’s writings is perhaps most striking in his transformation of structuralist notions of the systemic code into his concepts of simulacra, simulation and hyperreality ... into the science fiction domain of communications superhighways, virtual reality and cyberspace' (p.94).

2  Coulter-Smith (1997) suggests Baudrillard's negative attitude to technology and art stems from his background in humanist Marxism and post structuralist theory. Marxist emphasis on the capitalist production of objects, in conflict with reproduction and virtuality of objects. This conflict leads Baudrillard to his bleak imaginings of the future of art where it is no longer a matter of an image and its illusion of reality, but of the hyperreality of virtuality.

3  Objects no are longer produced, they are reproduced to serve different functions as well as use value, such as exchange value, symbolic value and particularly in the present society, that of status value. For Baudrillard (1993), the 'sign' and its reference to anything 'real', with 'production, signification, the affect, substance and history ... all this is over with' (p.6/7). In the age of simulation, a hyperreality has been created where the sign holds status value, signs are exchanged 'against each other rather than against the real. By emancipating the sign, it becomes 'free indifferent and totally indeterminate in a structural and combinatory play that succeeds the rule of determinate equivalence' (p.7)

4  Phenomenological philosophy has not been applied in this thesis to support the strategy for seduction, although clearly the philosophy of Merleau Ponti (1968) offers a useful perspective to embodied interrelations of subject and object (performer and spectator) in dance theatre performance. Garner (1994), who transposes Ponti's theories to theatrical performance dynamics, suggests living embodiment is already an ambiguity of subject/object, where living in the body, being alive in the world, is recognised by an inseparable experiential relationship between observing and being observed. A phenomenological understanding of real lived subjectivity, of the performer performing, provides a constant reminder of corporeality, the force of theatre performance, and which post structuralist theoretical fictions can be in danger of losing (Garner 1994). As a performer and spectator, there is an ambiguity in experiencing body as both subject/object, where one's own real being and identity can only be recognised through the relationship of looking and being looked at. Acknowledging this bodily relation to the world as a basic premise for being alive, the focus of the thesis moves away from that premise to imagine an artificially constructed illusive performance for the body and its seductive relations to real embodiment.

5  Clearly, parallels can be made between butoh, the work of Laban and the practice of Tai Chi. The focus is drawn to butoh in this instance because of its performance form, as an illustration of real becoming illusion within a theatrical context.

6  Recognising that Plato's 'spoken word' is only known to exist through its form in written language makes Plato's texts ideal material for Derridean deconstruction of the logocentrism of metaphysics (Plato's Pharmacy 1981, pre-text Plato's Phaedrus and Khora 1995, pre-text Plato's Timaeus). 'I am on the threshold of reading Plato and Aristotle. I love them and I feel I have to start again and again and again. It is a task which is in front of me, before me' (Derrida 1994 in Caputo 1997 p.9).

7  Franko (1995) criticises Derrida's application of dance as an analogy for writing. Derrida's employment of dance is described by Franko as 'a new identity of writing
within Jacques Derrida's deconstruction of the transcendental ego as “presence” (Franko 1995 p.205). Franko claims Derrida does not recognise the role of ‘trace’ or body memory, asserting that dance is remembered, it does not dissolve, it builds up in the mind and the body of performer and spectator. ‘Between self-referential mimicry and trace lies performance as what can materialise, and therefore “retain” what is not, re-call it’ (Franko 1995 p.211). Applying ‘dance’ as a metaphor to support textual and literary concerns can re-turn dance to a place of ephemeral absence, negating its existence as an embodied art form. However, his theories are being manipulated here as metaphors for dance performance, rather than the reverse.

8 Phelan (1993) claims that it will be forever impossible for the fetishization of an object to provide the subject with an identity of Same, or to convey a ‘real’ meaning exactly.

9 Ballet has provided feminist theorists with an obvious illustration of the conventional binary relationship between male subject and female object, the desire to identify the Other as the Same in a patriarchal phallocentric matrix (English 1980, Adair 1992, Briginshaw 1996 Foster 1996). Feminist readings focus on the phallic signification of the ballerina’s body and the phallic artifice of ballet. Fondly he holds the phallus in his arms, longingly he looks into his princess’ eyes, ecstatically he lifts her, his hands around her long, stiff tube of a body. Easily he holds and moves with her. Flying, she is his own’ (English 1980 p.18). Foster (1996) also describes the signification of the ballerina’s technique, style and pliable body image that ‘believe the phallic identity of the ballerina. They signal her situatedness just in between penis and fetish’ (p.13)

10 Other post structuralist writers refer to the concept of ‘secret’. For Deleuze & Guattari (1988) secret is employed as an analogy for ‘becoming’, (see Chapter 7). The contents of a secret are always much bigger than its form, for Deleuze, what draws one to the secret, desires its revelation, is that ‘something must ooze from the box, something will be perceived through the box or in the half-opened box’ (Deleuze 1988 p.287). Baudrillard also refers to the secret as an analogy for seduction. ‘The secret maintains its power only at the price of remaining unspoken, just as seduction operates only because never spoken nor intended’ (1979 p.79)

11 For Phelan the relationship between self and other in western philosophy and culture becomes a marked one, where one term of the binary is marked with value and the other is unmarked. The marked term is the subject, male, normal, and the unmarked is the female which the subject must mark as his own, within which he searches for his own identity. ‘Unable to bear (sexual) difference, the psychic subject transforms this difference into the Same, and converts the Other into the familiar grammar of the linguistic, visual, and physical body of the Same (Phelan 1993 p.5/6).

12 Baudrillard’s negative perspective on hyperreality of technology can be applied to the present controversy regarding dance performance and advanced digital technologies, whereby the real body can exist only as an initial reference point for the creation of virtual digital dance. On the one hand, there is the fascination to explore the simulated cyberbody of the dancer with its immediate global interaction and its potential for scientific dissection and analysis. On the other hand, a danger manifests itself as the simulated perfection of a digital body replaces the live performer, closing the space of seductiveness between spectator and performer in the act of live performance.
Chapter 4
The Problems of Being Female

A strategy for seductive relations has been proposed - real becoming illusion, presence becoming absence. The focus now turns to the problem facing the female body in dance performance, exploring more specifically the extent to which the loss of seductive relations is a response to new dance languages. Drawing on the work of Yvonne Rainer, Rosemary Butcher and Eva Karczag, *Historical Moment of Negation* examines elements of postmodern minimalism in dance, while *Seduction Challenges Feminism* turns attention to feminist agendas to establish female subjectivity. It is argued that the layering of postmodern and feminist agendas to deconstruct the metaphysics of conventional dance has created a loss of illusion, and therefore a negation of seductiveness at the site of the female body in performance. *The Other of the Other* offers theoretical proposals as possible ways forward, suggesting that to discard the artifice of 'phallic' and 'feminine' as constructed illusions in dance languages risks the female dancing body becoming 'real on real'.

4.1: Historical moment of negation

A closing of seductive space in dance, specific to the female body, can be considered the result of two historically important strategic developments in dance theatre performance over the past 20 years. It can be argued that layered, interrelated, developments of early postmodern dance agendas which deconstruct the universal metaphysics of narrative and virtuosity of ballet, together with feminist agendas to establish subjectivity and female sexuality, have acted to close the seductive potential for the female body in performance. This appears to be a problem specific to the female body, because through these same agendas the male dancing body has usurped the conventional female position as seductive presence, becoming object of desire on the performing stage.

Necessary strategic developments in early postmodern dance focused on the deconstruction of capitalist, patriarchal hierarchies and the universal metaphysical language of ballet. These agendas centred on making the dancing body 'explicit', to render the 'symbolic literal' (Schneider 1997 p.6), to counteract the mysterious and unknowable object position the female body had come to signify. Making this body explicit, unadorned and subject
of the dance signified a crucial statement, a negation of conventional seductiveness in early postmodern/new dance performances. Foster (1997) describes the ‘chaste’ dancing of early modern dance pioneers Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, who, reacting against representations of women as erotic objects in both ballet and vaudeville, focused on ‘the sculpted potential of movement’ (Foster 1997 p.54). Although both women exposed plenty of naked flesh while performing, they refused any sexual connotations. ‘By insuring the absence of sexuality, these women could display a new body-centred endeavour, found a new genre of dancing’ (Foster 1997 p.55).

Fifty years later, Yvonne Rainer, one of America’s minimalist choreographers, along with Simone Forti, Deborah Hay, Lucinda Childs, Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton (Berger 1998), offers her ‘Strategy of Denial’ (1965), a manifesto for early feminist postmodern performance which begins:

No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make-believe no to the glamour and transcendency of the star image no to the heroic.

Rainer 1965 p.178

Rainer’s Trio A (1966), which Banes (1977) claims is the signal work for ‘the entire post modern dance’ movement. (p.4) addresses the ‘ephemeral nature of dance’ (p.45). Rainer rejects the always ‘out of reach-ness’ of the ballerina’s seductive presence and the deep and meaningful expressivity of modern dance. Instead, Rainer opts for ‘neutrality’ (Banes 1977 p.43), making the body in action the explicaded subject of the dance. One section of Trio A consists of a four and a half minute solo composed of pedestrian movement, task-like actions, broken classical lines, ‘violating nearly every canon of classical dance conventions’ (Banes 1977 p.44), the emphasis being on physical energy dynamics of an active anatomical body rather than language conventions of narrative, climax, virtuosity, all rejected in early postmodern dance in favour of ‘Minimalism’s anti-metaphorical strategy’ (Berger 1998).

Rosemary Butcher’s prolific body of work, ranging from Landings (1977) to Fractured Landscape, Fragmented Narratives (1997), consistently reveals
the performing body as anatomical presence undertaking task-like movement.

What I have to offer must be purely in a task form and they (the dancers) must use that task and move in their own way in order to achieve the sort of results I want.

Butcher 1986 p.10

Analysis of Butcher’s work (Crickmay 1986, Adair 1992), is more likely to discuss the structure and the architectural use of space, than the individual eroticised presence of the performer.

Lines, circles, spirals, diagonals, squares, corners, edges, directions, dimensions, are a constant feature of the choreographic language.

Crickmay 1986 p.11

These elements take precedence over any concern for illusion, fantasy or seductive relations between performer and spectator. In a similar way to Rainer’s work, recognisable elements of timing, narrative, suspension, climax and repetition, which would evoke interactive desiring for either performer or spectator, are consciously resisted.

Early postmodern minimalist dance work supports the notion of explicit surface appearance, rather than hidden meaning at the site of the body, as the way to deconstruct the metaphysics of ballet. In this way it appears to parallel the strategy for seduction offered by this thesis, in that the surface appearance, not the deep meaning, evokes seductive presence. However, postmodern minimalist notions of surface appearance involve a process of reducing the dance to its real essentials (Banes 1977), rather than a process of constructing a play of surface illusions. Stripped of all conventional performative traits, minimalist postmodern dancers are recognised and appreciated for their ability to be real anatomical bodies doing pedestrian movement in real time (Banes 1977, Burt 1995).

On the one hand, negation of conventional elements offers the most liberating and exhilarating features of postmodern new dance practice, allowing for ‘an appreciation for the possibilities latent in nothingness, absence, the marginal, the peripheral, the repressed’ (Tong, 1989 p.233).
On the other hand, within a conventional theatrical setting, the seductiveness between real and illusion necessary to engage an audience has been negated. To procure theatrical recognition for dance languages when they are marginal, peripheral and repressed is no easy task. Dominant power structures of traditional theatre conventions are quite clearly not going to disappear, to be replaced by some new utopian non-cultural construction.

The juridical structures of language and politics constitute the contemporary field of power; hence there is no position outside this field, but only a critical genealogy of its own legitimating practices.

Butler 1990 p.5

While artists enjoy their freedoms of ‘Otherness’ in the creative process in the studio as ‘a way of being, thinking, and speaking that allows for openness, plurality, diversity, and difference’ (Tong. p.219), the work attracts, primarily, only a small knowledgeable audience following. Outside conventional theatre settings, in galleries, church halls, lofts and external environments, the work is perhaps more appealing, following a different criteria for engagement. In the conventional theatre, audiences are being asked to read into absences rather than follow narrative, reject traditional gender roles and social hierarchies of dance, open their eyes and minds to an esoteric and kinesthetic understanding, put aside speculative fetishistic or voyeuristic desires, be satisfied by performance that has no recognisable references to structures or conventional seductive devices related to subject/object of desire. Banes (1977) writes of the role of the spectator in Paxton’s contact improvisation performances, where

the primary focus in the dance is the dancer’s physical sensation and awareness, a focus that threatens to remove the work from the realm of art altogether, by making the spectator obsolete.

Banes 1977 p.18

This is hardly a recipe for a seductive relationship between performer and spectator.

Considering postmodern dance in this way, the strategies for seduction,
that is, the positive advantages to remaining unmarked, have been bypassed by postmodern/new dance performers, as a consequence of agendas to deconstruct the illusions of conventional dance styles. Minimalist new dance bypasses the potential of the power of invisibility and seductiveness of illusive surface appearance, in its negation of narrative, virtuosity and climax in dance languages.

Although not necessarily the main focus of their work, a dissolution of binary sexual differentiation was achieved by early postmodern choreographers. While the primary project of postmodern dance seems to have been the deconstruction of language, illusions and narratives in ballet (and 'modern' dance), a negation of the play of sexual desire and a dissolution of binary sexual differentiation seems to have been the secondary inevitability. This important historical 'moment of negation' has tended to cast the female body as an anatomical, mundane and visible object.²

4.2: Seduction challenges Feminism

The secondary inevitability which results from postmodern minimalist strategies becomes a primary focus for feminist agendas. The previous section focused on postmodern strategies to deconstruct metaphysical hierarchies of dance language, this section focuses on feminist agendas to establish female subjectivity, positively positioning the female body as subject. While postmodern minimalist agendas in dance focus on alternative reconstructions of language, indifferent to gender, feminist concerns, first and foremost, focus on bringing the real female body as subject, not seductive object, to the performing stage. These two historically important strands of 'negation' parallel each other, a layering of concerns which together have created the problem for seductive presence of female bodies in performance.

Feminist struggles to establish female subjectivity in performance can be thought of as an attempt to exist somehow outside traditional contexts of desire. An attempt to establish a spectator/performer relationship in which the female subject negates identifications with (Oedipal) narratives of
desire, of being the desired object and desiring to be desired object, refusing and rejecting all positions and variations of desire within a patriarchal economy.

Categories of true sex, discrete gender, and specific sexuality have constituted the stable point of reference for a great deal of feminist theory and politics.

Butler 1990 p.128

If annihilation of the (male) gaze of desire in Oedipal narrative lies in the real presence of female body, then feminist agendas deliver the real female body as object of that gaze (De Lauretis 1984, Schneider 1997). Feminist political and social objectives have been necessary in order to problematise woman's conventional position as inferior object within phallocentric and heterosexual representations. This agenda can also be considered to have problematised the female body as a site of seductive play in theatre performance. If seductiveness between spectator and performer thrives in the space between real and illusion, then stripping the female body of all constructed phallic and feminine significations of language and image, to establish a real feminine on a female body, collapses that space of seduction. The clash of difference between real female body and created illusion provides the spark for seductive relations.

This echoes Kristeva's theories concerning feminism (1981), which suggest that the feminist project to establish subjectivity as 'other' and 'different' damages the potential for a female presence in art practices.


Kristeva's project, which spans psychoanalysis and linguistic theory, focuses on the conflicting interrelations of semiotic and symbolic at the site of the speaking subject, the clash of a real body in its relationship to phallocentric language.

Kristeva claims that the Oedipal complex and fear of castration structure
the sense of subject identity, the child making a position for itself according to the phallic signifier. According to Grosz (1989), Kristeva endorses the phallic centrality of the subject, the maleness of the symbolic order. Consequently, she is convinced that it is only (some) men who can truly subvert and change the symbolic, because they are the only subjects with a position to subvert.

He ... is able to say what she (the mother, the infant) experiences. Though a risk to his masculine, phallic identity, he can evoke the jouissance he experiences with her in a way that she cannot. He can transgress the boundaries of the symbolic, while she exists at its pre social margins. He can speak the jouissance which overwhelms her 'identity'.

Grosz 1989 p. 96

For Kristeva, male texts have the potential to be revolutionary or avant garde because men are the sex which has created paternal law, the language of phallocentrism.

Kristeva assumes that 'women, particularly feminists, represent a semiotic, negative, dialectical movement, a transgressive challenge to the symbolic' (Grosz 1989 p.65). Writing by women for women, implies taking up a position outside the symbolic and in this way feminist struggles have no possibility of effecting change within the symbolic order. Women's position in the Oedipal complex is to be excluded from the paternal language, therefore they are unable to create ideological change. In other words the language must be owned before it can be subverted and transgression can only happen from within. Kristeva urges women to position themselves similarly to men, arguing that the phallus, as signifier, belongs to both sexes, that the subject is neutral and is a position that can be and should be claimed by both men and women.

I believe two conditions are necessary if this course is to be followed. The first is historical; it involves throwing women into all of society's contradictions with no hypocrisy of fake protection. The second condition is sexual ...it involves coming to grips with one's language and body as others, as heterogeneous elements.

Kristeva 1980 p.164/5 in Grosz 1989 p.66

This reading of Kristeva suggests that the conflict between semiotic and
symbolic, the ruptures of jouissance and erotic drives into paternal symbolic language, creates the clash necessary to impassion art practice (Lechte 1991). Given this perspective, feminist agendas to establish another, different, ‘feminine’ language for the female body in dance are unlikely to engage the spectator, through the lack of dynamic conflict between real female body and feminine language.

Although her theories have been criticised for being anti-feminist (Grosz 1989), Kristeva’s project offers a clear parallel to the aim of this thesis. For a female body to engage the spectator within the conventions of a theatre setting, she must first of all ‘come to grips’ with the ‘phallic’ of dance language and, in so doing, embrace the creative conflict between semiotic and symbolic, pleasure and power.

It is possible to argue that feminist agendas for subjectivity in dance construct a way of moving and image which identifies an embodied femininity. Female dance practitioners of 1970s in this country, such as Gaby Agis, Miranda Tufnell and Mary Fulkerson (Adair 1992, Jordan 1992), challenge their position as object of desire in performance, stripping away the fetishistic markings, establishing the female body on stage as a different, separate subject equal to that of the male.

At the same time as stripping away any conventional notions of phallic fetishistic illusion and phallic signification of dance languages themselves, the muscular, linear, masculine, power dynamics in dance were also stripped away. As a spectator, I was reminded of this figuration of negation when watching Eva Karczag’s solo performance Anemomenotactic Orientation in Dance Umbrella Festival 1997. Karczag was a member of Richard Alston’s first company, Strider (1971) (Jordan 1992), and subsequently danced with Trisha Brown. Eva appears, dressed in a loose long cotton top over loose trousers, with bare feet and no make-up, running out from the audience onto the bare stage with open studio lighting, and stops downstage facing the audience, looking directly out front. Her dance incorporates tiny loose-limbed gestures of isolated body parts, flamboyant large waves of movement and circular running with abrupt stops. There is a long slow section performed in silence close the floor, incorporating rolling, sitting, crawling and stillness, where Karczag delicately and precisely
positions her body in particular poses. Her movement style is fluid, non-linear, focusing on a loose-limbed non-conflicting flow of gestures.

As a feminist postmodern minimalist new dance performer Karczag presents herself as vulnerably and humbly female, no secrets to hide, honest, open. She rejects the erotic glamour, the signs of female fetish, make-up, jewellery, tight-fitting clothes. She refuses conventionally seductive movement that reads as submissive, the downcast eyes, the tilt of the head, pretty and delicate gestures. The audience are invited to watch her as if she is in a studio practising, not performing. There is an intimacy of familiarity, of shared understanding, taking part in an experiment. She seems to say, ‘I am just asking you to watch what I do every day - a moment in time’, which closes the seductive play space between spectator and herself, between real and illusion, collapses the theatrical elements of the performance with a style of non-performing performance, and establishes a real body presence.

Watching Karczag’s performance invites analytical spectatorship, observing a structure of language where the real body of the performer merges with the language performed. Watching this work suggests identification with the physical act of doing the dance, its pedestrianism, the concentration on task. It is possible to objectively analyse choreography and movement style, paying attention to the architectural use of space. However, the seductive practice of playing identities, fantasies and imaginative narratives, questioning ambiguity of presence/absence at the site of the real and illusive body is not evoked, coaxed, teased, played with, stimulated or encouraged. This work can be thought of as a closing of the space of seductiveness rather than an opening of it, where the space of mystery, ambiguity, secret, the play and interaction of desiring presence/absence between performer and spectator is collapsed.

Within the patriarchal matrix, a heterosexual feminist is dependent on ‘man’, if only for her sexual intimacy. Adjusting to ‘normal’ heterosexual relations suggests that a feminist must, in some way, resolve her position as sexual object. In some ways she is locked into the framework of patriarchal constraints even as she breaks away from them. I suggest that this sexual in/dependence tends to strengthen the heterosexual feminist
political and psycho-sexual resolve to strip herself of phallic and feminine sexual seductive signification. Heterosexual feminism must establish how ‘real’ women feel differently, orgasm differently, have different sexual pleasures, in order to problematise and liberate her position as sexual object inside and outside of the bedroom. Heterosexual feminism has produced ‘constructs of identity’ in order to ‘express the interests, the perspectives of “women”’ (Butler 1990 p.128). 4

Irigaray’s feminist project purposely brings the previously unrecognised real, sexual female body into phallocentric philosophical discourse in order to disrupt that discourse (Braidotti 1994). Irigaray writes of the diffusible, multiple, fluid nature of female sexuality and femininity, which is separate from and different to the solidity and finality of male sexuality and rationality represented by phallocentric language (Irigaray 1985).

Irigaray (1985) created the now-familiar image of ‘the two lips’ as a metaphor for defining female sexuality, illustrating that there is no single identity for female sexuality, no beginning and end, no definitive point between one or two or many erogenous zones, dispelling the myths which define female sexuality as being located solely in vaginal penetration, as being One and the Same as male sexuality.

It is continuous, compressible, dilatable, viscous, conductible, diffusible...that it allows itself to be easily traversed by flow by virtue of its conductivity to currents coming from other fluids or exerting pressure through the walls of a solid.

Irigaray 1985 p.111

Identifying in language, spoken or danced, the realness and difference of female sexuality, can be considered to carry a danger of closing the seductive space between real and illusion. Although fluid, continuous, viscous and different, female sexual identity becomes equally as anatomical and physically real as that of the phallic/masculine. For Baudrillard (1979), feminist concerns, such as Irigaray’s to discover a female ‘fluid’ sexuality, are still a question of the real anatomical body. He suggests there is one sexuality, one libido, and it signifies as masculine, claiming the uselessness of ‘dreaming of some non-phallic, unlocked, unmarked sexuality’ (1979 p.6). However feminine sexuality is described, as multiple erogenous zones or
whatever, for Baudrillard there is nothing radically different to oppose Freud’s notion that ‘Anatomy is Destiny’ (Baudrillard 1979 p.9). Sexuality, male and female, single or multiple, is anatomical, biological and determined, all of which symbolically qualify as ‘masculine’. ‘Sex ... has a quick, banal end: the orgasm, the immediate form of desire’s realisation’ (p.22). 5

There is something to be drawn from Baudrillard’s notion of embodied sexuality signifying as masculine. To make female sexual difference visible in phallocentric language suggests a relationship to normality, production, to a real marked body, all of which can be considered to signify as ‘masculine’. Therefore, identifying the anatomy and physicality of female sexuality and subjectivity in language (text and dance) brings them to that same masculine, marked, ‘banal’ state. 6

In contrast to sexuality, Baudrillard (1979) considers seduction as a play, a force that can take any illusive form, that foils all truth pertaining to ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ through its illusive appearances.7 Seduction drives sexuality and production, is the play that makes real sex possible, that circles ‘reality’, reversing everything that is deep or real. Considering seduction in this way clearly suggests that a strategy of seductive appearances for the female anatomical body which playfully reverses any ‘truth’ concerning a female sexuality, would be a far more engaging tactic for performance than the established presence of a feminist, marked, sexed, anatomical subject.

4.3: The Other Of The Other

New dance languages that have emerged through a layering of postmodern minimalist and feminist agendas can be described as having non-linear, fluid, multiple, diffusable and viscous signification. There is a danger that this language, on a female body in performance, because of its affiliation to internality, to feminine semiotic forces and female sexuality, does not read as ‘appearance’ or illusion, but as female essence. 8 When female subjectivity and sexuality are made visible at the site of the female body through signification of ‘feminine’ dance language, the female body in
performance can be considered as a fixed feminine identity. Without acknowledging 'femininity' and 'phallicism' as constructed devices available for a play of illusion and surface appearances, neither being essential to the real body, there is a risk that female body and dance merge and the space of seductive play collapses. As a consequence, the female body performing becomes feminine on feminine, or real on real.

When female body and feminine qualities of New Dance languages blend so closely, becoming other on other, there is difficulty for a female body to represent itself as unmarked on stage. Clearly, within the arena of dance theatre performance where the site of performance is the body itself, techniques of disguise and displacement that are available in performance media such as Cindy Sherman's photography, are more difficult to appropriate. There is a challenge for the female body, already always seen as Other and appropriating the signs of Other, to use dance language as a performance play. Compared to other art forms, dance already signifies as a 'feminine', therefore Other, and with feminist agendas it also tends to lose the phallic properties within the language. On this argument, dance language tends not to 'play' on the surface of the female body as illusion, it does not disguise the female, it is the female. Phelan asserts,

it is difficult for women to appropriate the image of the other for their own fantasy. As Lacan bluntly puts it, "There is no Other of the Other".

Phelan 1993 p.60

As other of the other, the female body can become even more vulnerable to the binary code of subject/object. Together, female body and 'feminine' dance are at risk of creating a bland, one-dimensional transparency, wherein spectator watches performer with an objectifying binary gaze. In performance where real and illusion play a game of 'hide and seek', if the female real cannot disguise, then her presence denies the spectator the engaging challenge of presence/absence, the play of active desiring to make the invisible visible. In this way the female body may no longer be a fetishized feminine object of desire, but she is still female object within the conventions of theatre performance, and now becomes one without seductive power.
To redress this situation, the first strategic proposition might be to recognise seductiveness as a signifying process free from any essential association with the female body. Seductiveness as a practice can be manipulated by a performer who is aware of its potentially disruptive two-way play. This is clearly possible. If seduction had any essential connection to the female body, then it would not have been so possible for the female body to strip it away as she has done over the past 20 years. Female bodies have undoubtedly demonstrated that seductive practice can be given up, taken up, used and discarded. The conventional fetishistic use of seduction in ballet can be compared with the negation of seductive play in early postmodern dance, and then exposed and subverted in postmodern parody. Seductiveness as a play of surface appearances, disconnected from the real of a female body, is a tool of power for a female performer, not one of oppression.

Secondly, (as the queer refiguration of androgyny emphasised in Chapter 1, Spanning the Divide), the signifying qualities of masculine and feminine constructed in language, sexuality, subjectivity and gender can be manipulated as free-floating qualities, available for use by any anatomically determined body as artificial and illusive significations for dance performance. Familiar now are post structuralist and queer arguments, that only through persistent performance of masculine and feminine can a gender be defined (Butler 1990). Masculinity and femininity are free-floating terms not connected to any gender, only producing an identity through the act of expression.

There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very “expressions” that are said to be its results.

Butler 1990 p.25

Masculine qualities of verticality, phallicism, ascendancy, growth, production, sexuality, power and solidity, or feminine qualities of fluidity, pleasure, ephemerality, multiplicity, diffraction, diffusion and decentrality - define characteristics within dance languages which are performative, free floating constructions. As 'artifice' these qualities are available for female bodies to appropriate in the creation of an illusion for performance. Consequently, 'masculine' and 'feminine' become signifying forces of conflict,
energy and interaction which, in constant tension with one another, have vast creative potential for creating new illusive presence.\textsuperscript{11}

Thirdly, new dance vocabularies, in their visceral, fluid, fractured, non-hierarchical ‘feminine’ forms, emerging for the most part from improvisation as an expression of interior drives, need to be recognised as representing \textit{constructed} forms of femininity, just as the phallic fetishistic femininity of ballet is also constructed. Emerging simultaneously with a feminist quest for female visibility does not naturalise new dance language as a ‘true’ expression of internal drives which somehow belong to the female body, even though the movement may \textit{feel} as if it arises from some internal place. Movement languages are written on the surface of the body as performative inscription and, considered this way, can become tools with which to play, which only through persistent repetition become ‘natural’ to a dancer’s body. Here is the familiar nature/culture debate addressed in Chapter 2 (\textit{W/hole}) and the recognition that only through representation in language can a dancer’s ‘true’ expression be seen to exist at all.

\begin{quote}
If we can attribute meaning only to that which is representable in language, then to attribute meaning to drives prior to their emergence into language is impossible’
\hfill Butler, 1990 p.88
\end{quote}

In other words, whether there is any ‘true’ feminine dance language for the female body, a mode of expression whereby she herself will be ‘realised’, is questionable. It can be argued that dance languages (and there are many of them) are externally constructed, available to any body, any gender, becoming tools with which to \textit{play between}, in performance.

The point is, if the feminine significations of new dance languages are not considered as constructed elements for performance, just as the phallic fetishistic significations of ballet or jazz, then they place themselves on a female body as a kind of truth. This is not to negate the important emergence of linguistic representations of femaleness which secure a positive and healthy alternative practice. Neither does this negate the coexistence of interior erotic drives and their influences on the body language. Rather, this point recognises that phallic fetishistic elements and ‘real’ femininity of feminist movements are both constructed elements of
dance language and can be employed, discarded or played between, to create performance illusion.

Chapter 4 has referred consistently to the female body as the site for postmodern and feminist concerns in dance performance, providing the opportunity to explore in depth the loss of seductive relations. It has been argued that deconstruction of metaphysical aspects of conventional dance, together with feminist agendas for visible female subjectivity and sexuality, have required a negation of seductiveness for the female body in performance. These artistic and political concerns have produced a 'new dance' language just as identifiable as ballet, butoh, jazz or any other established dance language. The dilemma is that new dance language, with its affiliation to feminine significations and its negation of phallic properties, on the female body becomes 'feminine on feminine', closing the seductive ambiguity between real and illusion.

Observing gay male bodies, it would appear that seductive relations between real and illusion have by no means collapsed. The futural imagining of androgyny as a seductive force for female bodies described in Chapter 1, Spanning the Divide, suggested a play between phallic and feminine significations. This refiguration is based on employing and manipulating, rather than negating, the female body's representation as the site of sexuality and desire in Western culture. It can be argued that gay male bodies in performance also represent a site of sexuality and desire in Western culture, and their manipulation of phallic and feminine significations can be considered to be an element of their seductive success. Side-stepping to observe gay male performing bodies at this point is not necessarily because the male body needs to be given any more space than it already holds within 1990s dance culture, but because a short analysis may reveal tactics which have relevance to seductive relations for the female body.
Chapter 4 Problems of Being Female. End Notes

1 Mundane can be interpreted as, ‘dull, routine’ and ‘of this world, worldly’ (O.E.D.). I refer in the text to the second meaning. However, for the female body in dance theatre performance, to be ‘of this world’ without access to fantasy, illusion or excess, probably does become ‘dull, routine’.

2 The terms ‘visible’ and ‘non visible’ have different meanings in different contexts, particularly in relation to the liberation of certain social groups. Feminist political agendas sought to make woman visible, as opposed to the non visibility of her image within phallocentric culture, where her role has been as the ‘looking glass held up to man’ (De Lauretis 1984 p.6). For gays and lesbians, becoming visible has been a positive ‘form of resistance to the negative implications of the lesbian/homosexual categories’ (Dyer 1993 p.21). Constructing a lifestyle of behaviour and dress has brought gays and lesbians together ‘in an act of sharing’ (p.21). Similarly, visibility for black people is what bell hooks (1992) addresses in her powerful and negative critique of Jenny Livingston’s film, Paris is Burning. She describes the non visible portrayal of black people in the film through the way ‘colonised black people ...worship at the throne of whiteness ... The “we” evoked here is all of us, black people/people of colour, who are daily bombarded by a powerful colonising whiteness that seduces us away from ourselves, that negates that there is beauty to be found in any form of blackness that is not imitation whiteness’ (bell hooks 1992 p.149). Drag King performance artist Diane Tor, who has become involved in New York with transgender rights, working with the group Transgender Menace, says ‘it’s so obvious to me that transgender people are the next group that should become visible. After all, they pay their taxes. They’re quite a force’ (Torr interview 1996).

In all of these cases becoming visible is associated with the positive act of liberation, power, coming out and claiming a place as subject. However, it is getting more complicated, particularly as the millennium approaches. Bersani (1995), referring to gays and lesbians says, 'Never before in the history of minority groups struggling for recognition and equal treatment has there been an analogous attempt, on the part of any such group, to make itself unidentifiable even as it demands to be recognised' (p.31). Phelan’s critique of Paris is Burning (1993) points out that the aim of the gay, transvestite and transsexual bodies that parade in drag at the Harlem Balls is to pass’ as white heterosexual women. The highlight of success in this instance, the highlight of visibility for the drag artists, is to pass as non-visible, as a white woman in a white world. Here there is a complexity of contradictions involving being visible on the one hand within transvestite drag culture of the balls which is attained through non-visibility to the outside world of the “secret” codes, the iconography of dress, movement, and speech which can be read by those within the community, but escape the interpretative power of those external to it’ (Phelan p.97). At the same time the drag artists strive for visibility in ‘passing’ as white within a ruling class white culture, while the act of passing as a heterosexual woman means being non visible within the same culture. The visibility of the drag artists at the Harlem balls conflicts with the non visibility of white heterosexual women, which feminists, gays and lesbians fight against to attain visibility.

According to the strategy for seduction in theatre performance, the visibility established by the feminist subject needs to become non visible (secret, unmarked) in order to reclaim a seductive play of visibility as a female body in performance.

3 Kristeva claims that feminism should not struggle for a separate feminine being, different to men. She does not see masculine and feminine attributes as belonging to the binary code of the sexed bodies of male and female. Believing in the polymorphous sexual drives of the infant, each subject therefore has access in itself to both masculine and feminine, becoming a subject in process, each child having had access to its maternal body and paternal language.. Kristeva states that the feminist struggle should concentrate on ‘the transgression of the binary codings of male and female, and
at the dissolution of male and female identities...She seeks, not sexual differences
distinguishing subjects from each other, but a sexual differentiation internal to each
subject' (Grosz 1989 p.67).

4 There is the risk of dividing feminist strength by defining heterosexual feminism as
different to, for instance, lesbian feminism, but there do appear to be differences
between the two in terms of the creative expressions of desires in performance,
expressions which have influenced feminist agendas along different lines (De Lauretis
1994). The agenda to establish female sexuality as different to male sexuality can be
thought of as a heterosexual feminist quest, while lesbian appropriations of male
sexual practice have been considered politically incorrect in the past by heterosexual
feminist agendas.

5 As Bristow (1997) points out, Baudrillard seems unaware of how feminism has
constantly struggled with this double agenda, desire for equality in the phallic order
without perpetuating that order. Baudrillard's provocative theories regarding sexuality
and seduction have raised considerable concern amongst feminist philosophers, and
understandable so (Lechte 1994). However, it can be argued that Irigaray's and
Baudrillard's theories regarding the feminine are not so very contradictory.

Baudrillard (1979), like Irigaray, writes of femininity as a principle of uncertainty, as
a 'circular reversible process of challenges' (p.47), as 'mobile, diffuse sexuality' (p.27).
'What is specific to women lies in the diffraction of the erogenous zones, in a
decentered eroticism, the diffuse polyvalence of sexual pleasure' (p.9). However, the
difference between the two writers appears to be in the context and application of
these qualities. Irigaray focuses feminine signification to the female body itself, its
psychic sexual reality, to establish a female bodily sexual identity and difference.
Baudrillard, on the other hand, describes these same qualities as free-floating signs,
separated from any bodily reality. When he states his desire for a 'universe where the
feminine is not what opposes the masculine, but what seduces the masculine' (1979
p.7), this statement is no longer related to the realness of male and female bodies but
to signifying strategies of seduction in the context of a technological universe.

6 For Lechte (1994), Baudrillard's theory of seduction involves the supremacy of the
object over the subject, 'fatal theory determined by the object over banal, critical theory
determined by the subject' (p.236). Banal theory is theory which is 'tautological',
having a beginning and an end, while fatal theory symbolises death and destiny,
having no end in any representational sense. Baudrillard sees seduction as fatal in
that the subject is dominated by the object of fascination, and the 'ecstasy,
fascination, risk and vertigo before the object which seduces, takes precedence over the
sober reflexivity of banal theory' (Lechte 1994 p.236).

7 Baudrillard then associates seduction with feminine because of its ability to be
somewhere else and not be identified. Here he appears to be trapped in phallocentric
notions of feminine as other - he himself is seduced by 'a highly uncritical notion of
feminine seduction' (Bristow 1997 p.143).

8 The conventional meaning of essentialism refers to a fixed masculine or feminine
presence, 'something beyond the reaches of historical change, something immutable
and consequently outside the field of political intervention ... Often reduced to mere
biological determinism' (Braidotti 1994 p.176-770). This has been a useful ploy of
phallocentric metaphysics - to establish the notion of One in binary relationship to
Other, equating masculine with male and feminine with female. One feminist
interpretation of essentialism suggests a feminist subject who reclaims the position
given her by patriarchy, that of nature and mother, taking charge of 'a feminine
creativity deep in individual women-artists and waiting to be released or expressed'
(De Lauretis 1984 p.5).
Case (1990) suggests there has been a 'crucial stall for feminist theory in the late 1980s between the materialist post structuralist (sometimes called post modernist) critique and others that have been considered essentialist' (p.7). This is a familiar feminist argument, the conflict between essentialist and post structuralist notions of female difference. Case continues by saying that 'praxis is unavailable to the materialist post structuralist critique and ... that essentialist praxis is based on an exclusionary critique' (p.7-8) While acknowledging the exclusionary failings of essentialist critique, Case also points out that at least essentialist feminism has succeeded in 'inhabiting certain concepts such as "women", "lesbian" (p.8), which materialist feminism has abandoned. This is echoed by Braidotti, who argues that essentialism may be a necessary strategy, in order to establish a consensus about the 'we' of 'women'. For Braidotti, 'being-a-woman' (p.176) is a necessary 'ontological precondition' for any post structuralist questioning of femininity and any discourse regarding sexual difference must first 'reconnect the feminine to the bodily sexed reality of the female, refusing the separation of the empirical from the symbolic' (p.177).

Braidotti also refers to Irigaray, who refuses 'to dissociate questions of the feminine from the presence of real-life women' (Braidotti p.184). Irigaray's strategies (to disrupt the positioning of female subject in phallocentric discourse) might appear to mime the essentialist logic of associating feminine with women, but Braidotti suggests the opposite, that Irigaray's mimesis is tactical, that 'attributing to women the right - and the political imperative - of voicing their "feminine" amounts to deconstructing any naturalist notion of a female "nature"' (Braidotti 1994 p.184).

These links between feminism and essentialism are tactical political manoeuvres linked to the positive aspects of establishing a feminist subjectivity. My wariness of the feminist employment of the term essential is linked with the strategy for seductive performance, not with the political agenda to establish a female subjectivity. As Braidotti (194) and Bristow (1997) point out, the danger in women 'voicing their feminine' is the repetition of phallocentric binarism, equating feminine with female. Although quite clearly this is not the agenda of Irigaray and Cixous, Lorde and Braidotti, 'voicing the feminine' becomes particularly problematic for the female body in performance. There is a danger of a return to essentialism when the sexual pleasurable activities and qualities associated with 'being-a-woman' and being 'other', such as jouissance and multiple erotic zones, also appear to belong at the site of the female body, suggesting a universal into which the play of differences is subsumed.

9 Phelan uses the term transparency in her analysis of Paris is Burning (1993), claiming neither metaphor nor performance reveals the true identity of the performers, that there is no 'transparent document' (p.108), no performance which would reveal the true image, the real identity. However, my concern is that in dance this is exactly the problem, because the site of the performance is the body itself, the 'real' identity of the female body is revealed, she becomes 'transparent', that is, simply and vulnerably present.

10 A question now arises as to why the terms masculine and feminine continue to be used, when they are refigured as free-floating qualities. However, masculine and feminine are convenient shorthand markers which refer to a range of qualities and characteristics within phallocentric culture. As they become free floating language qualities available for any dancer to appropriate they also retain a link to conventional anatomical specificity.

11 Interactive creativity of masculine and feminine signification echoes Irigaray's (1980) project to establish strategies for a female imaginary through the metaphorical imagery of the four elements: fire, earth, water and air. Whitford (1991) describes Irigaray's analogy as 'a vocabulary for talking in the most basic terms about the material of passionate life, about opposition and conflict, or love and exchange, about fertility and creativity, or sterility and death ... It is a discursive strategy which allows for fluidity' (Whitford p.61). Irigaray proposes that a female imaginary based on the interactions and transmutations of the elemental passions would be free from binary
opposition. Where violence is still wed to softness. The heroic body spilling over with
tenderness. Its arms still those of an original innocence. Which confounds all decisive
distinctions and returns all divisions to their original nuptials' (Irigaray 1980 p. 125).

Irigaray's project can be interpreted as holding no natural affiliation with a female
body as opposed to a male body. The descriptions of the elemental passions illustrate
the potential for the interweaving of form and expression, phallic and feminine,
production and seduction as free-floating signs applicable to any body.
Chapter 5
Male Objects of Desire

The performing appeal of male dancing bodies in the 1990s would suggest that the problems pertaining to a seductive presence for the female body do not occur for the male dancing body. The Allure of the Feminised Phallus draws attention to four sources which possibly contribute towards male seductive presence in dance performance, all of which focus on a particular configuration of feminine illusion on anatomically real male bodies. As 'masculine' power and 'feminine' pleasure have no 'natural' affiliation to male bodies, neither are they 'natural' to female bodies, becoming artifice with which to play in performance. The three terms, Play, Power, Pleasure offer possible embodied starting points for refiguring a female seductive presence. The notion of play is emphasised as a fundamental element of seductive relations. References to power and pleasure return the thesis to the theme of androgyny, arguing that for the female body to become androgynously seductive in performance, she must play, rather than negate, the masculine power and feminine pleasure of her real desiring erotic body.

5.1: The Allure Of The Feminised Phallus

The emergence of male dancers, and particularly gay male dancers, in the Diaghilev era came after almost 50 years of male non-visibility in ballet, the ballerina having been enthroned as centre of attraction (Au 1988, Foster 1996). This thesis can not contain a thorough analysis of the emergence of men and homosexuality in dance, not least because of the inverted presence of gayness in ballet within patriarchal culture, which makes this history a very complicated one, requiring a massive untangling in both theory and practice. What it can do, however, is attempt to draw attention to some aspects pertaining to the seductive success of gay male dancers in the 1990s.

This section focuses on the illusions of femininity and gay 'otherness' at the site of the male performing body, which can be considered to evoke seductive relations between performer and spectator in an ambiguous play of presence/absence. Four possible sources are indicated: the significance of camp and drag parody, the gay 'gaze', the feminine qualities of new dance languages on the male body and a gay male relationship to physical pleasure.
The first source of seductiveness focuses on the allure of cross-dressing in performance. The male body within phallocentric culture is positioned as subject, but becomes object on a performing stage, yet for the gay male body this is significantly complicated. Franko (1995) argues that because the gay male is still biologically man, therefore subject, therefore the One, within a phallocentric matrix, he has to perform his otherness, 'he is basically in a theatrical rather than a speculative rapport with his own nascent “identity” as other' (Franko 1995 p.94). Within the binary system, this means performing woman. ‘The gay male wishes to exchange sameness for otherness, but he must do so in the very terms of the same’ (p.95). The gay male, in wishing to exchange his sameness for other, or rather wishing to exchange conventional maleness for a gay other maleness, can only do so from his place as male, where other has meant female. Immediately it is obvious how drag performance can seduce an audience through its play between real and illusion. Ferris (1993) describes the seduction of transvestite theatre and cross-dressing in performance as allowing the audience ‘to concede to multiple meanings, to ambiguities of thought, feeling, categorisation, to refuse closure’ (p.8).

Interestingly, cross-dressing performance is not necessarily sexually seductive to a gay spectator - in fact, for gay men cruising, camp drag performance is generally a turn-off, while gay macho-style performance is intended to sexually excite (Bersani 1988). 3 This is the paradox for a gay man, who may desire to express his gay otherness in performance for a gay audience, but within conventional contexts can only do so by disguising himself under an illusion of ‘fetishistic female’ for which a gay spectator has no sexual desire. From a gay perspective, watching camp signification on a gay man's body can be read as other on other, similar to feminine on feminine, closing the space of seduction. However, from a heterosexual male/female perspective, reading the performance of an anatomically male body becoming ‘feminine’ illusion opens the space of humour, intrigue and ambiguity.

While the context of ballet has historically provided gay male bodies with a safe haven of disguise within which to express their otherness as gay men,
a phallocentric context of desire still prevails (Burt 1995). Expressions of gayness are still constrained by traditions of drag, transvestite, camp and cross-dressing as an expression of gay ‘other’. Cross-dressing performance within conventional theatrical contexts has always attracted a heterosexual audience with its play of absence/presence, hence the attraction of media stars Julian Clarey, Lily Savage and, in ballet, Sleeping Beauty’s ‘wicked’ fairy Carraboss, Cinderella’s ‘ugly’ sisters. Les Ballets Trockadero de Monte Carlo parody ballet as men in tutus and pointe shoes. Their drag character parodic impersonations are addressed, not to the choreography, but to the constructed role-play of ballet itself (Mackrell 1997). Their highly amusing performances are extremely popular with heterosexual audiences. Parodic theatrical play with characterisations of ‘woman’ suggests a source of seductiveness - however, without recourse to female drag impersonation, the gay male body becomes more vulnerable as object of desire.4

As homosexual laws have relaxed and a gay liberation movement has emerged, numerous gay artists have ‘come out’ in dance theatre, using performance as a medium to explore gay politics and identities. While female dancers in the 1970s and 1980s were struggling to redefine themselves, stripping their bodies of fetishistic symbols of phallocentric desire, the gay male dancer as soloist/choreographer stepped to the forefront of the performing stage as object of desire.

The feminist seeks to deny the erotic investment of the male gaze, to expose it as phobic, whereas the gay male exposes its ostensibly phobic quality as a screen for its eroticism.

Franko 1995 p. 93

Although homosexuality in dance is no longer weighted by the same homophobic oppression as 50 years ago, a gay man who desires to express his sexual otherness within a conventional theatrical context of desire without recourse to female impersonation, can do so only through a complex system of significations. The second source of seductiveness refers to the ‘gaze’ adopted by gay men within conventional performance and media contexts to counteract the vulnerability of being exposed as object of desire. For Dyer (1992), the active gaze, usually recognised as the dominant
staring at women, is rendered instable when the gay male body becomes object of the spectator’s gaze.

When the female pin-up returns the viewer’s gaze, it is usually some kind of smile, inviting. The male pin-up, even at his most benign, still stares at the viewer ... as if he wants to reach beyond and through and establish himself.  

Dyer 1992 p.109

Dyer (1992) describes how this look takes on different disguises, when he is in the position of object as a model or a dancer. It can be the look that ignores the spectator, or it can be the staring look which asserts dominance, it can be a look off stage or up, ‘off’ suggesting his interest in something else, or ‘up’ which suggests his mind is on higher matters while his body is available for the spectator to objectify. Whatever the look, ‘this does violence to the codes of who looks and who is looked at’ (Dyer 1992 p.104).

According to Gilbert (1994) in his critical analysis of gay theatre, a male body portrayed as object of desire can be ‘punished’ (p.483) within a patriarchal matrix of desire. To avoid punishment,

the male body can be displayed as icon of power and of the sexuality of power ... In these cases the body is read as desirable but in control, not only returning the spectator’s gaze but overwhelming it with a more arrogant, or uncaring, or sexually potent gaze.  

Gilbert 1994 p.483

For Gilbert, a gay man is allowed to be other if he can stare down the spectator. If he cannot do this he is assigned the position of the female but with added scorn for not retaining his male power in a patriarchal economy of desire. In other words a gay male can become sexual object as long as he retains the dominant gaze.

Simpson (1994) has a slightly different slant. He compares the images of model Marky Mark on his own and when positioned with Kate Moss. On his own, Mark grins and flirts, acts as object of desire, while with Moss he ‘gazes manfully straight at the camera, eyes half-closed, lips fully closed, with his lower jaw jutting arrogantly forward’ (Simpson 1994 p.102). This
suggests that when a gay male model poses for a gay audience he can allow himself a gaze of 'feminine' object of desire, but when appealing to a heterosexual market he must prove how 'manly' men are. For gay audiences, the latter 'macho' image is more alluring than the former (Simpson 1994). Here again, the seductiveness of a gay presence is immediately obvious, as his 'feminine other' body as desired object conflicts with an illusion of a dominant gaze in performance.

Matthew Hawkins, in his choreography Matthew and Diana on Manoeuvres (1993), performs conventional ballet movements in travesty. He wears fetishized ballet costume, complete with tutu and pointe shoes. His facility to perform what have been conventionally considered to be feminine ballet gestures draws into focus, and displaces, the conventional construction of male and female roles in ballet. However, what is more relevant to this discussion is Hawkins' gaze, focused beyond the audience, as if concerned with something outside and away from the theatre and the performance. It is a gaze of looking, not of being looked at, one of arrogance not submission. Although his body is displayed as a feminine object complete with its parodic feminine apparel, he is not performing as 'female', Hawkins himself is still firmly established as subject of his performance. The space opened between his feminine balletic illusion and the dominant male gaze is one of intrigue and fascination.

Nigel Charnock's gaze is more complex. In Human Being (1997), he gazes very directly at the audience, commanding attention through his brilliant manipulation of language, a fast, witty, sharp, coarse tirade of words about love, sexual acts, loss, loneliness, murder, bisexuality, god. However, at times he averts his gaze in a manner which displaces his masculinity, admits to the vulnerability of being exposed, sitting silently in a chair wearing only white boxer shorts with no attempt to make his body 'beautiful'. At times his gaze expresses a (hopeless) desire to be desired by the spectator or by the skeleton with which he dances, or by the many toy babies he attempts to carry. The contrasting combination of his passionately energetic and violent physicality, with its dominant focus, together with his vulnerable gaze of desiring to be desired can read as romantic, feminine, tragic. Like an animal in a cage, he changes from aggressive action to pathos, his focus and expression shift with each new
episode, from stand-up comedy to foetus-like movement. Tragedy is definitely an appealing element of his performance, signifying a longing to be loved, a man not afraid to desire as a ‘woman’, he is in ‘no man’s land’, a place of longing to belong. The illusion of tragedy on Charnock’s body, the incredibly powerful physical and verbal skills conflicting with the honesty of his body when not expressing a ‘dominant’ gaze, engages a spectator who, identifying with his vulnerability and his power, can only love him (or punish him).

A displacement of object/subject relations of the gaze in performance sets up an interesting confusion of meanings, the male body being watched, who also watches. The male body is, in a sense, in the position of being objectified, scrutinised, dominated by the spectator, yet he is able to play that scrutiny right back at the audience for his own purposes. A masculine body becomes feminine object of desire in performance context, manipulates dominant and submissive gaze, creating multiple illusions of gender play, which seduces the audience. The clash of masculine gaze, while appropriating the female position as object of desire, destabilises the conventional ‘truths’ about man while also engaging in a play of presence/absence.

A third indication of seductiveness refers to feminine significations of new dance languages on a male body and the ambiguity that is evoked by a male body dancing ‘abstract’ movement. As previously mentioned, Kristeva claims that only the eruption of (feminine) jouissance into symbolic (male) language/art/text creates the potential for those practices to become subversive (Kristeva 1984, Grosz 1989). In parallel, feminine ‘jouissance’ of dance movement appearing on the male body creates the juxtaposition of meanings between male and female significations which allows the potential for dance art practice to become subversive. Feminine dance on a male body does not emphasise ‘truth’ about ‘man’ in the same way as feminine dance emphasises ‘truth’ on female bodies. In Siobhan Davies’ work, for instance Bank (1997), where individual personality is secondary to the abstract movement language and crafted choreography, the male bodies engage the spectator more than the female, provoking Mackrell to remark in her review of the piece,
the men dominate the stage, especially David Hughes. He moves with the loose-knit fluency of a big cat, but there's a ruthless power to his dancing.

Mackrell Guardian, May 17th 1997 p.6

This review draws immediate attention to the feminine illusion (cat) together with the masculine real (ruthless power) that intrigues the spectator. Here at the site of the male body dancing, I suggest that the otherness of new dance languages, although abstract, acts in a similar way to theatrical drag characterisation, by alluding to the illusion of feminine as 'constructed' on a male body.

Feminine movement qualities on a masculine body, portrayed in abstract movement languages, frequently evokes androgynous illusion, as discussed in Chapter 1 (Boys Transcending). Applying the strategy for seduction, it now becomes clear how androgyny as a seductive force relies on the oscillating play between real and illusion, presence and absence. A space is opened between masculine male body (real) and feminine significations of dance (illusions), which, appearing as pure dance, becomes full with significations of transcendence, mystery and spiritual 'beauty'.

The fourth and final source of seductiveness to be mentioned here, refers to the gay male body's relationship to sexual pleasure. Even though he may have to establish a muscular power and appropriate a dominant gaze, the arena of dance performance still offers the male body access to his own body as object of pleasure. Heterosexual masculinity has never focused on the pleasure of the male body, this expression is refused in patriarchal contexts of desire where his desire must be directed to the woman's body, which consequently comes to represent his own body pleasure, as phallic fetish.

Dyer (1993) describes how heterosexual masculine sexuality is difficult to define, as 'we look at the world through ideas of male sexuality' (p.111) and even when we are not looking at it, 'we are looking at the world within its terms of reference' (p.111). For Dyer, heterosexual masculine sexuality is portrayed in the media through symbols of dominant power and appears to be 'overwhelmingly centred on the genitals, especially the penis, there being no other accepted symbol of male arousal' (p.112). This penis is symbolised
by an endless supply of imagery such as 'trains going into tunnels, cigars raised from the lips, guns held close to the hips ... hard, tough, dangerous, erect' (112/3), together with the goal orientated imagery of 'swords, knives, fists and guns' (Dyer 1993 p.113).

Even when other parts of the heterosexual male body are used to describe sexuality, it is their relationship to phallic power, not to pleasure, that is important. 5

The above description of masculine sexuality can be traced to heterosexual male fear of receiving pleasure. In Western culture, receiving pleasure is associated with being passive, which is associated with losing authority. As Bersani (1988) suggests, 'to be penetrated is to abdicate power' (p.212). He claims that biological death from AIDS symbolises punishment, in a patriarchal culture, for gay men who have given up 'proud subjectivity' (p.222). Quoting Foucault, he suggests the practice of S/M in a gay sexual context has provided a positive framework for alleviating the problem of feeling 'that the passive role is in some way demeaning' (Foucault 1985 in Bersani 1988 p.213). For Foucault and Bersani, S/M is not (only) about genital pleasure.

Foucault praised S/M practitioners as "inventing new possibilities of pleasure with strange parts of their bodies". He called S/M "a creative enterprise, which has as one of its main features what I call the desexualization of pleasure".

Bersani p.79 1995

Not only does S/M practice displace the notion that physical pleasure for men can only be sexual, that is, penis-related pleasure, but S/M, in its frequent reversing of roles, allocates power to the submissive role. The passive role, of receiving pleasure as object, is given the position of power, therefore reversing the roles for men constructed by heterosexual culture. S/M allows a male body to express the pleasures of his physical body as power, without fear of its associations with the demeaned heterosexual 'female' role of passive object. 6

S/M raises, however crudely, important questions about the relation between pleasure and the exercise of power, and invites ... a psychoanalytic study of the defeat, or at least the
modulation, of power by the very pleasure inherent in its exercise.

Bersani 1995 p.83

Referring to S/M is not to suggest that all gay men must practice S/M to appreciate 'pleasure', or that S/M is specific to gay male bodies. Rather, experiencing physical pleasures for many gay male bodies is not a demeaning or powerless role, nor is it fixated on the 'penis'.

An appreciation of the physical pleasure in the role of passive object in sexual practice, and recognition of the inherent power and value in that role, might be traditionally associated with gay sexuality. However, transferring these ideas from a social/sexual context to that of dance performance it becomes clear how a male dancer can experience the pleasure of his own body and its movement with other male bodies, while being gazed at as object. A dance performance context gives a male body the space and acknowledgement to be 'in touch' with his own body, experience the act of 'desiring to be desired' as positive, expressing a self-contained sense of pleasure that is conventionally considered a sign of female narcissism.

Mark Morris' L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato (1988), which had a triumphant reception at the London Coliseum in 1997, is a joyous, exuberant, passionate series of dances set to Handel's music together with the poems of John Milton. Morris uses 25 dancers; running, skipping, light-footed figures, skimming and circling, mimicking birds, flowers and gambolling ponies, embodying pastoral images of melancholic and happy days. L'Allegro is an abstract movement piece interspersed with witty parodic comments, closely worked to the meaning of the text and the music. The piece is both serious and playful, respectful and teasing, playing the edge between utter kitsch and high art. Classical formality mixes with folk dance patterns, outrageously flamboyant gestures with simple slow walking weaving lines. Most of all it is a piece expressing pure pleasure, the pleasure of dancing to music for the spectator's gaze.

The male bodies are dressed in shiny lycra tights and soft Grecian style shirts, reminiscent of classical ballet, all in bright pastoral hues of pinks, greens. They trip and skip lightly across the stage, one moment being a
flock of birds in flight, another hugging each other and holding hands in childlike bliss, expressing an obvious pleasure in desiring themselves and each other. Morris’ personal signature, the eccentric, detailed ‘wafty’ gestures, flamboyant and effeminate at the same time, creates an ironic subversive juxtaposition on the male bodies, flaunting and teasing with the concept of masculinity. When the male bodies mimic the actions of birds, it is witty, clever, surprising. The feminine gestures of pleasure fascinate and amuse, displacing heterosexual constructs of stable male authority and power.

Mark Morris is gay, the piece appears to be created, quite blatantly, from a gay homoerotic perspective and it is a work which exudes pleasure. However, the male bodies, rather than the female bodies, parody, subvert, humour and play with notions of desire and pleasure. Morris’ wit rides with confidence on the male bodies.

It is a work to make one laugh and cry ... the cheeky number (so cleverly timed on the music) in which the men alternately fight, kiss and slap each other’s bottoms, the wonderful passage conjuring up a flight of birds, with Kraig Patterson incarnating the trilling lark.

Dougill, Sunday Times June 7th 1997 p.19

Side-stepping a moment to compare male with female - the joyous sense of wit and parody that emerges when the men perform Morris’ choreography can be read somewhat differently on the women’s bodies. The female dancers in L’Allegro are dressed in long flowing dresses, pinks, greens and browns, and many of them have long flowing hair. The choreography and movement material is light and lyrical, similar to that of the men, with Morris’ slightly eccentric affected style. This movement on the female bodies appears to return them to a role constructed by patriarchy, that of nature and Mother, associated with mother earth, rituals of life and death, with circles and weaving shapes and rounded grounded gestures of giving birth. This symbolism, which is very much present in L’Allegro (1988), appears on the male bodies as witty, outrageous, amusing or kitsch, while on the female bodies it reads as ‘true’ and respectfully ‘feminine’, the movement merging with their female bodies as a kind of essential statement of womanhood.
Images of femininity have shifted drastically over the past 50 years. Isadora Duncan dancing as the ‘natural woman’, expressing a classical purity of ancient Greece contrasts with the intense contracted meaningful sternness of Martha Graham’s female representations. The neutralised task-like non-performing female images of postmodern dance contrast with sexually aggressive powerful dramatics of femininity in physical theatre. Although there are many more, these wide-ranging images prove each ‘feminine’ representation to be a constructed performance. It would seem, therefore, that this ‘naturalistic’ choreography in L’Allegro (1988) should read as an ironic statement on the female bodies, a parody of the notion of woman as nature, another constructed femininity. Yet there appears to be no sense of irony, when the women mimic the gesture of birds or gather in a circle signifying some life-giving ritual, the body and gesture reads as unifying, whole, real. In L’Allegro there appears to be an element of respectful (fearful) idolisation of the concept of ‘woman’. The female bodies are left to be simply ‘feminine’, simply ‘lovely’, no traces of subversion or conflicting signification suggest this femininity could be just as much a play of pleasure for the female as it is for the male bodies.

Javier de Frutos is a solo artist who appears to have no fear of taking the role of object of desire to a symbolic extreme by consistently performing naked. Speaking at a post-performance talk (Transatlantic at Purcell Room, London 21st October 1996), Javier explains that performing naked is not an expression of sexual seduction. He says he wants to work with ‘raw nerve’, to choreograph the organs, and work with the effect of light on naked skin. Javier reveals that he has a difficult relationship to his body, being more concerned to explore its awkwardness than its harmonious beauty. The material for Transatlantic emerged from his experiences and feelings in America at a particular time, especially connected to his mother.

The piece is constructed in small sections, each one with a repetitive movement theme and framed in some way, by lighting, a particular space, a circle on the floor, a doorway, a window. In the first episode, the movement is gestural, verging towards the grotesque: Javier walks with his arse stuck out, back arched, his body stiffly leaning forward, his legs moving like a colt which has just been born, wobbly yet stiff. In another, Javier
moves across the back of the stage on his stomach, arching and pushing like a reptile. In another he holds a small window frame in front of his torso and uses his left arm and hand to gesticulate amusingly within and without the frame - which can be read as a playful irony, revealing a part of his naked body as framed object of pleasure.

These images expose Javier's body to the vulnerability of its position as naked object, yet the grotesque, quirky, playful movements, strong facial expressions and dominant eye focus contradict any notion of a passive beautiful object of desire. He manipulates the role, grotesque with beautiful, expressing his passionate power simultaneously with his vulnerability. His technical skill, muscular body and athleticism confirm that his masculinity will not be threatened by the play of pleasure as vulnerable object. He uses the position of object, manipulates, exaggerates and parodies it to various degrees, takes pleasure in its possibilities, rather than being used by it.

Interestingly, the display of his naked body, with bald head, hairless chest and penis dangling, becomes Javier's costume, almost a uniform. Through its repetition in performance, his nakedness becomes part of a performance style, begging the question as to who Javier might be when he is clothed. As he has 'dressed up' in nakedness for performance, the spectator wonders who the real Javier might be. His illusion is his real naked body. Usually, nakedness is not in itself seductive, the body revealed neutralises seductive elements, the secret being no longer secret (Barthes 1972, Simpson 1994, Derrida 1995). Yet Javier becomes, in a sense, fully clothed through repeated nakedness in performance. He retains his real self as secret. For Simpson (1994), male stripping only enchants a spectator because

the phallus can never be shown - instead we are palmed off with the paltry penis ... As with "Pass the Parcel", the enjoyment of stripping is, of course, in the unwrapping not the revelation.

Simpson 1994 p.187

On this argument, the stripper must reveal 'nothing (castration) as everything (fetishistic glamour)' (Simpson 1994 p.187). Javier manages to reveal nothing as everything, by a process of stripping in reverse. His manipulation of movement and gesture, traces of stories, gimmicks,
images, the physical realisation of his pleasure, seem to gradually dress his body. As his performance continues, his naked body becomes ever more clothed and the presence of his 'real' body becomes ever more secret. Javier's naked body becomes a surface appearance of illusion rather than the anatomical real.

Clearly this appraisal of masculine bodies can be criticised from a feminist (and lesbian feminist) perspective, as unquestionably colluding with a gay male queer culture. Jeffreys (1997) severely criticises lesbian writers such as Butler (1990) and Sedgwick (1993), suggesting that their writing contributes solely to gay male queer studies, accusing them of being 'feminism-free' (p.272) in their persistent use of male examples to define what is queer. Jeffreys asserts that Butler's employment of the term 'performativity' refers only to gay male cultural forms.

Butler does not simply fail to recognize that lesbians might have different interests, a culture and traditions of their own, but she selects, as the way forward, precisely those aspects of gay male culture that have been subjected to fairly rigorous criticism by lesbian feminists.

Jeffreys 1997 p.272

Referring to the seductiveness of gay male bodies does not deny that phallocentricism still prevails. This thesis acknowledges that gay male bodies are male bodies, penis intact and visible, and on exit from the stage they still, even against their desire, resume a place as subject in a patriarchal culture. In point of fact, the thesis is constructed on the crucial undeniable factor, the simple historical knowledge, that however subverted and dysfunctional the binary may have become, the (gay) male body off stage, is not object, it resumes subjectivity within a culture which still encourages phallocentric representation.9 It is precisely this undeniable factor which cannot be negated, i.e. that the 'real' male body is subject in patriarchal culture, that clashes with the male body as 'illusionary' object in performance and reveals the basis of his seductiveness.

Four indications of seductiveness have been analysed here, the parodic performativity of fetishistic feminine, the ambiguous subject/object play of the gay gaze in a binary theatrical context, the abstract play of feminine
significations of dance on a masculine body and an awareness of physical pleasure as a powerful performing tool. All of these elements work against, and are triggered by, the knowledge that the male body is positioned as subject off the performing stage. The ambiguity and intrigue caused by real becoming illusion at the site of the male body in dance performance can be considered to be the 'secret' of their success.

Taking the time to observe gay male bodies in dance points to conclusions which can be manipulated to assist in a refiguration of seductive relations for the female body. It has been argued that the play of feminine signification in dance, on a male body, indicates an element of his seductive presence. Consequently, this displaces the femininity of dance from any natural affiliation to the female body. However, the patriarchal notions of masculinity are also displaced on the gay male body, therefore masculine significations can also be considered as a constructed artificial play. If masculinity is a play for the gay male body then it can also be play for the female body.

As embodied practice, the constructed artifice of femininity can be considered as 'pleasure', and that of masculinity as 'power' and it can be argued that the embodied play of pleasure and power, on the male body, creates the ambiguity between real and illusion which evokes seductive relations. Having no natural affiliation to either gender, the play of pleasure and power becomes available for any body to practice, providing the initial embodied starting points for reclaiming seductive relations for the female body.

5.2: Play Pleasure Power

The first term to be considered in the embodied construction of pleasure and power, which might appear as an innocent bystander to the significant terms 'pleasure' and 'power', is that of 'play', provocative in its innocence, having several meanings relevant to this strategy. The notions of being masculine or being feminine as identifiable separate presences do not describe the seductiveness made possible by the play of (masculine) power and (feminine) pleasure. Therefore the primary use of play in this context refers to the interacting and interweaving between the two forces.
Butler (1990, 1991), being only comes to exist through doing/playing and it is only through repeated performances of doing/playing that identity can be present. In other words, doing is the prerequisite of identity. For Derrida also (1978), play precedes Being, playing creates the possibility of Being, play is always a play of absence and presence, but if it is to be thought radically, play must be conceived of before the alternative of presence and absence. Being must be conceived as presence or absence on the basis of the possibility of play, not the other way around.

Derrida, 1978 p. 292

For this strategy for seduction, playing between power and pleasure as a physical doing can create illusion for performance which has no fixed identifiable presence because playing is always a play between. Any number of possible ‘presences’ become open to suggestion between extremes of pleasure and power.

‘Play’ can be interpreted in reference to a game, which has its own seductive element, never knowing at the outset who will win or lose. A game implies that rules can be made and broken, evoking spontaneity, eruptions of emotion, laughter and tears, creativity and imagination, it allows for love, humour, joy and anger. Play is the first element that participants practice in the Cruising Workshop that I have been directing since 1992, aiming to encourage participants to discover a seductive performing presence of their own, separate from the material to be performed. Working in pairs, one task invites each participant to ‘pick up’ her own story by observing her partner’s gestures, to follow her own imaginative, fantasy journey in movement, gesture or dramatic action, and return to pick up again when the spontaneous fluidity of the fantasy becomes fixed. The aim is never to ‘get stuck’, always changing stories, avoiding habitual patterns of movement, finding one’s own eccentricities of movement, taking risks with physical limits.

Play describes a child’s imagination, non-linear sequences of creative narratives, going with the flow, nothing to resolve, logic itself becoming the play. Play suggests parody, self-reference, an ability to step aside from rationality and subjectivity in oneself, approach life as a game of chance.
Playing a game, like keeping a secret, is always more seductive than winning, losing or telling. Play provides a fundamental element in this project, playing androgyny, playing seducer and seduced, playing eroticism. Play offers the possibility of mutating, shifting, a changing process, a movement stretching between non-fixed points. 10

Being ‘woman’, appropriating female/feminine identifications, is not necessarily as seductive as the play with significations of pleasure associated with ‘feminine’. The Cruising Workshop introduces pleasure through improvisation. Imagining an image, experience, memory or mood related to physical pleasure, each participant moves from where she feels her ‘sexual centre’ to be. Participants move individually, recreating the imagined source as an abstract physical sensation in/on their bodies. Working with the focus directed inwards, gestures and a way of moving are reclaimed which ‘normally’ read as sexual, pornographic, erotic. Reclaiming these movements from personal imagination, participants become subject and object of their own pleasure. Questions emerge - which and what gestures associated with voyeuristic pornographic fetishism are actually pleasurable to enact? Does imagining an external gaze on your/her body increase the pleasure? Where is the line between expressions of pleasure which evoke a seductive response and those which simply encourage and perpetuate a pornographic sexual looking? Which elements of dance technique itself, so thoroughly ingrained with phallocentric marking, (such as pointed feet, stretched and highly extended legs), are pleasurable to achieve? Is there pleasure in pain? These are notions which will be explored in Chapter 6 as erotic practice. Play infiltrates the improvisation, ‘realising’ is constantly shifted so that expressions of pleasure are displaced before they can become fixed.

Being ‘man’ in terms of the anatomical reality of the penis and issues of FTM transgender are not primarily relevant to this thesis, rather the interest lies in symbolic and signifying qualities of playing masculine power for theatrical illusion.11 Performance artist Diane Torr directs Drag Kings for a Day, a workshop which offers female participants the space to assume the persona of a man. In the BBC documentary (1995), the participants are revealed dressing up as a men, binding their breasts,
donning beards and moustaches and appropriating penises. There is an amusing moment when Diane Torr asks them very lightly and sweetly, if they have remembered to bring their penises - if not, she has some material (cotton wool and stocking) with which they can be made. As the ‘men’ practice eating, dancing and walking, as they go out in the evening into the streets to ‘pass’, it becomes clear that the aim of the workshop is to perform ‘man’, to enact gestures associated with stereotypical heterosexual masculinity. Interviewed, Torr asserts ‘becoming a man is an act of repression ... everything has to be toned down’. She describes how retaining total authority means a man must practice ‘specific minimal gestures ... a way of behaving that men have utilised to control the situation’ (Torr BBC documentary March 1995).

Torr’s workshop is directed towards passing as a ‘man’ in a performance context, adopting extremes of heterosexual male stereotypes to ‘expand their repertoire of performing gender’ (Torr and Czyzselska 1998). However, visibly performing a man, being repressed, controlled and authoritative, lacks the interactive ambiguous play with pleasure and power necessary to be a seductive force. This is endorsed by Schultz (1990) in her analysis of female body-builders,

\[
\text{the bodies can drift out of difference, ceasing to be a radically different female body, into an unsettling sameness, a body that seems no different from a “male” body. This drift is experienced as displeasurable.}
\]

\[
\text{Schultz 1990 p.78}
\]

Consequently, body-builders are ‘femmed up’, adorned with smiles and make-up to acquire an aura of pleasure to counteract the possible invisibility as ‘male’ (Schultz 1990). In this way, the masculine body, with its significations of power and solid erectibility, becomes displaced through play with illusions of feminine pleasure, while the feminine body with its significations of pleasure and fluid diffusibility, becomes displaced through play with illusions of phallic power and masculine focus.

Power is introduced as the final element in the Cruising Workshop. Physical manifestations such as muscular definition, aggressive energy, attack, athletic skill, physical speed, upward direction and precision initiate the
play with power. Subsequently, participants improvise with a ‘power gaze’, active desiring as ‘hunter’, moving toward extremes of aggression, dominance, control and possession, alternating with the gaze of playing pleasure object. Frequently, a night-club atmosphere is set up in the studio, and the ‘cruising’ game takes place. In all tasks, ‘play’ and ‘pleasure’ switch the game before fixed narratives can occur. The workshop tasks reveal how power without pleasure becomes fearful and aggressive, how pleasure without power has no external focus, appearing mundane and indulgent, and how pleasure and power without play conflate into a fixed identity. One of the causes of the fixed homogenised androgynous dance language that has emerged (discussed in Chapter 2 W/ hole) can be seen as a consequence of this loss of play between power and pleasure.

Wendy Houston as a solo performer (Haunted, Daunted and Flaunted 1995-97), engages her audience with ironic wit (and a small black gun). She interweaves spoken language with a powerful hunting gaze which clashes with the sensuous expressions of physical pleasure in her movement and image. Wendy, as a performer with DV8 (Strange Fish 1992), throws herself half-naked on to a floor strewn with rough stones, to improvise with spontaneous powerful and pleasurable abandon. The dancers of CandoCo Dance Company (Back to Front with Side Shows 1993, video 6 and Across Your Heart 1996 video 8), are wickedly aware of how their use of dance language is an expression of their physical (erotic) pleasure and how their power is inherent within that pleasure. The deliciousness of play between the extremes of phallic aggression and feminine sweetness is an ironic play which they employ to entice their audiences and each other.

The physical play of power and pleasure embodies the play of subject/object significations of language, the phallic/feminine significations of gender, the vertical/horizontal significations of aesthetics. Chapter 2 (Playing a Space) addressed the post structuralist philosophical notion of the horizontal as a ‘thought of difference, not identity’ (Lechte 1994 p.217), where the vertical does not exist in opposition but as a form for the horizontal. Here again, embodied power and pleasure do not exist in opposition to one another. Pleasure accepts and incorporates power as a difference, the pleasure of a dancer’s body gives rise to the power, not as a separate and opposing entity, but as a form for pleasure. Pleasure takes/gives form in/to power, pleasure
may exist without power yet is acknowledged as an expression through power, pleasure recognises power as an expression of itself. As the vertical line of power is produced along the horizontal axis of pleasure, pleasure can bypass that of power. There is nothing fixed about power if it exists as a form for pleasure, it becomes an illusionary construction of pleasure. Pleasure will never be invisible as a feminine 'otherness' if it finds its expression in power. Power and pleasure interweave, power always reversing itself in a fall towards pleasure to emerge again differently. In this way, both 'male' power and 'female' pleasure become seductive playful forces by the interweaving and layering of one within the other. 12

**Witch One** (1992 video 3) was a five minute solo created for myself which began as an exploration into a play with the power and pleasure of dominant and submissive gaze, the active and receptive roles of sexual desire. The solo was positioned in a spotlight, downstage, facing out front. Communication throughout was very directly with the audience. The piece could be described as a love affair between myself and the spectators.

> It can't be easy to seduce your audience en masse, but choreographer Emilyn Claid uses us collectively as her lover ... Forget Madonna's raunchy risings. This is an honest piece of soul-baring, exploring female sexual cunning - manipulation of magic.

_Ferguson Yorkshire Post February 26th 1992_

The lights come up on one body standing still with legs slightly apart, facing directly front, dressed in a black all-in-one cotton body suit, a black silver jacket which glitters in the lights and boots, head closely shaved. The following description is written from my perspective as a performer, in order to describe the play of power and pleasure and the interactive engagement with the audience as an embodied experience.

> Adrenalin pumping, alone, in the dark (check feet the right distance apart, ready for anything but casual, waiting but not sloppy or insolent, shoulders, knees, feet, hands relaxed, neck lengthened, cool exterior, in charge, in power). Lights come up, hold the black space in my gaze, my power, feel pleasure and play rise inside, I have control, make myself available to them, enjoy them watching me. Hold them in the full black space, cruise them, span the black space like a crowded room, bringing them with me. I turn my head to the side, (how is the angle of my chin? Too high is aggressive, too low is passive, check the timing)
removing my gaze, now they look at me (hold calm, no hiding, feel their eyes on my neck, jaw line, how do I look, do I look thin, strong, muscular, or big, flabby, out of shape). With their eyes on me, I smile, a mysterious, knowing secret smile (time the smile with the music, let my lips open slightly) taking pleasure in their looking, returning their gaze in the next phrase. Look at them, stop smiling, replace with an active gaze, hunting them, enacting the power to take each one of them. Now extend my left hand to them, (adjust the motion of the wrist, delay the opening of the fingers, complete the musical phrase) teasing not proud, tempting not giving, (drop the weight into my left hip, head angled slightly down, eyes focused out). Flirt, tease, offer my hand, inviting them to play with me, pretend to demand their attention, throw it back when they give it. Laughing inside, touch my left palm with right middle finger, bring it to my mouth, lick it, my cunt, her cunt, an imaginary lover's cunt, wet, sharp, pleasure, (not too much smile, subtle with the tongue, not too slow, delicate, delicacy and dominance through eyes and hand). Fast flip of my body to the side releases tension of the gaze.

Each minute movement is controlled, its timing, angle, dynamic, placement, I am questioning every detail of gesture to ensure its expression will carry into the space between myself and the audience. Adjusting each one at the instant of doing it, tempting the audience into the space, just enough to draw them into the play, giving a little, inviting, holding back, throwing out, making them come to meet me. Touching, laughing, playing, holding, taking, throwing and catching into the dark. There is nothing real here, it is an act of desiring, illusion, role play, but something happens in the doing, watching, I can feel it in the space between us, there is something extremely delicious in the two way interactive illusions of power and pleasure.

Part One concluded by suggesting androgyny in dance languages as a place/space between phallic and feminine, vertical and horizontal, from which it might be possible to play an illusive presence. However, it was also argued that a homogenised established dance language had emerged that closed the space of illusive play. Part Two has presented a strategy for seduction as an oscillating play between real and illusion, illusion and real, one becoming (not being) the other, offering an ambiguity of presence/absence pertaining to both. The problem for the female body introduced in Part One has consequently been examined in depth, suggesting that historically important postmodern and feminist agendas have closed the seductive space between real and illusion for the female body. Observation of seductive elements of male dancing bodies emphasises, not only the performative construction of male/phallic and
female/feminine but also suggests that the embodiment of those characteristics as a play of power and pleasure offers a possible way forward.

The discussion of power within pleasure and pleasure within power returns the thesis to the theme of androgyny. Exploring how the practice of power and pleasure, as embodied manifestations, might evoke a play of androgynous illusions, becomes the next task of this thesis. Applying the strategy for seduction to the female body dancing, it becomes clear that androgyny as a seductive force cannot be considered only as a play of artifice in languages. Androgyny must also be considered as illusions which emerge from the play of erotic desires at the site of the real body. Corporeal sexual practices, erotic drives, physical passions and energies can be described as a driving force of lived experience for every body, they penetrate, infiltrate and problematise all language representations. To ignore their presence suggests a body in denial.

As the gender which conventionally signifies as object of sexual desire, reproduction, mortality and ‘mothering’, androgyny in new dance languages on the female body does not/cannot inspire the same transcendent immortal spiritual illusions as the male dancing body. Therefore, the problem to be investigated becomes one of how the female body can manipulate rather than negate her sexual role, to refigure androgynous illusion as a seductive force in dance performance which retains the power and pleasure manifestations as illusions of embodied desires without returning her to the fixed binary object role.

The way forward proposed by this thesis is characterised by the term erotic androgyny as a practice of illusion. The term itself offers an oscillating play between sexuality and textuality, real (erotic) and illusion (androgyny), identity and ambiguity. Achieving a seductive illusion of erotic androgyny involves an investigation of the androgynous possibilities of eroticism or, to put it another way, an investigation into the eroticism of the androgynous body.
Chapter 5  Male Objects of Desire  End Notes

1 During the romantic ballet era of the 1800s, the male dancer had become almost invisible. The ballerina ruled supreme and even her male partners were played by travesty dancers. Foster’s feminist account of the supremacy of the ballerina (1996) includes the notion that the ballerina’s role was ensured as an agency for ‘male sexual potency’ and as ‘sexualised commodity exchange’. (p.14) His disappearance can be thought of similarly to that of the female body in dance theatre today. Forbidden to engage in ‘pleasure’, constrained to masculine steps, his presence did not engage, the space of seduction between real and illusion became closed - this is a hypothesis worth exploring at another time.

Foster (1996) continues by saying that the beginning of the 20th century saw two important changes. Women choreographers and soloists began to establish themselves in their own right through the medium of modern dance and at the same time the gay male dancer was ‘outed’. These two forceful events, which Foster’s feminist critique describes as women appropriating the phallus and men as queered phallus, have continued to develop a parallel existence ever since, in ballet and contemporary dance.

2 The effect on ballet of the emergence of performers such as Nijinski has yet to be assessed and would require a complex deconstruction. Although Nijinski’s ‘queered phallus’ (Foster 1996) was outwardly expressed through his performance, he went on to make ballets which ‘self-consciously staged the same patriarchal dynamics on which the ballets of a century before had been founded’ (Foster 1996 p.16). A deconstruction of ballet from a gay perspective of desire, as there has already been from a feminist perspective, is long overdue, particularly considering how many powerful and influential figures in the ballet world have been and are gay. What if ballet has always been a gay male construction? Did Louis XIV sleep with men? After all, homosexuality was not even considered a category until the 18th century. (Foucault 1976 Foster 1996). How different is the signification of the ballerina when read from a queer perspective of desire? What would be the significance of her ‘phallic pointe’?

What effect has the invisibility of homosexuality had historically on the expression of gay culture in ballet? Why is ballet so popular with gay audiences? What are the meeting points and the clashes between feminist and gay perspectives in ballet? To what would the gay male choreographers and critics have to admit? Why, in the face of their own oppression, have gay choreographers in ballet colluded with heterosexual men in the physical torture of the ballerina? Bersani (1995) addresses this issue claiming ‘A more or less secret sympathy with heterosexual male misogyny carries with it the narcissistic gratifying reward of confirming our membership in ... the privileged male society’ (p.64) Does the ballerina, similarly to the drag artist, embody a gay camp femininity? Matthew Bourne (Swan Lake, 1995), quite blatantly, it would appear, dresses all the female bodies in gay male drag, which reveals the camp signification of all the queen mothers, princesses and courtiers that have dressed the stage in the romantic and classical ballets. (Dyer 1992). None of this is simple to unravel and my final question must be, where are the gay male theorists who could counteract/support the many heterosexual feminist theories about ballet? Franko (1994) and Dyer (1992) have certainly dipped their toes into the waters of the Lake, but it appears no one has yet decided to swim across its murky depths. As the young gay book seller in Compendium Books in London informs me, ‘well, of course - they’re all dead of AIDS’.


4 A number of independent gay dance artists have manipulated gender role play in drag, camp performance, as a parodic strategy for questioning social and sexual identity, to deconstruct notions of humanist essentialism and determined gender.
Michael Clark, Mark Morris, Matthew Hawkins, Nigel Charnock and Matthew Bourne have at various times employed cross-dressing parodic play to reveal inconsistencies in the truth about the male bodies. Whether these forms succeed in their political objective to threaten the stability of heterosexual cultural norms is questionable (Burt 1995 p.181). Certainly, from a feminist perspective, gay camp in its parody of ‘woman’ appears as both hostile and supportive in that it gives expression to gay men’s hatred of women while also deconstructing notions of an essential femininity (Bersani 1995).

5 In a similar way to Baudrillard (1979), Dyer (1993) suggests that the symbolism used to describe conventional heterosexual ‘man’ conjures a host of signifiers but rarely the term seductive. Male sexuality as a sign in itself is not engaging, flirtatious, joyous, fluid, sensual or even movable as these qualities seem likely to disrupt the fragile erection of phallocentrism, a structure apparently so delicate that it ‘must be defended by retrenchments, institutions, and artifice. The phallic fortress offers all the signs of a fortress, that is to say, of weakness’. (Baudrillard 1979 p.16)

6 The power inherent in the role of ‘submission’ for female bodies, is rarely alluded to in heterosexual feminist agendas. For Dworkin (1987), to be under a man is neither empowering nor pleasurable. Within a ‘male-dominant gender hierarchy,... female is bottom, stigmatised. Intercourse remains a means or the means of physiologically making a woman inferior ...she loses the capacity for integrity because her body ... is entered and occupied ... She learns to eroticise powerlessness and self-annihilation. The very boundaries of her own body become meaningless to her ...’ (Dworkin 1987 p.162-163). Lesbian/queer appropriation of the role of ‘bottom’, in a similar way to gay men, offers a return to an expression of power.

7 Focusing on his act of watching gay male dancers, Burt, who identifies himself as a heterosexual man states, ‘my theoretical investigation is the pleasures and terrors of watching male dancers that have, and let me know they have, penises’ (1998 draft in press). He claims his desire does not have deep psychological roots but develops through a ‘form of interactive production ... on recognition and acknowledgement of sameness which manifests itself through making connections on the level of knowledge of the common experience of embodiment’. He chooses to define his looking, and the gay dancers he watches (DV8, Nigel Charnock, Bill T. Jones, Steve Petronio, Michael Clark), as ‘queer’ rather than gay, not only because queer ‘embraces a wide range of practices and identities that are subversive and oppositional’ but because the term allows for ‘gay cultural formations ... to be conceptualised in wide ranging and inclusive ways’. By using the term queer, Burt figures the term gay can be opened up to new configurations and possibilities, to include his own queer heterosexual perspective.

8 Narcissistic behaviour is conventionally regarded negatively, ‘synonymous with selfish individualism and solipsism by the Left and decadence by the Right’ (Simpson 1994 p.15).

Freud (1914) claims that every body has a primary narcissism, takes her/himself as a sexual choice. Developing through the ‘normal’ channels of the Oedipal complex, narcissism is given up and replaced by an ‘object-love of the attachment type’ (p.82). This object love, which has its origins in narcissism, is based on a replacement of the mother or other to whom the child was first attached. For Freud, this describes the state of ‘being in love ... a state suggestive of a neurotic compulsion’ (p.82) and is particularly a characteristic of the male. The female on the other hand, tends to intensify her primary narcissism, and instead of transferring to an object love develops a certain ‘self-contentment’ where it is ‘only themselves that such women love’. (p.82). The female takes her own body as her object choice.

Nowhere does Freud refer to narcissism and its pleasurable positive associations with ‘desire for the mother’ (p.186), a point of view taken up by later psychoanalytical theorists (Lacan, Kristeva, Irigaray, Grosz, De Lauretis), and which becomes
particularly relevant when considering narcissism from a lesbian/gay perspective. Simpson (1994) regards the narcissism of gay men as 'the desire to re-enact in adult life the joy of infantile 'oneness' with the mother' (p.16). Rather than interpreting narcissism as a homosexual 'disorder' (p.65), the self-contentment and love of self that is expressed by gay men in the presence of other gay men and the desire to love and be loved in a maternal manner, becomes the pleasurable expression, rather than the fault, of the early loving and nurturing relationship between self and mother. Simpson points out that as long as narcissism is considered in a depreciatory light, then so will homosexuality, and so will mothers be blamed 'as the authors of their sons' homosexuality.' (Simpson p.15)

The look of self-contentment which Freud reckons women appropriate, could be due to a longer, more positive, early relationship between mother and daughter. This look, which has become negatively associated with narcissism, can be interpreted as a sense of 'oneness' with her/himself and a recognition of a pleasurable identification with the mother figure, making the search for an object-love of the opposite sex, outside of herself, less compulsory.

Narcissism is alluded to in this thesis as a positive expression of pleasure on a performing body, a gay perspective on narcissism which contradicts Freud's approach to it as 'perverse' or a homosexual 'disorder' (Freud 1914). Narcissistic behaviour manifests as someone in love with her/himself, or in love with someone who is strikingly similar in looks to her/himself. (Hence the stereotypical generalisation that gays and lesbians are narcissistic). This appearance of narcissism can be interpreted as a positive desire to copy, appropriate and physically resemble a oneness enjoyed in identification with mother/child relationships. Within a theatrical context of performance, narcissism manifests as the pleasure of self contentment, enacting an imaginary state of self perfection, 'oneness', thereby attracting the spectator by the appearance of possessing a secret. Returning to Freud, 'For it seems very evident that another person's narcissism has a great attraction for those who have renounced part of their own narcissism and are in search of object-love' (Freud, 1914 p.82/83).

9 Gay agendas to establish femininity (or masculinity) as an element of real body gay identity in day-to-day life is not intentionally negated here. Certainly it can be argued that the focus of DV8's performance work is the recognition of deeply psychoanalytical real identities of 'gay' sexual identities. Burt cites Winter (1989) who holds the opinion that the men in Newson's Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men (1988) and MSM (1993) 'are being honest and presenting on stage aspects of their experiences as gay men that are in some way 'true' for themselves. The underlying sub text of this is the idea that sexuality is either innate or an expression of something interior' (Burt, draft in press), which suggests an essentialist nature for gay sexuality. As the millennium approaches, the hetero-homo boundaries are radically shifting. Gay men have consistently performed as straight men, heterosexual men become 'mothers' and child carers, transvestism has been a practice of heterosexual men in family life, transgendered bodies 'pass' as straight women. This fluidity provokes Phelan to remark 'if the ascendant term in the binary hetero-homo is beginning to shift ... perhaps too the binary visibility-invisibility will also shift' (1993 p.97).

10 An obvious definition of play is provided by its connotations with theatre, the 'Play' and the 'Players', evoking associations with acting, performing, magic, representation, illusion, non-illusion, play with language, making a text come alive with its embodied play. The written text is a play with language which conjures the act/art of illusion in theatre performance. The body text is a play with physicality which conjures the act/art of illusion in dance theatre.

11 Issues of transgender and FTM (female to male) are explored in the end notes to Chapter 1.

12 Playing pleasure and power can be theoretically contextualised by Irigaray's project...
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(1982) to re-imagine rationality by refiguring the interaction of the four elements, fire, earth, air and water. Just as appropriately, this construct can be theoretically situated parallel to Kristeva's project (1984) regarding the semiotic clash with the symbolic of avant garde art practices. However, a Deleuzian reading (1983) of Nietzsche's active and reactive forces in the will to power (1968), endorsed by Grosz (1994), offers interesting parallels. Nietzsche, according to Deleuze (1983), proposes a more positive theory regarding 'power' than does Foucault (1979). For the latter, the will to power is hindered by reactive forces which are unhinged from the body, becoming power knowledge discourses which, in turn, construct the body along set structures of being where the body is the instrument and object of power. 'Power, according to Foucault, utilises, indeed produces, the subject's desires and pleasures to create' knowledges, truths, which may provide more refined, improved, and efficient techniques for the surveillance and control of bodies, in a spiral of power-knowledge-pleasure (Grosz 1994 p.146). While for Nietzsche, it is the body itself which produces knowledge and power. 'Knowledge and power are, for Nietzsche, the results of the body's activity, its self-expansion and self-overcoming' (Grosz 1994 p.122). According to Tomlinson (translator for Deleuze 1988), Nietzsche's will to power has often been misunderstood as 'wanting or seeking power' (p.xi) and he emphasises that Nietzsche's concept is not 'what the will wants, but on the contrary, the one that wants in the will' (p.xi). Power is not something to be gained, but is an active play of pleasure in the body.
Chapter 6
Pausing to Identify

For the purposes of this thesis, eroticism is defined as desiring in practice, embodying the play of power and pleasure. Drawing on Deleuze & Guattari's motifs 'body without organs' and 'strata', erotic androgyny is characterised as a desiring practice between identifiable erotic figurations. Kristeva's theories of semiotic/symbolic provide a contextual framework for the erotic figurations that are identified. *A Little Pain Never Hurt - say yes* describes figures drawn from Oedipal narratives of desire and Bataille's concept of eroticism. *Goodbye to Glitter - say no* describes feminist figurations of semiotic/erotic drives. Performance illustrations range from ballet to 'Eurocrash' and body art practices. Analysis of performance work suggests that erotic androgynous illusions are not evoked by the identities of figures as real expressions on the body. They are being identified here in this chapter in order that they may become points of reference between which the androgynous body performs. My own experiences are included, to illustrate both the interior depth and the performative potential of desiring practices.

6.1: Desiring in Practice

Throughout psychoanalytical discourse, desire signifies as a projected search for pleasure, involving a binary relationship between a subject and an object that is desired. If desire can be defined this way in theory, then eroticism can be characterised as the *practice* of desire, the embodied activity of desiring. If desire, in language, signifies a projected *search* for pleasure, then eroticism can be thought of as the physical embodied activity of experiencing desire. In this way eroticism becomes the embodied experience of both active and receptive desiring, the power (masculine) and pleasure (feminine) of desiring, a physical embodied play that is experienced between these elements.

Deleuze and Guattari's motif of 'body without organs' (1988) offers an imaginative theoretical parallel for the androgynous practice and performance of eroticism. Massumi's introduction (1988) describes their work as spirited controversial discussions which rebel against 'state philosophy', against psychoanalysis and the death drive, against pro-party Marxism, against organised movements, identities and subjectivities. Instead their writing encourages such motifs as 'nomadic thought, planes of
consistency, smooth plateaus of immanence, bodies without organs, rhizome networks and assemblages. These motifs intrigue, they refuse identity as a single truth and they offer creative potential for transference, networking, connections to other events and mediums. As Massumi explains, 'Most of all the reader is invited to lift a dynamism out of the book entirely, and incarnate it in a foreign medium' (p.xv). In this case, dance becomes the medium to which these motifs can be applied.

Deleuze and Guattari (1988) focus on overturning all theoretical models that claim desire is predicated on lack, claiming that it is not the object that is lacking in desire, for desire creates a proliferation of objects, but rather that desire misses a subject. Bristow (1997) describes their figuration of desire between objects as

perpetual movement, following diverse channels, proliferating and multiplying, fragmenting and reconfiguring, forever adopting unforeseen shapes and forms.

Bristow 1997 p.130

Grosz emphasises the great value in their work for challenging 'our most common assumptions regarding identity, relations between subject and object, substance, matter, corporeality' (1994 p.164). Her reading of their work is by no means 'faithful' - she appropriates ideas to develop concepts about the body (lesbian particularly), which their work does not.

Their theories of desire are applied here to describe an erotic body in dance performance. Because their work does not specifically focus on the live, flesh, human body, a free play of associations between their fictional theories and future possible figurations can be appropriated for the dancing body. This is particularly relevant to a strategy for seduction which requires a body illusion for performance, a presence/absence between genders, desires and identities, displaced from an essential belonging.

In the chapter 'How Do You Make Yourself A Body Without Organs?' (Deleuze & Guattari 1988 p.149), a BwO is described as a set of practices, not a concept. 'You never reach the body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit' (p.150). We are informed, as readers, that we have one, make one, cannot desire without one, but to
recognise its practice it is necessary to let go of ‘the three great strata concerning us ... the organisms, significance and subjectifications’ (p.159) that bind us as blockages, stopping the free networking of desires between bodies. For Deleuze and Guattari, the personal pronoun which encourages possession of bodies, ‘yours and mine’ as subjectifications, block the movement of desire and should be exchanged for the indefinite article. Thinking in terms of ‘“a” stomach, “an” eye, “a” mouth’ (p.164), where the indefinite article becomes ‘the conductor of desire, encourages ‘pure determination of intensity, intensive difference’ (p.164).

There are both strengths and weaknesses in these Deleuzian views from the perspective of a real material body doing a play of erotic desires. The philosophical concept of BwO can be regarded as a precarious analogy to apply to the seductive potential of a female dancing body. It can suggest an abstraction and negation of eroticism in the body itself, where bodies moving in space and time become a networking of points of intensity and dynamics on a ‘plane of consistency’ (Deleuze and Guattari 1988 p. 90), but without individual expression, subjectivity and recognisable play of desires. Considered this way, the analogy of BwO is more readily applied to work by choreographers such as Trisha Brown, Yvonne Rainer, Siobhan Davies and Rosemary Butcher where choreographic structures, movement tasks and networking of assembled bodies overrides the individual expression of the dancers. The analogy of BwO can quite easily be applied to Rainer’s minimalist postmodern dance works, clearly illustrated by her description of movement phrasing in Trio A (1966).

One of the most singular elements in it is that there are no pauses between phrases. The phrases themselves often consist of separate parts ... but the end of each phrase merges immediately into the beginning of the next with no observable accent. The limbs are never in a fixed, still relationship ... creating the impression that the body is constantly engaged in transitions.

Rainer 1968 in Copeland and Cohen 1983 p.329

Reiterating the aim of this project once again, its focus is the female performing body’s potential to evoke a seductive interactive relationship with the spectator, not the engagement with abstract choreographic language. Applying BwO to minimalist postmodern works can be considered
to support the negation of erotic practices on live dancing bodies. Therefore Deleuze's conceptual practices need to be firmly anchored in the corporeal desires of a body/my body.

It is interesting that the early postmodern choreographers' quest to deconstruct metaphysical aspects of ballet and modern dance in order to establish the real body's subjectivity in performance should draw parallels with the writing of Deleuze and Guattari. For feminist writers, the lack of connection to lived bodies in the work of Deleuze and Guattari has been a point of consternation, many of whom have ignored their writing. Grosz (1994) mentions Irigaray and Jardine, who express concerns that 'Deleuze's radical refiguring of ontology in terms of planes, intensities, flows, becomings, linkages' (Grosz 1994 p.161) will undermine the feminist agenda for subjectivity, identity and equality. The notion of 'becoming woman' can be considered as 'yet another male appropriation of whatever is radical or subversive in feminist politics' (Grosz 1994 p.162). Bristow points out that their work operates 'at such a high level of abstraction that readers can only wonder at the cognitive or political reach' (Bristow 1997 p.134).

This thesis aligns itself with the philosophical theories of writers such as Baudrillard, Derrida and Deleuze, who seek to destabilise humanist concerns and free desire from its psychoanalytical position in relation to lack. However, this is the consequence of my experiential history with heterosexual, feminist, lesbian practices of desires each with its own 'deep' quest for subjectivity and identity. Even as I let go of fixed identifiable practices, they are still shadows which influence, colour my present androgynous queer perspective. In other words, while theories of BwO offer exhilarating theoretical imaginings, their translation onto the real erotic desiring body in practice appears more problematic.

In fact, Deleuze & Guattari (1988) focus on a particular point in their approach to BwO. When opposing the 'three great strata ... the organism, significance, and subjectification' (p.159), on which the metanarrative of phallocentric desire such as psychoanalysis and Christianity depend, these writers consistently caution against blowing everything apart. 'You don't reach the BwO and its plane of consistency by wildly destratifying' (Deleuze 1988 p.160). For Deleuze and Guattari, opposing the organism is not to
oppose the organs, rather it is to oppose the ‘phenomenon of accumulation, coagulation, and sedimentation’ (p.159) that imposes on the BwO its ‘forms, functions, bonds, dominant and hierarchized organisations, organised transcendences’ (p.159). Running parallel, the idea of strata can be applied to this project to locate the identifiable structures and practices, such as those of heterosexuality and homosexuality, as organisations which categorise erotic practices of desire on the body.

Instead of losing the strata altogether and becoming an empty body, Deleuze & Guattari recommend that it is possible to ‘mimic the strata’ (p.160). Their concept of ‘mimicking’ suggests a performative play with the strata, through which the desiring network of a BwO can be imagined.

It is through a meticulous relation with the strata that one succeeds in freeing lines of flight, causing conjugated flows to pass and escape.

Deleuze 1988 p.161

The notion of ‘mimicking the strata’ can be interpreted in this thesis as playing in the shadows between recognisable practices of desire, not losing them altogether, ‘mimicking’ sexual identities and subjectivities in performance. ‘Figurations’ of erotic practices, such as those which emerge from heterosexual, feminist, homosexual, transgender, lesbian and gay contexts of desire, each with its externally recognised and organised structures, resemble the strata. Playing between these figurations, throws up different and multiple ‘figures’, images, moods, relationships, characters, gestures, all identifiable with the strata yet freed from their fixed positioning.

Erotic androgyny is thus not a merging of many into one universal position, but a play between many erotic perspectives and between real body expressions of eroticism which open out to become free floating illusions. While these ideas of the play between as a BwO are attractive, there is still a real body doing, a body with a cultural background, identifiable history, and a wealth of embodied experiences from within which erotic practices emerge. While the strata can be thought of as dismantled, their structures flattened, becoming surface and open to a horizontal axis for play, a performing body does not become an empty, mundane, unified body with
body language that is sterilised and universal. Each erotic practice has a depth and interiority, it can be experienced, identified, stratified, yet each practice can also be dismantled from its depth to become a horizontal surface figuration, between which a body plays. It is because of my own experiential acts of lived performer/spectator practices of desire that I now recognise the potential of playing between them for performance.

In taking the stance that androgyny is a play between recognisable signs of gender, and erotic androgyny is a play between identifiable 'gendered' practices of desiring, this fiction becomes closely related and intertwined with a personal journey through identifiable figurations. Consequently this chapter includes my own experiential voice in an attempt to illustrate how ontological depths of experience can become a surface play of appearances in performance, both informing embodied practice.

In this way, an erotic androgyne also echoes the political fictional figure of Braidotti's 'nomad' (1994), invented in response to her own experiences as 'a subject in transit' (p.10) living across many different countries, Italy, Australia, France and Netherlands (1994). The rich metaphorical potential of a nomadic state conjures images of a 'shifting landscape' and a travelling between. A nomad 'knows how to trust traces and to resist settling into one, sovereign vision of identity' (Braidotti 1994 p.14). Not surprisingly, Braidotti also refers to Deleuze's schemes, which, for her, offer a total dissolution of the notion of 'a centre and consequently of originary sites or authentic identities of any kind' Braidotti 1994 p.5). Similarly, personal experiences of erotic practices can become reference points and traces, which can be travelled between without settling a visual identity, to create seductive illusion in performance.

Braidotti's 'nomadic' figure travels between different feminist theoretical agendas in order to refigure an alternative strategy for feminist subjectivity, 'blurring boundaries without burning bridges' (Braidotti 1994 p.4). The figure of erotic androgyne plays between different corporeal erotic practices in order to refigure an illusive seductive presence for a female body in performance.

In this chapter several different figurations of erotic practices are
described, drawing from Oedipal, Bataille and feminist narratives of desire. My own voice is included in order to emphasise both the deep-rooted interiority and the performativity of these practices. Drawing attention to them in this way can be considered as moments of pause, identifying in order to move on and through, eventually opening them out to a horizontal surface on which to play in performance.

6.2: A Little Pain Never Hurt - say yes

Freudian and Lacanian fictions of psychoanalysis, particularly the universal theories regarding the broken pre-oedipal relationship between mother and child, can be thought of as having far-reaching consequences in the construction of the psychic and physical erotic life of early childhood. I acknowledge fundamental psychoanalytical concepts as deeply conditioned on my body through patriarchal cultural traditions, in particular the concept of desire in its relationship to lack (Freud 1953, Lacan 1973). As a female body growing up in this culture, psychoanalytical concepts of ‘male subject’ and ‘female object’ of desire are considered as basic conditioning, against which to pitch personal experiences, the agenda being clearly to separate from this deeply rooted and static binary concept of desire.

A preferable psychoanalytical contextual background for the following figurations of erotic practice can be found in Kristeva’s work. Her concepts, concerning the emergence of semiotic drives within symbolic forms, closely link the real body to language and therefore to art practice.

Art - this semiotization of the symbolic - ... represents the flow of jouissance into language. Whereas sacrifice assigns jouissance its productive limit in the social and symbolic order, art specifies the means - the only means - that jouissance harbours for infiltrating that order.

Kristeva 1984 p.80

Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic (1984) suggests pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal, multiple, sexual drives, which are non-representational, existing in the child before separation from the mother’s body, before identification as a subject, before its entrance into the world of language and representation. Grosz (1989) describes Kristeva’s notion of semiotic as ‘an anarchic, formless
circulation of sexual impulses and energies traversing the child's body before sexuality is ordered' (Grosz 1989 p.43). For Kristeva, these drives of 'jouissance' also signify as feminine and maternal. For her, they precede the unified binary oppositional structures and hierarchical structures of symbolic representation. Kristeva asserts that the pleasure-seeking semiotic drives which return in adult life as a surge of jouissance, impassion the symbolic order.

The first figuration of erotic practice to be identified, which can certainly be considered as a clash between semiotic and symbolic, emerges from the Oedipal narrative of desire.

As a white middle class girl, dance was available to me as a means of expression. I exercised a driving passion to expend physical energies and express feelings and experiences through the medium of dancing to music. I trained at the local stage school, grew up performing on stage, competing continually, all year round, for 10 years in local and London dance competitions, making sure that I nearly always won. In retrospect, my childhood and early professional life as a ballet dancer appears as a continual eruption of impetuous decisions, emotive irrationality, ambitiously driven forward by a desire for success (love) and recognition (attention) within a patriarchal matrix of desire.

De Lauretis (1984) points out that the question of desire is the impulse, the drive that generates narrative in film, theatre, media presentation. Narrative itself is structured upon the question of desire, geared to the quest to know the answer, to satiate desire. ‘Thus not only is a question ... always a question of desire; a story too is always a question of desire’ (p.112). Already, before being appropriated to describe subjectivity for ‘man’ within psychoanalytical discourse, the Oedipus tale was focused on the ‘hero as mover of the narrative, the centre and term of reference of consciousness and desire’ (De Lauretis 1984 p.112), and had been for centuries of patriarchal culture.³ De Lauretis goes on to explain how all narrative is based on Oedipal logic, based on the question of desire,

as action at once backward and forward, its quest for (self) knowledge through the realisation of loss, to the making good of Oedipus' sight and the restoration of vision.

De Lauretis 1984 p.125/6

The goal of all this is the impossible possession of the object of desire
(mother, love, breast). This is what the little boy is promised, that the girl will be there for him when his journey is over and her story (an arduous one, according to Oedipus myth, with the final reward being motherhood) is all a question of his desire. Which brings De Lauretis to the conclusion that "story needs sadism" (1984 p.134), a woman's consent must be obtained or forced, if necessary, in order for the Oedipus narrative to be fulfilled.

The training I received as a child in order to achieve the role of female object, is one such sadistic story. Striving to be the most beautiful and best object of desire, I focused my training on ballet dreams, to which end I was prepared to suffer extreme physical pain. I recognise this now as the female role in what De Lauretis (1984) describes as the sadistic Oedipal narrative. The desire for narrative, to be in the narrative, was fundamental to my early erotic practice. (Figure I)

Schneider (1997) describes the narrative of desire/lack as having a secret service, that is, its service to the general circulation of commodities in a dreamscape upon which late capitalism so intrinsically depends.

Schneider 1997 p.5

Desire has become associated with ownership and possession, and it has been sexualised, associated with masculine and feminine in binary opposition. As Schneider (1997) emphasises, this perpetual and insatiable addictive cycle of exchange is 'nature designed, packaged, and sold - marketed, outfitted, and set upon a runway of dreams where it is also marketed for gender' (p.5). The important ingredient of this perpetual cycle is that desire, in its associations with loss, can never, must never be satisfied, or the cycle breaks. Therefore the female body, as the symbolic object in desire's narrative, must always remain 'just beyond reach' (Schneider p.5), temptingly close but never grasped, a symbol always of what is forever lost (mother/love/breast). Hence the addictive fascination of the swan, sylph, Wili, the ballerina herself.

She attracts, invites, beckons and then disappears. To lose her is to lose that which is desired above all else, the imaginary, that pre-verbal, womb-ish world.

Foster, 1996 p.14
My early life embodied this concept of 'secret service'. Somehow, I was to be the prize at the end of the narrative, while always remaining just out of reach. This required the physical practice of pain and anguish, in order to achieve conformity as the desired feminine 'prize'. At the same time, the narrative fantasies of ballet were offering me the rewards of romantic passion and transcendence from that pain. As it would for most young white middle class ballet girls, this proved an impossible practice. When I arrived in Canada to join the National Ballet Company, aged 16, the sadism of the story lost its pleasurable rewards. The dream of 'making it' was no longer glamorous or romantic, outweighed as it was by the physical and emotional pain required to endorse that fantasy. I could no longer maintain the gap between the transcendent, 'out of reach' body, which was doing the ballets, and my flesh and blood body, which persistently spilled over to stain the other's purity. I moved to New York on a scholarship to the Martha Graham School, and bulimia, drugs and osteoarthritis took hold. At 21, this first period of my professional life ended. The cycle was broken, the realities of my desiring body could no longer obey the fantasies of ethereal transcendence.

This history should not be considered only as an unfortunate experience of patriarchal oppression, to be negated and deconstructed by feminist analysis. I relish this history. The wild passions of those early years influence me still, the extremes required to live as a ballet dancer both physically and emotionally have thrown up figures of erotic desire on my body which I consider to be positive shadows. These figures identify themselves through representations of the female character in an Oedipal narrative of desire, that of submissive object, desired one, and her flip side, the femme fatale - the one who desires to be desired.

Clearly, there are pleasure and power to be found within these roles, whether represented by figures of princess, virgin, witch or whore. Kaplan (1988) draws attention to the degree of pleasure to be found in 'identification with objectification. Our positioning as “to-be-looked at”, as object of the (male gaze) has come to be sexually pleasurable' (p.34).6 Recognising the pleasure involved in being able to attract the subject's desire, and in manipulating and directing the course of the subject's desire through the performance of object, remains one of the female body's most powerful strategies of seduction within a heterosexual identified scenario.

It can be argued that the erotic practice pertaining to the performativity of desired object, which continues to provide a creative stimulus, revolves
around the interweaving relationship of pain and pleasure. As a positive physical force, a parallel can be drawn with Kristeva's (1984) concept of 'rejection' or 'negativity' of semiotic drives. 'Rejection could be described as what is repressed - kept at bay - in the operation of the symbolic' (Lechte 1991 p.135). Through rejection by the symbolic, semiotic drives identify as concrete expressions within the symbolic. Rejection becomes, therefore, the dominant drive of the semiotic as a positive force or an expenditure ... As the term "expenditure" implies, rejection is not a constant or even static force, but is rather the movement of excitation and discharge.

Lechte 1991 p.137/38

According to this argument, rejection can be thought of as an embodied semiotic force of pain within pleasure, which in turn characterises erotic figurations of the Oedipal narrative. Lechte (1991) draws a parallel between Kristeva's concept of rejection and Bataille's theories on eroticism (p.137), a parallel which becomes clear in embodied erotic practice. A desire for passionate life through self-destruction, pain and death, is a concept of eroticism thoroughly researched by Bataille (1962).

Bataille (1962) argues that, through eroticism, a person calls his being into question.

Eroticism is one aspect of the inner life of man. We fail to realise this because man is everlastingly in search of an object outside himself but this object answers the innerness of the desire.

Bataille 1962 p.29

For Bataille, innerness, or erotic desire, is a call for continuity, becoming one with another being, which Bataille claims can only otherwise be found through death itself. He suggests that a gulf of discontinuity exists between one being and another, and that, as two bodies enter into that gulf through erotic meeting, to find continuity, a certain 'death' must be experienced. 'Reproduction leads to the discontinuity of beings, but brings into play their continuity; that is to say, it is intimately linked with death' (p.13) For Bataille, eroticism offers an experience for a body to meet with another and, in so doing, answer the fundamental need for continuity. As continuity can
only be found through death, the height of erotic pleasure always holds the
violence of death at its core. ‘The whole business of eroticism is to destroy
the self-contained character of the participators as they are in their normal
lives’ (Bataille 1962 p.17). For Bataille, eroticism merges the space
between objects; erotic activity, whether physical, emotional or religious,
offers an experience of continuity, through an appointment with death,
where one loses oneself in the other. ‘If necessary I can say in eroticism: I
am losing myself’ (p.31). Developing his theories, Bataille asserts that the
force of life as a reproductive sexual act can only be experienced through
this death,

the dissolution of the passive partner means one thing only: it
is paving the way for a fusion where both are mingled,
attaining at length the same degree of dissolution.
Bataille 1962 p.17

Clearly, associating Bataille’s concept of erotic practice with female bodies
contradicts feminist agendas, which claim Bataille speaks as a man
referring to ejaculation. For Bristow (1997), Bataille’s eroticism focuses on
the outcome of sexual desire, the orgasm of heterosexual reproductive sex,
which reflects the Freudian concept of ‘le petit mort’ (Freud 1955).

We have all experienced how the greatest pleasure attainable
by us, that of the sexual act, is associated with momentary
extinction of a highly intensified excitation.
Freud 1955 in Bristow 1997 p.121

Bataille’s final erotic orgasmic ‘little death’ suggests the drawing in,
possessing, withholding, building up, accumulating of desires by the subject,
only to be exploded, released, expended in conjunction with the other in
expectation of everlasting life through dissolution, which is never realised,
and so the story repeats. For Bristow (1997), Bataille clearly considers the
female role to be the one that will dissolve in erotic activity and relegates
the female to a passive role: ‘male heterosexuality requires a female sexual
object, not to fuse with a woman, but to fuse with death’. (Bristow 1997
p.127).

Dissolution, death, pain and anguish are, for Bataille, associated with erotic
sexual pleasure. ‘Mortal anguish does not necessarily make for sensual
pleasure, but that pleasure is more deeply felt during mortal anguish' (Bataille 1962 p.105). He illustrates his point by asserting that 'Many women cannot reach their climax without pretending to themselves that they are being raped' (p.107).

Although associated with the heterosexual male, it can be argued that the accumulation and release of physical desire is an erotic practice which both male and female bodies experience, significations of which are inherent in the practice of ballet. An erotic sado-masochistic network of relationships upholds the 'master/slave' tradition of ballet training, itself steeped in a relationship between spiritual beauty and the violence of the sadistic Oedipal narrative. Bataille (1962) devotes two chapters to the erotic writings of De Sade. The sadism inherent in the hierarchy of ballet training is matched by the masochistic complicity on the part of mothers and daughters who participate in fulfilling the ballet myth.

Doing ballet as a young woman was a constant masochistic and addictive attachment to physical pain which brought the pleasure and rewards of success. Through pain I worked towards an always 'out of reach' perfection, perpetuated and goaded by doses of criticism and praise, driving me further towards the pain. The more pain and terror experienced in the rehearsal studio the more possible it was to transcend it in performance. Toes that were covered with blood in rehearsal never felt painful in performance. The deeper the pain, inflicted from outside forces but consistently endured and embodied by my own body, the more totally immersed I became in the passion of performing, abandoning my body to that 'great love'.

The pain must be transcended to uphold western culture's aesthetic qualities of beauty. Grosz (1994), who discusses the installation of pain onto the human body as civilisation's way to institute the law, turns to Nietzsche, who says,

man could never do without blood, torture, and sacrifices when he felt the need to create a memory for himself; the most dreadful sacrifices and pledges (sacrifices of the first-born among them) ... all this has its origin in the instinct that realised that pain is the most powerful aid to mnemonics. 
Nietzsche 1969 p.61 in Grosz 1994 p.131

In this way, beauty in the art of ballet contains violence, constructing erotic life as one of extremes, passion and pain. Within this scenario, consider the
glorious erotics of life and death represented in the narratives of classical ballet. In Swan Lake (1895), Odette offers Siegfried continuity only through a transcendence of death, while Odile offers him the baseness of sexual passion through a real body erotic conflict with violence/evil/death. Note the contrast between Odette and Siegfried's anguished 'martyred' facial expressions and gestures in their final pas de deux in Act IV compared with the hard-edged cruel powerful gestures of Odile, which offer carnal pleasures but with a sadistic edge.

In Eric Bruhn's version of Swan Lake (National Ballet of Canada 1965), I was given the role of 'Black Queen'. The role required a certain amount of long, low, powerful running about the stage, ordering swans about: complete with long black cloak trailing behind, stopping periodically to mime gestures to do with banishment and death. Much of the performance, I spent sitting downstage on a throne, embodying the image of 'wicked sexual mother from hell', making provocatively meaningful glances to particular key figures to move the narrative along. I understood exactly what this character must portray: the combination of sexuality and evil, the dangerous edge between the pleasure of sexual desire and the power to kill for it. After all, the Black Queen gave Odile her power to destroy the innocence of Siegfried's youth. (Figure II)

Odile's erotic gestures, hard-edged technique and cruel smile may seem to be an illusion for performance, yet they hold echoes of embodied off-stage erotic practice for the ballet dancer. Bataille's theory of eroticism is most assuredly also a physical practice, and one which I continue to respect and manipulate in different ways.

The Oedipal narrative of desire, embodied by 'bataille-esque' eroticism, is characterised as a passion for life through pain of death. As one embodied figuration of erotic practice, its figures, (such as Odette and Odile) can become shadows, markers, with which an androgynous body can play. To recognise this figuration now as a constructed performative practice of a heterosexual matrix of desire is not to negate it, but to acknowledge it as one of many erotic practices and to manipulate it for performance play. In physical theatre performance, this erotic practice is frequently expressed, in order to expose and therefore subvert.

A familiar marker of 'Eurocrash', which established itself as a dance genre
in the late 1980s, is characterised by flying through the air parallel to the ground and falling without recovery. The source of this dance genre can be traced to artists' desires to expose an erotic clash with death. Its inherent expression of a downward aesthetic of beauty, falling without rebounding upwards, can be traced to early contact improvisation workshops with Steve Paxton (Novack 1990). Nigel Charnock illustrates this erotic clash with death in *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988), where he repeatedly climbs a ladder to increasing heights and throws himself down to the floor. Nigel's death jumps seem to acknowledge that there is no God, no purity, no transcendence, no promise of life after death; eroticism and sexual desire cannot be hidden any longer behind religious doors (Bataille 1962). This is it - a baseness, a downward fall, an appointment with death. Let's face it, sex can lead to death and nowhere more so than in an AIDS culture. Nigel's solo shows, from *Original Sin* (1993) to *Human Being* (1997,) contain text with references to God, sex, death, religion and pain, and episodes where he ritualistically throws himself into wild frenzied dancing, naked or vulnerably exposed in white boxer shorts, performing movements which appear to tear his body apart with exhaustion and pain. Another figure of this erotic practice is illustrated by the body of Louise Lecavalier of LaLaLa Human Steps (Cooper Albright 1997). Her famous horizontal twist in the air, the climax of which brings her flying body crashing against her partner's, who then falls backwards onto the floor with her on top of him, exploits the falling movement for its inherent emotional risk and erotic thrill.

*Red of The Sweet* (1991 video 2) was created for the female students at Northern School of Contemporary Dance. The women, dressed in Amazon-style swimsuits, throw themselves into a frenzied, highly technical, risk taking movement section, which involves throwing each other to the ground, and falling headlong into each other. In rehearsal and in performance this piece offered an exhilarating engagement with aggressive passion, which only these very young bodies could have sustained without injury. In rehearsal I observed each dancer's engagement with the pleasure that derives from the risk of pain. Throwing oneself to the floor became formulated and established as a marketable trademark of physical theatre work. Stereotyped as 'Eurocrash', this falling movement and its variations
have been exploited in dance theatre practice for their ability to engage both performers and spectators in an erotic practice of pain and pleasure, similar to that of high-wire acts at the circus. 'Underlying eroticism is the feeling of something bursting, of the violence accompanying an explosion' (Bataille 1962 p.93).

The rehearsal process of Virginia Minx at Play (1993) included exploring the erotic desires behind each of Virginia's characters, focusing particularly on the moment when pleasure becomes pain, when humour becomes horror, power becomes sadistic. 'Sweet Rage (video 5b), portrayed a woman with knives, ritualistically laying them out, playing with them perversely, painting herself with blood, teasing herself and her audience with violent possibilities, taking pleasure in a mad obsession.

The most thought provoking work is Sweet Rage. In this Claid appears in a scarlet-hooded cloak, a muttering bent figure, who surreptitiously produces one knife, then another. Casting aside the cloak she reveal herself in a huge wig and white shift - a character who appears to be half witch and half naive child, who delights in these gleaming deadly weapons. Sitting on the floor, looking much like Mary Wigman's witch in Hexentanz, she continues to wield these deadly objects in increasingly aggressive gestures, as she starts to cut and rip her flesh. In a mindless and dissociated state, this bloody figure starts a little skipping dance to the popular thirties' tune I Love My Baby, My Baby Loves Me - a chilling spectacle.

de Marigny 1993  p.5

Performing 'Sweet Rage' offered a cathartic erotic play with the images of self-destruction that had been a part of my ballet youth, but which were, by 1993, tools with which to play in performance.

The penultimate episode of Virginia Minx (1993) 'Portrait' (video 5d), already described in Chapter 3, can be analysed as an example of erotic masochism experienced in attempting to fulfil the role of female in the Oedipal narrative. 'Portrait' describes the violent effect of that narrative on a female body:

behind each mimetic gesture I experienced a suppressed erotic force which felt sometimes like it would explode out from within the slow continuously shifting stylised gestures. Moving through the shy awkwardness of pre-adolescence, repressed power of a tomboy, sexual arousal which becomes rape, body image
distorted by bulimia, mother's loss becoming drunkenness, making/performing
Portrait is a practice of rejection, pleasure turning against itself as an erotic
creative force.

‘Portrait’ evokes a struggle for the passion of life to assert itself against its
own erotic suppression. Kuppers (1998) describes the pleasurable
masochism of the piece, ‘The female grotesque is played out in this
mimicked life cycle... The image is embodied: this is a real body, this body,
with its bones sticking out’ (p.57).

Ritual and sacrifice have, according to Bataille, always been strongly linked
to eroticism, a concept exposed by the body art practices of performance
artists such as Ron Athy, Orlan, Franko B.7 Athy (Deliverance 1996), a
body with AIDS, undergoes an enema ritual on stage, is hooked through the
skin of his thighs and wrists to ropes attached to scaffolding, is fucked up
the arse with a dildo and allows his blood to be taken. Franko B. (Mama I
Can’t Sing 1996) is alone on stage, ritualistically taking his own blood,
slowly, over the length of the performance, allowing it to drip and form a pool
around his body. The spectators are shocked but they do not leave. Franko
B.’s programme publicity suggests his performance ‘reduces human
existence to the body to illuminate the darker nature of human behaviour
and its creative drives’ (Armstrong 1996). There is a link through these
body/flesh performances between eroticism and sacrifice.

Flesh is the born enemy of people haunted by Christian
tabooos, but if as I believe an indefinite and general taboo does
exist, opposed to sexual liberty... the flesh signifies a return to
this threatening freedom’

Bataille 1962 p.92

Orlan, French performance artist, documents her self-designed cosmetic
surgery on video as her performance art practice. Orlan’s exposure of the
violence inherent in erotic pleasure disturbs aesthetic expectations
regarding physical beauty and perfection. She does not experience cosmetic
surgery to make herself ‘beautiful’, rather she does it in order to explore the
beauty of the grotesque. For instance, she has implants inserted into her
forehead, which resemble devil’s horns. Armstrong (1995) likens Orlan’s
work to deviancy and mutancy. ‘The deviant brings social change and
provides the fabric for the richness of life. Mutants are the method of
progress and the substratum for evolution’ (1995 p.54). Orlan’s creative desire is to be blasphemous, to make art that makes both spectator and performer uncomfortable. Armstrong’s critique of Orlan’s work includes a quote from John Wyndham,

any creature that shall seem to be human, but is not formed thus is not human. It is neither man nor woman. It is blasphemy against the true image of God, and hateful in the sight of God.

Wyndham in Armstrong 1995 p.53

Price (1995) draws parallels between Orlan’s work and Bataille’s writing.

Bataille defined painting as the ultimate act of self-mutilation....the irremovable blister between sight and consciousness, as epitomised by the pineal eye of the brain.

Price 1995 p.46

Pineal eye refers to pineal gland, which is thought to regulate the developments between sexuality and intelligence. Price then quotes Orlan, who says of her own self-mutilation, 'It seems to me that your eyes become black holes and the images come into these holes down into the body where it hurts’ (1995 p.47).

There is a link to be made between ballet bodies and body art performers. Both can be considered as bodies of blood, torture and sacrifice. This erotic element in ballet is camouflaged to perpetuate the myth of transcendence, while body art performers expose this erotic practice for what it is - a sadomasochistic physical play with pleasure and pain.

Through my own experiences I have always been drawn to horror. I remember as a child hungrily devouring the sight of an enormous cart horse lying dead across the road, its head propped up on its own stiff tongue. I always have wanted to slow down the car, to catch sight of the victims of an accident. I am drawn to the horror of violence even while repulsed by it. I admit to an erotic charge at the sight of a scene of carnage.

Castle of Slow Death (1991 video 4) exposes each performer’s vulnerability - the point from which it was possible to be pushed over the edge into horror. The images of Lea Parkinson are memorable. Dressed in a tunic with little
angel wings, he attempts to recite poetry while being beaten up and kicked down. Russell Trigg has his mouth stuffed obsessively with lettuce till he is on the verge of tears, while Angela Askew, overpowering, mad, possessive and spiteful, whispers repeatedly to him "you like that don't you - I think we can find a little treat for you later - don't you!". These images both repulsed and engaged spectators.

Six years later, Across Your Heart (1996 video 8) is still concerned with exposing the eroticism where pleasure and pain combine. Helen Baggett appears with her back to the audience, naked except for a white loin-cloth, all boy/girl innocence, and ends up hanging upside down from scaffolding, blood dripping from her belly, above the dinner table. At the table sits Celeste Dandeker, drinking Helen's blood and laughing. Kuldip Singh Barmi, wearing a tight-fitting, long grey/brown dress, a grotesque/beautiful figure whose movement is accentuated by distorted quirky, broken and deviant gestures, shifts deviously through the spaces between other characters, himself becoming other figures - clown, gigolo, dead body - and returning in the gaps as a grotesque unidentifiable creature. He worships and destroys Helen's classical purity. He fills the chalice with Helen's blood and hands it to Celeste. Kuldip pulls John French out of his wheelchair, leaving him on the floor unable to move, completely vulnerable. Kuldip is hunted by Sue Smith, who performs as a hunched, hooded creature, leaning forward on two long thin sticks appearing as extended arms. As John lies on the floor, Kuldip and Sue cross the back of the stage, Kuldip, in his tight-fitting dress and distorted movements, is gripped between Sue's hunched body and long stick arms, becoming insect in a spider's jaws. These two creatures appear and disappear, surreal and monstrous, juxtaposed against more identifiable events of funeral, carnival and wedding. Celeste poses for wedding photos, standing, out of her wheelchair, wearing a long, full, white, lace dress, echoing Frieda Kahlo's paintings. The dress is removed and Celeste is revealed strapped into a walking-frame machine which looks like a leg calliper for a whole body - a white solid back frame with steel bars and straps crossing the front, holding her upright. Celeste is standing and walking independently, but within a cage, a contraption which encases her. There are two flat steel feet, and as she thrusts her weight forward with her shoulder and arm, the steel feet rock forward. We see Celeste alone on stage, facing the back, walking upstage slowly, precariously, rocking from
side to side as she goes, summoning enormous effort to move the steel frame - and singing gaily. Joyous and terrifying, shocking and vulnerable, a moment of precarious balance. Although these scenes can be read from other perspectives (Briginshaw 1998), I am suggesting here, that watching these images can offer an erotic pleasure and fascination with violence and death.

The embodied power/pleasure eroticism of Bataille's 'little death', contextualised by Oedipal sadistic narratives of heterosexual desire, has been described as the first of several desiring practices with which the androgynous body might play in performance. Although conventionally considered as 'masculine', this practice has no essentialist location in either sex, it is culturally constructed through repeated conditioning onto the body. Once recognised as performative, this figuration provides a rich source of imaginative figures with which to play between, from ballet to body art. My personal history has been included in order to emphasise embodied desiring as a performative erotic practice which influences the creation of figures of illusion for performance.

6.3: Goodbye to Glitter - say no

Against a backdrop of Oedipal narratives of desired/desiring object, feminist agendas propose another desiring practice which signifies as a 'feminine' erotic, negating the bataille-esque erotic practice of 'masculine' little death. This section explores the eroticism of jouissance as an abstract release of energy into dance language, together with its more identifiable significations in feminist defiance and parody. I am continuing to include my own voice to indicate, through the changes in my own life, the potential to play between a range of experiential desiring practices.

Finally I rebelled against conventional structures and hierarchies that upheld the ballet systems. I was swept along for a few years on 'sex, drugs and rock and roll', underwent surgery for osteoarthritis and, five years after leaving New York, found myself back in training at the London School of Contemporary Dance. In 1973 I met Jacky Lansley and Fergus Early, both ex-Royal Ballet dancers, who introduced me to 'women's consciousness-raising' and 'reevaluation co-counselling' and, consequently, feminism grounded me with the full force of its weight. In 1975 the three of us, together with Maedée Duprès
Dance artists at X6 were eager to experiment with new dance forms that were emerging from Dartington College, which have already been sketched in Chapter 2 in relation to androgyny in dance language. Practising the task-like movements of contact improvisation and release technique, which centre on internal visceral sources and encourage an internal listening to one's own body without projection outwards to please or placate, allows for the emergence of another figuration of eroticism. American lesbian feminist writer Lorde (1984) refers to eroticism as an inner force. Unlike Bataille, her figuration of eroticism assumes life-giving properties rather than death simulations.

Lorde (1984) speaks of the erotic as being 'an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire' (p. 54). In recognising the intensity of the erotic, 'we can then observe what of our various life endeavours bring us closest to that fullness' (p. 54-55). Eroticism, Lorde emphasises, is rooted in the body, in the physical desires, pleasures and satisfactions of the body, desires that act as a creative force pervading all aspects of human endeavour.

When I speak of the erotic, I speak of it as an assertion of the life force... of that creative energy empowered, the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives.

Lorde 1984 p.55

Lorde (1984) suggests that eroticism is not just a question of what we do, but how we do it. She illustrates this with reference to the white margarine supplied during World War II, along with an 'intense pellet of yellow colouring' (p. 57). For Lorde, the kneading of the pellet into the margarine, spreading the colour throughout the whole, describes the 'kernel' of eroticism within herself.

When released from its intense and constrained pellet, it flows through and colours my life with a kind of energy that heightens and sensitises and strengthens all my experience.

Lorde 1984 p.57
This view of eroticism as an inner source of power is echoed by that of French feminist writers, who refigure feminine writing as a force of semiotic 'jouissance' into symbolic language (Kristeva 1984). This writing has been described as 'open and multiple, varied and rhythmic, full of pleasures and, perhaps more importantly, of possibilities' (Tong 1989 p.225). Irigaray's project (1982) to re-imagine rationality, to include the female in phallocentric language through the metaphorical imagery of the four elements, fire, earth, water and air, suggests a female erotic very different to that of the 'little death'. Cixous (1980) explores female pleasure that is orgasmic, yet also more than orgasmic, as a kind of corporeal non-genital multiple pleasure.

Almost everything is yet to be written by women about femininity: about their sexuality, that is, its infinite and mobile complexity, about their eroticization, sudden turn-ons of a certain miniscule-immense area of their bodies; not about destiny, but about the adventure of such and such a drive, about trips, crossings, trudges, abrupt and gradual awakenings, discoveries of a zone at one time timorous and soon to be forthright.

Cixous 1980 p.256

There are parallels to be made between the jouissance that explodes through 'female' writing and that of the pleasures in doing new dance movement practice, in the same way as Cixous has made parallels between female writing and theatre practice (Running Johnson 1989).

Although the pleasure of improvising is, to a certain extent, dependent on the performing element and an awareness of who is watching, it also allows for a practice of erotic jouissance as an internal process of discovery. Improvisations are based on internal listening to anatomical and muscular workings of the body rather than on projection outwards to an external audience.

My body listens, opening a quiet space to allow interior drives to energise the movement language. Dancing in this way releases a rush of pleasure, like a gentle internal smiling running through the body. Movement is unpredictable, catches by surprise, breaks all formal codes of choreographic expectation. It is fractured, my body moves in many different directions, always changing, before one movement is complete another has begun. An elbow lifts, knee falls, foot circles, hands clasp, hip juts - all in fast succession, then comes to a sudden
stop, complete stillness, a body paused in some strange quirky pose, a mad journey that goes nowhere in particular. Movement appears and disappears, fills and empties in the space around my body. No straight lines, no grand statements, no linear narrative, movement tickles, lightly delicious, gurgling and giggling it is going nowhere and everywhere.

Deleuzian motifs, ‘assemblage’ and ‘rhizome’ (1988) can be applied as metaphors to illustrate the influence of improvisational qualities of jouissance within dance performance. For Deleuze (1988), ‘rhizome’ describes a horizontal networking which connects any point to any other point ... It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle from which it grows and which it overspills. The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots.

Deleuze & Guattari 1988 p.21

For Deleuze, the ‘rhizomatic’ movement of bodies creates ‘assemblages’.

We think the material or machinic aspect of an assemblage relates not to the production of goods but rather to a precise state of intermingling of bodies in a society, including all the abstractions and repulsions, sympathies and antipathies, alterations, amalgamations, penetrations and expansions that affect bodies of all kinds in their relations to one another.

Deleuze & Guattari 1988 p.90

A devised assemblage has neither deep nor superficial structure, ‘it flattens all of its dimensions onto a single plane of consistency’ (Deleuze and Guattari p.90).

Jouissance, as a semiotic erotic force, erupts into symbolic language influencing work processes, choreographic forms and structures which can resemble the abstract motifs of rhizomatic assemblages. Venus Hurtle (Sue MacLennan 1990) is performed by seven bodies in different groupings; solos, duets and group sections. There are explosions of hurtling off-centred movement, dancers are scattered throughout the space, movement sharp then fluid, fractured then linear, constantly changing before singular identity can take place, each movement sets off reactions in continually changing and shifting patterns and directions. As choreography derived from improvisation, each body has an individual language of eccentric
gestures, a clear but always understated sense of humour. There are chain reactions of movement, something in one space sets off something elsewhere, bumping, crashing, pushing, lifting and falling bodies. I am aware of the spaces between bodies, the informal scattered use of space, aware of the gaps between the dancers and how these spaces are filled and emptied, rather than the wholeness of grand choreographic formations and final statements which ignore the emptiness of space.

Moving sideways, making rhizomatic connections, Venus Hurtle reminds me of Rachel Whiteread’s sculptures such as Ghost (1990) and House (1993). Whiteread solidifies space:

Central to her work is that its materiality is also an index of absence...what is left is a residue or reminder, a space of oscillation between presence and absence.

Bradley p.8 1996

Applying these Deleuzian motifs, as an analogy for the erotic figuration of new dance jouissance, might be considered to be a discussion about choreographic structures and patterns in space rather than the erotic bodies of the performers. This reveals, once again, the ‘slippery’ nature of Deleuzian motifs, the ease with which they can be applied to abstraction and ‘absence’ and what a challenge it is to root them to flesh and blood bodies. 11

New dance ‘jouissance’ offers one erotic figuration with which to play, based on eroticism as a force of semiotic/feminine pleasure. This figuration conjures images of a dancing body dressed in baggy trousers and loose T-shirt, where the contours of the body are undefined. As with jouissance in writing, the physical inner force erupts through the dancer’s body to influence the movement, creating a dance language which is multiple, fractured, varied and non hierarchical. Listening internally, the new dance figure appears to negate outward projection; as a movement form, there is no expression of individual ‘personality’, instead, the language and the dancer’s body conflate into anatomical vulnerability. As a single erotic figuration on the female body, dancing ‘jouissance’ in performance can close the space of seduction between real and illusion by appearing as real on real, other on other. A spectator may experience an internal erotic charge
while observing the bodies moving through spatial choreographic patterns (Mackrell 1997), but not necessarily the interactive play of real and illusion, presence and absence that constitutes seductive relations between performer and spectator.

This thesis is suggesting that not one figure, but a play between many erotic figures is required to evoke illusions of erotic androgyny as a seductive force. 'Feminine' jouissance has been described here as one erotic practice of a performer’s body, to reveal both its interior depth and its performative construction. As another erotic figuration, it can exist parallel to that of a 'masculine' bataille-esque erotic. It is suggested that the play between the imaginative erotic figures evoked by Oedipal, bataille-esque and feminine jouissance creates the illusions of erotic androgyny which might evoke seductive relations.

Anger, which can be thought of as a positive physical release of semiotic drives of rejection (Kristeva 1984, Lechte 1991), can also produce powerful erotic figures. For Juno & Vale (1991), feminist anger has been the food of radical politics. They conducted a series of interviews with performance artists such as Annie Sprinkle, Karen Finley and Holly Hughes, describing anger as a positive passionate creative force for

> cutting-edge theory, linguistic reconstruction, adventurous sexuality...Anger can spark and re-invigorate, it can bring hope and energy back into our lives and mobilise politically against the status quo.

Juno & Vale 1991 p.5

In a similar way, some of the most subversive and adventurous work in dance has derived from a positive drive of anger: for instance, the performance work of DV8, created in response to Section 28. 12

Anger, manipulated as a creative expression, has been a driving rebellious force for the emergence of new images for female bodies in the 70s. Inspired by a feminist consciousness, X6 dance artists rebelled against the powerlessness to effect change, lack of creative possibilities within established traditions, the exploitation of dancer as choreographer's 'tool', competitive structures, crippling training and the years of silence.
We rebelled against the construction of bodies to fit aesthetic moulds, together with the ensuing lack of confidence, eating disorders and wasted youth and beauty. By the late 70s my body had rebelled against the aesthetic of ballet, reconstructed itself as a feminist 'non-desirable' object, with body weight at least a stone heavier than the ballet ideal. Anger projected itself into the image of a solidly built woman with hairy armpits, big boots and short hair, dancing with weight and wild power in a series of introspective autobiographical solo performances including *Going Back* (1977) and *Solo* (1977).13

X6 artists reacted against the conventional image of the female dancer’s body as thin, long-legged, hairless and less than five feet five inches tall. Many were the images of ‘graceless’ girls, stomping around the X6 studio, running and rolling and lying about, replacing the romantic image of the dancer as lithe and petite and forever submissive, forever desired. The anger translated to the body as qualities of power and dynamic energy, a strident, defiant female body, unrestricted movement covering large quantities of space, a big body, cutting the space rather than being absorbed by it, with a focus which was direct, outward, proud and defiant.

Out of this anger came a stereotypical figure of feminist androgyny in image, costuming and dynamic physical power. Doc Martens boots, cotton dresses, short hair cuts and unshaven armpits and legs were appropriated as signs of a physical political female liberation. This image embodies the feminist theory of androgyny discussed in Chapter 1. Female dancers appropriated certain masculine characteristics in their body image as a result of this expression of rebellion. ‘In emotional terms, performing maleness means reducing facial expressiveness, reining in exuberance, holding back’ (Solomon 1993.p.148), characteristics practised by participants in Diane Torr’s workshop *Drag Kings for a Day*. This familiar, stereotypical, feminist, liberated, positive image for the female body dancing in the 1970s was followed through in the 1980s in the work of artists such as Gaby Agis (*Close Streams* 1983 and *Shouting Out Loud* 1984), Lea Anderson’s work as director of the Cholmondeleys, (*Flag* 1988) and Yolanda Snaith’s *Can Baby Jane Can Can* (1987), all of which are well-documented in Adair (1992).

Stepping sideways, making connections, androgynous fashions continue to
surface now more than ever as the millennium approaches. Style File (Sunday Times, Macleod 1997) refers once again to the ‘masculine/feminine theme’ (p. 17), depicting an image of bare female legs wearing male brogues. ‘Style pundits are predicting that by spring heels will be gone and androgyny will be the next buzzword’ (Macleod p. 17). The difference between fashion androgyny of the late 1990s and the feminist artist androgynous look of the 1970s is that the former caters to the heterosexual-defined fashion market while the latter signifies a rebellion against that same market. The bare legs and Doc Martens of the feminist 1970s which reveal unshaven ‘not-so-thin’ legs, opposes Style File's image of very clean-shaven thin legs, which is accompanied by the caption,

brogues are really cheeky and boyish to me, and look so sexy with a bare leg ... After all, the heaviness of a man's shoe shows off the delicacy of feminine proportions to great effect.
Macleod 1997 p. 17

A queer perspective on androgynous fashions would consider the hairless feminine legs and heavy shoes of the 1997 image as more seductive in its play of ambiguity than the 1970s image of the liberated feminist body. Whereas the feminist position might disclaim the Style File shaven legs image as a return to powerlessness and to a representation of the female body as object, a queer perspective could perceive the same image as powerful in its play of masquerade with male and female. Particularly as the image portrays only a pair of legs, shaved legs, which, in the 1990s, could belong to either male or female body.

The stereotype of a powerful defiant androgynous feminist of the 1970s can be thought of as being replaced in the 1980s by the muscular female body in high heels and underwear, a slick, hard-edged, angry parody of female glamour object, for instance DV8’s My Body, Your Body (1987) for twelve men and twelve women, which explored relationships between the sexes from an angry feminist perspective. Fetishised costuming such as high heels, silk slips, tight skirts, tutus and underwear have been used consistently in physical theatre dance work as weapons to subvert the image of woman as object. The question of whether or not fetishized costuming serves a political objective or whether its sadomasochistic erotic appeal plays straight back into the clutches of a heterosexual economy of
desire even as that economy is rejected, echoes the inherent contradictions of heterosexual/feminist/queer politics.

Another erotic figuration of semiotic drives, which does evoke a more playful exchange between performer and spectator, is that of feminist parody. Parody's inherent erotic practice can be considered as a layering of anger or rebellion, projected through laughter which is shared between performer and spectator.

As a performer and spectator, I recognise the erotic thrill of pleasure that can be derived from laughter. Through early performance practice at X6 I discovered that dealing, in performance, with issues that made me angry, could also, through parodic installation and subversion, be the performances that could draw a laughing response, evoking a seductive reversible play between myself and the spectator.

For Kristeva (1980), laughter is one of the earliest expressions of semiotic impulses.

Oral eroticism, the smile at the mother, and the first vocalisations are contemporaneous ...During this period of indistinction between 'same' and 'other', infant and mother, while no space has yet been delineated, the semiotic chora ...relieves and produces laughter.

Kristeva 1980 p.284 in Grosz 1989 p.44

For Lorde also, eroticism functions as 'the sharing of joy, whether physical, emotional, psychic, or intellectual' (Lorde 1984 p.56). As an erotic practice, laughter has been suppressed, controlled and contained by Western culture, which denies its driving force for change. To a large extent, erotic pleasurable release of laughter has been restricted to the realm of jokes in Western culture. For Freud, jokes excite pleasure through 'condensation, displacement, indirect representation' (Freud 1905, 1991 p.138), and the jokes which trigger the most laughter are 'tendentious' ones. Three elements are required to excite pleasure for a tendentious joke, the one who tells the joke, the one who reacts with laughter and an object of anger, suspicion, hostility or rebellion (Freud 1905).

Running parallel, parodic performance can be thought of as requiring three elements, a performer who tells the tendentious joke, a spectator who
receives it and an object, recognised by both performer and spectator, which has given cause to the anger, or towards which anger is directed. As a culturally constructed context for the excitement and expulsion of pleasurable laughter between spectator and performer, parody provides an erotic charge, while allowing the most political and rebellious statements to be made. In the context of dance theatre performance, the tendentious object is often characterised by theatrical 'stereotypes' taken from politically contentious motifs of patriarchal culture.

Ballet stereotypes very frequently become the third element of the feminist parodic joke. In Bleeding Fairies (1977), devised with Jacky Lansley and Mary Prestidge, ballet was used as the 'object' for subversive parody. We took images of sylphs, whores and witches from traditional ballets and subverted their mythical properties through feminist principles. The following is an excerpt from a song in Bleeding Fairies:

If I had known about the blood when I first saw a fairy,  
I would have made her dew drops red instead of pearly white.  
I would have dreamt her all with tits,  
And made her wand of tampons.  
She would not have been a fantasy, but very much more like me.  
CHORUS.  
Who invented fairies, were they bleeders first,  
Do we need a fairy, or will a bleeder do


Raw Hide (1984 video 1) includes a section entitled 'Tutu Strip'. Standing centre stage in a spotlight, wearing a white tutu (a tutu I had worn aged 15 for ballet competitions see figure 1), I perform a series of ballet poses, mimicking the styles of the classical ballerina. As recorded 'stripper' music begins to play, I freeze, look around as if for escape, and then proceed through a series of enacted body gestures, including that of embarrassment, self-conscious recognition of myself as object of spectators' gaze, confusion and anger at having been vulnerably exposed. Unable to escape, I begin to strip, awkward and clumsy, going through stripper moves with a 'fed up' expression until finally, swinging the tutu over my head by its elastic shoulder straps, I turn upstage, fling the tutu over my shoulder and walk away. The more I enact the illusion of
sullen rebellion and vulnerability, the more the audience laugh, which in turn pleasures me as performer, there being equal shared pleasure in the telling and receiving of the parody.

_Laid Out Lovely_ (1994 video 7) began as a deep and meaningful exploration into beauty and death, a theoretical engagement with the death of the 'beautiful body' and the beauty of the 'dead' body. 'Dead', in this context, applies to a body stripped of conventional gender, evoking chaos, terror, eroticism, monsters and homosexuality as cultural signifiers of death (Bronfen 1992, Franko 1995, Benshoff 1997). The character illusion which evoked the erotic practice of parody between myself and the audience was that of an aging ballerina, her pointe shoes, pink net skirt, gin bottle, cigarettes and her stereotyped attempts to stay 'prima ballerina' despite a severe limp. A light-weight, superficial, humorous look at the aging ballerina, which evoked laughing responses from both sides of the stage, brought to light the tragedy of aging and death of beauty.

Laughter can be considered as a crucial element of spontaneous play, releasing the fear which blocks desires for change, spontaneity, subversion, chaos, courage and creativity. Despite the dangers of perpetuating the systems it most wishes to displace, laughter evoked by parody is a seductive force for dance theatre. It can be argued that the erotic pleasure of laughter is an element of seduction far too often denied by dance makers and performers, in our efforts to establish dance as an art form of the 'highest order'.

This section has sketched feminist figurations of erotic practices drawing on 'feminine' semiotic drives. Figures created include the image of a new dance improviser in her baggy trousers and loose T shirt, the strong 'hairy' androgyne in a frock and Doc Martens boots, subverted slick 'glamour' stereotypes and parodic images drawn from conventional ballets. All of these figures and many more are represented in _Grace and Glitter_ (1987), a full-length 'women's' piece directed, in collaboration with Maggie Semple, for Extemporary Dance Theatre.

The central theme of _Grace & Glitter_ (1987) deals with young women's loss of innocence while simultaneously celebrating women's power. Through the
women’s relationships, stories and a range of dynamic energies, the spectators ‘are invited to appreciate the sharing and co-operation between women but at the same time the struggle of survival for women’ (Adair 1987). The performance begins with an aerobic power dance. Dressed in black sports wear, crop tops, shorts and Reebock boots, the women pound the stage with high kicks, jumps, rolls, running and lifts. There follows a scene in glamorous tight dresses and high heels, peacocks pruning - a high school party - enter the tomboy figure, Lindsey Butcher, who is teased and bullied but who finally comes into her own as she easily outruns Sarah Baron, who performs a high camp parody running after Lindsey in her dress and heels. Two of the black women, Dawn and Chantal Donaldson, perform a loving sisterly duet to blues jazz wearing white swan tutus. Dawn, Chantal and Kay Hunter dress each other’s hair while discussing how stories from their histories as black women are passed down from mothers to daughters through a daily hair ritual. Another group dance, of soft, lyrical, non-defined movement, depicts the women wearing baggy T-shirts and trousers, the typical uniform of ‘feminist negation’ in 70/80s new dance. There are fight scenes between jealous couples, a rape scene and amusing stereotypical character studies of their mothers and grandmothers. There is text written by Tash Fairbanks and spoken on tape by Maggie Semple’s mother, describing ‘a tidal wave of women down the years’ (Fairbanks 1987). A version of ‘Tutu Strip’ takes place (Raw Hide 1978 video 1). This time, the ballerina, Lindsey Butcher, who finds herself having to strip, is joined by four professional strippers who get on with their business in spotlights in four corners of the stage. Later, Sarah Baron teaches the ballerina to strip ‘properly’, but Lindsey’s final stripper pose of flippant eroticism changes to one of muscle power. Prostitutes in high heels and raincoats street-walk, hard and angry, glaring at the audience, breaking into a powerful jazz disco routine where little remote control cars run riot at their feet. The final image portrays the two musicians, Sylvia Hallet and Lucy Wilson, as older women, walking towards the back of the stage, while the six young women dressed again in their aerobic gear, standing still facing the audience, let out a long piercing war cry.

In retrospect, Grace & Glitter (1987) appears to cover a wide range of female figures of erotic practice. Phallic muscular bodies of aerobic power,
strident figures of defiant focus, abstract bodies of new dance jouissance, fetishized bodies of phallic femininity, stereotypes of tomboys, strippers, prostitutes, amazons, mothers, school girls and ballet dancers all appear in literal representations throughout the work. However, the figures represented in *Grace & Glitter* rarely evoked seductive relations as characterised for this thesis. For the most part, the figures were identifiably present, as parodic pastiche or theatrical stereotype, therefore a play of presence/absence as a seductive force was missing. At the time of making *Grace & Glitter* (1987), the erotic androgynous play between figures which provides the key to seductive relations was not the objective. It was, rather, a feminist statement of the subjective differences of ‘women’. The production concentrated on the identifiable ‘strata’ (Deleuze 1988), the images of female differences and shared feminist concerns, rather than the ‘BwO’ play between these images.

Feminist erotic practice might appear to be more ‘true’ or ‘real’ to the female body than the practice of the ‘little death’. Or the figures feminist erotic practice evokes for performance may appear to emerge from a negation of Oedipal narratives of desire, as ‘positive’ liberated images, implying a kind of vertical hierarchy to erotic practices. Embodied experience offers another possibility. Erotic practices from both these figurations can be considered as existing parallel to each other without identification to any particular gender and without hierarchy. Considered this way, all figures become ‘strata’ between which an erotic androgynous body can play. *Being* any one of them seems to limit the seductive potential of performance illusion.

Chapter 6 has identified two extremely different figurations of erotic practice. One might be considered as ‘masculine’, derived from Oedipal and bataille-esque ‘little death’ narratives, and another which might be considered ‘feminine’, derived from internal semiotic drives. Figures thrown up by these figurations include submissive object and femme fatale from conventional Oedipal scenarios and represented in ballet; ritualistic figures of pain and pleasure exposed by physical theatre and body art practices; figures of jouissance, power and parody represented in postmodern feminist dance theatre practice. However, as *Grace & Glitter* clearly illustrates, identifying figures does not necessarily evoke seductive relations between
real and illusion, presence and absence. The illusion of erotic androgyny, like the motif of BwO, cannot be defined by any one of these figures. Defining them is for the purpose of recognising their embodied experiential reality and their constructed performativity, allowing them to become reference points between which the illusions of erotic androgyny can be imagined.
Chapter 6  Pausing to Identify  End Notes

1 Grosz (1995) traces this discourse of desire as a history of desire within phallocentric language and culture that stretches back to Plato and the Greek philosophical concept of desire as 'a yearning for access to the good and the beautiful that man lacks'(p.176). Grosz explains how psychoanalytic theory is an heir to that tradition, but rather than desire being some inherent part of man's 'nature', it is formed within a social reality. Desire, in psychoanalytic theory, 'is the movement of substitution that creates a series of equivalent objects to fill this primordial lack' (Grosz 1995 p.176).

2 Lack, originating in the relationship of loss and separation between mother and child, is part of the oedipalising process. According to this theory, loss and desire become a perpetual and interdependent chain of events where desire can never be satisfied but creates 'an endless network of replacements, substitutes, and representations of the perpetually absent object'. (Grosz 1995 p.176)

3 Employing the term 'figure' refers to Barthes (1977), who applies the term to physicalise 'fragments of discourse' (p.3) pertaining to acts of love. For Barthes, 'figures' are the actions, emotions, discourse that the lover performatively experiences which are not defined as such, but rather as 'the body's gesture caught in action and not contemplated in repose' (Barthes 1977 p.4).

4 Freud's appropriation of the Oedipus myth 'as the emblem of every man's passage into adult life' (De Lauretis 1984 p. 125) is already situated in textual practice - in its literary form it existed within the text of Sophocles, many centuries before.

5 Ballets, Giselle, Swan Lake, Sleeping Beauty, to name but a few, through various alternations, follow the narrative of masculine desire, in which female pleasure/desire is derived through manipulation of the role of object. For instance, in Swan Lake, where Siegfried holds the centre of attention, it is his quest that we follow for knowledge/love/mother/perfection. This search is threatened and manipulated by OdiLe, the femme fatale, the sexual woman, interrupting his homo-erotic quest for himself/other, fulfilled by Odette. OdiLe manipulates the role of object, desires the prince, usurps his power. He succumbs to the presence of the phallic, sexual femme fatale, then accomplishes his quest to achieve a spiritual love, transcending the bodily reality of the female body, meeting the impossible to obtain object of desire, Odette, but only in death. Transcendence through death resolves the earthly reality of sex evoked by female flesh (Dworkin 1987). This is a homo-erotic fable, always his story, not hers. Seen from the patriarchal perspective, evil is embodied in the role of the seductress, disrupting 'his' quest for ideal love, which can only be attained through the submissive female. Odette, (who also dies) represents unconditional mother love, an unobtainable, forever-lost love. It is the story of his loss, his desire (Mulvey 1975, Dolan 1993, Kaplan 1983). However, this is a feminist perspective, a queer
perspective might be very different - to be considered at another time.

6 Drawing on Mulvey (1975), Dolan (1993) describes two options for the female spectator within the psychoanalytical model. She can either identify with the male spectator and 'participate in the female performer's objectification' or she can 'identify with the narrative's objectified female and position herself as object' (p.109). Both positions propose that women are 'merely consumers invited to buy the idealised, male-generated image of the female body as a commodity displayed in the representational frame' (p.109). Both positions, for Doane (1987), involve 'a confusing array of concepts - transvestism, masochism, masquerade, double identification' (Doan 1987 p.6), all of which presume women's acceptance of the dominant phallic signifier. Dolan (1993) claims that the female spectator identifies with the idealised image of herself, she and the performer are 'collapsed into one', they are both 'commodities in an exchange by means of which they are both objectified' (1993 p.110).

7 Charnock's solo show, Original Sin (1993), can also be considered to expose and subvert Bataille's notion of eroticism in Christianity, that of ritual, sacrifice and nakedness (Bataille 1962).

8 The research at X6 has been historically and critically documented by Jordan (1992) and Adair (1992). Reviews and reflections of events at X6 can be found in New Dance Magazine (1977-1987).

9 This quote was used as the programme note for Red of the Sweet (1991 video 2).

10 For Running-Johnson (1989), Cixous' theory of writing provides a strategy whereby women can write the feminine as a 'cultivation of their “difference” - of inherent libidinal drives which originate in the unconscious' (p.177). Johnson's article focuses on Cixous' writing and its appropriation into theatre performance practice. 'The human physical element in theatre ... may be seen as an inherently subversive element, just as feminine writing can be characterised as potentially disruptive of the traditional masculine order' (p.180). Even though Johnson does not mention dance, I suggest similar parallels between Cixous' writing about theatre and dance theatre: 'its insistence upon movement, profusion, free exchange and transformation, and the importance that it places upon the corporal' (Running-Johnson 1989 p.179).

11 In my opinion Deluzian motifs of rhizome and assemblage analogue the play of jouissance into choreographic process, while the motifs of BwO and becoming are more aptly applied to theorise the seductive potential of erotic androgyny on a performer's body.

12 Section 28 of the local government act 1988, prohibits local authorities from spending money on the promotion of homosexuality.

13 For reviews see New Dance Magazine no.2 Spring 1977 p.14/15 and No 3 Summer 1977 p.10 respectively.

14 For more detail regarding this work see Adair (1992 p.189).

15 Within a heterosexual matrix, the use of parody to effect change will always be paradoxical and compromised by postmodern strategies. Postmodern use of parody requires a complicity with the past in order to deconstruct, and although the techniques to install and subvert are clearly disruptive, this complicity will always condition and limit the extent of radical change. Subsequently, as Hutchinson stresses, feminism can use postmodern strategies but only as first step towards its political goal. Feminism is a political movement, while 'Postmodernism is not; it is certainly political, but it is politically ambivalent' (p.168). For Case (1988), writing from a lesbian perspective, the heterosexual feminist subject is 'still perceived in terms of men
and not within the context of other women, the subject in heterosexuality cannot become capable of ideological change' (p.56).

16 See Adair (1992). Christie Adair documented the work process of Grace & Glitter, which was used as material for an education pack by Extemporary Dance Theatre.

17 The quality of the video recording of Grace & Glitter is of very poor quality and consequently has not been included.
Chapter 7
Becoming a Play Between

Categories of erotic practice as expressions of embodied desires have been rendered visible in order to provide a network of figures with which a performer might play in order to evoke illusions of erotic androgyny. From the ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ erotic figurations of the last chapter, this thesis now moves to consider lesbian erotics, which recognises the constructed performativity of both male and female gendered desiring practices. Look Both Ways - say maybe uses the roles of ‘butch’ and ‘femme’ to argue that the potential of lesbian erotic practice lies in the play between these two identities. Extracts from my own work are analysed to illustrate the play between two referents in one body. Having identified many figures of erotic practices from Oedipal, bataille-esque, feminist and lesbian narratives, Performing Across ... explores how these figures can become a surface network for androgynous play. Different performances are described for their erotic androgynous potential from the physical perspectives of performer and spectator. Consequently, the seductive force of erotic androgyny is acknowledged in its embodied practice as well as in its illusions.

7.1: Look Both Ways - say maybe

Within the context of lesbian sexual play, a female body can switch between dominant giving and submissive taking, between desires that are considered ‘masculine’, that is the active desire for female bodies - phallic significations of penetration, domination, objectification, and ‘feminine’ significations of desiring to be desired - penetrated, pleasured. Lesbian erotic practice plays between a ‘feminine’ multiplicity of erogenous zones, ‘what-was-before-language reverberating’ (Cixous 1986 p.88), and one centred orgasm, the bataille-esque ‘withholding and releasing of sexual forces’ (Bristow 1997 p.127).

Lesbian eroticcs acknowledges that all gender and sexuality models are constructed. This is not to infer that lesbian erotic practices are any less real, embodied or deeply interior than any other practice, rather it is to open up and contest the meaning of real and interior depth. For Butler (1991), ‘being’ anything implies an oppressive regulation, but, conversely, if there was no problem with identifying as lesbian, it would cease to be of interest to her.
It is precisely the pleasure produced by the instability of those categories which sustains the various erotic practices that make me a candidate for the category to begin with.

Butler 1991 p.14

Identifying a 'lesbian' figuration, as with any other figuration in Part Three, provides a theoretical moment of pause before once again moving on. In this way, identifying lesbian is not being lesbian, identifying and then moving on opens the category itself to a discursive site where identity can no longer be controlled. Lesbian play with what has been considered as 'real' erotic practice of male and female, displaces the meaning of real, and the oscillating play between illusion and real comes into play.

This chapter begins by identifying the key performative figures of lesbian erotic practice, those of 'butch' and 'femme', as desiring figures which masquerade with the constructed roles of masculine and feminine. The chapter does not intend a thorough, in depth, study of butch/femme couple identities or cultures which continues to be well documented by lesbian and queer theorists (Munt 1998). The brief sketch offered here focuses on the role playing masquerade of masculine and feminine desiring, as an erotic practice, which can be manipulated for performance.

Case (1988) describes how butch/femme lesbian culture, which had been rendered invisible due to the moralistic politically correct essential feminism of the 1970s which rejected butch/femme as imitations of heterosexuality, emerged later as a form of camp, ironic role-play for performance (Roof 1998). Here, the butch/femme dynamic assumes a performative masquerade, where there is no natural or original sexuality (Butler 1991). Referring to Baudrillard's argument for seduction, Case acknowledges that

the point is not to conflict reality with another reality, but to abandon the notion of reality through roles ... A strategy of appearances replaces the claim to truth.

Case 1988 p.70

Peggy Shaw and Lois Weaver, the butch/femme performance partnership Split Britches, to whom cultural theorists consistently refer, have become cult figures of lesbian theatre (Case 1988, 1996, Dolan 1993 De Lauretis

They do not identify these butch-femme roles with 'real' people or literal images of gender, but with fictionalised ones, thus underscoring the masquerade. Two, the history of their desire, or their search for a sexual partner becomes a series of masks, or identities that stand for sexual attraction in the culture. Case 1988 p.68

The cross-dressing butch symbolises, through image, behaviour and clothing, a taking of responsibility, which is represented by an ironic play with 'possession of the penis' (Case 1988 p.64). The butch appropriates significations associated with 'male' power in dress code and body language, as a performative pleasurable expression of her desire for other women. It is a role which Butler refers to as 'capable, forceful and all-providing ... a certain husband-like role' (Butler 1991 p.25) which is played out within a lesbian context of desire and depends on 'the male's recognition of defeat' (Case 1988 p.64). However, the butch does not compare herself to a man, nor pretend to pass as a man, but plays directly to the femme, who plays to her - as an erotic figure she is recognised through her relationship to the femme.

De Lauretis (1994) describes the exaggerated display of femininity in the masquerade of the femme as 'quintessential, empowered, and exclusive or absolute femininity'. She goes on to say that the femme 'performs the sexual power and seductiveness of the female body', which has been 'aggressively reclaimed from patriarchy by radical separatism' (p.264). The femme masquerades as submissive, she performs as object of desire, she acts as passive site of sexuality, always with the knowledge that she is also subject of her desire, actively desires, has usurped the (masculine) power by having chosen another female body to desire.

The femme who actively desires to be desired, physically manipulates the actions of her lover for her own pleasure (Cvetkovich 1995). Being receptive to pleasure in this instance is not powerless or passive but an active, self-conscious submission. A lesbian femme's enacted play of submission can be explained in relation to the phallus of Lacanian psychoanalysis (Lacan
183). The phallus, grand Lacanian imaginary signifier for the speaking subject (Grosz 1990), is appropriated by female bodies within lesbian contexts of desire (Hart 1997). To enact the femme role, a lesbian gives up the symbolic phallus,signifying as an act of submission, in order to ‘receive’ the phallus, knowing full well that she has had the phallus in the first place, to be able to give it up. The excessively enacted play with the imaginary ‘having’, ‘being’, ‘giving away’ and ‘receiving’ the phallus, describes the performative position of a lesbian femme erotic. 2

For the heterosexual feminist performer, receptivity has often signified powerlessness, while for the lesbian performer and her manipulation of the ‘phallus’, receptivity signifies as a dynamic of power. While the figures of butch and femme most easily identify and stereotype lesbian figurings of erotic practices within lesbian discourse and spectatorship, most lesbians will recognise that these figures in practice are not stable sites of identity, hence the well-known phrase, ‘butch on the streets, femme in the sheets’.3

The erotic practice of the femme, taking power in the pleasure of ‘submitting’ to another woman, transfers to the performing stage as the playful excessive masquerade as object of desire. Lois Weaver plays the ideal excessive femme in her ‘hostess role’ as Tammy Whynot, complete with blond wig, Southern accent, and Country Western-style costumes. Her doll-like appearance juxtaposes an act so excessively performed, that it suggests a femme role considerably more active than passive, more dominant than submissive. 4

‘Naked Truth’, one of the episodes in Virginia Minx at Play (1993 video 5c), portrays an opera diva, complete with long white chiffon gown and long black hair:

I float in and out of the spotlight, performing the consumptive heroine, an image familiar to romantic opera (Clément 1989). Subverting the image, indulging in the climactic moment, I repetitively act out the death scene, consumptively coughing myself to death, only to rise up again to cry out for my lover, only to die again. Dying, recovering, dying, recovering interrupted finally by Heather Joyce’s entrance. Dressed in black leather trousers and jacket, and carrying a saxophone, she blasts out a famous stripper tune, which breaks the repetitive death cycle. After several attempts to get Heather’s attention, having come to
Performing consumptive diva and brazen stripper reveals an excessive and ironic pleasure in being sexual object of the spectator's gaze, a receptive pleasure which is controlled by a manipulation of the dominant gaze as performer.

Lesbian figures of butch and femme certainly offer desiring practices which masquerade with both masculine and feminine roles. As theatrical figures for performance, Case (1988) argues that 'the butch-femme couple inhabit the subject position together' (p.56), the ironic play of butch and femme roles are recognised in relation to each other, the two positions create each other and are dependent on each other. 5

No doubt the terms butch and femme provide liberating, ironic and playful devices with which to emphasise the fictional non-essentialism of gendered identity. However, as performative identities they install, as much as subvert the symbolic order. Speaking of the butch role (but equally applicable to both roles), Hart (1993) explains how, on the one hand, the butch's performance enhances the political agenda for lesbian visibility but also balances uneasily on the divide between disruption of rigid heterosexual sign systems and assimilation or reification of the heterosexual dyad.

Hart 1993 p. 125

Performance representations of a butch/femme subject position can establish the lesbian subject as an identity within heterosexual/homosexual signification (Hart 1993). While recognising the masquerade, a spectator can simultaneously read a dualistic binary relationship of fixed gender on to the lesbian bodies of butch and femme.

Both theoretical contradictions and my own experience of lesbian spectator/performer relations, inform me that a more intriguing erotics is not the identities of butch and femme as a couple, but the butch/femme
play of *each* performer, a relationship of desire played within one person and between the shadows of two figures, allowing an ambiguity of signs where a single identity as butch or femme remains unmarked. This is not a negation of butch/femme roles, in fact it is because these performativities can be identified that it becomes possible to explore an erotic practice which spans between them. Seductive illusions of erotic androgyny are not the creation of an abstract, empty body which negates identifiable erotic figures, but one which moves between these identities (Deleuze 1988). Case's butch/femme couple subject position, while 'playfully inhabiting the camp space of irony and wit, free from biological determinism, elitist essentialism' (p.71), tends to pass over the potential play of active and receptive, power and pleasure, butch and femme within *each* performer and the ambiguous interaction of these qualities between performer and spectator. 6

Characteristic of lesbian theatre is an interplay of subject (desiring) and object (desired). These two positions are interchangeable, reversible - playfully occupied or abandoned at will.

Rapi 1994 p.55

Erotic practice of lesbian desire can be defined for spectator and performer, not by dualistic butch/femme figures, but by the play between these roles in each dis/appearance on each body, dissolving one into another, promising but not realising the identifiable presence of either. The performer/spectator actively looks, the spectator/performer feels desired, the performer/spectator allows herself to be desired by the spectator/performer's active gaze. This embodied experience of lesbian erotic practice reveals the potential of the two way play between identifiable lesbian referents, which is demonstrated by *Witch One* (1992) and *Le Flesh* (1995).

*Witch One* (1992 video 3) provides me with a crucial practical illustration of the play between the roles of butch and femme. In retrospect, this piece can be considered as the performance which initiated the theory of erotic androgyny as an illusion for performance. The initial ideas were drawn directly from lesbian erotic practice and the material in performance retains sexually explicit gestural content which emphasises the relations between dominant/submissive and subject/object of lesbian erotics. Phallic
masculine power is asserted through an active gaze, precise technical formal language, gestures of penetration, central positioning, upward line of stretched and extended leg positions. Feminine is asserted as an active desire to be desired, abandonment, fluidity and delicacy of hand gestures.

A theoretical parallel to the interactive desiring of both watching and doing Witch One (1992) is provided by Derrida’s (1985) deconstructive play with Freud’s Fort/Da’ (Freud 1920). I use Derrida’s deconstruction, rather than Freud’s original, because Derrida sets up the scene as a theatrical event, and it therefore becomes more appropriate for transference from a philosophical and psychoanalytical dynamic to a physical erotic for performance.

The curtain is about to rise. But we do not know if it rises on the scene or in the scene... All the comings and goings will have to pass before the curtain.

Derrida 1985 p.238

Here is a child, observed as in a theatre, re-enacting a realistic drama of his expressions of desire. Derrida watches Freud, who watches/analyses his grandson’s behaviour, which relates to the presence/absence of his parents. Running parallel, here is a writer, watching an audience, watching a performer acting out a play of desiring. The boy’s game begins as he throws small objects away into corners and under the bed, making the hunt for them hard work for his parents, who must reassemble the objects and give them back. The ‘work’ and the ‘play’ repeat themselves. The psychoanalytical analysis of the child’s game is not particularly relevant except that, in throwing, he asserts his power to separate from his parents, and in the objects being returned, he experiences the pleasure of being reunited, similar to throwing and retrieving the gaze in Witch One.

The boy’s game develops. He is given a spool with a piece of string in place of both toys and parents. He throws the spool and then draws it back into himself, to repeat again and again. His play becomes a performance, a game, as the real objects that produced the desired effects in the first instance, the toys and the parents, are no longer present. Toys and parents as external objects are now symbolised in the play of the spool, toys and parents are no longer needed to play the game and get the desired effects.
The child develops the game further, eventually replacing the spool with himself, plays the game of re-turning with himself, throwing and retrieving, being subject/object of his play, playing presence/absence with his own imagination. Similarly, in *Witch One* (1992) the act of desire is thrown out and pulled back as the act of being desired, or vice versa, playing a repetitive game of disappearance and return with desire as a game in itself, separated from any objects which might in reality disappear or return. 'Desire' is now symbolised within the physical actions of throwing and retrieving movement dynamics as signs in themselves.

As a game of disappearance and return, the act of throwing is the direct (power) action of the game, while the act of returning is one of greater pleasure. Speculating on Freud's analysis, Derrida writes,

> it is completed in coming back: the greater pleasure, he says, is the Wiederkommen (the return), although the spectacle is less directly seen. And yet, that which again becomes a revenant must, for the game to be complete, be thrown away again, indefatigably. It speculates on the basis of the return, the point of departure of that which owes it to itself to return. On what has once more just returned from leaving or has just left again.

Derrida 1985 p.242/243

Fort/da' play offers a parallel with lesbian erotic practice in its gradual abstraction of fixed subjects and objects, the active demand ('throwing') for love and pleasure of 'retrieving' becoming a desiring game in itself. In the act of making *Witch One* (1992), the two-way play of subjects and objects of lesbian sexual acts, which are its starting points, become no longer relevant, identifying lover/loved one, desired object/subject of desire are shadows in the doing of desire between two referents.

> One must make return the repetition of that which returns, and must do so on the basis of its returning. Which, therefore, is no longer simply this or that, such and such an object which must depart/return, or which departs-in-order-to-return, but is departure-return itself, in other words, the presentation of itself of re-presentation, the return-to-itself of returning.

Derrida 1985 p.246

At one moment spectators are being asked to actively gaze, at the next they are being cruised, then thrown back to the role of voyeurs as I turn
attention to an imaginary partner. Because I never move from the centre
downstage spot, the audience are brought into an unavoidably intense but
playful relationship from which they can not escape, they become
participants in the play. The switch between taking the spectator,
assuming a powerful controlling gaze as the lover and hunter, to releasing
that control and positioning myself as the taken one, the hunted, describes
the erotic play of Witch One.

In a conventional theatre space, darkened auditorium and lit stage, the
seductive potential of the piece becomes clear to me, as a performer.
Playing between who is seduced and who is seducing displaces the solid
binary of subject watching object and allows an interactive energised
engagement between myself and spectator. 9

The cycle of seduction cannot be stopped. One can seduce
someone in order to seduce someone else, but also seduce
someone else to please oneself. The illusion that leads from one
to the other is subtle. Is it to seduce, or to be seduced, that is
seductive? But to be seduced is the best way to seduce. It is an
endless refrain. There is no active or passive move in
seduction, no subject or object, no interior or exterior: seduction
plays on both sides and there is no frontier separating them.
Baudrillard 1979 p.81

However, just as Derrida's Fort/Da remains situated with psychoanalytical
discourse, so does Witch One (1992) remain locked in a 'lesbian' figuration of
erotic practice, playing within the binary, who has, or who has not, the
famous phallus.

Le Flesh (1995) also takes lesbian erotic practice as its starting point.
Witch One's play of desire between referents took place directly between
spectator and performer. Le Flesh directs this enquiry to the imagery of
'hermaphrodyke', defined as a lesbian body with penis and breasts,
signifying a body with sexual desires of both male and female. While
androgyny is defined for this thesis as an imaginative play between
performative genders, hermaphrodite represents the physical reality of a
body with two anatomical sexes. For Weil (1992), the figure of
hermaphrodite, from Ovid's Metamorphoses (ed. Innes 1955), embodies the
transcendental ideal of androgyne, suggesting 'an original confusion or chaos
of sexes and desires' (Weil 1992 p.11). Altering the term to hermaphrodyke suggests a lesbian masquerade with the 'real' term, an interweaving of male and female gendered sexual acts mimicked for performance play.\textsuperscript{10}

\textbf{Le Flesh} (1995) pushes the imagery of the interweaving of gendered sexuality to an extreme. The costume includes a bra and a loin cloth which has the padded shape of a penis sewn into it. Throughout the piece, a series of slides are shown on a large screen centre-back. There are five stereotypical portraits, a Lana Turner femme, Valentino-style butch, an angel, a leather-clad S/M dyke and a Gothic romantic vampire. The images are camp, ironic, fashion glamour poses, recognisable stereotypes initially, then, as the piece progresses, these stereotypes begin to fragment. Valentino appears wearing a bra, S/M leather dyke wears Lana Turner's long blonde wig, angel wears a leather harness, Lana Turner holds two black dildoes in her upturned palms. Interspersed with these images are ones of my own naked body, seen mostly from the back.

\textbf{Le Flesh} (1995) exposes figures of dominance and submission, switching between images of 'hunter' and 'hunted' with identifiable imagery.

I watch for the look of the wild in your eyes rise up from the sweet and tear me apart. Watch like a wolf till I submit to your power, so bite till I bleed, dive into the wet, climb on my back, draw blood from my flesh and drink from my womb. ...Watch out for the look of the wild in my eyes rise up from the sweet when I thrust into you. Cause I can turn you, twist you, lift and screw you, turn you, twist you, lift and screw you.

text spoken in Le Flesh 1995

One section explores a series of slow, mimed gestures and poses describing a physical practice of dominance and submission.

Pull an imaginary someone towards me by a rope around her neck - kiss her - make her kneel and put my foot on her neck - hold her face to my dick - fuck her mouth ... on my knees with my hands tied behind my back - my mouth is open - arms pulled back and back arched - slap my own arm till it's red and raw - crawling forward - on my back being fucked, a hand over my eyes ... flip over - on my knees fisting her.

As a research process towards a practice of erotic androgyny, \textbf{Le Flesh}
(1995) was a worthwhile stop/step along the route. I wanted to expose lesbian erotics to physical performance, identify them, in order to move through them. It was a cathartic process, a rite of passage through which I had to pass, even though I knew I wouldn't stay there. As a work in progress this was an important moment, but, as a performance, the piece was not a critical success. 'Emilyn Claid, whose narcissistic, near-pornographic solo got Dance Umbrella off to a bad start' (Parry 1995).

How Le Flesh failed to seduce in performance is obvious, and relevant, to this thesis. By emphasising lesbian play with images of masculine, feminine sexuality, the identities became more dominant than the play between the images, denying the potential of real becoming illusion, presence becoming absence. The imagery, frozen in time by the performance, was confined to the identifiable flip sides of lesbian sex, creating a duality. The work lost touch with the movement between, the piece was not about playing but about being. While revealing the performative extremes of gender, therefore suggesting the space between them in which to play, I did not actually play in that space. The figure 'hermaphrodyke', because of signifying associations to embodied anatomical sexual acts, limits the illusive play between identities in performance. In comparison, the term erotic androgyny allows for wider imaginative possibilities for performance illusion. Interestingly, the slide images, rather than the piece itself, reveal the potential for different imaginative figures between referents (Figure III).

Secondly, certain episodes in the piece reenacted representations of sex on stage, which Baudrillard (1988) refers to as 'disenchanted simulation: porn, more real than the real, and the height of simulation' (p.154). The simulated performance of sex on stage had become too real, the space of seduction between real and illusion had collapsed. The spectator, rather than becoming an active participant in the play of presence/absence, became 'a voyeur peeping through the fourth wall of the stage' (Rapi 1994 p.61).

Clearly, a retrospective analysis of Witch One (1992) and Le Flesh (1995) reveals, once again, that one particular figuration, or strata, of erotic practice, with its identifiable imagistic figures, does not describe an illusion of erotic androgyny. Throughout Part Three, figures have been continually identified only to say 'no, that's not it - that's not seductive'. Each
identifiable figuration is situated within or without, and always in reference to, phallocentric language and binaries of desire. Even lesbian practice, which recognises, practically and theoretically, the performative construction of all gendered desiring practices, refers back to patriarchal psychoanalytical discourse, as it breaks away. 11

Part Three has identified erotic figurations from Oedipal, bataille-esque, feminist and lesbian narratives. There are many figures, each with their own epistemological history. Conventional binary structures of heterosexual Oedipal narrative evoke a female body of passion and pain, characterised by images of submissive object, femme fatale, witch, whore, maiden. Feminist figurations offer the emergence of jouissance in dance languages, characterised by the figure of an abstract dancing body, together with the figures of defiance, postmodern ‘glamour’ and balletic parody. Lesbian erotic practices evoke not only the masquerading figures of butch and femme but the lesbian androgyne who switches between roles of ‘hunter’ and ‘hunted’ of erotic practice, revealing the potential of a desiring force between identifiable referents.

7.2: Performing Across ...

Erotic figurations, identified as embodied desiring practices, are now explored for an androgynous play of illusions in performance. Attention is turned to how embodied practices become a horizontal play of surface appearances, available for a seductive strategy of presence/absence, and how a real desiring body retains the embodied-ness of erotic practices yet allows them to become surface illusions. It has been suggested that erotic androgyne for performance is characterised, not as a play with one identifiable figure or figuration, but the play between many figurations, categories, organisations, all strata. In this way seductive relations, for performer and spectator, can be described as an encounter of desire itself between parts, where parts are eroticised by their immediate interaction. Desire becomes a creative, productive, inventive force, can be thought of in terms of intensities and energies, movements, connections between surfaces, ‘a pleasure/unpleasure always of and for themselves’ (Grosz 1995 p.182) rather than (only) a fixed binary of vertical depth.
Erotic androgyny does not propose non-identity, non-desiring, a blown-apart abstract body, but a multiplicity of possible identities. Chapter 6 began with references to ‘strata’ and ‘BwO’ (Deleuze & Guattari 1988). The erotic figurations and figures that have been identified can be considered as strata, appearing to have deep-rooted interiority in real bodies. For the purposes of erotic androgynous play, the strata now become free-floating, as shadows, markers and referents. Like the rules of a game which are spontaneously abandoned or manipulated but not forgotten, the strata of erotic practices consistently reminds a body of its embodied desiring while no longer subscribing to static identities. The figures and images evoked by the practices become signs without fixed signifiers, reference points, shadows of ontology, which any body may appropriate for a creative play of performance illusion.

’BwO’, Deleuze and Guattari’s imaginative figure for the doing of desire without referents (1988), does not play within a binary of two, but within a network of many, making multiple connections between the strata.

Thus the BwO is never yours or mine. It is always a body... organs are no longer anything more than intensities that are produced, flows, thresholds, and gradients.

Deleuze 1988 p.164

As an embodied motif, BwO resembles an erotic androgynous figure, a physical body practice of desiring between many referents. The more referents identified the better, for the play between can become ever more intricate. In this way, the ‘real becoming illusion’ of erotic androgyny on the dancer’s body describes a seductive site of intrigue, imagination and multiple meanings.

The term ‘becoming’, applied throughout the thesis to describe the relationship between real and illusion, is now applied as an analogy for the physical activity of crossing between identities and desires. The term is drawn from Deleuze and Guattari’s references to BwO as a ‘becoming’ body.

Becoming is certainly not imitating, or identifying with
something; neither is it regressing-progressing; neither is it corresponding, establishing corresponding relations; neither is it producing, producing a filiation or producing through filiation. Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own; it does not reduce to, or lead back to, “appearing”, “being”, “equalling” or “producing”.

Deleuze & Guattari 1988 p.239

The performer's task in doing/making performance can be thought of as a practice of becoming, not being, identity.

‘Portrait’ (Virginia Minx at Play, 1993 video 5d), already described in Chapters 3 and 6, can be read as a process of becoming. Child-becoming-tomboy, becoming-religious, becoming-teenager, becoming-good-bad-raped-anorexic-mother-old, are images which never quite identify themselves before changing. Never stabilising, each gesture already mutating into another, shifting the action to a new image which, as it begins to emerge, initiates its own change. Yet the body remains a desiring expressive body. In a similar way, the integration of wheelchairs, steel walking frame and flesh and blood bodies in Across Your Heart (1996 video 8) for CandoCo Dance Company (described in Chapter 6) can be read as crossings between beauty becoming grotesque becoming beauty, body becoming-machine, becoming-mutant, becoming-meat. At the end of the millennium ‘becoming’ evokes the potential of a body where art and science merge, real and virtual interact, natural body and machine can no longer be separately defined, artificial is becoming biological (Haraway 1989). Grosz (1995) describes this notion of becoming as ‘fingers becoming flowers, becoming silver, becoming torture-instruments’ (p.184).

Becoming evokes movements of bodies in a process of transmuting, making, doing, trans crossing, never being, always on a journey with no final destination, junctions of creative change. In this way, becoming is seductive, as the moments of ‘getting to know’ before knowing, stretching the space of chaos before the order, acknowledging choices before making decisions, as embodied physical activities in performance these moments are seductive and erotic.

Did I Speak? (1996 video 9) provided a challenge to create an illusive erotic
androgynous surface play though the material for the piece was derived from deeply experienced erotic practices. Initially, the intention was to explore the possibilities of movement without resource to interior emotional states, or to characterisation, text, visual image, stories or any other identifying external elements. However, my coming to the end of an intensely passionate love relationship influenced the working process. The challenge of the process focused on how the ‘interior’ drives of jealousy, loss, anger, joy, could be represented in performance as illusive figures of erotic androgynous play. Could I move between figures of erotic practice, which appeared to have a vertical depth of subjectivity, evoke them without identifying them, becoming but not being? As written words on a page, the following description appears to fix identifiable figures, as a performer these imaginations describe what was happening in my body as I moved through the performance. Appearing in one corner of the space in a spotlight dressed in a long black velvet evening dress,

I imagine a hostess in an empty hotel ballroom and circle the outside of the space, looking in towards its emptiness. A nostalgia for lost femininity, movements are delicate and particularly ‘feminine’, non-defined, empty, thrown away, addressed to the air, gestures appear like memories of times gone by. Arriving at the centre of the space a dance begins as a teasing display of hips, hands, shoulders enjoying the pleasure of continuous shifts of focus between elbow and wrist, hip and foot, performing a desiring to be desired through provocative fragmented body gestures, playing at being object of desire. Yet it seems an ironic play, these feminine signs appear misplaced on my aging body, which watches itself perform its feminine reminiscences. Back flat and arched, chin against palm of left hand, performing an exaggerated false smile, I imagine an aging drag queen who attempts to hold on to artificially performed feminine guiles. As the images emerged, I let them go, suggesting a movement between, female body becoming hostess becoming dancer becoming object of desire becoming old, becoming drag queen.

The second section emerged from spite and jealousy, a grotesque place at the edge of rage, hitting out at the boundaries of accepted feminine behaviour.

I pull myself across the back of the stage, dragging my legs behind me, whole body being pulled along by the movement of arms, disabled, paralysed. On reaching the other side, my head bangs against the wall and my body collapses. Becoming lizard, bird, moving through crawling, pecking and slapping, to standing and walking straight-legged, shoulders lifted, arms and hands twisted,
I am becoming a grotesque figure conducting an invisible orchestra. I imagine an old man and an impetuous child, twitching, uncontrolled, switching from one gesture/image to another with abrupt abandon. Shaking violently, I reach up my skirt to scratch my thighs, smooth the skirt obsessively kneeling on the floor, fall backwards, legs open, making the sign of the cross with fingers raised high between my legs. One moment slapping my cheek, then rocking my body on the floor, then throwing the dress over my head, then dragging my body along by my arms once more.

The third section was initiated by pain of loss, that old familiar loss/lack pain of the desiring body. Attention focused on the detailed reenactment of gestures of loss, as empty gestures of emotion now gone, slowly moving through one and then another, interiority opening out to a horizontal becoming, similar to the butoh experiences described in Chapter 3.

One fist clenched in the palm of the other hand and pressed against diaphragm, the fisted hand softly opens describing the pouring of pain from that place in my body. Reaching forward with both hands to nothing, elbows lift at the sides with lower arms loose and hanging, a crucifix position with knees together and twisted to the side, I am naked from the waist up, child becoming sacrificial victim. Caught in a chaos, I sense the androgynous crossing, overstepping the boundaries, existing in no time, in no man's land. Wearing trousers with a belt undone, with bare chest, a boy/woman involved in a sacrificial ritual, I can sense a vulnerability of stripped gender.

The fourth and last section is a reprise of the first but performed with different intentions, a confidence of androgynous play with power and pleasure of the movement language itself and in the crossing between gender qualities. Dressed in a black sleeveless vest with black trousers, belt done up,

I imagine a boy, playing sexy, tough, hunting and hungry and out to attract. With strong legs, gestures slick, beaten precision, sharp focus, I am taking space with a pleasurable power. Where before there was nostalgia, now there is defiance, walking toward the audience as if to speak, I playfully refuse the opportunity. With a flirting provocative gesture of my right hand and a sharp focused look I leave the stage.

Making and performing Did I Speak? (1996) provided an opportunity to explore the conflict and play between interiority and surface gestures, structuring the material for performance as a movement in time across genders and across erotic practices. Unlike Witch One (1992), there are no
explicit sexual references nor recourse to external props, text and theatrical images, just the body image, movement itself, sound accompaniment and empty stage. The movement bears shadow references to erotic pain and sacrifice, to jouissance and the play between seducer and seduced of lesbian erotics. Androgyny is suggested by a play of gender significations and a play of active/receptive desiring, as a movement across the time span of the performance. Crossing between figures such as hostess, drag queen, lizard, conductor, sacrificial victim, boy/woman, suggests a metamorphosis of one body becoming another and another, swinging across from heterosexual definitions of feminine to androgyny. Making horizontal links, letting go of meaningful figures, allows what had been deep to become surface, emptying the gestures of their interior depth while retaining a shadow of the real.

What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes.

Deleuze 1988 p.238

Erotic figurations become a network of levels, platforms, existing side by side, vertical and horizontal structures on which to climb, up, down, sideways. The androgyne plays imaginative games between each platform, jumping, crossing, climbing, catching, spinning, sliding, falling between, grabbing hold. The androgyne teases, suggests, comes close but is already becoming another, performs within a frame of memories, no longer relevant except as shadows, memorial signposts at a crossroads, directions which lead nowhere important, within which the movement of **doing** desire, falling in the gaps, swinging on the bars, becomes the erotic practice, a new performance dynamic.

From a spectator’s perspective, erotic androgyny is not something that is ‘identified’ as such, rather that the ambiguous, yet real, desiring play of illusions performed, stimulates an intriguing and erotic androgynous desiring on the part of the spectator.

I observed Wayne McGregor’s *The Millenarium* for Random Dance Company (1997) at the Queen Elizabeth Hall in London. From where I was sitting in this large theatre, it was the movement language and body images of the performers that engaged my attention, rather than the individual
personal performing expressions of the dancers.

Entering the theatre the first sensation is the sound, a low continual throbbing sound, like the massive heart beat of a robotic beast. At the back of the stage there are two large frames, almost touching, appearing like two massive doors slightly ajar, onto which and behind which computer graphics are projected throughout the performance. The first performer appears in silhouette, moving in front of the two frames. A tall thin body with bald head, long arms and legs, wearing a skin-tight suit of metallic shine. This body appears as part animal, part machine, part man, moving with grace, producing long lines with arms and legs which are then displaced with broken disjointed awkward gestures. Movement is both beautiful and grotesque, classical and broken, human yet monstrous. Two small, thin, lithe, bare-legged bodies enter, with short-cropped hair and wearing short metallic shining tunics. The power of their legs, as they thrust them high in the air, phallic tools of muscular precision, leaping and turning with athletic grace, is matched by broken, quirky, non-linear, non-climactic gestures which have no beginning and no end. Another body enters, tall, thin, also wearing a skin-tight suit, dancing with languid luxurious fluidity in contrast to the sharp energised attack of the first two dancers. Yet another dancer appears, again in a short tunic, small, athletic, muscular, wiry.

A seductive force is the play of desiring my body experiences as spectator, identifying genders for these androgynous performers and the erotic pleasure I experience in my recognition of their play between gender significations. Their movements continually play one quality against another, each dancer resembles two bodies in one, a power body and a pleasure body. As the dancers react, play, shift, resist one against the other, they leave physical corporeal trace images of complex ambiguity. Erotic androgyny becomes something I am experiencing, I am pleasurably involved in the act of desiring multiple meanings on to these bodies, which, in their play of real becoming illusion, defy recognition as single genders. The actual categorisation of each body as male and female becomes a secondary and unimportant piece of data. Like that moment between sleep and awake, before consciousness takes over, this performance opens that place between the dream and reality, the moment of chaos before linguistic categorisation. I desire to hold that moment longer, as a moment of constant becoming, to resist the inevitable rationality that follows.

Watching We set Out Early... Visibility Was Poor (Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Dance Company March 19th, 1998) at the Peacock Theatre in London
offered a contrasting seductive experience of spectatorship. I was sitting two rows from the front of the stage, very conscious of every individual dancer's performing focus and expression. No identifiable language defines these dancers, the movements emerge from their desiring bodies, and the sharp shifts of energy, quality and focus between erotic figurations engages me. Their pleasure in moving emerges through powerful muscular linear technical precision, muscles and delicacy interweave, changing with the interactions between each other and the audience, always shifting, always becoming, never settling. They performed to each other and to me, while gorgeously, selfishly, luxuriating in the pleasure of their own bodies.

A sensation of physical pleasure overtakes a desire for meaning, or to know where it was going, how long it was taking. I am wondering at the presence/absence of African-American, Caucasian, South American, black, white, mixed race, boy, girl, man, woman, gay, lesbian, transgender, heterosexual, homosexual, AIDS, death, life, spirit, transcendence, skirts, dresses, hot pants, trousers, shirts, jackets, short hair, long hair, fat, thin, tall, skinny, ballet, pedestrian movement, disco, jazz, contact improvisation, groups, solos, duets, slow, fast, tragic, humorous, joyous. I can sling these terms together in different configurations, mixed race/girl/boy/skirt/duet shifts to black/gay/ballet/tragic, none of these terms and all of these terms can describe what was happening. These terms are shadows, tantalising hooks which collapsed as I reached for them.

Real bodies evoking passion, joy, grief, real bodies with individual images, costumes, languages, these are bodies with no fixed identities, playing between genders, sexualities, relationships, moods, the movement changes, a group shifts, a new energy interrupts, another focus cuts across. Between the hunter and the hunted, between my power and her pleasure, his power and my pleasure, my gaze to her body, his body to his gaze, her gaze to my body, this is a focused energised activity of gazing which flips and reverses these roles again and again. As I watch the performers, I am performing watching, this performance appears to offer an experience of erotic androgyny from both sides of the footlights, as a physical practice of seductive relations.

Describing Did I Speak (1996), The Millenium (1997) and We Set Out Early ... Visibility was Poor (1998) from positions of performer and spectator respectively, reveals that the illusions of erotic androgyny evoke its practice and the practice evokes its illusions. As a real body moving between and across identifiable performative significations of gender and eroticism, experiencing erotic androgyny can best describe it as spectator
and performer, this can be its only identification.

7.3: Conclusions

In many respects this thesis is a 'sketch', covering many issues, ideas and theories. Applying the metaphor of a journey, I could have chosen to travel slowly, covering a small distance but exploring places more fully. I did not, choosing instead to journey as if by air, from where I could make connections between places as dots on a map. Maybe this is the consequence of working as a free-lance choreographer, with often only three weeks to make a piece, then on to the next. Working in this way, the connections between ideas become intriguing glimpses, rather than in-depth explorations.

The introduction to this thesis announced that there was a 'problem' for female bodies in dance theatre performance, pertaining to a loss of seductive relations. On the basis of this problem, Yes, No, Maybe: The Practice of Illusion investigated two main themes, namely the character of seductive relations in live dance performance, and how the female body might achieve them.

Part One examined the illusion of androgyny in Western culture, and considered its potential as a seductive force for the female body. Representation of the classical myth of androgyny on male bodies idealises the notion of a spiritual union, transcending sexual desire, offering a patriarchal culture the opportunity to worship the beautiful young male body without fears of any embodied homosexual relations. In this way, the identity of the androgynous male body becomes an ambiguity, a secret, seductive as a shadow, all of which displaces and disguises conventional 'truth' about man, while his maleness remains unquestioned.

According to the heterosexual feminist agenda, the female body, in a phallocentric matrix, is positioned as the site of sexual desire, a constant reminder of sex, reproduction and mortality. Consequently, the ambiguity of 'transcendent' androgynous signification is not possible for the female body. Feminist interpretations have manipulated the myth for political and social agendas offering, on the one hand, a neutral harmonising of masculine and
feminine, and on the other, a liberation for male and female bodies from fixed gender roles, with no visible strategies for getting there.

Rather than dismissing the illusion of androgyny as being inappropriate for a female body in a postmodern post-gender culture, an alternative interpretation to those of the classical and feminist has been proposed. This refiguration is embodied and rooted in, (rather than transcending), sexual play, does not attempt to deny sexual embodiment or difference, nor attempt a utopian union as an end goal. This is an interpretation based on androgyny as 'action', a movement which spans the divide between masculine and feminine qualities, playing the extremes of both and neither male and female sexualities and genders in one body.

Applying the above interpretation to dance languages, androgyny has been characterised as the place/space between the extremes of vertical and horizontal, phallic and feminine significations of ballet and new dance forms, appropriated by one body. The genealogy of this characterisation can be traced back to combined developments at X6 Dance Space and Dartington College in the 1970s. As a futural imagining, the practice of androgyny in dance languages brings the female body to an active physical place from which play becomes possible, offering a state of readiness from where a multiplicity of movements can happen. This appears to be a solution, offering a practice whereby a female body can create an ambiguity of illusions which evokes seductive relations. However, from this theoretical solution the 'problem' is revealed: that in practice, the two extremes of dance languages have merged to become an established, whole, real, homogenised dance language whereby the ambiguous play of androgynous illusions between extremes is lost.

Part Two explored the 'problem' in depth, arguing that homogeneity is the result of new dance developments over the past 20 years. At this point a strategy for seduction was introduced, based on the theory that seductiveness lies in the surface appearance, rather than the real identity of a performer. It was suggested that seductive relations are evoked through the oscillating space between the performer's real body on stage and the illusions that body creates while performing. This play of real and illusion provokes an act of desiring on the part of the spectator, a desire for
identifiable presence which refuses, through the play of real and illusion, to secure fixed identification. Illusion seduces by suggestion of the real, teasing without revealing, evoking possible passions, histories, desires, moods for the spectator, without establishing a fixed identity for the performer. The desire to know the surface appearance or secret of illusion on the part of the spectator, and the performer's skill in presenting surface appearance as a secret which is never revealed, provides a basis for an energised seductive interaction between spectator and performer.

Applying the strategy for seduction, 'real becoming illusion, presence becoming absence' to the female body dancing, it was argued that the space between real and illusion has collapsed. The female body's negation of artificial codes of appearance, a consequence of postmodern minimalist and feminist agendas which sought to make the real female body, as subject, visible on the performing stage, has risked the female body becoming 'real on real', 'feminine on feminine', which can be considered to collapse seductive relations.

Whether or not the feminist postmodern minimalist dancer is seductive is an issue which can be contested by dance practitioners and enthusiasts. It is questionable why the term 'seduction' has been used in the first place, when it has such sexual connotations for the female dancer and negates the hard work done by feminism and postmodern minimalist practitioners to liberate the female body from her role as sexual object of desire. According to this argument however, the signs of seduction, for instance the constructed masquerading appearances of femininity and masculinity, the two-way reversible play between subjects and objects, the erotic, pleasurable, mysterious, illusive, ambiguous, active and receptive elements that are associated with sexual seduction, also characterise an engaging relationship between spectator and performer. Applying the term seduction to dance performance allows for the shadow of sexual performative play to infiltrate the scene of performance, without being focused on the goal of 'sex'.

Seduction has been characterised as a force that can take any illusive form, which foils all truth pertaining to 'masculine' and 'feminine' through its surface appearances. It drives sexuality and production, is the play that
makes sex possible, circles 'reality', reversing everything that is deep or real. Considering seduction in this way clearly suggests that a strategy of seductive appearances for the female anatomical body, which playfully reverses any 'truth' concerning a female sexuality, is a far more engaging tactic for performance than the established presence of a feminist, marked, sexed, anatomical subject.

In order to initiate moves towards reclaiming seductive relations, these ideas were proposed.

1. A recognition of seductiveness as a signifying process, free from any essential association with the female body.

2. A recognition that the signifying qualities of 'masculine' and feminine', constructed in language and sexuality, are free-floating qualities, available for use by any anatomically determined body as artificial and illusive significations for dance performance.

3. A recognition that new dance vocabularies, in their fluid, visceral, fractured forms, are constructed notions of femininity, just as the phallic fetishistic femininity of ballet is also constructed.

Emerging simultaneously with a feminist quest for female visibility does not naturalise new dance language as a 'true' expression of internal drives that somehow belong to the female (or male) body, even though the movement may feel as if it arises from some internal place. This point acknowledges phallic fetishistic elements and 'real' femininity of feminist dance as constructed elements of dance language which can be employed, discarded or played between, to create performance illusion.

The analysis of gay male bodies in dance, who can also be considered to represent a site of sexuality and desire in performance, suggested four possible elements which evoke seductive relations. Cross-dressing, the performer's 'gaze', feminine dance qualities on anatomically male bodies and a relationship to physical pleasure, all of which focus on the clash between the real male body and feminine illusion. As both feminine and masculine significations are displaced from any 'natural' affiliation with gay male bodies, these significations, as constructed artifice, become available for
male and female bodies in performance.

As embodied practice, the constructed artifice of femininity has been considered as 'pleasure', and that of phallic/masculinity as 'power'. Having no natural affiliation to either gender, the practice of feminine/pleasure and phallic/power provides the initial embodied starting points for creating an ambiguity in performance between real and illusion. The 'problem' then became one of how the female body (as site of sexuality and desire) could reclaim seductive relations, not only as a practice of phallic and feminine significations in dance languages, but as androgynous illusions created by the embodied play of power and pleasure. At this point the term erotic androgyny was introduced and focus turned to an investigation of the androgynous possibilities of eroticism, or alternatively, an investigation into the eroticism of the androgynous body.

Part Three argued that 'masculine' and 'feminine' erotic practices, which appear to have interior ontological depths, can become a surface network of reference points between which the performer plays (Deleuze and Guattari 1988). The erotic practices explored, from Oedipal, bataille-esque, feminist and lesbian narratives of desire, revealed many different performative figures, only to expose the 'problem' once more, that the illusions of erotic androgyny are not evoked by 'being' any one of the figures. Defining them has been for the purpose of recognising their embodied experiential reality and their constructed performativity, allowing them to become reference points between which the illusions of erotic androgyny can be imagined. Erotic androgynous illusion is thus not a merging into one universal position, but a play between many erotic perspectives and between real body expressions of eroticism, which open out to become free-floating surface appearances. Consequently, the thesis revealed that the illusions of erotic androgyny evoke its practice and the practice evokes its illusions, one becoming recognised by the other as embodiment and imagination.

Regarding the theoretical research, it became clear as the thesis progressed and focus turned towards a strategy for seductive relations, that feminist and gender discourses regarding embodiment in subject/object relations were a limitation as much as a liberation. On the one hand, gender and feminist studies run parallel to the practice of performing and the necessity
to explore an engaging presence for the female body. On the other, these inquiries limit the potential of seductive relations, which are evoked not so much by the real ‘true’ female subjectivity on stage, but by the illusions it creates. However, the reappropriation of theories offered by post-structuralist philosophers, while useful to analogue the illusiveness of seductive relations, certainly do not appear to consider female embodiment as a high priority for discussion. In this way, refiguring erotic androgyny as a seductive force for the female body, has offered a challenge, to ignite the conflicting sparks between illusive ambiguity of performing presence and embodied reality of performing and watching. To a certain extent, this challenge has been met within the context of queer theory. Burston and Richardson (1995), whose writing is dedicated to queer readings of popular culture, suggest that

Queer Theory gives academic credence to something that lesbians and gay men have known all along - that the imagination is, by its very nature, promiscuous; that identification is never simply a matter of believing what you are seeing.

Burston and Richardson 1995 p.112

The terms eroticism and androgyny offer an oscillating play between sexuality and textuality, real and illusion, identity and ambiguity. Seduction, as a play of deceptive appearances, flies between the two, disrupting the truth of either, circling the heart of the conflict between real embodied eroticism and the illusive gender play of androgyny. As discursive sexual sites, these three terms (seduction, androgyny and eroticism) appear to slide easily into the slippery framework of queer theory, which blows freely over the coagulated conventional organisations of binary definitions.

For Sedgwick (1993), the term queer can refer to

the open mesh of possibilities, gaps, overlaps, dissonances and resonances, lapses and excesses of meaning when the constituent elements of anyone’s gender, of anyone’s sexuality aren’t made (or can’t be made) to signify monolithically.

Sedgwick 1993 p.8

For Probyn (1995), ‘the singularity of queer theory can only reside in the
way in which it puts desire to work’ (p.7), suggesting that where desire comes from can be exchanged for where it is going, removing the emphasis from the impossible-to-possess lost object offered by psychoanalysis. Eroticism has been described as the physical activity of experiencing desire, embodying both active (subject) and receptive (object) desiring, a physical practice that is experienced between these referents. Desire, as an erotic practice, becomes a creative, productive, inventive force to be thought of in terms of energies, movements, connections between surfaces, rather than as (only) a fixed binary of vertical depth. Consequently, seductive relations can be described as an encounter of desire itself between performer and spectator, where both are eroticised by their immediate interaction.

7.4: Before, During and After

This project has not built towards a final revelation in its theoretical content or its structure. The academic echelons of phallocentrism recommend that the ‘classic text’ is one which holds a final truth or builds towards a final climax, ‘the profound is what is discovered at the end’ (Barthes 1975 p.172). Yes, No, Maybe has proposed a mass of little climaxes, little ‘truths’, throughout the text, and quite probably the first and not the last has been the most profound. Possibly, the thesis tells a backwards story, which goes forward to another beginning at the end. The chapters have been arranged for the purpose of this immediate presentation, offering what appears to be a linear progression from one idea to the next. The order is fixed by the relations of words to the page, the page to the document, the document to submission, but until this point I have been laying the pages out flat and continuously rearranging them in different configurations, moving between them, making new links and connections.

In retrospect, it appears difficult to ascertain from the writing whether the ‘problem’, concerning seductiveness for female bodies, existed before the solutions offered here, or whether the solutions have created the problem. In this way, problems and solutions cannot really be identified as such, the problems may be fantasies and the solutions may have always existed. The ‘problem’, which has been central to the arguments, has really acted as a catalyst to explore a narrative for theory and performance, namely the
practice of erotic androgyny as a seductive force between performer and spectator. Erotic androgyny is not a definitive answer or a solution to the 'problem' of seductiveness, it is simply an imaginative model on which to consider certain elements in the art/act of performing.

A model is a heuristic device ... highlighting certain features while diminishing the significance of others; it is a selective rewriting of a situation whose complexity entails the possibility of other, alternative models.

Grosz 1994 p.209

As a fiction, Yes, No, Maybe: The Practice of Illusion offers an ongoing imaginative scenario, as another way to consider the illusive reality of a dancer's body in performance. As a practice, this might allow the performer a 'sexy ambiguity', retaining a desiring body while playing an illusive ambiguity between gender characteristics and dance language significations. It has been suggested that the illusions created through the movements of play between power and pleasure, phallic and feminine, male and female cannot be identifiably fixed and consequently maintain the act of desiring identity. The writing imagines the practice of erotic androgyny to acknowledge all gender and sexual identities, figures, characters and stories, but moves between them, playing and becoming, not being, suggesting and teasing, not fixing, moving towards and away, never static.

As I write this conclusion, I discover the latest edition of Ballet International is devoted to gender issues (August 1998). Turning the pages, I find articles titled 'For a Theory of Androgyny' (Odenthal 1998), 'The Masks of Seduction - gender between femininity and masquerade' (Wesemann 1998), even an article about myself 'Queer - the Female Side of Dance: Emilyn Claid and Yael Flexer' (Leask 1998). Leask writes of my work having a 'strong lesbian sensibility' moving towards androgyny as a 'third' gender (p.23). Wesemann writes of seduction as a 'female masquerade (p.64)', Odenthal theorises androgyny as the 'arrested movement', 'an unattainable goal', 'this sexuality-neutralising process' (p.60/61) with wonderful photographs of 'androgynous' dancers. However, these articles deal inadequately with the complexities of performing and watching the illusions of androgyny, as a seductive practice.
Before research began, androgyny, eroticism and seduction were terms I presumed could be identified in theory and could be ‘fixed’ in a photo, a gesture, a sexual practice, a performance image. Before the writing began I considered dance performance to be the place to ‘say’ something, where ideas could be expressed, issues and politics tackled, a situation to ‘put something across’, or make a statement in movement.

During the writing I recognised that the illusions of erotic androgyny continue to seduce for the reason that they cannot be fixed or identified. There is no specific figure, no performance image that says ‘this is erotic androgyny - this is it’. My thoughts consistently returned to the notion of an embodied practice of the play between figurative points of reference, a desiring body which spans the divide between genders and erotic practices. At no point has the thesis encouraged a ‘third thing’, a union of two, or imagined an image which can conflate vertical and horizontal, or phallic and feminine into an homogenised specific moment. The entire thesis appears to be linked by the notion of a play space between points, this point

this point

this point

and this point (for instance).

Perhaps this continued to fascinate because I was writing about it, attempting to characterise something that exists between points - yet that ‘between-ness’ has been given a name which constitutes another identity. Seductive relations, as an oscillating play of ‘real becoming illusion, presence becoming absence’, presents just as much of a challenge for the
writer as it does for the performer. Perhaps these 'ideas' continue to seduce me because I perform and I recognise the impossible challenge offered by 'embodying' a space between.

*After* the writing I am left with another inquiry, namely, how these ideas will shift performance practice. The next stage of this research requires a return to the studio. Here I am obviously interested to investigate how this writing affects what I *make* next. However, my need to express 'ideas' in performance has been satisfied by the writing, which suggests I might now be able to 'let go' of everything I have written and refigure, in the studio, the reasons for making performance. Consequently I find myself re-turning to why I undertook this research in the first place. The investigation emerged from an inquiry into the act/art of performing, the 'HOW' of performing rather than the 'WHAT', and consequently how the art of performing affects the performance act.

Those moments, so difficult for a dancer who is trained to keep moving, when she stands still on stage, walks on and off stage, focuses a gaze, prepares to move, before, during, after, in front of and behind the choreography which defines him, those are the moments to which I might apply this theory/practice of erotic androgynous illusion as a seductive force in performance.
Chapter 7 Becoming a Play Between End Notes

1 For Foucault (1979), sexuality as 'discourse' is created and deployed by a historically specific power system, which is itself constructed through exclusionary means, dependent on and inviting what it excludes in order to perpetuate its power. Homosexuality as a 'discourse', constructed in the late nineteenth century, is discussed, analysed, medicalised, legalised, nurtured through scientific discourse, positioned in a sequential relationship to heterosexuality, deployed by a patriarchal power system of western culture and becoming a necessary and much-discussed 'abnormal', from which the so-called 'normal' defines itself. For Butler (1990) 'systems of power produce the subjects they subsequently come to represent ... the subjects regulated by such structures are, by virtue of being subjected to them, formed, defined, and reproduced in accordance with the requirements of those structures' (Butler 1990 p.2). If the so-called normal is constructed over the abnormal, then there is no original heterosexual normality, only a constructed normal revealing 'the original to be nothing other than parody of the idea of the natural and the original ... thus, gay is to straight not as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy' (Butler 1990 p.31).

2 For further reading on femmes and phalluses, see Hart's article Doing It Anyway (1997). Parallels can be drawn with the discussion concerning gay S/M in Chapter 5.

3 For further reading on the instability inherent to butch and femme roles, see Butler 1991, Hart 1997, 1998.

4 Tammy Whynot first appeared in the Split Britches show Upwardly Mobile Home (1984). Lois has now developed this character for her hostess role in the Club Bent cabaret shows (1997).

5 Interestingly, these figures seldom appear in dance theatre. The physical training and discipline automatically encourages the transference of literal and sexual figures of lesbian 'discourse' into movement qualities and dynamic energies. Literal characterisation of the butch/femme dynamic in theatre is more likely to manifest itself, in dance, as either high-energy aggressive dancing or lyrical fluidity rather than the literal theatrical play with sexual dynamics. Red of The Sweet (1991 video 2), explored the extremes of both aggressive, outwardly focused dynamic in one section, and gentle, fluid, non-linear lyrical softness in another. The different qualities of these dynamics can be described as actively cutting the space and receptively absorbing the space, which could, if read within a lesbian spectatorial context, represent qualities of butch and femme, however, these roles can not be identified as such. Furthermore, dancers identified as being lesbian suggests a conflict with creative aspirations. Being lesbian in a homophobic culture labels the dancer with a sexuality simply by deviating from the 'normal', which can mark all her work, whether it is 'movement' or 'issue' based performance. Because dance as an art form is performed on the body, coming out becomes closing in, being enclosed by a 'lesbian' discourse, even if the acts of that discourse cannot be discursively defined (Butler 1991).

6 Hart (1993) does recognise that Weaver and Shaw 'do not remain fixed within the femme and butch roles, but rather alternate between them' (p.127), in Split Britches' performance of Anniversary Waltz (1990).

7 For Marcalo (1997), the play of the lesbian gaze displaces Mulvey's 'masculine' positioning of female spectatorship within the heterosexual binary context of male gaze (see end note 6, Chapter 6). Drawing on Derrida and his deconstruction of Being and Truth as a play of presence/absence, Marcalo suggests that Mulvey's theories of the gaze not only excludes a female looking (opening a debate on feminist subjectivity), but also plays into the metaphysical structures of male and female, subject and object positions as fixed. Marcalo suggests an alternative 'queerotic' gaze, which is the act of
doing and playing ‘where the centre of the erotic structure is not an original ‘presence’, but an original play, for erotic signification is understood as the very process through which maleness and femaleness are installed’ (Marcalo 1997 p.20).

8 Other theorists reinterpret Freud's Fort-Da for their own purposes, including Doane (1987) Grosz (1990) and Phelan (1993). For Lechte (1994), Derrida's deconstruction reveals not only how ‘philosophically, the ‘laws’ of thought are found to be wanting. Rather, the tendency evident in Derrida’s work is a concern to generate effects, to open up the philosophical terrain so that it might continue to be the site of creativity and invention.’ (Lechte 1994 p.109).


10 ‘Hermaphrodyke’ was used during early research for Le Flesh, for publicity and for Art Council funding applications. Photographer Del la Grace Volcano, also used it as a working title for a project, dominated by photos of herself with her girlfriend. For her, hermaphrodykes are not ‘sexless creatures who crave recognition as “the third gender”. We believe in the infinite capacity of gender to mutate and transgress all numerical boundaries. Our purpose is to cross lines, not just once, but as many times as it takes to weave a web strong enough to walk on’ (Grace in interview 1995).

11 For Grosz, the number of theorists who continue the attempt to understand lesbian and gay relations through the discourse of psychoanalysis is surprising, given Freud’s rigid analyses of the homosexual woman, an analysis which Grosz summarises as, ‘insofar as the woman occupies the feminine position, she can only take up the place of the object of desire and never that of the subject of desire; and in so far as she takes up the position of the subject of desire, the subject who desires, she must renounce any position as feminine’ (1995 p.178).

12 Queer theory is founded on performative actions of perverse, displaced, subversive, outlawed sexual practices and gender identities. However, in the past the term has suggested a unifying dumping ground for lesbian, gay and transgendered identities, in fact for all perversities that can be identified against the ‘normal’ (Grosz 1995). For Sedgwick (1993), these perversities are all very different one from the other, claiming that the notion of a dumping ground can be contradicted by the ‘experimental, linguistic, epistemological, representational, political adventures attaching to the very many of us who may at times be moved to describe ourselves as (among other possibilities) pushy femmes, radical faeries, fantasists, drags, clones, leatherfolk, ladies in tuxedos, feminist women or feminist men, masturbators, bulldaggers, divas, Snap! queens, butch bottoms, storytellers, transsexuals, aunties, wannabes, lesbian-identified men or lesbians who sleep with men’ (Sedgwick 1993 p.8).
Figure 1. Ballet Solo, 15 years old.
Figure 2. 'Black Queen' in *Swan Lake* (Bruhn 1965), 18 years old.
Figure 3. Le Flesh (Claid 1995).

Photographs: Leanne Harris
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