

**Linguistic markers as evidence for cultural  
awareness:**

A critical examination of international critiques of a South  
African dance company

by  
Ann-Christin Görtz

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Supervisor: Ms Taryn Bernard  
Co-supervisor: Dr Kate Huddleston  
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
Department of General Linguistics

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Ann-Christin Görtz

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## **Abstract**

Viewing cross-cultural dance performances on international tours or as part of international dance festivals has become common practice all over the world. For critique writers, choreographers/ dancers and the audience the accessibility of such a diverse variety of dance has both advantages and disadvantages. Cross-cultural differences in these performances challenge strategies of viewing and perception which may lead to aesthetic enrichment but these performances also risk being misunderstood. In dance critique writing, such a misunderstanding may result in a negative critique projecting, in a worst scenario, negative prejudices on the respective cultures.

This thesis investigates how attitudes towards, and perceptions of, cultural differences are reflected in cross-cultural dance critiques, through the use of particular linguistic and stylistic devices. Analysis strategies deriving from Critical Discourse Analysis and Text Analysis are used to uncover the critique's strategies to communicate their evaluation including ways of persuasion and power. I analyse six critiques from three countries on the performance *Beautiful Me* performed on international tours by the Vuyani Dance Theatre from South Africa. My initial hypothesis is that cultural differences may lead to negative critiques due to intercultural misunderstanding. Since viewing Performance Art is not only influenced by the critique writer's cultural background but also by their perception attitude towards the performance, the analysis takes perception modes such as a theatre semiotic approach and a phenomenological approach into consideration.

Interestingly, different perception modes seem to have a greater impact on the outcome of a critique than cross-cultural differences. This means that most negative evaluations must have their origin in the applied strategy of viewing and perceiving dance. The critic seems to interpret and embed the perceived features of the dance performance into specific cultural or socio-political contexts forming an individual, often complex evaluation.

## **Opsomming**

Om te kyk na kruiskulturele dansuitvoerings deur dansgeselskappe op internasionale toere of as deel van internasionale dansfeeste, het wêreldwyd algemene praktyk geword. Vir kritici, choreografe/dansers en die gehoor hou die toeganklikheid van so 'n diverse verskeidenheid dans sowel voordele as nadele in. Kruiskulturele verskille in hierdie vertonings daag kyk- en waarneem-strategieë uit, wat tot estetiese verryking mag lei. Daar is egter ook 'n moontlikheid dat hierdie vertonings verkeerd geïnterpreteer mag word. Só 'n waninterpretasie in dansresensies mag lei tot negatiewe kritiek wat, in uiterste gevalle, negatiewe vooroordele oor die betrokke kulture projekteer.

Hierdie tesis doen ondersoek na die wyse waarop houdings teenoor en persepsies van kultuurverskille in kruiskulturele dansresensies deur middel van spesifieke talige en stilistiese middele gereflekteer word. Analitiese strategieë uit die velde Kritiese Diskoersanalise en Teksanalise word gebruik om kritici se strategieë wat 'n oordeel kommunikeer, bloot te lê. Ek analiseer ses resensies uit drie lande wat handel oor die vertoning Beautiful Me wat deur die Suid-Afrikaanse dansgeselskap Vuyani Dance Theatre tydens internasionale toere opgevoer is. My aanvanklike hipotese is dat kultuurverskille aanleiding mag gee tot negatiewe kritiek vanweë interkulturele misverstande. Aangesien die beoordeling van Uitvoerende Kunste nie slegs deur die kritikus se kulturele agtergrond beïnvloed word nie, maar ook deur hul waarnemingshouding teenoor die vertoning, neem die analise waarnemingsmodusse soos 'n teater-semiotiek-benadering en 'n fenomenologiese benadering in ag.

Interessant genoeg, lyk dit asof verskillende waarnemingsmodusse 'n groter impak het op die uitkoms van kritiek as kruiskulturele verskille. Dít beteken dat die meeste negatiewe oordele hul oorsprong moet hê in die toegepaste strategie van dans kyk en waarneem. Dit blyk dat die kritikus die waargenome eienskappe van die dansuitvoering interpreteer en inbed in spesifieke kulturele of sosio-politiese kontekste wat aanleiding gee tot die verskillende, dikwels komplekse maniere van beoordeling.

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## **1 CHAPTER ONE: Introduction**

Dance companies that are internationally active are confronted with a culturally diverse audience when showing their artistic work. The audience of each country (or in some cases each city) visited by the company has different forms of conscious or unconscious bias and various expectations of the performance. Therefore, the degree of toleration and acceptance of several kinds of routines and dance executions may vary to different extents. In their critiques, critique writers do not limit their description to the artistic and aesthetic elements of the staging, but they reflect on the general attitude of the audience combining them with their own personal preferences, feelings and evaluations, which are, in most cases, culturally bound. The expression of preferences and sentiments on behalf of the writer is essential to the critique itself, and this judgement can appear in a strongly polarised manner, as well as in a more subtle way. Some critique writers prefer a differentiated judgement that evaluates some parts of the performance positively and some negatively. In any case, this judgement is deliberate, as the reader of a critique expects to obtain some kind of advice as to whether a performance is worth seeing or not.

Due to the fact that different writers have different perspectives with regards to the nature of critique writing, and to the way questions about the perception of dance performance should be approached, the outcome and the structure of the critiques of one and the same performance may vary. Sometimes the judgement of a performance is not based solely on the performance itself. The judgement can also be influenced by differing cultural assumptions. In this case, a negative critique could be produced simply because the performance did not meet the audience's or the critic's expectations. The critique writer must therefore be aware of the cultural differences which confront them whenever they write about a performance created from a different culture. Since dance needs to be viewed as both an aesthetic and a cultural practice that reflects the beliefs of a particular culture, my assumption is that intercultural misunderstandings or cultural knowledge gaps may lead to negative critiques.

### **1.1 Situational context and research aims**

The following appeal from South African specialist writer in dance and theatre critiques, Adrienne Sichel, reflects the dependency of South African Contemporary Dance on Western formalistic conventions and structures in terms of perceiving dance performances:



[... T]here needs to be a total re-assessment or abolition of Western formalism in the critical approach. Equally, there is a responsibility to create a new criticism that embraces evolving aesthetics, intensive hybridities and techniques. We urgently need to interrogate, research and document the creative processes, the conditions, the intellectual and philosophical underpinnings of this choreographic repertory, which is being produced on the continent, and we need to do this, not from a distance, but here in Africa (Sichel 2004:24).

An investigation of the cross-cultural differences in ways of and approaches to perceiving dance and dance critiques suggests that, particularly from “Western” critics, respect must be shown to African performance artists who are developing individual identities independent of Western formalism.

One factor that influences intercultural misunderstanding concerns the attitude in perception with which a dance performance is approached and evaluated: I will limit my focus to two main approaches practised in Theatre and Dance Studies, namely the theatre semiotic approach and the phenomenological approach. They will be considered in order to differentiate whether a negative evaluation is based on cultural presumptions or derives from a certain perception mode relatively independent of the writer’s cultural background.

By combining cultural and perceptive concerns, the thesis aims to create certain awareness amongst critique writers and readers with regards to the evaluation of dance staging. I hope that this will help to prevent judgements based on cultural prejudice and will increase the awareness and appreciation of cultural differences. The analysis will provide suggestions on what to bear in mind in the field of dance critique writing in order to assist writers in avoiding culturally biased judgement in favour of truly aesthetic critiques. Even though the fields of intercultural communication and the perception of international art are interwoven, critics should be aware of cultural differences and should be able to make their judgements solely on the basis of their sensual, corporeal and kinaesthetic perception<sup>1</sup> of the piece of art.

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<sup>1</sup> During the cognitive process of perception, the individual becomes aware of what surrounds them. There are different perceptive channels that are used in order to transfer stimuli: Sensual perception refers to our five senses, whereas corporeal perception means that the viewer focuses on their personal corporeal reactions such as holding their breath, shivering, etc. while attending a dance performance. Before, however, being able to attribute emotions and feelings and thus detect corporeal reactions, the viewer needs to perceive movement kinaesthetically. Kinaesthetic perception has a stronger reference to the perception of movement and stimulates the viewer’s muscle memory. Kinaesthesia thus helps to imagine a movement seen on stage executed in the viewer’s own body and provides the basis for any corporeal reactions intended through muscles. Since the complex differentiation of the various kinds of perception are not subject of this thesis, I will refer to perception in general including sensual, kinaesthetic and corporeal perception to the same degree unless stated differently.

## **1.2 Research questions**

The research questions of the study are as follows:

- i. How are cultural assumptions reflected linguistically in critiques on cross-cultural dance performances?
- ii. How do certain perception modes influence the judgement of a particular dance performance?

In order to answer these questions I will investigate both intra-cultural (South African critics judging a South African performance) and cross-cultural (British and American critics judging the same South African performance series) critiques in order to draw a cross-cultural comparison. Linguistic features and rhetoric devices will serve as objects of investigation, enlightening mechanisms of power in discourse. Language is understood as a means of power execution and as a means of setting ideologies in an intercultural frame of dance critique writing. The thesis' conclusion aims at suggesting an approach to writing on the perception and the experience of a dance performance on behalf of the spectator that considers the findings regarding the linguistic field of intercultural communication. Based on the analysis I will suggest a different writing style as well as a different perception mode that might be useful for professional dance critique writers.

## **1.3 Research design and outline of the thesis**

For the study I will focus on the internationally active South African dance company Vuyani Dance Theatre whose artistic director and choreographer is Gregory Vuyani Maqoma. The company will be presented from both a local (i.e. South African) perspective as well as from a British and American perspective. A general overview on Maqoma's artistic way of working will be complemented by background information on the company and the dance piece in order to extend the reader's knowledge of the cultural and dance-specific background of the company. After the presentation of the company and its contextualisation in a specific dance culture, a selection of six critiques taken from newspapers and online platforms will be described and analysed. Linguistic features of local critiques will be compared to those written from American and British cultural backgrounds.

The analysis of the critiques will focus on those linguistic devices that convey judgements on behalf of the writer. I assume that an investigation of these linguistic devices can indicate

whether the motive for the judgement is personal, or whether it is culture-based and indicates a lack of cultural awareness. Therefore, a general overview of the practice of dance critique writing will be given and used as a basis to analyse the critiques. Background information regarding the linguistic theory of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) will be provided. Bloor and Bloor (2007) provide an overview of figurative language and rhetorical devices in a CDA context. The specific analysis of texts will be undertaken from different perspectives: To give an introduction to those fields of CDA that are relevant to both Applied Linguistics and Dance Studies, I will focus on Wodak (1995, 2001), Widdowson (2004), Fairclough (1992, 95, 2001) and Van Dijk (1985, 2001, 09), who refer back to ideas and thoughts about discourse, ideology and language. The topics of power, control and ideology will be covered by readings from Fowler (1985), Kress (1985) and Fairclough (1990).

This theoretical background will be the basis for the analysis, relying specifically on a set of criteria identified in readings such as Kress (1985), Fowler (1985) and Bloor and Bloor (2007). The chosen analytical procedure will be applied separately on each text so as to allow for cross-cultural comparison. Identified similarities and differences will lead to an evaluation of my assumptions about cultural influences on critiques, as well as the outcomes stemming from these critiques.

#### **1.4 Linguistic and dance specific core terminology**

The core linguistic terminology used in this thesis is mostly taken from CDA that works with notions of power and control in and through “discourse practice”<sup>2</sup>. Discourse in this thesis is understood as a communicative event in which language use is shaped by society and vice versa (Van Dijk 2001:98; Fairclough 1992:8). Van Dijk sees a fundamental connection between ‘discourse’ and ‘communicative event’ defining the latter as anything contributing meaning through any kind of communicative medium such as conversations and written texts, gestures and facial work, layout and images (Van Dijk 2001:98). Fairclough refers to “discourse” simply as ‘language use’ emphasising a dialectical relationship of shaping discourse through society and vice versa.

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<sup>2</sup> A term used by Michel Foucault (Eagleton in Widdowson 2004:130). Foucault understands the process of signification analysed in CDA not as something underlying the discourse waiting to be discovered. Signification is established and formed through the practice of discourse. Thus, while speaking, while practicing discourse, the discourse itself is created (Nightingale 1999:168).

In my analysis, a dance critique is understood as belonging to the linguistic unit “text”, specifically of the persuasive genre of critiques. This genre of text typically expresses an opinion where the writer uses their creativity and ideological stances to formulate a personal statement. Texts, more specifically dance critiques, appear within the social unit “discourse”, in this case the discourse of African Contemporary Dance.

Reviews are understood as means of power execution since they may influence the attitude of a certain group of people towards or against a particular dance performance. Thus, the linguistic way of presenting and evaluating a performance may have a great impact on how the readership reacts and may determine whether they are persuaded or discouraged to attend the performance. Since this kind of power and control execution is applied on dance critiques, more specifically on dance critiques of a South African Contemporary Dance group, it is important to create sensitivity to the concept ‘African Contemporary Dance’<sup>3</sup>. The aesthetics or norms of this dance style are of lesser concern to this thesis; more relevant is, however, the choice and the construction of the meanings attached to the term. “Contemporary Dance” is a term commonly used for a dance style that is currently practiced, according to its time-dependent instead of its local categorisation, all over the world. Language practice, however, shows that Contemporary Dance is primarily located in the Western hemisphere, namely the United States and Europe, excluding African and Asian countries. The terms “African Contemporary Dance” and “Contemporary African Dance” may convey slightly different notions; definitions, however, remain imprecise. The least restricting or discriminatory term might be “Contemporary Dance from Africa”, as it attempts to overcome notions of superiority, power and ideology.

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<sup>3</sup> It would make sense to call a dance style practiced by a South African company “South African Contemporary Dance”. Major readings, however, use the term “African Contemporary Dance” or “Contemporary African Dance”. Since the labelling of the dance style is not the major interest of this thesis, I will follow Kodesh (2006), Douglas et.al. (2006), Maqoma (2002/2006), Loots and Lang-Jahanger (2005) and Reddy (2006) and use the term “African Contemporary Dance” throughout the thesis – well aware of its controversial background and its ideological impact.

## **2 CHAPTER TWO: Literature review – an introduction to Critical Analysis**

This chapter will present a collection of selected readings published between 1985 and 2009. The chapter is constructed so as to give an overview of CDA and its methods and positioning in relation to other Discourse Analysis (DA) methods. To follow the scope of this thesis, this chapter focuses specifically on those aspects of CDA pertaining to the topic of dance critiques and their analysis. The respective theoretical aspects are introduced according to thematic relevance. There is a strong focus on Widdowson's (2004) critical examination of different scholars in CDA (mostly Wodak and Fairclough). These investigations are supported by Wodak (1995, 2001) and Fairclough (1990, 1992, 1995, 2001) themselves and become more specific with Van Dijk (1985, 2001, 2009) who has an approach that can best be related to Dance Studies and the critical analysis of dance critiques. His readings also give a detailed model of the interconnection between discourse, society and text.

Fowler (1985) complements the overview on critical analysis in attributing further notions of power and control to discourse whereas Kress (1985) provides significant insight into the concept of ideology and how it underlies different discourses.

### **2.1 Analysis of dance critiques**

Generally speaking, the writing of dance critiques focuses on two different content-related topics: on the one hand there is a description of the performance and on the other hand there is the writer's observation regarding the perceived audience's reaction to the performance. This observational-descriptive text turns into a critique when the writer's opinion on the piece is made evident in the second part of the text. This personal judgment is not always explicit, but may often be expressed implicitly, when hidden meanings are conveyed indirectly by words, linguistic features and stylistic devices, which can have a pragmatic effect on the reader (Van Dijk 2001:106). Thus, the perception of, and subsequent writing about and describing dance movements in the form of dance critiques, creates a discourse around dance. Like any discourse, this thesis aims to show that dance discourses are to a large extent culture-bound, and cultural ideologies influence the perception and description of the performance itself.

To discover the underlying meaning and the pragmatic impact of communicative events, such as, in this case, dance critiques, one has to investigate the writer's intention, and their socio-cultural perspective, especially in relation to the performance-specific field of dance (Van

Dijk 2001:106). The reader declares the author (or “critic”), who constructs a positive or a negative statement on a piece of art, an expert in this particular field and thus accepts them authoritatively (Fowler 1985:67). A problematic consequence of this is that the reader might not reflect critically on the critique, nor question the writer’s judgment regarding the performance. Furthermore, the reader might not be aware of the cultural framework or cognitive structures that lead to a particular categorisation. Seeing a performance as stemming from a different cultural background from to the one they know might create a feeling of insecurity about the unknown. However, an un-reflected judgement of such a performance might cause the writer to criticise the unfamiliar aspects and to tag them as “bad”, whereas the familiar elements might be seen as beautiful, meaningful and thus the performance could be characterised as “good”. This polarisation automatically leads to a negative opinion towards the alien and a positive towards the known aspects and can turn into a generalisation (Van Dijk 2001:107). Thus, critique writing is not only related to the performance and its perception by the audience, but it becomes an ideologically biased discourse in which a trend to a culturally positive self-representation and a negative other-presentation can emerge (Van Dijk 2001:103).

According to Widdowson (2004:102-3), scholars of CDA believe that “no linguistic expression is ideologically neutral” so that any result of an analysis can only be interpretation of the discourse itself. The perception of art is also ideologically biased. Even more critical is the perception of critiques based on personal evaluative judgements undertaken from specific socio-cultural and political backgrounds. Despite these individually biased limits, it is assumed and suggested that a neutral analysis of writings about contemporary dance pieces is possible in so far as it might discover and highlight underlying social, cultural and ideological impacts and discover consequences of hidden power relations implemented through language.

## **2.2 Concepts of ideology and ideological discourses**

Ideology is generally seen as a form of social knowledge that relates social practices to social structures (Kress 1985; Bloor and Bloor 2007; Fowler 1985). However, a consistent definition of the term “ideology” cannot be settled; its meaning ranges from “system of ideas” or “worldview” (Kress 1985:29) to “value systems of a social group” (Bloor and Bloor 2007:18) and “ideas of the dominant, ruling class” (Kress 1985:29). A more general description defines

“ideology” as “a largely unconscious theory of the way the world works accepted as commonsense” kept current by the continuous reproduction of discourse (Fowler 1985:65).

The ideologies underlying social practices, find one way – according to Fowler (1985:66), the most powerful way – of articulation in written and spoken language which therefore requires an examination of language on lexical and grammatical-syntactical levels (Kress 1985:30). Ideological content can be identified by analysing the selection of linguistic forms on behalf of the author (which results in the creation and reproduction of discourses) as well as their specific contextual combinations (Kress 1985:31). However, the co-presence of other linguistic forms creates the space for interpretation on behalf of the reader. This means that linguistic forms can have multifaceted meanings when analysed on their own; once related to and embedded in a discourse, the intended meaning becomes clearer.

Relating ideology to discourse is of fundamental importance to CDA since ideology finds its expression in discourse; no linguistic form is pragmatically or socially meaningful without an ideological backbone. A particular discourse is organised and structured according to an underlying ideology, interwoven in such a manner that Kress states that “ideology and discourse are aspects of the same phenomenon, regarded from two different standpoints” (Kress 1985:30). The system of different linguistic features appearing contextually in a discourse incorporates and expresses a specific meaning and a choice of content which are influenced by a certain set of norms and beliefs, the so-called ‘ideology’ of the speaker (Kress 1985:30-1). In this case the writer of a dance critique is influenced by the set of norms and beliefs that are familiar to them and that they prefer. Consequently, evidence of ideological and socio-political attitudes in texts can always be found (Widdowson 2004:130-1).

As noted in the introduction the dance critiques examined in this thesis appear within the discourse of African Contemporary Dance. Kress refers to discourse as a stable unit and to texts as relatively unpredictable and thus major causes for linguistic change (Kress 1985:28-9, 32). Moreover, newspapers, magazines and more recently online news platforms, are identified as specialist media in producing and reproducing ideologies by working with selected signs and thus creating a biased worldview. Keeping this in mind, the analysis of dance critiques becomes exceedingly relevant for the general discourse on Contemporary Dance. Critiques are powerful instruments that, if published in a well-known and frequently

consulted medium (magazine or internet-platform), can influence a whole readership in the perception of dance (Fowler 1985:68).

### **2.2.1 Concepts of power and control**

Fowler describes ‘power’ as a transitive concept of an asymmetrical relationship characterised by the “ability of people and institutions to control the behaviour and material lives of others” (Fowler 1985:61). Thus, powerful people construct social reality by implementing their ideology mostly through language. Language use is, according to Fowler, a social practice which constitutes social roles enabling people to claim certain rights regarding the exercise of power and thus create a social reality of inequality (Fowler 1985:61-2). The way in which language is applied is accompanied by certain status attributions such as prestige or authority and powerlessness or deprivation. This means that the dialect or language variation one speaks automatically reveals a certain social status or role the other attributes to the speaker (Fowler 1985:62, 67). This complex topic of creating social roles and social identity through language use will not be elaborated on at this point; but what is crucial to understand this thesis is the fact that language use is a means of exercising power by authorities.

Once an imbalance in power distribution is established, it is reproduced and maintained by linguistic practice. The most severe and pervasive power inequalities in language are often executed by official and public institutions such as newspapers and magazines which have high print runs or well-frequented internet news platforms. The constant, implicit affirmation of the established ideology of an authority paralyses the readership in so far as the reader often does not question or criticise that which is published. Rather than applying criticism, the linguistically and visually constructed ideology is perceived as natural and unchangeable (Fowler 1985:67-8). The more subtle and implicit the ideology is hidden in texts and images, the less the readership reflects on that which they have read and unconsciously reproduces an ideology. Thus the more subtle the manner in which an ideology is implemented, the more powerful and threatening it becomes (Fairclough 1992:3, 5-6). This is pertinent to this thesis because the personal opinions expressed in dance critiques can – if expressed in a dexterous, implicit way – cause great harm to the choreographer’s and performer’s reputations.

Describing and explaining the enactment of power and control by authorities in discourses and relating them to underlying social and ideological strands is a major aim of CDA (Fairclough 1992:6; Bloor and Bloor 2007:27). Revealing and criticising underlying



mechanisms of power and control enable conscious readers to challenge and disrupt them and to implement alternative social structures (Van Dijk 1985:6-7; Fairclough 1992:9-10). Therefore, a CDA analysis of a text starts on a syntactical and lexical level and broadens to contextual explanations and interpretations of institutional discourses, such as, in this particular case, dance critiques on the South African Contemporary Dance company Vuyani Dance Theatre (Bloor and Bloor 2007:30).

### **2.3 Critical Discourse Analysis and general linguistic aspects of critiques**

According to Widdowson every text not only bears a certain ideological stance expressed through pragmatic interpretations of grammar, but it also permits a variety of interpretations, depending on the research question and the aims of investigation. With this Widdowson finds CDA selective – the researcher is permitted to assign meaning according to their preference or prejudice without taking all possibilities, maybe less offensive ones, into account. He explains that critical analyses have their origins in practical criticism and literary hermeneutics, a theory also known as stylistics<sup>4</sup> which extends from literary to non-literary texts (Widdowson 2004:121, 129, 131).

#### **2.3.1 Critical Discourse Analysis – an overview on relevant aspects**

CDA is a form of linguistic analysis that takes, besides linguistic features, social, political and cultural factors into account. These characteristics take the critical analysis beyond the goals of stylistics. In stylistics aesthetic values are complemented by socio-political ideologies encoded in the text (Widdowson 2004:131). It is assumed that an underlying socio-political meaning inherent in discursive practices is not accessible to all readers, so it needs to be revealed by assigning meaningful significance to linguistic features of texts. The relevance of the features (no text can be depletively analysed) depends on the scholar's aim and the applied research question (Widdowson 2004:129, 138, Van Dijk 2001:99) Thus, CDA includes interdisciplinary methods and multidisciplinary theories that investigate the complex relationship between discourse structures and social structures such as cultural, moral, socio-political and ideological issues (Van Dijk 2001:96; Widdowson 2004:89). Any CDA study must be explicit, systematic, relevant to actual social problems and scholarly reliable in order to produce adequate and useful observations and descriptions (Van Dijk 2001:96-7).

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<sup>4</sup> Fowler sees the origins of CDA in literary criticism and critical linguistics, labelling the combined area of enquiry 'linguistic criticism' (Fowler in Widdowson 2004:130).

Fairclough avoids referring to CDA as a ‘method’ or a ‘theory’ because of the fundamental interdisciplinary nature of CDA. Theories and methods from different disciplines meet in CDA in order to provide tools of analysis enabling the critical examination a certain discourse. For every investigation, the theoretical and methodological setting must be reorganised according to the context of discourse and the scholarly aims and participants (Van Dijk 2001:98). CDA could be described as operating on a meta-level since it analyses the functions and process of discourses in different disciplines, or it can be understood as a discipline that relates disciplines to each other and evaluates them within themselves. How far and in what way the different disciplines complement and thus mediate each other is also a field of investigation for CDA (Fairclough 2001:121-22; Widdowson 2004:97, 145). In other words, CDA oscillates between “a focus on shifts in the social structuring of semiotic diversity (orders of discourse), and a focus on the productive semiotic work” in texts representing social interaction (Fairclough 2001:124). Moreover, Van Dijk emphasises that CDA works across disciplines in order to adapt its methods and theories to subjects of investigation and thus establish a relationship between the social problem and the occurring discourse (Van Dijk 2001:98).

Widdowson differentiates between Fairclough’s and Wodak’s levels of precision in specifications of CDA: Fairclough attributes crucial importance to circumstances of production and consumption of a discourse, namely the study of the context, society and culture related to a particular discourse but he does not give a detailed model of their inter-relation (Fairclough in Widdowson 2004:138). Related to this axiom, Widdowson emphasises that context is not encoded in text, concluding that discourse interpretation cannot solely be based on textual corpus analysis, but must be a combination of textual and discursive analysis (Widdowson 2004:138). Wodak uses discourse analysis broadly in this sense and develops more precise differentiations in a circle-based model in order to place texts into a contextual and historical frame. She differentiates between the local situational context on the micro level of discourse from the broader cultural context localised on the macro level of discourse (Widdowson 2004:138-40). Bloor and Bloor (2007:27) on the other hand understand both situation and cultural context levels to be almost indefinitely closely intertwined to the extent that they limit the analysis of context to linguistic features that indicate notions of power and control. The context of culture preconditions the creation and development of a discourse, whereas its actual realisation takes place on the micro level, the level of the individual and

their understanding of social identity and role. This also means that the situational context is only created through discourse; the relationship of discourse and context can thus be called a dialectical one (Widdowson 2004:139).

Contextual information, however, is considered as unnecessary to be said, because it is information that has already been established through discourse and now is commonly known. Cultural and situational context are assumed to be familiar to the recipient and thus cannot be identified through textual corpus analysis which provides consistent information on the text, on what is explicitly and implicitly uttered. Pre-textual information – the sum of information published through any means of communication before the corpus analysis – is also taken for granted. Different from contextual information, the pre-text is assumed to be known from having read the respective text or having overheard certain speech events or having otherwise participated in a communicative event (Widdowson 2004:122-3). Widdowson agrees that part of contextual reality is encoded conventionally in grammatical and syntactical structures which narrow the pragmatic possibilities of the interpretation of particular expressions (Widdowson 2004:124; 133, 138, 144-45). The analysis of co-text describes the immediate surroundings of the respective linguistic unit and is dealt with in corpus analysis; the co-text could be understood as textually relevant leading towards the contextualisation of a text. Stubbs and Widdowson (2004:124) therefore label text analysis “a corrective to the CDA tendency” stressing an interwoven form of text corpus and context analysis to come to a global interpretation result.

The interpretation of text as discourse underlies the question of the author’s intention, for instance a positive or negative evaluation of a dance performance (Widdowson 2004:125). Thus, it is crucial to describe a text precisely on all relevant linguistic levels known from literary criticism, embedding the results into a cultural and historic context (related to the author and the text itself) and making inter-textual links. There is no strict methodology that could be applied to every text or communicative event but the scholar needs to find an appropriate way to connect their research goals with the corpus of a discourse (Widdowson 2004:145).

In his context models, Van Dijk (2001:108-11) understands the cultural context as the global context structured by social, political, cultural and historic strands. He calls the situational context “local context” and also applies it to the individual participants of a communicative

event, their social roles and intentions. Moreover, he assumes that through the interpretation of the local context and the relevance of the discourse for certain individual, so-called “mental models” are constructed which again influence the creation of discourse on a local level. Mental models control choices of word order, style, rhetoric, etc. as well as they control the pragmatic understanding of a discourse. According to Van Dijk “context models are crucial because they are the interface between mental information [...] and actual meanings being constructed in discourse” (Van Dijk 2001:110-1). Context and mental models play complicated, dialectical roles in the creation and maintenance of discourses.

Hence, Van Dijk identifies the so-called “context of discourse” similarly to Widdowson in differentiating between personal and social cognition and the local and global structures of society (Van Dijk 2001:97-8). The term ‘cognition’ enters into Van Dijk understanding of CDA through the emphasis on personal perception modes of communicative events and the multifaceted possibilities of interpretation. Thus, he includes personal cultural values and beliefs into his basic structural-functional analysis of linguistic features (Van Dijk 2001:97). This focus makes Van Dijk’s theory particularly interesting for the personal perception-based analysis and interpretation of dance critiques.

Linguistic usage, according to Halliday, encodes different representations of the world, which means that, although people might speak about the same thing they use different syntactic strategies and stylistic devices representing different worldviews (Halliday in Widdowson 2004:115). Specific aspects of CDA focus on the contextualisation of texts as linguistic products inside or outside of a specific discourse (Locke 2004:38). The aim of CDA is on the one hand to describe and explain a certain discourse and on the other hand to discover the ideological rules and constraints leading and underlying the discourse which Fairclough calls “orders of discourse” (Wodak 1995:208; Wodak 2001:10). It is not only the analysis of discourse but also the structure of its construction in relation to the social self and identity of the individual, the relationship between people and a resulting construction of systems of knowledge and belief which need to be considered in critical analysis (Widdowson 2004:90). To achieve this aim, it is necessary to analyse concepts of ideology, history and power as outlined above and explained in more detail in chapter 5 (Wodak 2001:3, 7).

A discourse is formed by specific rules, for example everyday talk and cultural practices over time and space; these parameters can be found in the concept of power (the relation between

dominance and subordination), the concept of history (background information related to time) and the concept of ideology (the creator of individual identity including ways of thinking and acting) (Wodak 1995:204, 209; Mumby and Clair 1997:184, 186). CDA investigates the interrelation of these concepts and the way a discourse is created, maintained and reproduced through discourse as communication and its obscurity, namely the opaque relationship between the concepts, as a means of socio-political power and influence. The opacity itself can be seen as a means of power with which the more powerful can get the less powerful to interpret the world in the former's way (Mumby and Clair 1997:183-84, 189). Power, according to Foucault, is not only executed from top to bottom but spreads through social practices, by simply telling a story about someone else, as in gossiping (Mumby and Clair 1997:191). These complicated structures make the discovery of how social reality is created through discourse necessary to enlighten the competing struggles of different interests as an equal opportunity to resistance (Mumby and Clair 1997:182).

According to Fowler "systematic grammatical devices function in establishing, manipulating and naturalizing social hierarchies" (Wodak 2001:6). Thus, a powerful user of linguistic devices, such as a dance critique writer, can have significant influence on social attitudes, for example, the perception of a dance performance by the readership (Wodak 2001:10). The fact that CDA is not only concerned with social influences on language but also treats the impact of language on society distinguishes this approach from DA (Östman and Virtanen 1995:248).

The execution of domination and power through language is therefore a fundamental interest of CDA. It is investigated on the lexical and syntactic level and reflects on how discrimination and power control are expressed and legitimised through language use. Jürgen Habermas recognises an ideological concept in language as it can serve as a medium of social force, legitimised by unarticulated conventions (Wodak 1995:204). Thus, it is also possible for CDA to investigate unequal power relationships and the creative breaking of conventions – those legitimised forms which become stable when they are seen as natural (Wodak 1995:205). In order to challenge conventions a critical approach analyses the situation from the perspective of the dominated group and raises consciousness about linguistic ways of subtle power execution (Fairclough 1992:9-10; Van Dijk 2001:96).

For both the analytical approach and the genre of the investigated text, the term 'critique' or 'critical' is crucial. Being critical can be described as taking distance from the object of

investigation (Wodak 2001:9). For CDA this would mean to reflect on the interconnections of a discourse, its mode of expression and its context. The importance of reflections thus alike becomes clear when analysing how subtleties of style, choices of words or syntax structures (e.g. the way how agents are used in active and passive sentence constructions) can influence their attributed and interpreted meaning, respectively (Van Dijk 1985:8). Illumination of certain phenomena can only be achieved in adopting a critical, cynical view, questioning and investigating all that reaches consciousness (Freire in Fairclough 1992:7) In a critical analysis, implicit argumentation derived from individual mental models should be made explicit and texts should be deconstructed in order to reveal underlying meanings and discover fundamental ideological beliefs including positive self-representation and negative other-representation (Van Dijk 2001:104). To contextualise a discourse, the analyst has to relate to connected discourses historically and ideologically (Wodak 1995:204). In doing this the analyst aims at discovering forms of language use that exercise socio-political control on the reader (Widdowson 2004:89).

This means that dance critiques should, to avoid the abuse of authoritarian commentary, describe dance in a neutral and distanced way<sup>5</sup>, unbiased by cultural or personal experiences of the writer and without the need to fulfil any reader's assumptions or expectations. A dance critique should reveal implicit meanings and make connections to other pieces of performing art, to other critiques and critique writers, as well as to current socio-political and cultural topics. Simultaneously, the neutral approach to a dance performance description questions and avoids general understandings of the dancing body as social commentary<sup>6</sup> (Nightingale 1999:169). Only in the last section should the writer's opinion appear.

This separation of description, interpretation and evaluation in dance critiques mirrors in their critical analysis: The greatest challenge in CDA is to relate the text analysis results to social theory and social context. As there are no fixed interrelations between text structures and their contextual meaning, the scholar can only describe and suggest interrelations through

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<sup>5</sup> "Neutral" and "distanced" in so far as the perception stance recognises the subjectivity with which we perceive the world. Reality – dialectically shaped by discourse and subjectively acting individuals – can only be perceived subjectively; a truly neutral way of perception cannot be existent since the reality of the world is a subjective construction *per se* (Nightingale 1999:170).

<sup>6</sup> The living, dancing body includes both the physical and social: It can only be perceived as real, but reality is constructed by the subjectivity of manhood and its discourses (Nightingale 1999:176). Thus, culture is enacted and at the same time embodied in the dancing body; this approach explains the interpretation of dance as a social commentary (see also chapter 4.3.1).

argumentation. Both ways of working with the dance critique need to be reintegrated into the analysis of the social context as a whole (Fowler 1985:75).

### **2.3.2 General linguistic aspects of Critical Discourse Analysis**

In general, DA investigates the difference and the relationship between the utterance (semantic level) and its actual meaning or the action that derives from it (pragmatic level) (Labov in Widdowson 2004: 94). Fairclough also refers to these differences when he identifies two levels of analysis when dealing with texts: The first focuses on vocabulary, grammar, cohesion and text structure. These aspects form a text analysis and characterise the so-called text-internal properties whereas the second level investigates various inter-connected texts in relation to each other and treats text-external factors. The investigation of the coherence of texts, their intertextuality and the force of the utterances in the texts form a discursive analysis (Fairclough in Widdowson 2004:91-2). Both levels need to complement each other to make a complete and whole semantic and pragmatic analysis of the entity of a text (Widdowson 2004:92, 96, 101, 110). It is particularly pertinent in CDA, in comparison to Conversation Studies or DA, to give a neutral structural-functional corpus analysis, as the critical approach already takes a certain socio-political stance to the text. To support a well-founded argument or analysis, the entire text, in this case a dance critique, and not only single sentences must be analysed, since syntactic structures can have a multifaceted meaning depending on cultural and contextual influences. It is also important to relate the critique to the general readership of the newspaper, magazine or online platform. The regular reader is pre-textually influenced and has developed an expectation of what genre of articles the respective media publishes. These publications have created a more or less shared popular opinion among the readership (Widdowson 2004:104).

### **3 CHAPTER THREE: Strategies of perception and interpretation – viewing cross-cultural dance performances**

Artistic performances are always social and political decision making processes (Fischer-Lichte 2010:222). There is no need for an explicit or definite social or political intention or comment in the performance to claim that every artistic decision must be interpreted in the global context of society. Cultural, political and individual imprints influence the production and the reception of performances. Consequently, differing backgrounds may lead to misunderstanding or even non-understanding. Conceptual frameworks from Theatre Studies and Linguistics underlie the process of understanding, producing and perceiving performance art. This chapter is aimed at treating the links between the two disciplines leading to the concept of theatre semiotics. Related to theatre semiotics, performance codes and conventions are presented which result in the application of theatre semiotics to dance. The apparent shortcomings of this approach motivate the focus in the second half of this chapter on an alternative approach to the analysis of dance: Phenomenology. The argumentation will lead towards a kinaesthetic perception of dance, understanding dance as a stimulus for corporeal sensing. Specifically in cross-cultural performances this strategy of viewing seems to bear the potential to help the critic to be less biased and focus on the artistic performance itself.

The elaboration of perception modes of dance are relevant for this thesis, as they may help to detect those underlying stances and biases which are not culturally dependent. Both the semiotic and the phenomenological approach provide a starting point for the following investigation of dance critiques based on CDA. Being aware of different perception methods can help to better reveal the critic's underlying understanding of dance, although they do not necessarily have to be a fellow of either scholarship. Since the presentation of different approaches to dance perception and interpretation strategies is not the main focus of this thesis – despite its importance in Dance and Theatre Studies – this discussion will not be presented exhaustively but within the limits of its usability and necessity for this analysis.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For the same reason, the study will only focus on the assumption that a performance's aim is either to be aesthetically appealing and/or to be understood by the audience. Cases in which the audience's frustration is expected by the performance will not be considered (also see Bennett 2001:182). It would be necessary to clarify the underlying intentions of the choreographer to detect positive and negative results in the dance reviews.



### **3.1 Theatre semiotics**

#### **3.1.1 Linguistics and theatre**

The roots of theatre semiotics lie in the understanding of art in the late 18<sup>th</sup> and the early 19<sup>th</sup> century when Theatre Studies first appeared as drama text analysis (Aston and Savona 1991:2). High culture, the common definition of art in those times, was always considered to be text; art was thus readable and analysable according to textual and linguistic conventions and supposed to be narrative (Fischer-Lichte 2004:35-6). Theatre Studies, however, declared the staging and thus the co-presence of actor and spectator as the aesthetical part of theatre and not the underlying dramatic text (Fischer-Lichte 2004:42-3). With the emancipation of Theatre Studies from Literary Studies, and the idea that theatre work needs to be seen rather than read the declining importance of the underlying dramatic texts was implied (Aston and Savona 1991:2). From the diverging theory of reading and viewing theatre, the distinction of dramatic text and performance text derived and legitimated a further application of linguistic analysis approaches – at least to the written dramatic text (Elam 1980:208-9; De Toro 1995:10). Text and DA methods as presented in chapter 2 were applied one-to-one to theatre performances. In the 1970s theatre semiotics was developed as a specification and equally applied to dance, namely to the libretti of romantic narrative ballets. Narrative dance could be analysed with similar means as its characteristics are also mimetically performative and merely lacked direct speech. The problem with this transfer of methods lies in the differing characteristics of their objects of investigation: a theatre or dance performance consists of both the actual performance, which is by its nature ephemeral, and the dramatic text. A performance can lack a dramatic text, but the dramatic text cannot lack the performance if one wants to treat it as a work of theatre (Elam 1980:209). Still, dramatic text and performance text can, to some extent, within the limits of semiotics, be analysed with linguistic methods (see also Aston and Savona 1991:8).

The development of theatre semiotics was strongly influenced by Ferdinand de Saussure's 'sign-signifier-signified' model (1915) and the interrelation of signifiers creating meaning, as well as Charles Peirce's triad of sign classification in icon, index and symbol at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Aston and Savona 1991:5-6). From the 1950's until the 1990's theatre semiotics was a very popular method to gain access to the making of theatre performances in order to enlighten both the production process and the interpretive reception of the work

(Aston and Savona 1991:1, 5, 10). The focus rested on the analysis of the dramatic text with the acknowledgment that the text cannot convey its full aesthetic value without the actual performance. The dramatic text is written in a specific historical moment whereas the performance is always contemporary (De Toro 1995:10). Hence, neither the performance text nor the dramatic text has priority over one or the other; rather it is “a complex of reciprocal constraints constituting a powerful intertextuality<sup>8</sup>” (Elam 1980:209) which connects them. Consequently, it is the task of theatre semiotics to explain the interaction between both formats of text (Pavis 1978:5). The fact that a performance is constituted of many more features<sup>9</sup> other than the materialisation of the dramatic text or the execution of movements prescribed in a libretto, demonstrates certain limits of a direct application of semiotics on performances (Pavis 1978:2; De Toro 1995:10).

In relation to the audience perception there are some general assumptions relevant to the application of semiotic linguistics to theatre and dance performances. Theatre semiotics presumes that there is a clear separation between the passive object and the active subject; relatable to the passive reader and the active writer of a text: The actor confronts the passive audience with non-negotiable facts by telling and performing a “story”. This concept suggests the classical linguistic model ‘sign-signifier-signified’ transferred to a performance production. Every element of the performance becomes a sign, so that the whole dramatic performance becomes a set of signs that needs to be decoded. The signs can only be interpreted after the appearance of the performance, namely during its reflection and the discussion on it (Fischer-Lichte 2004:19-21; Aston and Savona 1991:8). Furthermore, some selections of signs are connoted with a greater importance than others. According to aesthetical or ideological conventions, a hierarchy of signs is established which directs the analysis of the theatre performance (Pavis 1978:5). This selection of signs during the perception process is made from a set of paradigms on behalf of the perceiver. The interpretation of signifying sequences in the performance can be illuminated by a semiotic explanation (Pavis 1978:6).

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<sup>8</sup> The notion of ‘intertextuality’ and ‘intertext’ in relation to the so-called “geno-text” and “pheno-text” as introduced by Julia Kristeva will not be discussed in this thesis. The term ‘intertextuality’ is meant to name the interconnection of texts. For Kristeva it also refers to the possibility of various incorporated texts on different levels. For the analysis of the dance critiques this further notion becomes important (De Toro 1995:36-7).

<sup>9</sup> Some of these features will be presented later in this chapter. The most important difference between text and performance is, according to contemporary theatre and dance theory, the ephemeral status of the performance.

### 3.1.2 Performance codes and conventions

The performance code is part of common knowledge shared by the spectator and the scriptor<sup>10</sup> which enables them to either encode or decode a message. Making theatre is thus understood as writing, and perceiving theatre is comparable to reading a written text. The assumption of the existence of a performance code leads to the understanding of theatre as a means of communication intended to convey meaning (Pavis 1978:8). The relationship between icon, index and symbol are assumed to be analysed by semiotic means as well as their relation to the pragmatic and symbolic structure (Pavis 1978:10).

Different performance codes and signs can be summarised and divided into visual and acoustic signs, which range from music, paralinguistic and linguistic signs, gestures, proximity relations to costume and make-up, stage design and light design. Identifying the various signs is one thing if one wants to interpret and understand a theatre performance: the attribution of meaning to the theatrical signs is related to everyday usages but, as will be explained in the following sections, theatrical arbitrariness of signs complicates this process. Viewing a table as a table and only as a table may lead the spectator into a false direction. According to the actor's play and the total stage context, a table can be interpreted as a mountain that has to be climbed or as a sheltering cave or, if turned upside down, as a boat to cross a river (Fischer-Lichte 2010:85). Thus, certain knowledge is necessary to choose the signifying signs and to create interconnections between the signs and their meaning. Some aspects of performance codes can be found in ideological and cultural knowledge so that the cultural background of performer and spectator always intertwine with the aesthetic performance itself. These so-called extra-performance codes are transformed into performance codes when they are realised on stage and contribute to the establishment of meaning (De Toro 1995:54, 3).

Theatre conventions are not performance-specific<sup>11</sup> but they are, nevertheless, often distinct from everyday social conventions used in everyday contexts (De Toro 1995:53, 55). They

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<sup>10</sup> For convenience, De Toro refers to the author and the director of a theatre performance as the scriptor (De Toro 1995:10).

<sup>11</sup> During their generation, their first appearance, performance conventions are performance specific. Otherwise they can be categorised in general conventions, particular conventions, which refer to certain theatre genres or categories, and unique conventions, which, however, are performance specific. Every general convention has once been unique and then particular (De Toro 1995:55-7).

direct the overall production and reception mode of theatre performances: they can, for instance, introduce the concept of the theatrical ‘fourth wall’ which is actually the front of the stage open to the audience but the performers treat it as if it was a solid wall. Thus, the stage signifies the world and the audience is treated as if they were not part of this world (Pavis 1978:8). Contemporary performances often break this convention and invite the audience to engage with and participate in the performance. Theatre conventions are even related to specific historical periods and genres. A re-enactment of a classical ballet can, for example, be staged according to the historic period but it can also be adapted to contemporary viewing attitudes (Pavis 1978:9). Thus, theatre conventions determine the possibilities of interpretation of the theatrical signs. They need to be “learned” because they are not usually made explicit in terms of a manual or introduction before the performance. They require conscious decoding strategies that develop through viewing experience (De Toro 1995:54-5). Habitualised viewing conventions influence the spectator’s focus in a theatre or dance performance (Pavis 1978:9): The spectator might fail to attach meaning to important details, if they are not familiar with them; they might even fail to perceive the important signs that carry significant meaning based on the creator’s intentions as well as on the cultural context of the performance. This implies that a more experienced spectator is potentially more capable of decoding certain performance codes (De Toro 1995:55-6). The elaboration of the issue of perceiving culturally different performances and thus being confronted with culturally different performance codes and conventions will follow in chapter 3.3.

### **3.1.3 The application of theatre semiotics of dance – limitations**

The elaboration of the application of semiotic linguistics to theatre performances reveals certain limitations, particularly because of the performance’s ephemeral, unique and thus unrepeatable nature. Dance is a performance art that is bound to the flow of time and space and thus hardly palpable with definite and static signs (Wittmann 2002:587-8). Furthermore, the detection of the total entity of signs requires numerous viewings which impede an objective analysis that is based on an unchanging object. The static text can be re-read several times without a change within itself whereas the dynamic performance cannot be perceived twice without any changes from one performance to the other. No performance production

equals another.<sup>12</sup> Thus, the problem of theatre semiotics lies in the assumption that the actual performance could be read and interpreted like a poetic or dramatic text (Elam 1980:210).

Another important fact in the perception and analysis of dance performances is the chronology of analysis: the meaning of specific signs can only be detected after their sensual perception and in a particular sequential order<sup>13</sup> (Fischer-Lichte 2010:84). Applying meaning to signs presumes the (phenomenological) reception of the signs as signs. Movements in Contemporary Dance<sup>14</sup> are not constructed to have a certain understandable meaning in the sense of Saussure's semiotic model (Wittmann 2002:588). Folkloristic or traditional dances, however, work differently: in traditional Indian temple dances, for example, every movement signifies a certain state of mind, an emotion, or an action. African tribal dances also have special purposes and meanings. European ballroom dancing is connected to ritual procedures, for instance the first waltz of a married couple. But since this thesis is concerned with contemporary theatrical dance, it is assumed that dance is not used as a means of communication in the classical semiotic model of sign-signifier-signified.

The way in which the audience is affected is ignored in theatre semiotics. Hence, the scholars pay more attention to the phenomenological approach in order to overcome the distinct shortcomings of conventional theatre semiotics (Fischer-Lichte 2010:87). The problem with Contemporary Dance is that it lacks not only the features of speech but also the element of a clearly-structured narration that is more evident in theatre. Signified and signifier are no longer compulsory elements of dance pieces. Pure movement aesthetics, both as a theme and as a choreographic tool, may be the sole motivation and intention of a contemporary dance piece. Evident reasons such as, for instance, the discussion of a specific topic or the narration of a dramatic story do not enjoy a compulsory status in a performance piece of art anymore.

Thus, another limitation of the semiotic approach becomes evident in the intuitive watching of theatre (Helbo 1987:25). Personal commitment and affection are left aside when searching for the "right" interpretation to understand the piece "correctly". The more abstract a theatre work is constructed, the more difficult the retrospective attribution of meaning to an identified,

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<sup>12</sup> This topic is discussed in philosophical discourses in Dance Science; it came from Theatre Studies and underlies any dance scientific research.

<sup>13</sup> In linguistics, this chronology of the detection of signs is also called syntagm.

<sup>14</sup> I assume a movement aesthetic that is abstract to the extent that its basic gestures or other common movement experiences cannot be detected anymore or do not make sense in attempts of interpretation.

definite sign – after its production and reception – gets (Fischer-Lichte 2004:17-8). It is evident that there cannot be one single, “correct” interpretation of theatre and performance art, but a range of possible interpretation strategies based on a combination of sensual perception modes and theatre semiotics (Fischer-Lichte 2004:18-9). The continuous development of performance art towards a solely aesthetic event explicitly suggests a corporeal experience in reception: both processes of performing and perceiving happen in the sharing of time and place by performer and spectator who thus constitute the performance event together (Fischer-Lichte 2004:20-2). Accordingly, the perception of theatre and dance can be called a personal, individual experience (Fischer-Lichte 2010:83).

### **3.2 Phenomenology of performance perception**

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach to understand the functioning of the world. It was founded by natural scientists in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The concept was transferred to other disciplines and philosophers such as Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty who developed an epistemology that suggests perceiving the objects as they are, opposed to the immediate attribution of meaning to what we perceive (Waldenfels 1992:13, 16, 19; Wilshire 1982:11, 18). The viewer should attempt to perceive all phenomena that are corporeally existent as how they appear, trying not to make attributions or interpretations (Waldenfels 1992:19). The “lived experience of visual impairment” is what Nightingale (1999:173) calls the phenomenological approach to the perception of the body apart from speech. Wilshire (1982:12) explains phenomenology as “an exercise in seeing” and claims that “[o]ur seeing is limited by prejudices so habitual that we have no awareness of them *as* prejudices.” An unbiased look at a scenario involving movement and a personal kinaesthetic involvement offer a many-sided perspective (Wilshire 1982:18-9). Seeing – in this case, bodies in motion on stage – the way they appear may provide a fuller and more useful account of Performance Art in phenomenological perception (Waldenfels 1995:19-20; Nightingale 1999:167). The body can thus be perceived as means of transmission and embodiment of aesthetic culture (Nightingale 1999:175).

The phenomenological approach to perceiving dance takes some assumptions of theatre semiotics along but utilises them differently. Although it is concerned with corporeal and kinaesthetic sensations of the spectator, it assumes certain symbolic constructions and the understanding of that which is perceived as a sub-text implicated in stage scenarios (Pavis

2001:24-5). Therefore, in phenomenology, signs step out of their hermeneutic context and reveal in how far the spectator identifies with the actor or dancer (Pavis 2001:17-9). But there is no “one-to-one correspondence between movement and meanings” (Adshead-Lansdale 2001:189) as one might expect from a semiotic communicative perspective.

The phenomenological view investigates the spectator’s perception and affective reception of the stage happenings, considering, apart from the performance itself, environmental factors such as the theatre or performance place, the position of the seats, the atmosphere, etc. (Pavis 2001:21, 23; Fischer-Lichte 2004:29). According to Pavis, the underlying intention of performance works is to emotionally affect the spectator and to make them identify with the scenario on stage (Pavis 2001:23, 29). Evidently, phenomenology refers to a synchronous perception of all theatrical signs without detecting a certain hierarchy or attributing meaning to them (Pavis 1976:2-3). The whole theatrical work is perceived as one unit comparable to the perception of an unknown environment. A succinct global perception is succeeded by a filtering focus on certain features that gain one’s attention (Helbo 1987:28).

### **3.2.1 The cognitive process of perception and kinaesthetic perception modes**

Pavis understands the audience not as the total sum of all spectators because the audience acts according to collective rules, cultural norms and habitualised behaviour. The individual spectator incorporates various cognitive and sensual processes during the perception of a performance. Pavis argues that the behaviour of the collective of an audience is ruled by different norms and constraints compared to the behaviour of an individual, for example the spectator. He identifies the audience as object of investigation for Sociological Studies whereas Psychology and Psychoanalysis treat the individual’s behaviour. Since Pavis works on a psychological basis, he refers, in this case, to the spectator as an individual (Pavis 2001:13).

Personalised habits and a unique experience of the world and specifically dance and theatre influence the cognitive process of perception (Pavis 2001:13). As the analysis of such inner, cognitive processes can hardly be objective, the nature of the matter itself impedes the use of generalised theories.<sup>15</sup> A so-called kinaesthetic perception of movement<sup>16</sup> provides a different

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<sup>15</sup> For the reason of lack of objectivity, Psychoanalytical and Psychological studies have long been neglected the status of science until in the postmodern world, other, more subjective fields of study, such as aesthetic subjects

way of perceiving Contemporary Dance since it views movement as corporeally sensed meaning that it stimulates the viewer's own corporeal movement memory (Pavis 2001:19). This implicates that movement perceived from the stage is attributed to individual experiences of movement stored in the viewer's own muscle memory. Consequently, the spectator remembers their individual experience of movement and creates an imagination of how the execution of the perceived movement might feel if one's own body was executing the movement. The spectator imagines the perceived movement taking place in their own body using both strategies of kinaesthetic and corporeal perception.

Watching movement on stage is assumed to evoke the spectator's corporeal memory putting them into the imagination of the movement itself, which results in a form of identification with the work or the dancer(s). Furthermore, during the cognitive process of kinaesthetic and corporeal sensing of movement can evoke certain emotions and feelings that need not be connected to the theme of the work but are rather constituted from one's individual experience and one's cultural background. Both aspects of individual corporeal sensing illustrate the difficulties of analysis and explain why Pavis differentiates between the spectator and the audience.<sup>17</sup>

The aim is not to provide a lengthy discussion on behavioural and cognitive attitudes of the spectator or the audience, but to sensitise the critique writer's awareness about the different perception modes. A certain perceptive attitude is assumed to underlie all critiques on dance, since the writer is expected to have watched the piece (Adshead-Lansdale 2001:200-1). However, this thesis investigates, whether this perceptive attitude is always clearly identifiable. Whilst perceiving the work, the critic forms a certain stance to or opinion on the work that becomes traceable in the critique.

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(Fine Arts, Music, Performing Arts, etc.) were accepted as fields of scientific research (Adshead-Lansdale 2001:192-3).

<sup>16</sup> Chapter 3.2.3 elaborates the concept of kinaesthetic movement analysis in regard to how to write about dance.

<sup>17</sup> Provable, empirical insights into the emotional state of the spectator are hardly collectable, but studies concerning the phenomenon of sensing, remembering and attributing visually perceived movement to once experienced movements explain how the so-called mirror-neurons are stimulated through perceiving dance but impede the execution of the respective movement itself. The mirror-neurons receive the motion which is seen but they do not transmit the signals thus far as to encourage the body to move. The result is an energised spectator sitting more or less motionless in their seat imagining how the perceived movement would be executed through their own body (compare Gallese and Goldman in Fischer-Lichte 2004:54-5).



### **3.3 On viewing cross-cultural performances**

In this study, I assume that a culturally diverse audience watches a particular dance piece, which was created with a certain cultural background familiar to some, but not all spectators. For example, an African audience may wonder why an African choreographer, who has recently returned from Europe, seems to deny their identity by integrating Western movement styles into a new performance. Often African dancers are accused of losing their artistic identity when they train in Europe or America. On the other hand, Western audiences sometimes perceive European trained African choreographers as not African enough (Douglas et.al. 2006:105; Kodesh 2006:41-2). In both cases the expectations of the audience, or rather of some single debate leaders, are not met by the performance. The assumption of cross-cultural differences between spectator and performer also presumes the investigation of a situation between a culturally different spectator/ critic and the dance piece. Thus, along with Pavis (2001:13), it seems more fruitful to analyse the perception mode in cross-cultural situations from the individual perspective of the spectator (in this case simultaneously the critic) rather than from the collectivistic view of the audience.

#### **3.3.1 The perception of cultural “otherness”**

A performance implicitly dealing with cultural knowledge that is not shared by a spectator puts them into a state of bewilderment and non-understanding. This constitution is henceforth called a cross-cultural performance. It assumes the presence of at least one culturally different spectator. In narrative theatre plays the partial misunderstanding or non-understanding can lead to a total misunderstanding when the spectator cannot follow the plot anymore. However, in Contemporary Dance pieces, it could be the aesthetics that are not understood by the spectator. They may feel lost instead of enjoying the performance and may feel as if they are missing the essence of the work. In such cases the presumed otherness seems to be unperceivable through “conventional receptive processes” (Bennett 2001:176). A certain fascination can derive from this otherness but it can also turn into a feeling of hopeless misunderstanding, perhaps even negative feelings such as frustration and anger. Bennett primarily describes the latter phenomenon from the viewing attitudes of a “Western” spectator being confronted with “non-Western” theatrical forms and relates the issue of power and authority to it: non-conforming ways of reception seem to destabilise security and thus disempower the spectator (Bennett 2001:176-7). Insecurity deriving from bewilderment and frustration can have different outcomes: Some people develop aggressive attitudes towards

the performance while others become lethargic and immobile. In any case the opinion about the dance performance might become a negative one, if the spectator's expectations are not met. The contrast between the familiar and the unknown performance codes, conventions and aesthetics brings the familiar norms and rules of dance perceptions to the spectator's consciousness. It is only in this contrast, in the conscious perception of the unfamiliar, that conventions and norms are questioned (unintentionally), and one's theatrical worldview is destabilised.<sup>18</sup> I assume that in these situations negative critiques on the specific dance piece may appear.

The spectator believes that the real, which constitutes their worldview, is visible and assumes this axiom to function in theatre or performance environment too (Bennett 2001:178). This also means that in a case of a positive critique on foreign, unfamiliar theatre conventions a critically reflective perception underlies the judgement. A spectator, who is first fascinated by the performance even though different theatrical conventions are exhibited, can become entirely euphoric and excited. Along with the positive reception of the piece, the spectator reflects on the perceived foreign conventions and theatre codes by comparing them to the known. Thus, if the spectator detects the foreignness in themselves, the performance can be critically reflected upon, whereas the detection of the foreign in the reception of the other, creates a negative attitude towards the performance (Bennett 2001:178). The most positive outcome would be that the spectator gains new insights into performance codes and conventions during the reflection and interpretation process after the performance. Bennett refers to Roland Barthes who first describes his fascination with foreign dances and admits that his curiosity only remains aroused because of the interesting otherness. Then he critically questions whether "[...] we Westerners [can] really consume a fragment of civilisation totally isolated from its context" (Barthes in Bennett 2001:176). Barthes introduces not only the curiosity about the unknown but declares it to be the spectator's major interest in cross-cultural performances (Bennett 2001:176). A further statement, which also leads away from the concept of theatre semiotics, points to the sensing of the performance's aesthetic without the attempt to discover an underlying narration (Bennett 2001:180). While reporting on her reaction towards a cross-cultural performance, Bennett admits that "[... she] felt [her]

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<sup>18</sup> Fischer-Lichte describes a similar phenomenon when describing the effects of the so-called "performative turn" which occurred during the 1960's in Europe. Narrative theatre forms were succeeded by event-focused performances that provoke an affective reaction within the audience (Fischer-Lichte 2004:25-5, 29).

strategies of viewing were not only disabled but irrelevant” (Bennett 2001:185). I will argue that a dance performance that is viewed, perceived and critiqued from a phenomenological perspective, especially in an intercultural context, is more likely to be judged positively by the writer and spectator.

With the investigation of the critique – the writer’s product and thus the impression of a single spectator – the focus shifts back from spectator to audience level. The reader of the critique may understand it, as if it reflected the opinion of the general audience. As argued in chapter 2, a reader who reflects only to a small degree on the critique may perceive the critic’s opinion as authoritative.

## 4 CHAPTER FOUR: Presentation of Vuyani Dance Theatre and African Contemporary Dance

This chapter presents the Vuyani Dance Theatre (VDT), including some basic facts and figures, a short description and categorisation of the so-called *Beauty Trilogy*, the dance piece that is referred to in the investigated dance critiques. The second half of the chapter focuses on Gregory Vuyani Maqoma, founder and Artistic Director of the company, including some biographical notes which help to understand his work and his way of thinking about dance and inter-culturalism. The chapter will conclude with a brief description of African Contemporary Dance, mostly from a South African perspective (compare *Critical Arts Journal* 2006, Vol. 2 (2)). It intends to give an overview on the cultural difference between a rather “Western” view on Contemporary Dance and a South African one.

### 4.1 Vuyani Dance Theatre

Maqoma founded the VDT in 1999 inspired by a Belgian dance scholarship at the Performing Arts Research and Training Studios (P.A.R.T.S.), a renowned centre for dance education that enjoys a very high reputation all over the world<sup>19</sup>. *Vuyani* means “joy” in Maqoma’s native language isiXhosa and according to his explanations the word entered the name of the company on the one hand in reference to the early non-professional dance practices of Maqoma and four of his friends (Vincent Mantsoe among others) who called themselves the *Joy Dancers*. On the other hand, Maqoma’s ethnic name already includes the name “Vuyani” (Maqoma 2002).

#### 4.1.1 The dance pieces *Beautiful*, *Beautiful Us*, *Beautiful Me*

A variety of solo pieces, duets and group works were performed by the VDT in the past 11 years. In this thesis I will focus on the last piece of the so-called *Beauty Trilogy* consisting of the duet *Beautiful* (2005), the septet *Beautiful Us* (2005) and *Beautiful Me* (2007), a solo of Maqoma, backed up by four live musicians, all South African. *Beautiful Us* was created in Johannesburg, whereas the other two were developed in Paris at the Centre National de la Danse (CND), which also supported the work financially. The South African premiere of

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<sup>19</sup> Anne Teresa de Keersmaker, a well-known choreographer from the Netherlands, has been the director of P.A.R.T.S. since its foundation in 1995 and marked its movement and dance style fundamentally.

*Beautiful Me* was in 2007 at the FNB Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg. On his website<sup>20</sup>, Maqoma explains that the *Beauty Trilogy* treats the beauty of human beings as living creatures opposed to the beauty of things and objects that surround the living. The interplay of nature and human beings, particularly in South Africa, is what fascinates Maqoma in the trilogy.

*Beautiful* is the first part of the trilogy which Maqoma performs with Shanell Winlock. The duet premiered in Johannesburg in June 2005 and toured, among others, to Sadler's Wells, a well-known dance stage, in London. *Beautiful* is about the beauty in our own evolution, the beauty in sudden and abrupt revolutions in which traditions are questioned and perception modes exposed to challenges.<sup>21</sup>

*Beautiful Us* is performed by seven dancers<sup>22</sup> who originally come from South Africa, mostly from Gauteng. It premiered in Paris at the CND and was performed in South Africa at the Jomba! Dance Festival in Durban in 2006, at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown and at the Cape Town Festival all in the same year.

*Beautiful Me* is a solo performed by Maqoma together with four live musicians. Until now, according to tour dates and the variety of destinations, it is the most popular part of the trilogy. It premiered in Johannesburg at the FNB Dance Umbrella 2007 (in March) and toured to the United Kingdom in June. Later on in 2007 Maqoma travelled to Oslo (Norway) and to Amsterdam, (The Netherlands). In January 2008 Maqoma performed in Europe, namely at CND in Paris, Brussels and Portugal. In 2009 he toured the United States (Miami, Seattle, San Francisco, Los Angeles and New Mexico) and later that year he also performed in Angola, Namibia, Johannesburg, La Réunion and once again in Paris. The 2010 tour started in Belgium, at Brügge, and continued to Switzerland and again to Paris, France.

This last piece of the *Beauty Trilogy* was greatly influenced by three colleagues, namely Vincent Mantsoe, a close choreographer friend of Maqoma since their childhood, Faustin Linyekula, a Congolese choreographer and dancer and Akram Khan, a British dancer with whom Maqoma has collaborated several times. The different movement styles (Mantsoe is

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.vuyani.co.za/rep.htm>.

<sup>21</sup> [http://www.artlink.co.za/news\\_article.htm?contentID=3882](http://www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=3882) (01.06.2010).

<sup>22</sup> I have included the names of the performers and musicians in Appendix A.

known for his Afrofusion<sup>23</sup> style, Linyekula for his visual theatre and Khan is known for his expertise in contemporary Kathak, an Indian dance style) inspired Maqoma during his work on this piece. Apart from live music and dance, Maqoma uses speech in isiXhosa and English during his performance. When he tours he does not translate the isiXhosa utterances into English. Language is thus used as an artistic, potentially traditional feature conveying aesthetic value rather than meaning.

## **4.2 Artistic Director Gregory Vuyani Maqoma**

### **4.2.1 Biographical notes**

Maqoma was born in Soweto, the South Western Townships of Johannesburg, in 1973. He lived there in a culturally diverse township with his father who is from Port Alfred and his mother who grew up in the Lesotho Mountains. The culturally mixed family started to create a new cultural identity for themselves. His grandmother was Xhosa and she raised him accordingly. Thus, issues of cultural identity, social norms and values, history and traditions have always influenced Maqoma. He started his education in dance in South Africa in 1990 where he enrolled at the Johannesburg based company and dance school, Move Into Dance Mophatong (MIDM), from which he graduated in 1993. He danced and taught dance across South Africa until, in 1994, he started working for an Afrikaans and later a German insurance company to financially support his parents (Maqoma 2002). After a tour with MIDM to eight African countries, Maqoma resumed dancing and continued his studies – after he had attended the five week choreographic programme DanceWeb<sup>24</sup> in Vienna, Austria, in 1997 – in Brussels at the P.A.R.T.S. Right afterwards in 1999, he returned to Johannesburg and founded VDT (Maqoma 2002)<sup>25</sup>.

### **4.2.2 Maqoma's cultural imprints and his dance style**

In Brussels Maqoma received a modern, European Contemporary Dance education. The dance style taught at P.A.R.T.S. is greatly music driven and based on a classical dance vocabulary, which influenced Maqoma in the development of his own style. The Belgian education programme provided Maqoma not only with an education in all major dance

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<sup>23</sup> For a further explanation of Afrofusion see section 4.3.2.

<sup>24</sup> DanceWeb is an annual summer school for choreographic research taking place in the frame of the highly repudiated dance festival “ImPulsTanz”.

<sup>25</sup> <http://mappinternational.org/artists/view/44> (01.06.2010).

techniques but also with a sound intellectual background in approaches to dance. The combination of music and theatre is fundamental to this school of dancing.<sup>26</sup> In the founding year of VDT Maqoma also became Artistic Director of the South African Performing and Visual Arts Festival *afrovibes* in the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Thus, he maintains strong ties to the European Contemporary Dance scene and he remains a regular guest on European dance festivals. His strongest artistic influences derive from Akram Khan (UK) and his contemporary Indian Kathak, Faustin Lineykula (DRC) and his visual dance-theatre and Vincent Mantsoe's (RSA, now based in France) Afrofusion.<sup>27</sup> This artistic variety, which has its roots in the diverse cultures of his Soweto childhood, characterises Maqoma's Contemporary Dance style. Urban and street dance cultures, as well as popular dance videos of Michael Jackson and Prince, inspired and motivated the *Joy Dancers* during Maqoma's adolescence and later influenced the formation of his movement skills (Maqoma 2002). "[...H]is body has become a mixture of all his influences, the origins of which cannot be identified in particular movements because of how he has combined them" (Kodesh 2006:46).

Maqoma (2006:36) not only sees himself as an artist but he also feels responsible for "cultural translation" embracing a certain cultural heritage as well as feeding the artistic demand for innovation. Here again, the reception mode of the audience becomes crucial, leading to the controversial question of audience education in case of misunderstanding (Maqoma 2006:36-7; Douglas et.al. 2006:105; Kodesh 2006:41-2, 49-51). Artists often find explanations for negative reception of their work (also finding evidence in dance critiques) in the lack of education of their audience: They find that the spectator has to get used to a new aesthetic form or has to learn about the new artistic value that is presented in the work. This is opposed to the assumption that art does not need an explanation since its artistic value is perceivable and existent in any case – if not, it cannot be called art.

#### **4.3 The cultural backbone of African Contemporary Dance**

The artists who attended the 7<sup>th</sup> Jomba! Contemporary Dance Conference<sup>28</sup> at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in 2004 argued in various panel discussions on the concept of 'African

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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.rosas.be/Menu1/ATDK/tabid/61/language/en-US/Default.aspx> (27.5.10).

<sup>27</sup> <http://mappinternational.org/programs/view/207> (30.01.2011).

<sup>28</sup> Jomba! Dance Festival is an annually held dance festival in Durban which was initiated by Lliane Loots, choreographer, teacher and critic, in 1998. The conference was first added to the festival in 2004 to give African choreographers and dancers the opportunity to dialogue with one another and exchange ideas. According to

Contemporary Dance'. The question was whether there was a type of dancing that could be called 'African Contemporary Dance'. Many dancers and choreographers from all over Africa came to Durban to speak about their situation as artists in Africa and as African artists in Europe or America. The discussion sessions repeatedly pointed to various attempts to explain each individual type of dance and its personal origins similar to the way Maqoma's story reads. Issues of cultural and social identity in relation to historical and political background emerged as crucial factors in the making of art in South Africa.

#### **4.3.1 Cultural, social and artistic identity**

The individual assessment of Contemporary Dance in South Africa mirrors the need for a culturally independent identity in South African performing arts that distinguishes South African art and dance from Western formalism. Adrienne Sichel<sup>29</sup> goes even further in her keynote address at the Jomba! Dance Conference in 2004 when she proposes, that African Contemporary Dance has to define and examine its aesthetic rules in Africa and amongst Africans (Loots and Young-Jahangeer 2005:25). It is not in the comparison with "Western" dance cultures which were long seen as superior to the African ones that constitute African dance as the antipole. For many African choreographers dance is not a means of representing a culture or a nation, as the term '*African Contemporary Dance*' might suggest. Most of the choreographers represent themselves as reflections of their cultural background, their tradition and, most personally, their own story (Kodesh 2006:43). Thus, the creation of dance cannot be separated from the choreographer's political, social and cultural background (Loots and Young-Jahangeer 2005:79; Kodesh 2006:48). These findings lead into a certain direction within the controversial debates about the question whether art incorporates political and ideological stances *per se*. Arguments include on the one hand the making of art for art's sake emphasising the true artistic and aesthetic value of a piece of art and on the other hand the ideologically, culturally and politically influenced individual that lives in the artist and expresses itself in the artwork. This discussion will not be deepened here; I assume for this thesis, referring to the mentioned and other current debates about South African Contemporary Dance (see also Jomba! Dance Conference 2004 and the *Critical Arts Journal*

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Kodesh (2006:56) this was a groundbreaking event in the South African dance scene documenting thoughts and attitudes towards the question whether there was a dance style called 'African Contemporary Dance'.

<sup>29</sup> Sichel is employed as specialist writer on dance and theatre performances by the Johannesburg daily newspaper *The Star* and is one of the key historians writing on the development of Contemporary Dance in South Africa (Douglas et.al. 2006:102).



2006, Vol. 2 (2)), that a certain, probably unconscious socio-political notion underlies the making of art. The personal identity of the artist is constituted by all these features that have taken and are taking influence on the person. This is reflected in statements such as “[T]hat’s what my dance is all about today. It’s an attempt to remember my name [...]” (Linyekula in Douglas et.al. 2006:110) and “All I’m after is my identity. [...] ‘We can see your identity on stage.’ This means a lot to me.” (Liadi in Douglas et. al. 2006:113). Much social commentary underlies the attempt to differentiate Contemporary Dance in Africa (Kodesh 2006:49, 52). There does not even seem to be a need to label the style of dance as something particular. It is just the individual characteristics that are crucial to the artists. This has also been true for American and European dancer-choreographers in the 1920’s and 30’s who tried to free themselves from the constraints of Classical Academic Dance including the prescribed movements as well as the status of the male choreographer opposed to women. Modern dance techniques and the examination of personal subjects were the result of this movement. Nowadays, some contemporary choreographers approach dance from a more theoretical side, reading philosophical and anthropological texts before creating the dance piece. This method can also be called conceptual dance.<sup>30</sup>

#### **4.3.2 ‘African Contemporary Dance’ – the “African” labelling**

Bearing the sole intention of enacting self in mind when regarding the West, the “African” labelling is understood as discrimination against the individual’s cultural and ethnical background: Terms and concepts such as “American Contemporary Dance” or “European Contemporary Dance” do not exist (Douglas et. al. 2006:107-8). From an African perspective, European and American choreographers seem to be claiming a universal understanding of Contemporary Dance, categorising the African scene as a derivation. African Contemporary Dance opposed to Contemporary Dance is taken to have emerged some decades later, inspired from the notions presented in the West.

The justification of the term ‘African Contemporary Dance’ derives from the responsive attitude towards Europe that many performance artists seem to adopt when they come back to their home countries (Pather 2006:14). Mixing the contemporary style learned and studied abroad with traditional movement aesthetics or discovering incorporated traditional

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<sup>30</sup> For further reading consult: Kodesh (2006:42-3), Albright (1997), Evert (2003), Odenthal (2005).

movements when learning a foreign technique can lead to desires of emancipation and deferral (Pather 2006:11-3). Although the term ‘African Contemporary Dance’ or ‘Contemporary African Dance’ was created by Western debate leaders, it resembles the selective attitude that African choreographers show (Kodesh 2006:45). “The tools that I’m making use of are from Europe and that experience has broadened my mind but not changed who I am.” (Liadi in Douglas et.al. 2006:106). On the one hand this statement reflects the search for cultural, social and personal identity in a continent culturally and politically more diverse than Europe<sup>31</sup> (Kodesh 2006:54) but it also feeds the argument that a “Western” artistic dance scene is older and thus has experienced a broader variety than the more ritually and traditionally originated one in Africa (Pather 2006:11). Classical Ballet, for example, had the time to develop manuals and notations and now preserve the regionally different techniques (e.g. the Russian Waganova method, the Italian Cecchetti method, or the Royal Academy method from the United Kingdom) very rigidly. They are taught according to fixed rules. Movements and figures are strictly defined and variations are only accepted to a very limited extent. Also Modern Dance techniques such as Cunningham, Alexander or Release technique etc., are relatively fixed and are based on notated manuals. In both cases, repetition over time seems to have supported the fixation of norms and rules meaning that African contemporary dance styles (leaving already fixed traditional dances aside) may also be definite techniques one day.

In order to receive a manifold education but also for financial reasons, many of the internationally successful dancers and choreographers from Africa are trained (by receiving scholarships from European schools like Maqoma did at the P.A.R.T.S.) in established methods in a European country or in the United States (Loots and Young-Jahangeer 2005:73, 77; Pather 2006:12-3; Douglas et.al. 2006:112). They then integrate the different movement styles that they obtained during their training to form individual “dance languages” that carry cultural and historical traces (Loots and Young-Jahangeer 2005:75; Kodesh 2006:45-6). One of those styles is called ‘Afrofusion’ which was and is still being developed by MIDM dancers and choreographers. In the late 1970’s Sylvia Glasser<sup>32</sup> first started to mix classical

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<sup>31</sup> Often the colonial past is mentioned as well as the cultural diversity from a tribal society (Maqoma 2006:34; Kodesh 2006:40, 51, 54).

<sup>32</sup> Glasser founded MIDM in 1978 and has since been chief choreographer and Artistic Director. She has studied dance in Canada and the United States, publishes as a dance anthropologist and supports schoolchildren and young dancers in their training ([http://www.midance.co.za/Sylvia\\_Glasser.htm](http://www.midance.co.za/Sylvia_Glasser.htm) 31.05.2010).

and modern movements she had learned in Canada and the United States with traditional South African movements (Kodesh 2006:59). Afrofusion uses the learned techniques and creates new movement styles independent from notations and fixed parameters by combining them with traditional movement scores.

After a strong influence of Classical Ballet influence, South African choreographers started to develop their own Contemporary Dance styles.<sup>33</sup> Afrofusion can be called one of them and emphasises the melting of all movement styles instead of a discrete separation aimed at preserving existing dance techniques in a contemporary framework (Kodesh 2006:46). Pather (2006:12) describes the African dance style as a “dialogue between a contemporary choreographer and traditional dance and ritual” and suggests referring only to Contemporary Dance ignoring a specific African attribution (Pather 2006:14). This might deny the claim of authenticity of African Contemporary Dance which seems neither truly what dance specialists understand as “contemporary” nor truly traditionally “African” (whatever style this might be) (Pather 2006:15; Kodesh 2006:40). But if ‘contemporary’ was interpreted in its chronological sense, Africans could contribute to its characteristics as any other continent. Maqoma’s style could thus more universally be labelled ‘contemporary’, but in Western debates it can best be described as ‘Afrofusion’. The question about the universal and the particular in dance styles seem to refer back to colonial structures; this issue is not to be developed here, but it emphasises the need for a thorough cultural emancipation of the African continent (Kodesh 2006:40). The more dynamic development of Afrofusion, and the ways in which it challenges the norms and codes of Modern and Contemporary Dance techniques in Europe and America is seen as an important advantage and could contribute to an independent Contemporary Dance aesthetic from Africa (Kodesh 2006:42).

This debate expresses, to a very limited extend, how political, financial, cultural and artistic reasoning come together when a performer presents their work to an audience. This process is even more complicated when cross-cultural differences occur regarding, for example, African artists who return home after having spent time abroad. This discussion will not be taken further here, but this section intended to emphasise the obstacles an African choreographer like Moqoma might have to deal with when they travel abroad and return home.

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<sup>33</sup> <http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/dance.htm> (31.05.2010).

## 5 CHAPTER FIVE: Methodology – description of study design

This chapter presents the methodological procedure followed in the analysis of the dance critiques on *Beautiful Me*. According to Bloor and Bloor, the critical examination of critiques belongs to the field of appraisal analysis (2007:33). The study will focus on the treatment of the critiques as single linguistic units, besides linguistic and rhetorical devices, mainly examining syntactic and semantic structures. It is aimed at unravelling the interconnection between the miscellaneous ways in which language is used when the critic's judgement is given. The ways in which the implemented strategies, including content related choices, strategies of power and authority, perception mode and assumptions on the audience and the readership, are communicated, are examined.

Many of the selected critiques are accompanied by a picture either from the performance or a portrait picture of Maqoma. Since the aim of this thesis is a critical examination of linguistic markers, the visual aspects of the publications will not be considered, although the multimodality contributes to the overall meaning.<sup>34</sup>

### 5.1 Presentation of data

The thesis focuses on six critiques of the various performances of one dance piece, *Beautiful Me*<sup>35</sup>. They were written by two South African, two British and two American critics and were published online and in print media. I will present the critiques in chronological order, including background information on the critics.

Two critiques on *Beautiful Me* are based on performances in South Africa. The critique "Dance used as a channel across culture and history" written by Adrienne Sichel was published on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007 in the "Sunday Independent" and is based on the world premiere performance at the FNB Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg. Adrienne Sichel is senior specialist writer in dance and theatre at the Johannesburg daily "The Star". After her graduation at the University of Natal in Speech and Drama, she started her journalistic career in 1970 and is now called South Africa's foremost critic in performance art. Together with two other journalists, she developed the concept for the FNB Dance Umbrella, which was launched in 1989. She is currently working on her book *Body Politics – Fingerprinting South*

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<sup>34</sup> A collection of the reviews is attached in Appendix B.

<sup>35</sup> One review treats the second part of the trilogy *Beautiful* and a part of *Beautiful Me*. It was performed as a preview before the piece had been entirely finished.

*African Contemporary Dance, a brief history of South African Contemporary Dance*.<sup>36</sup> The second critique is an online critique of *Beautiful Me* written by Moira De Swardt, published on July 27<sup>th</sup>, 2009, during VDT's 10-year-anniversary Africa tour at the Dance Factory in Newtown, Johannesburg, on [www.artlink.co.za](http://www.artlink.co.za).<sup>37</sup> Moira De Swardt studied BTh Ethics and Church History at the University of South Africa. She is a marriage officer and received basic medical care training. In addition she critiques books and performances and writes on arts, culture, entertainment, ecology and nature.<sup>38</sup>

Two critiques were published in the United Kingdom in 2006 and 2007. Francis Angol wrote about *Beautiful* and *Beautiful Me – Part Of* performed at Sadler's Wells in London in a text named "The artist – a landscape of ever shifting metaphors!", published on March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006 on [www.adad.org.uk](http://www.adad.org.uk).<sup>39</sup> Francis Angol is a dancer, choreographer and teacher of Contemporary African Dance from the Dominican Republic now based in London. He studied MA Dance and Somatic Wellbeing at the University of Central Lancashire and is now artistic director of the Movement Angol Dance Company.<sup>40</sup> The second British critique "Beautiful Me" by Lyndsey Winship was published on June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007 on [www.thestage.co.uk](http://www.thestage.co.uk),<sup>41</sup> and discusses the completed *Beautiful Me* also performed at Sadler's Wells. Lyndsey Winship studied 20<sup>th</sup> Century Music at Sussex University and now works as a dance writer and editor. She received the Chris de Marigny Dance Writers' Award and in 2008 she was invited as a jury member for the inaugural Priz Jardin D'Europe at the dance festival ImPulsTanz in Vienna.<sup>42</sup>

Finally, two critiques were published after performances during VDT's first US tour in 2009. Both critiques are about the same San Francisco performance at Yerba Buena Center for the Arts. *Beautiful Me* was critiqued by Allan Ulrich in a text entitled "Maqoma's sinewy search for kinetic identity" published in the "San Francisco Chronicle" on November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009.<sup>43</sup> Allan Ulrich is a teacher for dance critique writing and an international dance and music

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<sup>36</sup> [http://www.artlink.co.za/news\\_article.htm?contentID=7220](http://www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=7220); Douglas 2006:102.

<sup>37</sup> [http://www.artlink.co.za/news\\_article.htm?contentID=8090](http://www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=8090).

<sup>38</sup> <http://za.linkedin.com/pub/moira-de-swardt/17/ab2/850>.

<sup>39</sup> <http://www.adad.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?iid=22809andisa=Category>.

<sup>40</sup> <http://womad.org/artists/francis-angol/>; <http://www.theplace.org.uk/1136/short-courses/contemporary-african-dance-with-francis-angol-open-level.html>.

<sup>41</sup> <http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/17194beautiful-me>.

<sup>42</sup> [http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2008/speaker\\_detail/1675/](http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2008/speaker_detail/1675/).

<sup>43</sup> <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/11/07/DDN61AGAC8.DTL>.

critic. He has written for both the “San Francisco Examiner” and the “San Francisco Chronicle” from 1980-2002 as well as for several other British, American and French dailies. His texts have also been published on dance specific media such as the “Dance Magazine” (of which he is senior advising editor), “Ballet News” and “Dance International”.<sup>44</sup> Rita Felciano, Ulrich’s colleague in writing for the “Dance Magazine”, “Dance International” and several daily American newspapers such as the “San Francisco Bay Guardian”, the “New York Times” and the “San Francisco Chronicle”<sup>45</sup>, published her critique under the title “Roaming to Find Your Voice” on November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009 on [www.danceviewtimes.com](http://www.danceviewtimes.com)<sup>46</sup>.

## **5.2 Intra-cultural comparative analysis**

Before giving a cross-cultural analysis of the critiques, I will focus on a comparative, intra-cultural analysis starting with a content analysis. The aim is to present and compare the topic choice of the critics. Therefore, the critiques will be viewed in a thematic context influenced by cultural and national background. Where applicable, I will also consider the personal background, in terms of dance critique writing, of the respective writers in order to make out the underlying reasons for the respective topic choices.

The linguistic and language analysis will focus, on the one hand, on the critic’s attitude towards the performance and, on the other hand, the stylistic strategies used to express this attitude. Both the attitude and the strategies underlie the critic’s overall intention which is expressed in the evaluation. The critic’s perceptual stance is assumed to underlie these strategies, contributing to the resulting evaluation. Thus, the linguistic analysis also aims at uncovering the interconnectedness between the strategic procedures of the critic, which can be elaborated in notions of authority and power, content and context focus, and the final evaluation of the performance through choices of language style and rhetoric devices. The results will be summarised in a so-called South African, British and American perspective, respectively. It is not my intention to generalise the respective cultural stance from two critics. The summary of my findings will be the basis for a model cross-cultural comparison giving an idea on how cultural imprints may influence a critic’s evaluation or not. These studies need

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<sup>44</sup> <http://www.voiceofdance.com/v1/author.cfm?author=37>.

<sup>45</sup> <http://www.danceview.org/aboutus.html>.

<sup>46</sup> <http://www.danceviewtimes.com/2009/11/roaming-to-find-your-voice.html>.

to be taken further in order to find a universal way of viewing and writing on cross-cultural performances.

The analysis refers to a limited extent to the elaborated literature presented in chapters 2 and 3. I decided to use the presented overview on CDA, theatre semiotics and phenomenology as a basis for implementing analysis strategies that allow a focus on the most obvious aspects of each critique. This approach reflects the fact that each text is a unique communicative event perceived uniquely by each member of its readership and re-appears in my suggestions on dance critique writing in chapter 7.

### **5.3 Cross-cultural comparison of the perspectives**

Finally, I will compare the results of the linguistic analysis, first focusing on specific elements that proved to have a comparably strong impact in the critiques. Secondly, I will focus on a comparison of the evaluative strategies, the judgements themselves, as well as on the perception modes influencing the evaluation procedure. This part of the analysis is aimed at answering the questions of whether a culturally different background may lead to a negative critique and to what extent an underlying perception mode may influence the evaluation process.

The conclusion in chapter 7 is aimed at developing an approach to dance critique writing which focuses solely on the kinaesthetic perception of the spectator and in this case the critic. This approach is meant to overcome the limitations of theatre semiotics in order to eventually limit the influence of the critic's personal background in critiquing a dance performance. Therefore, in chapter 7, I will introduce a limited selection of readings, not yet discussed, in order to give a certain prospect on how this research could be taken further.

## 6 CHAPTER SIX: Analysis and comparison of dance critiques

### 6.1 Analysis

Throughout this section I will analyse the dance critiques with regard to their content and their linguistic style. Intra-cultural comparisons between the critiques will be made where applicable. Otherwise, the focus lies on how argumentative and persuasive strategies are established by linguistic means. In the second section of this chapter a comparison of culture-specific features identified in the texts is presented.

#### 6.1.1 South African critiques

Although both critiques treat the same performance given at different venues and evaluate it positively, they are marked by several differences in thematic content and linguistic style.

Sichel's critique is the first one published on *Beautiful Me*. It deals with performance specific background information, performance description and contextual interpretation of the piece. In her presentation of the performance to the reader Sichel concentrates on the discovery of prevailing socio-political issues underlying the performance. De Swardt's critique generally deals with similar topics. However, she focuses on the financial situation of South African performance artists, expressing her resentment against the national funding system. She shows an almost personal commitment to the dancer and his work and focuses on a positive evaluation.

The topic of artistic and cultural identity<sup>47</sup> is of great importance among South African performance artists who received additional training in Europe or the United States and who have created styles such as Afrofusion. This mixed dance style is cause for much controversy among both national and international audiences (compare Douglas et.al. 2006:105, 8-9, 11; Kodesh 2006:40; Reddy 2006:118). Furthermore, South African performance artists are largely dependent on international funding to be able to work. Sichel only mentions this parenthetically, she sees a chance of enrichment in the training abroad (compare Maqoma 2006:35; Kodesh 2006:46), foregrounding the cultural and political aspects of the performance. Paying limited attention to the topic of cultural and artistic identity makes the critique more accessible for the audience and the readership. Possibly, a more explicit

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<sup>47</sup> See section 4.3. For further discussion of this issue from an artistic point of view, consult the discussions of the Jomba! Dance Conference in 2004 (Loots and Young-Jahangeer 2005).



treatment of the choreographer's struggle might not have been comprehensible for an audience more conscious about daily socio-political issues than artistic concerns.<sup>48</sup> Although De Swardt also does not comment on this struggle explicitly, it underlies her argumentation strategy and her choice of thematic emphasis more overtly. By expressing her resentment towards the South African funding system for arts, and by naming possible biases that could be put forward against the highly acclaimed performance, she implicitly discusses the prevailing topic of funding in the Performing Arts in South Africa.

Thus, both critics show awareness of and sensitivity towards the controversial topics of funding and artistic identity. They follow the same aim of establishing a positive evaluation of the performance, advocating and advertising for Maqoma. Sichel starts the critique with an explicitly positive judgement: “[...] that’s quite a faint. This is even more remarkable [...]” (Sichel 2007:1)<sup>49</sup>. By choosing to emphasise the locally important topic of artistic and cultural identity and to announce a mixture of African and Asian dance styles in the subheading, curiosity and a positive image of the performance are evoked (Sichel 2007:2). De Swardt also evaluates the performance positively, first expressed by mentioning the audience’s standing ovation in the headline. Her personal judgement surfaces when she describes Maqoma’s work as “lovely” (De Swardt 2009:4); further evaluations appear mostly through similar emotional adjectives.

With her critique “Dance used as a channel across culture and history” Sichel contributes to the South African debate on politics, issues of identity based on Maqoma’s biography (Douglas et.al. 2006:105, 109, 110-11, 113-14) and dance as a medium of communication between arts and politics. “Dance” combines “culture and history” in the heading: The emphasis does not lie on the artist, and who dances is not as important as the thematic interpretation of Maqoma’s choreography. His name is only mentioned in the subheading and the focus immediately – within in the same line – shifts back to the interpretation of the piece categorising performance features in “ethnographic, political and biographical elements”. This

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<sup>48</sup> From an artistic point of view, it is a great chance for African dancers to experience themselves in other fields of dance. Furthermore, the funding situation is much better in Europe than in South Africa; Maqoma, for example received scholarships for both the Vienna and the Brussels sojourns. In South Africa he even had to quit dancing for a while to be able to feed his family when he was in a financially difficult situation. For further reading on the issues of finances in the South African dance scene consult: Douglas 2006; Loots and Young-Jahangeer 2005; Maqoma 2002/06; De Swardt 2009.

<sup>49</sup> To facilitate referencing during the linguistic analysis I will henceforth use this system: Surname of the writer, year of publication, line number.

shows a contradiction in referring to Maqoma's biography and then not attending to it since Maqoma is not presented as a dancer/choreographer in the first place, but is characterised as an agent for important social issues. This socio-political perspective is specified: "[...] Maqoma the dancer, the biographer, the medium [...]" (Sichel 2007:20-21). Issues, such as South Africa's political past and the individual search for artistic identity in a culturally diverse, politically shaken society are further summarised and implicated in the alliteration "Cracking cultural codes" (Sichel 2007:1). Sichel sees the dance as the medium which cracks cultural codes and thus at the same time goes beyond the current issues of reprocessing the past. It is Sichel's choice to focus on the ideological content of Maqoma's work, instead of primarily referring to his renown as a dancer. Thus, Maqoma's piece of art is interpreted as a choreographic comment on socio-political circumstances in contemporary South Africa. The critique of *Beautiful Me* serves, besides for the elaboration of a positive judgement, to discuss socio-political and historic stances that concern a majority of the South African population. The entity of the historic and social topics as well as artistic and aesthetic influences appears as an element in Maqoma's own biography and identity. Concentrating on a topic that concerns almost every South African and then shifting the focus to a more artistic concern is an approach which leads to a subtly elaborated strategy of gaining the audience's attention and interest.

In contrast, De Swardt's heading "Local dancer and choreographer Gregory Maqoma gets a standing ovation in his hometown" presents the critique with a focus on the artist and the positive reaction from his hometown audience. The double emphasis on Maqoma's origin ("local" and "hometown") directs the reader's sensitivity to the topic of localism. The introductory section (De Swardt 2009:1-10) focuses on the financial situation of South African artists. They are dependent on international, in this case French, funding to be able to create and show their work. In South Africa, *Beautiful Me* was solely presented at the FNB Dance Umbrella 2007 in Johannesburg, which also commissioned it, and thus has a special interest in presenting the performance (De Swardt 2009:4-5). Mentioning this fact may implicate a certain pride and a feeling of popularity among the audience: Getting the chance to see this rarely performed work may have a pleasing effect on a regular viewer of dance and may put them into a privileged position among the local experts in dance. Along with this flattering of the spectator, comes the awareness and sympathy for the artist's situation in South Africa. The detailed elaboration of the financial situation combined with De Swardt's

(2009:8-10) comment “It was, I think, meant to be both an encouragement to young artists to persevere and an indictment on a system which fails its artists in every stage of their careers” expresses her advocating stance for the artists and her resentment about the local artistic funding system.

Both critiques show authoritative and persuasive strategies. The following paragraphs will elaborate their functioning, their implemented technique and their respective aims on behalf of the critic.

De Swardt identifies the topic of humility in Maqoma’s work: introduced in the description of the piece as “a work of grace and humility” (De Swardt 2009:34), it is elaborated in the lengthy explanation of the concept of “ubuntu” which states that the people around a person make that person (De Swardt 2009:53-7). Along with this interpretation she attributes humility to Maqoma’s performance attitude as well: “he mentions with delicious and amusing humility that he couldn’t say his own name, ‘Gregory’” (De Swardt 2009:72-3). Thus, the concept of humility seems to underlie De Swardt’s persuasive strategy: she assumes that without emphasising the dignifying attributes of Maqoma’s work, and hence implicating that dignity and grace are values that should be appreciated by social individuals, her praising arguments of a “beautiful body [...] magnificently manipulated” and “exquisite dancing” (De Swardt 2009:31-2) do not suffice. Investigating the use of the concept of humility from a structural perspective, it appears in all three sections of the critique – excluding the introduction – also marked by missing thematic linkages (De Swardt 2009:10, 34, 61). After the second and third change in topic, De Swardt describes performance elements in order to eventually lead back to the topic of humility and finally conclude with it in form of an appeal implicated in the evaluation: “One has to love the “Beautiful Me” which ends with that”<sup>50</sup> (De Swardt 2009:74).

The sudden turns in topic give a certain liveliness and a spontaneous, personal impression to the critique. The irregular syntax, apparent in the different length of the sentences (compare long sentences De Swardt 2009:1-4, 15-20, 43-7 with short constructions De Swardt 2009:15, 59, 71), contributes to this *ad hoc* impression and characterises an almost casual, less-sophisticated language style. The advertising stance of the critique is underlined by De

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<sup>50</sup> “That” is in this case the “[...] delicious and amusing humility that he couldn’t say his own name [...]” (De Swardt 2009:72-3).

Swardt's strategy to destroy any doubts and biases against the performance. In order to achieve this, De Swardt (2009:35-9) negates the biases and weakens existing criticism against the popularity of African pieces abroad by acknowledging the effort the Johannesburg audience made in order to see the performance (De Swardt 2009:24-30). In exposing the behaviour of fellow spectators (assuming her readership to be the prospective spectatorship) De Swardt creates – also by the regular use of the first person pronoun – a group in which the interest is to see a local choreographer perform an excellent piece of art despite the existing prejudices and biases against migrating choreographers.<sup>51</sup> Whenever De Swardt formulates such a bias, she debilitates it either by claiming Maqoma's high reputation among the audience, especially the local one (De Swardt 2009:26-7), or by appealing on Maqoma's generous artistic personality (De Swardt 2009:40-3). To further persuade the readership, De Swardt switches tenses and mixes general and particular performance descriptions: she uses past tense to describe performance elements and her personal opinion that are specific for the particular performance she attended (De Swardt 2009:17-20, 28-30) In her statement, however, "The audience loves it. We react with joy [...]" (De Swardt 2009:59-60) she uses present tense presenting the positive audience reaction as if it was not dependent on the unique constellation of audience and performance. The prospective spectator gets the impression that the audience will always love Maqoma's work.

Examples of more general elements that change to a comparably low degree from performance to performance would be the description of the musicians, Maqoma's direct speech or his dancing which appear in present tense in a performance description (De Swardt 2009:12-17, 21-2, 31-3, 63-71,). De Swardt also generalises in the description of the music: "The musicians clearly enjoy themselves throughout the performance, working both as individuals and as an ensemble to co-create with Maqoma a *Beautiful Me*" (De Swardt 2009:15-7). It is her particular perception of the performance she attended that signals enjoyment. From the musician's attitude, their way of playing and co-creating the work of art, De Swardt concludes through interpretation that the musicians must have enjoyed what they were doing. Thus, this passage introduces the following personal comment "I particularly loved [...]" (De Swardt 2009:17) on an atmospheric level and contributes to a cohesive structure.

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<sup>51</sup> In this attitude, the accusation of not being African enough is treated implicitly (see chapter 4.3).

Sichel refers to the reaction of the audience with a subtle advertising stance. “These satiric ironies were rapturously recognised by Dance Umbrella audiences” (Sichel 2007:49-50) is a short alliteration, with which Sichel refers to Maqoma’s altered utterance about the selling of exotic stories to survive. In this context, the positive reaction of the spectators shows how they might see themselves from the perspectives of foreigners; the spectators imagine how, for instance Europeans, might see African dance; a view characterised by prejudices, biases and simplified generalisations. Expressed by the use of alliteration, Maqoma mocks the assumed ignorance of foreigners which can be seen as a means to sympathise with the South African audience and to show them that he has not forgotten his roots and that his identity has not altered through the artistic influence of choreographers and dancers from other cultures. To further extend this consolidative point of view, Sichel explains that all current ideological affairs are also combined in Maqoma’s “holistic identity” (Sichel 2007:44) which must mean that Maqoma is still truly South African, concerned with the same current affairs as the reader and the spectator.

The reference to current socio-political affairs in South Africa is implicitly treated in the performance (Kodesh 2006:40, 3, 8-9) which Sichel uses as a strategy to approach the performance and to present it to her readership. The readership that Sichel assumes in the concluding sentence and in her reference to Linyekula’s “trademark credo” (Sichel 2007:44), is familiar with African Contemporary Dance. The reader of Sichel’s critique is educated in Contemporary and Classical Dance (at least familiar with the world-famous classical ballet *Swan Lake*) (Sichel 2007:37) and is aware of current socio-political issues in South Africa. On the contrast De Swardt addresses a broader readership, less educated in African Contemporary Dance, but aware of the prevailing problem of African dancers influenced by Western dance techniques. Furthermore, De Swardt not only strengthens the feeling for localism (headline) but includes herself in the audience and thus minimises the distance between herself, the rest of the audience and the reader creating an in-group feeling by using the first person pronoun and generalisations of personal comments.

Thematically, the topics Sichel mentions are combined with the past which is, according to Khan, never dead (Kahn in Sichel 2007:15). Khan, one of the contributing choreographers, is an expert in contemporary Kathak, a traditional Asian dance style, which influenced the choreography of *Beautiful Me*. In order to create a foundation for the overarching notion of

'past', Sichel uses Khan's utterance in the form of direct speech and a quotation of the programme pamphlet rephrasing a statement by Maqoma (Sichel 2007:15; 16-9). Thus, Sichel verifies her interpretation of the piece through the direct speech of the choreographers who worked with Maqoma and Maqoma himself. Moreover, she links the level of background information to the performance level by quoting Linyekula, another co-choreographer and thus an authority: By discovering the connection between Maqoma's utterance "I sell exotic stories – to survive" (Sichel 2007:46) and Linyekula's phrase "I am an African dancer, I sell exotic stories, which one do you want to hear tonight?" (Sichel 2007:44-5) Sichel not only links the artists to each other but she proves the general reliability of her quotes. To a spectator of *Beautiful Me*, familiar with Linyekula's works, it will emerge that these quotes are true since they will appear during the performance. To further integrate the use of direct speech and quotes into the structure of the text, Sichel re-refers to this specific utterance when she gives her final evaluation on the piece: "It pays tribute to African dancers who do more than survive" (Sichel 2007:61-2). This penultimate sentence rounds the critique; it refers on the one hand back to line 46 and on the other hand it implicates the evaluation which focuses – different from the headline and the introductory part treating specifically *Beautiful Me* – on the broad genre of Performing Arts. Sichel concludes on the whole South African dance scene in using the plural *dancers*. But instead of giving a particular evaluation for *Beautiful Me*, Sichel praises it in categorising it to the genre of "groundbreaking art" in general (Sichel 2007:62). Thus, she states that a certain section – presumably in some aspects similar to the work of *Beautiful Me* – of South African contemporary Performance Art is, in her opinion, "groundbreaking".

De Swardt makes use of a more mystifying technique in order to convince her readership of the quality of the performance. The reader realises De Swardt's expertise in conveying her superficial knowledge of foreign evaluations of *Beautiful Me* and older pieces by Maqoma (De Swardt 2009:7, 25, 28). She adds background knowledge on Spanish tradition without specifying or deepening her point considerably (De Swardt 2009:13). This attitude can be perceived as authoritative by the reader: De Swardt seems to expect the reader to have such profound knowledge that superficial mentioning suffices to make a relevant and logical point. Instead of being precise, De Swardt implements a mystification strategy that avoids well-founded explicating information. De Swardt only establishes a certain degree of reliability in front of the reader when she refers to the Indian dance style Kathak. Some general, but in this

context, comparably precise, movement characteristics [“flat-footed stamping and intricate hand movements” (De Swardt 2009:44)] have to satisfy the reader. Her general knowledge about dance is underlined when she presents dance as an integral element to music: She generalises her opinion to “as it should always be” (De Swardt 2009:11) and states that a certain relationship between music and dance is (aesthetically) the “correct” one. This statement nevertheless lacks reflecting contemporary performance practice in which dance is not necessarily integral to music. In this case, De Swardt presents herself primarily as an authority, claiming that her personal preference is a general one, and secondly as a critic implicitly praising the performance.

Shifting the focus away from content-related thematic aspects of the critiques, the following paragraphs will deal with linguistic and stylistic devices. In order to describe the performance Sichel makes use of metaphors and imaginative language. This language appears primarily in the present tense when Sichel describes movement and music: The violin “call[s] sombrely” (2007:25-7) and “[c]reeping light reveals a man dressed in Sun Goddess red and black silk [...]” (2007:26-7), “[t]he plumage is mainly in the imagination and the ear, thanks to the tinctures of music [...]” (2007:30-1). In her descriptions, Sichel attributes personal images to that which she perceives from the stage. This means that the reader has to imagine her descriptions reversely: They attribute a certain, imagined stage design, light atmosphere or movement to a mental image constructed by the critic. Particularly with regards to the last image, which already belongs to a subsequent, well-elaborated bird metaphor, and does not say anything about the music, although it is the actual, to be described performance element this technique can lead to imaginations on behalf of the reader that are far from the performance.

The bird metaphor has its origin in the performance itself (Sichel 2007:29-34) and is transferred onto a meta-level of interpretation (Sichel 2007:36-9). Sichel takes Maqoma’s utterance in his native language isiXhosa, which declares that he is a peacock, as a starting point to elaborate on the image of the plumage, perceivable through “the tincture of the music”. She adds that Maqoma was not imitating the movements of a peacock (Sichel 2007:27-8; 30), which strengthens her personal, imaginative approach to the performance description. Sichel bases this comparably lengthy metaphor, which aids her to understand all other performance elements such as music, light and movement, on an utterance that is

probably not understood by every spectator.<sup>52</sup> Thus, the South African audience is also represented in the South African readership: In basing a great part of the performance description on this specific, language-dependent element, Sichel assumes that the reader who watches the piece on her recommendation is able to recognise the described scene. The specific address to the South African audience and readership supports the positive evaluation of the performance and the appeal implicated in the critique. It fulfils the audience's expectations in terms of a national aesthetic and ideological evaluation of the performance and thus endorses the performance to the South African spectator.

The further elaboration of the bird metaphor relates Africa to America and Europe to Africa ("ostrich meets phoenix; *Swan Lake* meets Mantsoe's *Gula*" Sichel 2007:37) and opens the notion of local limitation through focussing on dance: the combination of international dance elements culminates in "Maqoma's own wild-winged, full-bodied earth-stamping incarnation which transcends all origins and influences" (Sichel 2007:38-9). In this picturesque description, Sichel combines familiar and foreign elements on both the levels of content and dance-style. She creates an image of the ideological values including tradition and artistic enrichment covered in the dance piece and argues that the traditional, cultural-specific features of the performance need the influence of international dance styles to gain spiritual value. The imaginative description of movement re-appears in this metaphor in form of a triplet of double adjectives, which have a downward direction in space: From flying, possibly fluid movements attributed to wings and centred, probably calmer movements close to the body, and finally to traditional movements that use the floor and go into the ground.<sup>53</sup> A spiritual rise, which can also be imagined as an upward movement in space – the "incarnation which transcends" – immediately follows the physical decline of the movement directed to solid ground. Thus, the international influence on Maqoma's dance style, which is criticised by the South African audience, is compensated by attributing a spiritual value to it. The use of

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<sup>52</sup> The part of the audience that understands isiXhosa in South Africa is, of course, relatively high. Considering that the performance travels around the world without any changes in language, illumines, that this part of the performance will not be understood literally, thus, the movement, light and sound will not be attributed to birds, if the spectators do not master isiXhosa to the required extent.

<sup>53</sup> This is an attempt of attributing a certain kind of movement to the elaborated metaphors – my imagination of the movement can only stay unspecific and actually unimaginable. But the attempt supports my general argumentation to a phenomenological approach to dance which aims at describing movement as it is in order to encourage the reader to make their own attributions independent from the critic's perception modes. Thus, the reader, a prospective spectator, has more freedom to decide whether the performance appeals to them or not. For a further elaboration of this topic see section 7.1.



linguistic images and elaborated metaphors such as the bird metaphor, which even has its origin in the linguistic element of the spoken words of Maqoma, strongly suggests an underlying theatre semiotic approach which is highlighted by the re-occurring use of linguistic features transferred onto the artistic field of dance – not obviously related to linguistics and communication.

The use of emotional adjectives in De Swardt's critique creates a positive performance evaluation. She states her positive judgment with adjectives such as "lovely" (De Swardt 2009:4, 60), "beautiful" (De Swardt 2009:31, 60), or "pleasing" (De Swardt 2009:20). Furthermore, she makes use of adverb-adjective constructions expressing sympathising emotions towards the dancers and the performance, "magnificently manipulated" (De Swardt 2009:32) or "delicately crafted and lovingly told" (De Swardt 2009:60-1), to describe Maqoma's body and the concept of the performance itself. The emotional stance of the critique is further elaborated by the use of the first person pronoun which is introduced in the beginning. Combined with the inconsequent use of tenses and the irregular syntactic structure, the use of the first person pronoun evokes a more casual tone than Sichel uses in her critique. Since De Swardt does not implement such an attributive style as Sichel, her approach to the performance could be called less theatre semiotic and her attitude is more spontaneous and emotional than Sichel's. Calling a dance performance a "tale" and "narrative" (De Swardt 2009:60), however, still suggests a theatre semiotic perception mode – not based on corporeal sensing prior to the attribution of emotions and feelings.

To summarise a South African perspective from this analysis one could state that through authoritative and persuasive strategies that include advocating and advertising techniques, both critics convey a positive evaluation of the performance and make use of different linguistic devices. They empathise with the choreographer's side as well as with the perceptive side of the audience and negotiate between them, putting their emphasis on encouraging the prospective spectator to watch the performance. Both critics employ a neutral tone, showing their commitment to the sincerity of the prevailing current issues. In order to persuade, Sichel uses quotes and reported speech, thus proving her general reliability, whereas De Swardt focuses on creating an in-group feeling among reader, spectator and critic through using a personal and emotional style. In their critiques, Sichel and De Swardt employ strategies of thematic and stylistic integration to inform their readers in a way that is subtly

directed according to their intention. Sichel elaborates on performance background and artistic content in relation to current South African debates on politics and culture, using quotes from the performer and co-choreographers to justify her argumentation. Her final, impersonal judgement on contemporary South African Performance Art is also authoritatively supported. She implements a serious, neutral and unemotional language style to establish and maintain her authority. De Swardt's style, in comparison, is more personal and emotional, giving implicit and explicit evaluations throughout the critique and at the same time accusing the South African funding system for the arts. She strongly appeals to the sympathy of her readership by making use of the concept of "ubuntu" referring to it on the one hand as a thematic topic and on the other hand implementing it as a strategy: Thus she raises sympathy for the financial and artistic situation of dancers and choreographers in South Africa.

### **6.1.2 British critiques**

Both Angol and Winship provide mainly descriptive accounts of the performance, although they approach and evaluate the dance piece from different perspectives, according to their individual educational and professional backgrounds.<sup>54</sup>

Angol's critique "The artist – a landscape of ever shifting metaphors" takes an artistic perspective – possibly deriving from his own artistic background as a dancer and choreographer of African Contemporary Dance. It includes a pre-viewing part of *Beautiful Me* and *Beautiful*, the second part of the *Beautiful*-trilogy, and is thus the oldest critique in the selection presented in this thesis. Winship's critique "Beautiful Me" was published more than a year later and after Sichel's critique on the South African premiere. Angol takes a conversational approach to the performance, combined with a subtle musical stance.

Both critiques mostly consist of performance descriptions: Winship even waives an introductory part; starting immediately with a performance descriptive element by quoting Maqoma's stage speech (Winship 2007:1-2). She is the only critic in this selection who immediately enters into the description of the stage performance. Her descriptions stay relatively performance-close and comparably neutral in tone, avoiding both explicit and

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<sup>54</sup> This study does not aim at providing an overall and generalising assessment of how people from a British, South African or American cultural background treat performance art. The categorisation into cultural backgrounds is followed in order to give the reader an idea of possible cultural differences in dance critique writing.

implicit judgements. Angol, however, presents background information on location and event context, co-production and funding in his critique (Angol 2006:1-12). The rest of Angol's critique focuses on performance, choreography and dance style descriptions, analyses and interpretations. He includes expert knowledge of dance and notions of his aesthetic understanding. 'Aesthetic understanding' in this case refers to Angol's personal aesthetic preferences as an artist, probably expressed in his own choreographies but also in the evaluation of Maqoma's performance. Generally one could say that in the evaluative part of a critique the personal aesthetic understanding of the critic appears naturally, but it is not of prevailing importance in all critiques. Angol, however, implicitly treats his aesthetic understanding as a topic, whereas Winship (2007:20) only states that the performance had certain effect on her. Having compared Angol and Winship, Angol's thematic emphasis lies on positive evaluations throughout the critique, which are mostly achieved through a picturesque, at times even poetic language style characterised by rhetoric devices. She neither names particular performance elements that she liked nor does she explicitly state that she experienced the performance positively. She softens her general negative evaluation in mentioning the effect the performance had onto her: "Beautiful Me is a slight piece, but it's definitely intriguing" (Winship 2007:19-20). Thus, she mixes a general assessment of the piece with her personal experience which could give an indication for her assumption on the general evaluation: It seems as if in general the piece was slight, but for herself, not necessarily including anyone else, it was intriguing. This restricted positive evaluation is supported by her neutral tone and the emphasis of the subjectivity of her view throughout the critique.

Angol's description of the performance starts with the performance topic which is presented in pamphlets, performance teasers and interviews with Maqoma. A perspective of the wholesome beauty of the universe is established despite the juxtaposition of human beings and things and by the connective notion of the seasons (Angol 2006:9-11). Angol's agreement with this thematic background of the performance is mostly expressed in the first part of the critique; namely explicitly in the headline "landscape", the landscape-like stage impressions (Angol 2006:15, 7, 9) and the use of word choice reflecting the expression of harmony (Angol 2006:20, 34). The description and interpretation of the stage design (Angol 2006:15-21) is followed by comments on the dance style (Angol 2006:22-6). Movement analyses, choreographic commentary and cultural interpretation are mixed in a comparably long

passage (Angol 2006:27-40) and express Angol's expertise in order to introduce his aesthetic understanding. In the evaluative conclusion, Angol's "hope" (Angol 2006:42) to see more performances like Maqoma's, expresses on the one hand his experience of a "satisfactory evening" (Angol 2006:40) and on the other hand makes his aesthetic understanding explicit in a retrospective manner: *Beautiful* and *Beautiful Me* can be seen as prototypes for what Angol understands to be African Contemporary Dance (Angol 2006:41-5). Comments on choreographic strategies such as "The use of repetition reinforced statements of expression, injecting a dynamics that played on movement metaphors" (Angol 2006:29-30) and "[a] style and structure that can be described as circular intensions interconnected through parallel planes within defined arena expressions" (Angol 2006:38-40)<sup>55</sup> and movement analysis, such as "[s]harp shoulder expressions with bounded and extended lower body movements [...]" (Angol 2006:27), "[...] sweeping contemporary dance motifs and gestures [...]" (Angol 2006:30-1) and "[f]ree flowing sharp precise motifs and transitions exhibited an interesting meeting of forms" (Angol 2006:37-8) describe those features of Maqoma's performance that Angol evaluates positively.<sup>56</sup> At the end of the critique Angol combines his movement descriptions to a statement of his aesthetic understanding; this is not foreseeable for the reader; thus the aesthetic understanding appears retrospectively and can only be fully identified and understood when reading the text a second time.

Winship's introduction – that is not preceded by a headline – is Maqoma's often cited quote presenting himself as a dancer who has exotic stories to tell (Winship 2007:1-2; Sichel 2007:44.5; De Swardt 2009:21-2). The form of speech and the word "story" are crucial for Winship's approach to the performance. Like De Swardt, Winship destroys the possible presumptions of a monologue, raised through the use of the term 'story', which to some extent conciliates the reader; but it mostly has a cohesive function introducing a conversational approach to the performance by opposing "conversation" to the assumedly expected "monologue" (Winship 2007:3-4).<sup>57</sup> Hereafter, the term 'conversation' gives thematic cohesion to the critique and appears four times (Winship 2007:4, 5, 15). The conversational

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<sup>55</sup> In the metaphor "[t]he movement vocabulary was rooted in placement and angular outline" (Angol 2006:36-7) Angol also looks for a placement of the movement in space.

<sup>56</sup> Another, more poetic description appears in the description of the female dancer who "[...] moved with poise and elegance, shifting and flowing from one dynamic gesture to the next [...]" (Angol 2006:32-4).

<sup>57</sup> Sichel also refers to linguistic and conversational aspects of the performance when she describes the staged communication in form of conversations, stories and dialogues (Sichel 2007:22, 36, 53).

approach is supported by the mentioning of the “[...] words, memories and email exchanges [which] are all part of the fabric of the piece” (Winship 2007:13-4). Her differentiated and specified positive evaluation is neutrally expressed at the end of the critique making the description of the stage scenario her major concern (Winship 2007:19-20).

After the thematic contextualisation of the British critiques, both the persuasive and the authoritative strategies used by the critics will be unravelled. Winship compounds her expert knowledge in a rather inconspicuous but still comprehensible way: the additional information that Maqoma performed with Khan (Winship 2007:10-1) is, for example, put in a sub-clause. The reason for mentioning this fact might lie in the popularity of Khan as the only co-choreographer from the United Kingdom with whom the assumed local readership might be best familiar. Winship’s own musical background becomes evident when she uses the word “ostinato” (Winship 2007:13) without explaining it.<sup>58</sup> Thus, she demonstrates expertise claiming a certain authoritative position which could also be interpreted in Winship’s comment on the contribution of “[...] ‘minutes’ of their choreographic material to Maqoma’s project” (Winship 2007:7): It either implicates the consultation of background information on the choreographic progress or it is based on the experience of the performance itself. Furthermore, she uses the word “minutes” as a cohesive element since it re-appears in the description of the content of Maqoma’s conversation (Winship 2007:17, 8).

Angol’s expertise apparently lies in his fundamental knowledge of dance styles and choreography. The categorisation of Maqoma’s dance style as “very contemporary” (Angol 2006:23) and “laced with an African resonance” (Angol 2006:25-6) and the recognition of “a movement signature that is inevitably Maqoma’s trademark” (Angol 2006:28-9) suggest that Angol is an expert viewer of African Contemporary Dance. Even the concession that “[a]t times sweeping contemporary dance motifs and gestures set against a backdrop of cultural expressions made it difficult to position the style of expression into one defined category” (Angol 2006:30-2) implies a particular form of knowledge: in specifying his bewilderment after a section of coherent interpretation (Angol 2006:28-30), he proves his knowledge rather than evoking doubt. Moreover, he generalises his knowledge in the last section expressing “hope” (Angol 2006:42) to see more performances like Maqoma’s and stating that this would

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<sup>58</sup> “Ostinato” is a musical term, besides its normal usage in Italian as “stubborn or headstrong”, it describes the constant repetition of a musical sequence.

“enhance the diverse richness of British dance” (Angol 2006:45). Thus, Angol assumes that his opinion can be generalised (he writes “one can only hope” instead of “I can only hope” (Angol 2006:42)) and that the British dance audience would benefit from his expert opinion. In establishing his expert knowledge, Angol claims a certain authoritative stance which he justifies at the beginning of the performance description by referring to an authority and stating the source: the thematic performance context is limited by Maqoma’s statement published in *Arts Alive* (Angol 2006:9-11). Thus, Angol verifies his approach to the elaboration of the performance from the beginning and establishes a certain degree of credibility among his readership.

Angol’s readership is, according to the specific comments on dance style and choreographic strategies, familiar with Contemporary Dance and African Dance. Considering his generalising evaluative ending, he assumes that the readership shares his aesthetic values. For the reader’s or the prospective spectator’s conciliation, Winship negates those performance aspects which she assumes to be the reader’s concern. According to Winship’s concentration on the reconciliation strategy, it is assumed that the spectator might be bored by solo pieces (which probably best represents a monologue in dance) as well as by pieces of more than one choreographer who enact their choreographic styles one after the other. Furthermore, Winship assumes her audience to be willing to hermeneutically follow the performance and assumes that they might understand those performance passages she mentions in the same way that she does (Winship 2007:20). Understanding and non-understanding of theatrical signs refer to the ability of attributing meaning and making sense of the interpretation of a certain sign. Assuming that a theatrical sign represents and signifies something in the real world, independent from the theatrical context, a certain code or certain conventions need to be recognised and decoded to understand the meaning of the sign correctly, namely in transferring it to the real world.<sup>59</sup>

Both critics, however, assume a certain intellectual level among their readership as they make use of foreign words from the French language (“griot” in Angol 2006:35) and the Italian

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<sup>59</sup> Compare section 3.1.

language (“ostinato” in Winship 2007:13).<sup>60</sup> Neither word is of everyday usage in the English language; both need some kind of expert knowledge to be interpreted correctly.

As for linguistic features, the use of various adjectives and adverb-adjective combinations characterise Angol’s descriptive style which is particularly elaborated in his stage description “[a] visionary landscape of two organic bodies [...] set within a rectangular space outlined by a perimeter, a path constructed so as to represent a daisy field – green grass with beautiful different coloured daisies sparsely positioned around the route” (Angol 2006:15-8)<sup>61</sup> and the description of Maqoma’s dance style “Maqoma’s tall prominent stature animated the landscape with a griot-like presence, exhibiting the skill and confidence of one well versed in their art” (Angol 2006:35-6). In the first quote, Angol creates a picture of the stage through language: the reader is no longer able to differentiate between the critic’s imagination and that what Angol saw on stage. The linguistic images leave unclear whether the stage design really was the imitation<sup>62</sup> of a daisy field in combination with grass. In the second quote Angol uses the word “griot” – besides the meaning of a Celtic poet and singer the term is also known to describe a member of a Western African tribe who keeps the oral history and traditions – and thus compares a South African performer to a West African, French influenced tradition.<sup>63</sup> On the one hand this shows a certain degree of empathic potential but on the other hand it is an inappropriate attribution that could be called a mislabelling or misinterpretation due to cultural differences. Angol uses further linguistic images when he transfers movement in a two-dimensional scale creating an image from the living performance: “[a] style that can be described as circular intension interconnected through parallel planes within a defined arena of expression” (Angol 2006:39-40). Alliterations such as “intension interconnected” and “parallel planes” and anaphors, such as “The programme [...]. The two works [...]” (Angol 2006:5, 9) and “The costumes [...]. The lighting [...]” (Angol 2006:18, 9) have rhetoric

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<sup>60</sup> *Griot*, meaning Celtic poet or singer in French, it might be familiar to those readers who know the Celtic tradition.

<sup>61</sup> Some positive adjectives appear throughout the critique: “beautiful“ appears in lines 14 and 17, “interesting” in lines 22 and 38, “green” as a synonym for nature in lines 17 and 18. The adverb “well” appears in lines 19 and 36.

<sup>62</sup> In the context of stage design it is likely to be impossible to create a natural, a real daisy field. Therefore, theatre invents signs that symbol a daisy field. The closest way of representing a daisy field on stage would probably be to put a few living daisies among a square piece of green grass. Angol’s description though, does not refer to the nature of the theatrical sign used in Maqoma’s performance. Thus, the impression or the imagination of a daisy field could also have been created through language. The term ‘imitation’ thus refers to an unknown sign signifying a daisy field under the circumstances that a real daisy field is very unlikely to be found on stage.

<sup>63</sup> <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/griot>.

functions and contribute as well as the antithesis “[f]ree flowing sharp precise [...]” (Angol 2006:37) to a vivid impression in language. The listing of stage and movement descriptions interrupted by choreographic analyses without any connectives creates an unsteady and lively picture of the critique that is constructed of simple syntactic constructions. The structure of subject-verb-object is rarely interrupted; exceptions are the beginning of a sentence with a temporal sub-clause (Angol 2006:12) and an adjective describing the following subject in form of alliteration “[s]harp shoulder [...]” (Angol 2006:27).

In contrast to Angol, Winship uses various connectives such as “but” (Winship 2007:3, 17, 20), “then” (Winship 2007:5), “rather than” (Winship 2007:7-8) and “while” (Winship 2007:17) which support the cohesive flow of the text and make it – in combination with the relatively short and simple syntax – easy to read. Winship’s attitude towards her writing about the performance shows her awareness about the subjectivity of performance perception: she expresses most perception-based descriptions in subjunctive formulations such as “[...] Maqoma seems to be absorbing [...]” (Winship 2007:8), “[...] moments that look like [...]” (Winship 2007:10), “[...] a swift kathak-like arm movement swells into a trancelike ostinato” (Winship 2007:12-3). Through this formulation attitude, Winship makes clear that these descriptions are based on her individual perception. Supporting this, references to Maqoma’s speech are made in the indicative mode, like for example “[t]here are conversations [...]” (Winship 2007:14-5) or “[...] he is struggling [...] he’s having [...]” (Winship 2007:17-8). Furthermore, Winship alludes to her musical background through the use of the word “ostinato” which also emphasises her subjective perception mode. Like Angol, Winship uses alliteration to give her critique a certain rhythm: “[...] a powerful passage where a repeated, stubborn stamping of the feet and a swift kathak-like arm movement swells into a trancelike ostinato” (Winship 2007:12-3). Interestingly, one could assume that the alliterations are chosen as to imitate the dynamics and power of the performance through language sounds; the *p* and *st* alliterations indicate powerful and probably tense movement whereas the *sw* alliteration and the *m* connection between “arm movement” makes a softer impression, perhaps indicating swinging or shifting movements. Repeating the notion of repetition – included in the term “ostinato”, explicated in the “repeated, stubborn stamping” – re-enacts the performance in language. Thus, the dance performance becomes a speech performance; comparable to performative speech acts. Furthermore, the notion of stubbornness is also repeated through the meaning of *ostinato* in English. Realising the different layers of meaning



postulates Winship's profound knowledge of Musical Science, the Italian language and Dance Studies.

The expression *twists and turns* in “[...] the twists and turns of Maqoma's thoughts [...]” is, on the one hand, a remarkable rhetoric strategy as it includes a triple alliteration (Winship 2007:19) but it also signals a certain non-understanding, especially being placed after a rather coherent passage of analysis and interpretation which is even elaborated into the metaphor of announcing the African leaders, laying them to rest and burying them on stage in order to create a new history signals a hermeneutic approach (Winship 2007:14-7). Winship succeeds in interpreting the theatrical signs from the stage – which she leaves, except for the announcement of the names, undescribed and unmentioned – and combines them with a narration. The rupture between this fluid narration and the section that discovers a non-understanding is underlined by this idiom. In the passage “[...] Maqoma seems to be absorbing their [the co-choreographer's] ideas and hanging them on his own body [...]” (Winship 2007:8-9), Winship also creates a metaphor from a performance section thus stating that communication between herself and the choreographer was successful through the means of dance. Each metaphor seems to mirror an event of successful communication from which she creates her own artistic image using linguistic and rhetoric features. Thus, Winship uses imaginary and performative language to signal her understanding of the performance and to create an individual narration in transferring the dance performance to different disciplines such as music and linguistic communication. This attitude suggests a hermeneutic, theatre semiotic approach to dance performances with little phenomenological impact. Her limited positive evaluation might derive from this approach, which seems to be culture-dependent and thus might not work with a cross-cultural performance.

Summarising the British critiques to a combined British perspective, one will find that in both critiques the individual educational and artistic background of the critics is expressed; it influences the style and the content of the texts fundamentally. Angol's concentration on the description of movement and choreography mirrors his expertise knowledge in the categorisation and evaluation of that what he perceives. His positive evaluation of the performance throughout the critique is expressed in his almost poetic language style. Winship also seems to understand the writing on dance performances as an art which becomes evident in her usage of imaginary language. Both critics, however, seem to have problems of sense-

making and understanding the performance: Angol attributes Maqoma's figure to a Celtic poet or singer with French origins – which could be explainable imagining that he wants to transfer that what he perceives into a local pattern, understandable for British audiences. If though he used the word “griot” in the notion of a West African story-teller and keeper of tradition, the attribution to Maqoma would be a mislabelling. But Winship clearly states her non-understanding when she labels the structure of Maqoma's performance content “twists and turns”. The choice of this idiom can be interpreted as a non-understanding due to cross-cultural differences.

### **6.1.3 American critiques**

The evaluations in the American critiques are differentiated into a positive section on dance and music as well as negative criticism on intended audience participation on behalf of the choreographer and the performance structure. Ulrich and Felciano share the background of experienced writers on dance performances. Their critiques deal with the same performance but differ from each other. The only similarities can be found in the separation between music and dance elements and the differentiated evaluation of the performance. Ulrich emphasises the mixture of dance styles positively, presenting *Beautiful Me* as one of the rare examples of “[c]ontemporary dance from Africa” (Ulrich 2009:3), possibly in order to educate the San Francisco audience. Felciano profoundly elaborates her criticism throughout the critique, weakening the positive elements of dance and music; she concludes with a lengthy negative evaluation of the performance that is based on divergent performance aesthetics.

Ulrich titles his critique “Sinewy search for kinetic identity” which evokes an imagination of Maqoma's physical appearance and his movements, respectively, as well as a vague impression about thematic points in the performance. The variety of Maqoma's movements is dealt with in the middle of the critique – after an introductory part which gives general information on African guest performances in San Francisco and introduces a differentiated evaluation of the performance – starting with descriptions on the performer's body and costume (Ulrich 2009:15-6). The physical description is interrupted by a thematic performance analysis mostly covering Maqoma's speech parts and the included address of the audience (Ulrich 2009:17-23). Ulrich introduces the description of movement with a negatively critical remark on the previously described aspects of the performance “[a] bit of a muddle, to be sure. But those observers in quest of lucidity can simply bask in Maqoma's

riveting movement style” (Ulrich 2009:24-5). By presenting movement aesthetics in this way, Ulrich implicates certain downgrading of its value: the reader gets the impression that, if the content of the piece – presumably the most important element in a presentation – cannot be presented to a satisfying degree, one can still be consoled by the aesthetics of the dance. He refers to his headline comment when he interprets *Beautiful Me* as a piece on the “search for kinetic identity” (Ulrich 2009:30) which he supports with Maqoma’s different dance styles (Ulrich 2009:34-5). Ulrich’s claim in this context that “one understands” (Ulrich 2009:30) the aim of the performance, implicates the aim of the critique: it is not the thematic content that interests Ulrich, rather he interprets Maqoma’s combination of the different movement styles as quest for an artistic identity. In contrast to Felciano, Ulrich concentrates on the interpretation of the choreography understanding it as treating issues related to cultural identity: “In seeking an African identity, Maqoma strikes a universal chord” (Ulrich 2009:39).

In contrast to Ulrich, Felciano’s headline “Roaming to find your voice” seems hardly connected to the body of the critique, since it suggests – similarly to Ulrich – a slow quest for the expression of a personal opinion. Felciano’s interpretation of the performance as the “[...] finding of his own voice in the pool of contemporary and traditional African dance [...]” (Felciano 2009:2) relates to the headline and suggests a further elaboration of the topic, but it is immediately succeeded by the introduction of the structure of the performance, Felciano’s main aspect in the critique (Felciano 2009:3). After a rough summary of the piece, an overall evaluation and the presentation of the dancer, Felciano describes each performance part according to its marks by one of the contributing choreographers. She mentions noticeable aspects of the stage design, movement characteristics and the music, including analytical, interpretive and evaluative comments throughout the text. In calling Maqoma “a truly global dancer thinker” (Felciano 2009:12) who “has seen a lot and absorbed more” (Felciano 2009:14-5), Felciano acknowledges Maqoma’s dance style. Nevertheless, the positive evaluation of the “remarkable” (Felciano 2009:7) dancer is succeeded by the praise of the music and musicians and their fusion with the dancer (Felciano 2009:5, 59-62). An elaborated evaluation is given at the end of the critique contrasting positive and negative aspects of the performance (Felciano 2009:59-69): The negative evaluation regards the performance structure and its form. Felciano attributes ephemeral, glittering and dream-like notions to Maqoma’s performance interpreting it as chaotic and disorderly (Felciano 2009:2-3, 23-4). Fatal mistakes in Maqoma’s dramaturgy are, according to Felciano, the direct address of the

audience, which has only recently been established as a theatrical performance feature and may still be perceived ambiguously; but Maqoma pushes further into the direction of contemporary Performance Art in encouraging the audience to participate at the performance. The negative evaluation of contemporary performance practice implicates that Felciano prefers classical theatre works (Felciano 2009:64-9). Felciano also evaluates a sequence negatively that she fails to fully understand: For her classical understanding of theatre art, more than one possible interpretation does not seem to be satisfying (Felciano 2009:43-5).

Unlike the previous critics, Ulrich and Felciano write fundamentally differentiated evaluations and implement various strategies of criticism, divided into positive and negative forms. Certain expectations about the performance form, its structure and about movement aesthetics and music seem to underlie Felciano's criticism. She attributes nature, earth and footwork in combination with "the playing, clucking and clapping musicians" (Felciano 2009:59-60) as typically African and judges them positively (Felciano 2009:24-5, 32-3). "Maqoma's stepping outside his persona [...]" (Felciano 2009:64-5) in contrast, is judged negatively, since it does not seem to meet Felciano's understanding of performance theory (Felciano 2009:69). Thus, Felciano compares that which she perceives to certain criteria in order to base her evaluation on whether the performance meets her expectations or not.<sup>64</sup> In case of mis-understanding Felciano labels the respective scene as "odd" (Felciano 2009:44): she perceives the sequence in which Maqoma beats himself<sup>65</sup> as unfamiliar and thus cannot categorise it. Through the use of rhetorical questions she suggests two ways of understanding the sequence, even though the reader cannot make an adequate decision on their probability because of the lack of necessary contextual information (Felciano 2009:43-5). The strategy of leaving a comment without context and mystifying its origin, transfers the impression of non-understanding to the reader who may chose to believe her judgement and to follow her authority or to ignore it. Hence, Felciano critically compares and discovers a mismatch of performance aspects and incoherently judges it as a negative aspect of the performance.

Ulrich's negative criticism, in comparison, is not this strong. He seems to introduce a differentiated evaluation at the start ("[...] sometimes compelling, sometimes elusive local debut [...]" Ulrich 2009:7-8) and mostly expresses negative judgements implicitly; for

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<sup>64</sup> Compare section 3.3.

<sup>65</sup> Ulrich also mentions this sequence but he does not evaluate it (Ulrich 2009:32)

example, Maqoma's "barely comprehensible mutter" (Ulrich 2009:21), which is supposed to be the quoting of important moments in South African history (Ulrich 2009:20). These comments are most saliently understood as negative criticism. The comment "There's even a request for audience participation" (Ulrich 2009:23) followed by the evaluative comment "A bit of a muddle, to be sure" (Ulrich 2009:24) suggests – in combination with the incomprehensible quotes of South African history – a negative judgement on the aspect of the audience participation. If "muddle" refers to a loose thematic cohesion, the comment could also refer to the structure of the performance. Ulrich, however, does not make explicit use of his authoritative position to claim negative judgements; he writes in a neutral and factual tone and leaves his statements open for ambiguous interpretation: "compelling" and "elusive" could be interpreted as either positive or negative aspects of the performance, depending on the reader's attitude towards the previously introduced contribution of *Beautiful Me* to Contemporary Dance from Africa. The introductory part "Contemporary dance from Africa may be one of the final fields for exploration by outsiders. Fortunately, Bay Area audiences have already sampled [...]" (Ulrich 2009:3-4) also does not clarify whether "fortunately" refers to the fact that eventually Contemporary Dance from Africa reaches the American continent or whether it criticises the unfamiliar aesthetics with which the audience have already had contact through previous guest performances.

Positive evaluations, in contrast, are explicitly emphasised by Ulrich. According to him, music and dance reconcile the audience for the non-cohesive thematic structure (Ulrich 2009:24-5). For Ulrich, lucidity seems to be an important positive characteristic of a dance piece but through this statement, he acknowledges an equal degree in value to movement aesthetics. The description and interpretation of movement underlies Maqoma's choreographic variety through precise verbs of movement<sup>66</sup> and are followed by Ulrich's personal statement that "he is not easy to forget" (Ulrich 2009:29). The comparison of Maqoma's fusion of dance and music to "American jazz dance at its most pristine" (Ulrich 2009:36-7) expresses high praise even though Ulrich concludes the critique with a more general statement leading back to the headline and thus rounding off the text (Ulrich 2009:39). Felciano emphasises the contribution of music in a comparably short section which

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<sup>66</sup> To describe arm movements, he uses for example "embrace", "wrap", "slice" (Ulrich 2009:26-7), to describe movements of legs and feet, he uses for example "stamping out", "dipping into a plié", "hopping around" (Ulrich 2009:29, 32) and torso movements are described as "torso twisting" and "ripples [that] run through his torso" (Ulrich 2009:28, 31).

evaluates the performance positively: “The contribution by the playing, clucking and clapping musicians, cannot be overstated” (Felciano 2009:59-60). Placing this judgement on the end of the critique increases its value in comparison to her initial comment on “Maqoma’s thrilling performance” (Felciano 2009:4) and his description as a “remarkable dancer[’s]” (Felciano 2009:7-8) – accompanied by the praise of the “exceptional musicians” (Felciano 2009:5) as an “astounding collaborative input” (Felciano 2009:5). Clearly, Felciano preferred the music to the dance; however, the critique concludes with relatively longer negative criticism which subsequently leaves a strong negative impression on the reader.

Both critics assume a comparably high degree of knowledge about European dance styles, education and influence in Contemporary Dance since they mention Maqoma’s training at P.A.R.T.S. and at the DanceWeb (Ulrich 2009:34; Felciano 2009:11). Maqoma’s South African training is mentioned by Felciano who gives general information<sup>67</sup>; whereas Ulrich does not mention it all. One might assume that the addressed readership is not familiar with Contemporary Dance from Africa<sup>68</sup> so that a reference to the known, in this case European, schools is made in order to provide a basis for imagining Maqoma’s dance style. The excellent reputation of both schools suggests to educated readers that it might be worthwhile to engage with Contemporary Dance from Africa. Moreover, Felciano and Ulrich use certain dance-specific terms such as “plié”<sup>69</sup> (Ulrich 2009:32), which belongs to Maqoma’s educational background, and “Voguing”<sup>70</sup> (Felciano 2009:56); which might refer to Michael Jackson’s influence on Maqoma’s dance style.<sup>71</sup> In both cases, the readership is assumed to be familiar with the specific terms, since neither Ulrich nor Felciano give explanatory or further contextual comments. Both critics see themselves among the audience using the first person plural pronoun when they write about the audience’s behaviour or reactions (Ulrich 2009:37; Felciano 2009:66, 68). The reader is addressed in a more distanced manner: Felciano, for example, avoids direct utterances to the reader and Ulrich uses them rarely, always in a

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<sup>67</sup> In her description she refers to “early street dance and traditional African dance experiences” (Felciano 2009:13).

<sup>68</sup> Ulrich strengthens this assumption since he labels Contemporary Dance from Africa “one of the final fields for exploration” (Ulrich 2009:3).

<sup>69</sup> A plié is a drawn-out, not necessarily slow, bending of the knees; a fundamental movement deriving from Classical Ballet but also element of most other dance styles.

<sup>70</sup> “Voguing” or “Vogueing” is a Modern Dance style coming from the culture of pop music. It describes the stage performances of popular singers such as Madonna or – in this case more probable – Michael Jackson.

<sup>71</sup> Interestingly and in contrast to the assumption of the critics being willing to give selected information on performance aspects the audience might be familiar with, the American reviews do not mention Michael Jackson’s influence explicitly.

generalising way. “Once you have seen Maqoma navigate [...] he is not easy to forget” (Ulrich 2009:28-9) is the most direct address conveying Ulrich’s personal perception of the performance. This passage evokes the impression of a private conversation between the reader and Ulrich in which he states his individual experience. Felciano uses the same strategy “You watched the energy soar in his body, [...]” (Felciano 2009:32-3) On another occasion Ulrich uses the more general pronoun “one” (2009:30) in order to lead to a broader topic of Maqoma’s diverse dance style and the interpreted search for kinetic identity. Thus, Ulrich carefully adjusts his choice of pronoun to the thematic comment he wants to make. The writer seems to show concern about how to address and deal with the reader.

The linguistic analysis of the American critiques include the following: there are three verbs that Ulrich uses twice to characterise Maqoma’s dance style and to establish cohesion. The verbs *stamp out*, *hop about/ around* and *slice (through) air* appear in the introductory sentence (Ulrich 2009:1-2) and re-appear in the first part that analyses movement and dance style (Ulrich 2009:27, 29, 32). They describe the nature of the movement in a comparably imaginable way, since they are taken from an everyday context. Furthermore, Ulrich combines the verbs in order to create metaphors and images that illustrate the choreography on a different level: he describes, for example, Maqoma’s isolations of the arms with the help of their embracing functions (Ulrich 2009:26), in alignment with the wrapping characteristic of tentacles (Ulrich 2009:27) and in the transformation to a knife when the arms “slice through air” (Ulrich 2009:27). Ulrich makes use of an imaginative language style when writing “Maqoma [...] dips into a plie [...]” (Ulrich 2009:31-2) instead of saying “Maqoma quickly bends his knees to a plié”. The verb, which originally refers to the context of dishes, might illustrate the way the plié is executed: The “dipping” could describe the dynamics of the knees’ bending: Imagining food dipped into a sauce, Maqoma might quickly bend his legs to jump upwards working his knees like a spring. The creation of images transferred into a different context is introduced by the use of “seem to” (Ulrich 2009:1, 26, 30, 36) giving a subjective notion from the perspective of the critic to the description.<sup>72</sup> Ulrich uses adjectives such as “compelling” (Ulrich 2009:7), “elusive” (Ulrich 2009:7) and “intriguing” (Ulrich 2009:12) mostly to evaluate the performance and to describe Maqoma’s appearance as for

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<sup>72</sup> The metaphor “[... he] generally transforms his body into raw clay, ready to be sculptured by its owner” (Ulrich 2009:32-3) is another example of Ulrich’s strategy of transferring the dance movements on another, broadly familiar level in order to present Maqoma’s (unfamiliar) movement aesthetics.

instance “sinewy” (Ulrich 2009:15), “barefoot” (Ulrich 2009:15) and loose-fitting” (Ulrich 2009:15). Furthermore, adjectives such as “splendid” (Ulrich 2009:11), “moody and propulsive” (Ulrich 2009:12) describe sound and musicians. The clear attribution of adjectives to stage elements and verbs to movement suggests a greater emphasis on the latter since verbs, as words representing an action, have a greater impact on the reader. The character of a dance performance is thus represented in so far, as the dance plays an active role whereas music and stage elements form the choreography’s complementing background.

Felciano uses a variety of rhetoric devices and syntax constructions to describe and interpret the performance. Metaphors and similes – concentrated in the first part of the critique (up to line 36) – are used to make comments on generalised performance aspects such as Maqoma’s “mesmerizing mediation on finding his own voice in the pool of contemporary and traditional African dance glittered and flitted like a trout in a sun-speckled dream” (Felciano 2009: 1-3). Imaginative language, alliteration, simile and a complex noun-adjective are combined in this quote expressing an overall impression of the performance: Felciano analyses, interprets and evaluates the performance in this elaborated first sentence. The positive judgement on the performance is slightly downgraded by the start of the second sentence “[t]hough ragged at its edges [...]” (Felciano 2009:3). Felciano’s imaginative language style gives an easily comprehensible impression on her interpretation of the piece. She also uses a method of transferring movement vocabulary from everyday life to the dance performance through metaphors and verbs. Movement analyses are introduced by the metaphor “its wings [Maqoma’s arms] at bay or grandly flapping, its darting head taking everything in” (Felciano 2009:22-3) which starts with the image of the peacock elaborated in the performance and is developed further in Felciano’s description. “[S]cooping and slicing arms that disappeared in a blur of motion like accelerating propellers” (Felciano 2009:29-30) describes Maqoma’s arm movements through verbs from a different field transferred to dance: *to slice* and *to scoop* could also appear in the context of working soil. Nevertheless, Felciano mostly describes movement and music with the help of alliterated adjectives such as “sun-speckled dream” (Felciano 2009:3), “long-legged bird” (Felciano 2009:21), “flat-footed beats” (Felciano 2009:29), a description which De Swardt (De Swardt 2009:44) already used ), or combinations of adjective and noun, like “mesmerizing meditation” (Felciano 2009:1), “soaring string melodies” (Felciano 2009:32), “simple strides” (Felciano 2009:35) and “split second” (Felciano 2009:46-7). On the contrary, Felciano describes positive and negative



evaluations with single adjectives like “thrilling performance” (Felciano 2009:4), “remarkable dancer[...]” (Felciano 2009:7-8), “overstated” (Felciano 2009:60), “extraordinary” (Felciano 2009:61) and “problematic” (Felciano 2009:64) or adverb-adjective constructions such as “too loosely structured work” (Felciano 2009:24), “spectacularly expressive” (Felciano 2009:28), “a little false” (Felciano 2009:69) and “truly global dancer thinker” (Felciano 2009:12). This adverb-adjective construction also includes the doubling of nouns “dancer thinker”. In practical dance discourses, dancing is not combined with thinking in the first place since it is a practical, bodily action, probably comparable to artistry in contrast to work based on the intellect. Of course, dancers also have to think – as well as thinkers have to use their body to execute their work – but still the combination of dancing and thinking can be viewed as a prevalent and controversial discourse in both dance practice and Dance Studies. Making Maqoma a “global dancer thinker” underlines the notion of thinking as the term ‘global thinker’ reminds of ‘global player’, a term from the field of world economics and thus mostly attributed with an intellectual occupation. The use of the term ‘dancer thinker’ points to Felciano’s intellectual approach to dance and explains her highly conscious writing in terms of avoiding over-generalising her personal perception. All in all, stage and movement descriptions gain more of the reader’s imaginative attributions whereas the evaluations are mentioned, mostly in the final passage (Felciano 2009:59-69), in a neutral tone. As comments, they appear throughout the critique and could thus be viewed as a cohesive element of the text. A cohesive function could accordingly be attributed to the musical element that re-appears throughout the text (Felciano 2009:5-7, 31-3, 38, 45-7, 58-63).

The American perspective on *Beautiful Me* is marked by a pertinent background in dance critique writing on behalf of the writers. This becomes evident in the aim of the critiques to give differentiated evaluations of the performance and the underlying understanding of classical performance theory – “a performance is a performance is a performance” (Felciano 2009:69) and the “problematic decision” (Felciano 2009:64) of the audience participation. Whether Ulrich shares Felciano’s scepticism about Maqoma’s way of addressing and involving the audience does not become clear (Ulrich 2009:17, 23). Considering the manner in which the critics describe movement and stage happening, a phenomenological approach suggests itself which tries to convey the perceived characteristics – such as dynamics, strength, speed, power, etc. – of the movement to the reader. Nevertheless, Felciano’s strict and classical understanding of a performance prohibits the unbiased perception of otherness:

She criticises those aspects that do not meet her understanding of performance standards although performance strategies such as audience participation and its direct address and the breaking of the fourth wall are common theatrical means in contemporary performances. If we take her rhetorical questions as signalling partial mis-understanding, a misleading cross-cultural perception seems likely. Ulrich rather refers to the notion of educating the audience, since he calls it fortunate that San Francisco audiences have already seen Contemporary Dance from Africa (Ulrich 2009:4) and promotes the discovery of the foreign aesthetic field (Ulrich 2009:3, 39). Thus, Felciano, exhibiting a more classical, traditional theatrical performance understanding, finds herself in the situation of mis-understanding a performance sequence, whereas Ulrich gives a differentiated evaluation on the basis of his awareness about the otherness and tries to evaluate in an unbiased manner.

## **6.2 Cross-cultural comparison**

### **6.2.1 Selected aspects of the critiques in cross-cultural comparison**

The following section analyses remarkable features of the critiques and compares them cross-culturally in order to investigate whether intercultural differences and perception modes have an impact on the outcome of a dance critique.

The South African and American critiques deal with the topic of Maqoma's quest for artistic and cultural identity to different extents: Since it seems to be a specifically South African topic, the South African concern is natural. From the American perspective one could state that either they are well-informed about the situation in society of South African dancers who were trained abroad coming back to their home countries or they have experienced a similar situation with American dancers being educated in Europe. Furthermore, they could concentrate their opinion on many artists' concern of finding one's own style in general. The interplay or the fusion (De Swardt) of dance and music – a performance feature that may be embedded in a choreographer's style – is treated by De Swardt and both American critics. The latter evaluate dance and music as the positive part of the performance. This could either be due to fulfilled expectations or it could derive from the natural strong interconnection of dance and music *per se*. The fact that the interconnection of dance and music is almost a binding one could be an explanation for why the British critics do not treat it explicitly. Advertisement and persuasion are strategies that De Swardt and Winship use in their technique of reconciliation: They destroy any plausible doubts and biases the reader might

develop against *Beautiful Me* in order to advertise the performance. Ulrich, though, conciliates the reader in a different way: He suggests concentrating on the aesthetics of dance and music if the thematic context of the performance is difficult to comprehend. In any case, the strategy of reconciliation serves to persuade the reader; on the one hand by conceding negative aspects on the performance and on the other hand by outweighing them in various ways.

In order to categorise that which the viewer and in this case at the same time the critic perceives, the critics compare their impressions to presumed expectations which come from their specific cultural background: De Swardt easily finds a match between her expectations and the South African conventions whereas Angol seems to use certain performance aspects to illustrate and present his own aesthetic understanding of Contemporary Dance from Africa. This attitude might derive from his African Contemporary Dance background and might thus be interpreted as a sign of solidarity for Maqoma and an implicit advertisement for himself. Felciano is the only critic who comes to a negative result through the comparison of expectations and that what she perceives in experiencing a non-understanding accompanied by a certain notion of bewilderment. Felciano's non-understanding seems to derive from her underlying performance theory perspective and thus might not have appeared if she had changed her perception mode. Winship's non-understanding, however, derives from the attempt of making sense of the performance, meaning that she wants to discover a certain story or at least elements with cohesive functions holding the performance together. The failure of her hermeneutic approach leads to the state of non-understanding. Angol, lastly, might have misunderstood or simply mislabelled the term "griot", but this might neither due to the usage of the performance as illustration to his own aesthetic understanding, nor to his mode of perception. It could also be a knowledge gap in epistemology.

The hermeneutic (Winship) and the theatre semiotic approaches (to a comparably high degree found in Felciano, a little lesser to Ulrich and Angol) seem to favour a negative judgement according to the analysis of the distribution of negative evaluations among intercultural critiques and the underlying perception modes. Phenomenological stances, applied by Ulrich and to some extent by Angol and Winship, however, seem to bring positive evaluations forward. The cultural contribution to the outcome of the critiques seems to be of significantly less importance than initially expected.

### 6.2.2 Cross-cultural comparison of the evaluations

The previous paragraph suggests that negative critiques might not solely derive from cross-cultural differences. In fact, the underlying perception mode seems to have a certain influence on it as well. To further elaborate this observation, I will consult – in specifically analysing the relation between language style and evaluative outcome – the underlying perception modes.

For movement descriptions Sichel, Angol, Winship, Ulrich and Felciano mostly use metaphors and imaginative language. De Swardt and Felcinao combine movement analysis and evaluation in using evaluative (Felcinao) and emotional (De Swardt) adjectives and adverb-adjective constructions. These stylistic devices transfer movement to a dance-foreign field, creating an image or attributing aspects of everyday life to them in order to facilitate their imagination. This strategy presumes the successful attribution of an aspect from a foreign field; if the critic does not find a suitable attribution, though, they might have difficulties formulating the perceived impressions of the dance. Accordingly, wherever the attribution of a picture or a story fails, either a hidden misunderstanding is the result or an explicit non-understanding. As Angol, Winship and Felciano show, non-understanding is more likely to lead into a negative evaluation; probably after frustrating and bewildering the spectator. However, Ulrich and to some extent Felciano, use, apart from metaphors, verbs of motion to describe the dancing: Describing a perceived action in words of action implicates that it is not the dance movement which is transferred to a foreign field. It is rather the verbs of action and motion connoted with everyday images that are taken from various backgrounds (*to dip, to wrap, to slice or to scoop*) and are attributed to dance movements. Thus, the writer transfers the respective verbs on the level of dance instead of transferring a whole interpretive image including music, dance and stage design – as happens when applying metaphors to describe a dance performance.

Thus, independent from cultural backgrounds, a theatre semiotic approach can be assumed to underlie an evaluation that is based on movement analysis expressed through metaphors, linguistic images and adjectives. Moreover, it becomes clear that it cannot be the cultural background alone that influences the outcome of a critique: evidently, the perception mode is a crucial aspect as well.

## **7 CHAPTER SEVEN: Conclusion and prospect**

### **7.1 Conclusion**

This study shows that cross-cultural differences in performance perception may have a certain impact on the outcome of a critique, but it also shows that the perception mode of the spectator and in this case also of the critic is more important than initially assumed: every analysed critic, irrelevant of their cultural background, evaluates at least parts of the performance positively, particularly Ulrich, who has the most experienced background in dance critique writing, and whose critique thus provides evidence for the importance of the spectator's attitude towards the performance. Winship shows that it does not necessarily have to be a fundamental background of Dance Studies that leads to a sensitive outcome since her imitation of the movement through linguistic devices shows her aesthetic understanding on a different, less factual but more artistic and rhetoric level. Hence, it seems necessary for the critic to be aware of the way they formulate that which they perceived in order to enable the reader to establish a certain stance towards the performance.

Through the analysis of the six critiques we have become aware of both the performance and the critique as means of communication. No critique is similar to the other and no one critic uses linguistic and rhetoric devices in the same way as any other. Some methods, some stylistic devices are similar, but mostly the underlying perception modes support a critique that is relatively free from personal and cultural influences trying to convey as clearly as possible what happened in the performance and evaluating it in the context of current dance discourses. The analysis shows that most strategies of interpreting the performance in a hermeneutic way as well as the embedding of the performance into socio-political and cultural backgrounds lead to evaluations that cannot solely focus on the aesthetics of the performance. In order to write a critique focused on the artistic value of the performance, the critic needs to be aware of their personal and cultural background, they need to be aware of the performance's background and they need to be able to overcome these personal influences in their critique.

The following section is aimed at suggesting some general methods on how to avoid negative evaluations due to restricted perception modes.

## **7.2 On dance critique writing**

In order to avoid a strong reliance on theatre semiotics or a hermeneutic approach, Fischer-Lichte suggests focusing on the active and conscious experience of theatre performance and becoming aware of one's individual sensual, kinaesthetic and corporeal reactions interrelated with the performance. The critic, who also embodies the informed spectator, thus describes their reactions to the performance and broadens these observations with perceivable reactions from the rest of the audience (Fischer-Lichte 2010:82-3; Fischer-Lichte 2004:12). After the sensual perception, attributions can be made to the affects that certain theatrical stimuli, such as theatrical signs or features like stage and light design, evoke (Fischer-Lichte 2010:82). During the process of viewing, the focus should shift and detach from the identification and interpretation of signs towards the materiality presented on stage (Fischer-Lichte 2004:24, 29, 50). Along with this shift, the strict separation of object and subject dissolves until both spectator and performer become interactive subjects, co-present during the performance (Fischer-Lichte 2004:31, 47). Consequently, the performer's bodies are no longer perceived as sign carriers but within their specific corporeality which supports a more sensual mode of perception (Fischer-Lichte 2004:52).

The perception process is not only influenced by the events on stage but it is important to be aware of the individual factors surrounding the spectator. Former experiences, associations and the cultural worldview as well as the reactions of the rest of the audience determine the spectator's perception and create an individual, unique way of viewing this particular performance (Fischer-Lichte 2010:83; Fischer-Lichte 2004:54). Thus, the perception of a performance is formed by a diverse set of inner and outer features and their interrelation: This diversity implicates that no perceptive experience can equal another. A critique of a dance performance can be understood as a momentary standstill of a continuous chain of performances and changing audiences constituting a whole production. Relating the relative unimportance of a critique to the value the readers give to it, the actual amount of thoughts, ideas and opinions on one staging is not being considered.

Bearing in mind the discourse of power elaborated in chapter 2, the critic is faced with a sensitive task: on the one hand, a critique acts as a subjective commentary on a unique, unrepeatable dance performance but on the other it is a powerful means of communication that can influence a whole spectatorship. Thus, a critic should use this power consciously.

This means that they need to be aware of their approach towards dance (whether it be a semiotic or phenomenological approach) and use language cautiously. Wittmann (2006:245, 247) suggests that a critic should, following the phenomenological approach, analyse their corporeal reactions and emotions about the performance on an affective level. The kinaesthetic and corporeal reactions of one's senses are those elements that other spectators may also perceive, but they might not attribute the same experiences, memories or knowledge to the affections and thus would generate different emotions<sup>73</sup> (Wittmann 2006:252). To avoid the presentation of formed emotions, the description of the kinaesthetic sensing<sup>74</sup> is what should appear in a critique (Wittmann 2002:587, 9). As for language use, she suggests using precise and particular verbs, avoiding vagueness and over-interpretation (Wittmann 2006:245, 247). Dance is mostly constituted of movement, so it suggests itself to make particular use of verbs of motion in their different forms. Ulrich exemplifies Wittmann's suggestion on dance critique writing to some extent. Still it is the description of movement alone that has the potential to create a discourse on dance. The selection of verbs is already connoted by the critic's impression on and stance towards the dance piece (Adshead-Lansdale 2001:201).

If critics were following the suggested method of kinaesthetically and corporeally sensing and reflecting dance movement after its sensual perception, critiques on one and the same dance performance may and should still vary in their outcome – what, however, would be missing, in an ideal scenario, would be mis- and non-understandings due to cultural bias or influences coming from different schools of viewing dance. According to the respective affections a performance evokes in a critic, the critiques may still have positive and negative or mixed, differentiated outcomes with the sole difference that the judgements are completely based on personal cognitive perception instead of attempts of interpretation which – by the definition of their genesis – are dependent from environmental influences such as culture, personal experience and a variety of socio-political imprints.

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<sup>73</sup> Wittmann (2006:240-2) understands emotions as a result of attributing meaning and connotations (from a cultural and an individually experienced background) to affection that can only be sensed on a corporeal level, not on a cognitive one.

<sup>74</sup> Wittmann (2002:590-1) explains this form of sensing (in opposition to feeling) as a sensing that lies beyond the conscious and sayable sensing. The kinaesthetic sensing can only be detected by the body itself but detracts itself from ways of articulation. Still, according to Wittmann, this is the task of the critic: Articulating that which is perceived on a kinaesthetic corporeal level.

### **7.3 Prospect**

This study is meant to encourage further work on dance critique writing in general and the building of an African voice on Contemporary Dance which does not need to refer to Western discourses.

Wittmann's suggestions concerning an appropriate language use stay relatively vague. Further research needs to be done on active and passive constructions, on the way of finding the right verb for a certain movement without metaphorising the movement or interpreting it in transferring it to a related everyday field. For a conscious critic, it is also important to understand how different rhetoric devices and language styles establish authority and execute power and establish ideologies. When used consciously, these rather limiting and controlling linguistic features can be used appropriately.

Further research on how Western formalism is able to control and influence African artists through discourse is necessary in order to give European and American dance experts a new perspective on the African performing arts scene. For African dancers and choreographers on the other hand it is important to see themselves detached from the traditional "Western" discourse directing their focus to the centre of their own work without constant competition with "Western" art. Choreographers, dancers, viewers and researchers of African Contemporary Dance need to start their own discourse in order to establish a perspective that does not attempt to compete with "Western" standards but has a direct focus on their own work marked by their own cultural background.



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## **Appendix A – Dancers and Musicians**

### **Dancers in *Beautiful Us* (2005)**

Shawn Mothupi (RSA, Mamelodi, Gauteng), Melusi Mkhwanjana (took over the artistic directorship from Maqoma after having run the training programme for VDT in 2009; Sichel 2010), Tercia Alexander, Tebogo Tlhale (RSA, Pretoria), Dillonne Prince (RSA, Cape Town) and Daniel Mashita.

### **Musicians in *Beautiful Me* (2007)**

Isaac Molelekoa (violin), Bongani Kunene (cello), Poorvi Bhana (sitar) and Given Mphago (percussions).

## Appendix B – Critiques

### 1. Critique: Adrienne Sichel (UJ Theatre, FNB Dance Umbrella, Johannesburg)

March 25<sup>th</sup>, 2007

#### Dance used as a channel across culture and history

Maqoma's solo is an extended conversation between ethnographic, political and biographical elements, which traverses African and Asian impulses

1 Cracking cultural codes while reconfiguring history that's quite a feat. This is even more remarkable when the artist uses his spiritually charged body to achieve this.

5 *Beautiful Me*, which had its world premiere in Johannesburg at the 2007 FNB Dance Umbrella, is an amplification – a magnification – of five choreographic approaches, which in turn become Maqoma's aesthetic signature.

10 In his search for choreographic growth and artistic identity, Gregory Vuyani Maqoma has consulted fellow dancers Akram Khan (UK), Faustin Linyekula (DRC) and Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe, and incorporated this research into his life as a South African dancer. (Influences include the moon-walking of Michael Jackson.) Central to the rationale of this solo, an extended conversation across culture and geography, is the spoken, recorded text by Khan, the London-born contemporary dancer-choreographer. Khan uses the classical Indian dance form Kathak as a springboard. His observation about historical ruptures that leave vacuums and conceptually, creatively and educationally make way for a new matrix are the fulcrum of *Beautiful*  
15 *Me*. The important thing to remember, notes Khan, is that “the past isn't dead”. Linking to this idea is Maqoma's programme note that he will treat his body “as moving portrait that continues to reinterpret emotions, histories and find a transitional point in tradition and language that evolves in finding creative translations for unfamiliar elements”.

20 Those points of resurrected familiarity and unfamiliarity are the triggers for Maqoma the dancer, the biographer, the medium who channels ethnographic, political and biographical elements from body and ancestral memory. Stitched into his conversation with his three physically absent peers, who are represented by three microphones placed at the front of the stage, are a series of intercultural epiphanies.

25 The performance, lucidly directed by Gerard Bester, begins with a violin calling sombrelly in the dark. Creeping light reveals a man dressed in Sun Goddess red and black silk, head bowed, feet in what appears to be the classical first position. He slowly raises his arms, exposing palms. The first revelation is in the text spoken in Maqoma's mother tongue, isiXhosa; that he is a peacock of many colours and in each  
30 is a story. There is nothing literal about the movement. The plumage is mainly in the imagination and the ear, thanks to the tinctures of the music emanating from musicians on stage. Isaac Molelekoa's haunting violin-playing is joined by Bongani Kunene's cello, Poorvi Vhana's sitar and Mustapha Kutoane's percussion.

35 The score, created in collaboration with the dancing choreographer, is a succinct extension of the choreography which traverses African and Asian impulses and also embodies them. In the telling of the stories, other birds appear fleetingly in the fragmented narrative. Ostrich meets phoenix; *Swan Lake* meets Mantsoe's *Gula*,

which finally evolves into Maqoma's own wild-winged, full-bodied earth-stamping incarnation which transcends all origins and influences.

40 Dance history, and specifically that of black dance, is ingrained in this work like colonial and post-colonial experiences, and much in between. One of *Beautiful Me*'s preoccupations, framed by slavery, is the naming of names, whether they are governor generals of the Belgian Congo or presidents of apartheid South Africa, in the pursuit of the dancer's holistic identity Linyekula's now trademark credo – "I am an African  
45 dancer, I sell exotic stories, which one do you want to hear tonight?" – is co-opted by Maqoma and altered to "I sell exotic stories – to survive".

Uttering these words and standing in profile his posture alters. He is shaking ritualistically and stamping traditionally, but a defiant authenticity informs every expertly articulated movement. These satiric ironies were rapturously recognised by  
50 Dance Umbrella audiences. The refined, multi-layered *Beautiful Me* strips away theatrical veneers to reveal essences through multiple, refracted identities. Fragments of vocabulary belonging to Akram Khan, Vincent Mantsoe, Faustin Linyekula and Michael Jackson surface in this dialogue, which binds Africa with Asia, Europe and America. This global dancing ground, with secure intellectual underpinnings, also  
55 provides remarkable insights from a South African perspective.

When Maqoma addresses Vinnie (Vincent Mantsoe, who is touring the United States), he says that, if he sees Michael (Jackson) tell him about the Soweto schoolboys who could afford only one pair of white gloves to perform their Jacksonesque street dance routines; who fought over each step they performed. The steps the then teenagers were  
60 besotted with have changed radically, but their adoration of rhythmic experimentation is intact, as proved by *Beautiful Me*. It pays tribute to African dancers who do more than survive. They are at the forefront of producing groundbreaking art.

Published in the Sunday Independent, Johannesburg.



## 2. Critique: Moira de Swardt (Dance Factory, Johannesburg)

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009

### **Local dancer and choreographer Gregory Maqoma gets a standing ovation in his hometown**

1 Just before the performance, brought to us as part of an African tour of the work  
courtesy of the French Institute, one of the generous intercultural sponsors on which  
South African art and culture depends heavily, the director of IFAS, Laurent Clavel,  
commented that this lovely work has only been performed twice before in South  
Africa, both times at the 2007 FNB Dance Umbrella which commissioned it.

5 A part of this work was also presented at the Gala Evening for the 2008 Celebration of  
20 years of the FNB Dance Umbrella, but the message was that a  
dancer/choreographer of the international and national renown of Gregory Maqoma is  
still battling the various funding systems to make his work available to the people. It  
was, I think, meant to be both an encouragement to young artists to persevere and an  
10 indictment on a system which fails its artists in every stage of their careers.

I am going to start with the music because the music is, as it always should be, integral  
to the dance. There are four African musicians, who create as they go along, much like  
the Spanish tradition of improvisation where the dancers and musicians work together.  
They are Isaac Molelekoa on violin, Poorvi Bhana on sitar, Bongani Kunene on cello  
15 and Mandla Nhlapo on percussion. All vocalise, including Maqoma. The musicians  
clearly enjoy themselves throughout the performance, working both as individuals and  
as an ensemble to co-create with Maqoma a “Beautiful Me”. I particularly loved those  
moments when Maqoma placed himself in front of the musicians and in doing so  
became one with the musicians, one with the music, blending sound and movement in  
20 a pleasing whole.

Halfway through his work “Beautiful Me” Maqoma states “I am an African dancer. I  
tell exotic stories for a living.” One of the gravest difficulties artists who deal in  
“exotic stories” have in their home towns and countries is that their stories are seldom  
exotic or novel to the native dwellers of that land. Many is the time local critics find  
25 too much fault with a work widely acclaimed in foreign places while local audiences  
express their disinterest by refusing to put their bums on seats to see it.

Maqoma is not a prophet without honour in his home town. His work does not fall into  
the category of dull and uninteresting to his country folk. Johannesburg audiences  
headed out to the Dance Factory in Newtown on cold winter nights in their droves to  
30 see him perform his highly acclaimed “Beautiful Me” on the weekend.

Part of the charm of this work is Maqoma’s exquisite dancing. His beautiful body is  
magnificently manipulated for maximum aesthetic pleasure. It wouldn’t matter what  
he danced, the dance itself would be powerful, controlled, spare and economical.  
However, Maqoma brings us, in “Beautiful Me”, a work of grace and humility.

35 The title gives it away – the work is about Maqoma himself. Rest assured it has no  
self-indulgence, no unnecessary glorification or self-pity. It is a work completely free  
of the agonising thoughts of failure and self destruction which leave one wishing,

several minutes before the end, that the protagonist would commit suicide and release the audience from their misery.

40 Maqoma recognises the best in himself and plays to that, acknowledging freely and generously the influence of others in his open association with three other choreographers, each with their own unique choreographic language. The artistic contributors are Akram Khan, Faustin Linyekula and Vincent Mantsoe. Khan's influence is seen in the kathak like flat-footed stamping and intricate hand movements,  
45 Linyekula's contribution is in the dialogue between Africans from different places in Africa while Mantsoe's is the peer recognition and dialogue between two "home boys" who share a history and knowledge of each other's strengths and weaknesses. The programme dwells at length on the reasons for the choice of choreographers, what each contributes and Maqoma's thoughts and ideas on the challenge of learning and  
50 mastering the choreographic language of others.

I don't think it matters which other choreographers Maqoma chose for his collaboration. To me the work speaks of the concept of "ubuntu", an acknowledgment that each of us is who we are because of others around us who are who they are. There is dignity in the individual because society recognises the dignity within. While it is  
55 not mentioned in the dance our beloved Nelson Mandela expressed this in his autobiography "A Long Walk to Freedom" when he refuses to allow the South African prison authorities to rob him of his dignity no matter how badly they treat him. Maqoma, young enough to have missed the struggle but old enough to enjoy its fruits, now restates the principle in this exotic story. The audience loves it. We react with joy  
60 and warmth to his lovely tale. It is truly the narrative of a beautiful person, delicately crafted and lovingly told in music and movement.

While many artists may have been tempted to begin with their name and go from there, Maqoma chooses to end with his, having the musicians respond to his palatial clicks so creating the sound of a "q" correctly pronounced in Xhosa. (The "x" is a  
65 labial click and the "c" is a dental click.). "Maqoma" is hellishly difficult to pronounce for many speakers unfamiliar with exactly where to place their tongues. Say "Ma" then put your tongue dead centre in the roof of your mouth against your palate bringing it down hard to the floor of the mouth while adding "oma". The q then clicks into place automatically. Maqoma, characteristically, doesn't dwell on that point. He  
70 stands before the audience telling of his father's insistence that he, Maqoma, write a "r" a hundred times, each time enunciating it "rrrr". He solicits help from the audience. Then he mentions with delicious and amusing humility that he couldn't say his own name, "Gregory". One has to love the "Beautiful Me" which ends with that.

[http://www.artlink.co.za/news\\_article.htm?contentID=8090](http://www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=8090)

### 3. Critique: Francis Angol (Sadler's Wells, London)

March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2006

#### **The artist - a landscape of ever shifting metaphors!**

“Beautiful Me - Part Of” and “Beautiful”

1 As part of the season of special projects by Sadler's Wells, Gregory Maqoma, a South African based artist who has been described as one of the most talented choreographers to emerge from the new generation of South African artists, presented an evening of dance at the Lilian Baylis Theatre.

5 The programme was co-produced by Centre National de la Dance (France) and Vuyani Dance Theatre (South Africa) with the support of AFAA - Ministere des Affaires Etrangeres and A.K.C.T Ltd, the charitable arm of the Akram Khan Company.

10 The two works; “Beautiful Me - Part Of” and “Beautiful”, are part of the trilogy which looks at the beauty of human beings as juxtaposed with the beauty of things and the seasons that contribute to the wholesomeness of the universe'says Greg in Arts Alive.

As the audience entered the Baylis theatre to take their seats, they were presented with a stage void of wings encapsulating a set that one can only describe as somewhat surreal in nature and beautiful in sculpture.

15 A visionary landscape of two organic bodies, one female the other male set within a rectangular space outlined by a perimeter, a path constructed so as to represent a daisy field - green grass with beautiful different coloured daisies sparsely positioned around the route. The costumes were simple in design, pastel green fabric tailored to the body worked well in portraying a simplistic organic view of beauty. The lighting was soft  
20 and plain in design but effective in creating a feeling of harmonised intimacy between the body and its environment.

The 75 minute programme presented an interesting view of the use of African dance within a theatrical presentation. Approached from a very contemporary perspective, the style of expression and choreographic structure gave an insight into Maqoma's  
25 influences and training. Contemporary dance expression laced with an African resonance that gave the work an engaging edge.

30 Sharp shoulder expressions with bounded and extended lower body movements created a mesmerising display of a movement signature that is inevitably Maqoma's trademark. The use of repetition reinforced statements of expression, injecting a dynamics that played on movement metaphors. At times sweeping contemporary dance motifs and gestures set against a backdrop of cultural expressions made it difficult to position the style of expression into one defined category. The female dancer moved with poise and elegance, shifting and flowing from one dynamic gesture to the next, creating a sentiment of harmony with every executable step.

35 Maqoma's tall prominent stature animated the landscape with a griot like presence, exhibiting the skill and confidence of one well versed in their art. The movement vocabulary was rooted in placement and angular in outline. Free flowing sharp precise motifs and transitions exhibited an interesting meeting of forms. A style and structure that can be described as circular intensions interconnected through parallel planes  
40 within a defined arena of expressions.

A most satisfactory evening of solo and duet work that allowed the voice of contemporary Africa to be made visible. Through this presentation one can only hope that, this kind of work and collaboration will help to influence the development of similar artists working in comparable genres and by doing so educate individuals and  
45 further enhance the diverse richness of British dance.

<http://www.adad.org.uk/metadot/index.pl?iid=22809andisa=Category>

#### 4. Critique: Lyndsey Winship (Sadler's Wells, London)

June 18<sup>th</sup>, 2007

##### **Beautiful Me**

1        "I am Gregory Maqoma, an African dancer. I have plenty of exotic stories to sell. Which one would you like to hear tonight?" Gregory Maqoma does have some stories to tell, but this hour-long solo offering, *Beautiful Me*, is not a monologue, more a series of conversations. There are conversations with the onstage musicians, a  
5        violinist, cellist, sitar player and percussionist. Then there are conversations with three choreographers, Akram Khan, Faustin Linyekula and Vincent Mantsoe, who have all contributed "minutes" of their choreographic material to Maqoma's project. Rather than simply demonstrating their work though, Maqoma seems to be absorbing their ideas and hanging them on his own body, or using them to inspire his own words. You  
10       can spot moments that look like they might have come from Akram Khan, a choreographer whom Maqoma performed with recently at the Barbican. For example, a powerful passage where a repeated, stubborn stamping of the feet and a swift kathak-like arm movement swells into a trancelike ostinato. Movement, words, memories and remembered email exchanges are all part of the fabric of the piece. There are  
15       conversations with African history too, in one scene Maqoma announces the names of former African leaders and lays them to rest on the stage, burying them in order to create a new history. But while one minute he is struggling to forget South African president PW Botha, ten minutes later he's having an imaginary chat with Michael Jackson, such are the twists and turns of Maqoma's thoughts. *Beautiful Me* is a slight  
20       piece, but it's definitely intriguing.

<http://www.thestage.co.uk/reviews/review.php/17194/beautiful-me>

5. Critique: Allan Ulrich (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum, San Francisco)

November 7<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**Maqoma's sinewy search for kinetic identity**

1 In "Beautiful Me," Gregory Maqoma stamps out rhythms, hops about and seems to slice air with vehemence.

Contemporary dance from Africa may be one of the final fields for exploration by outsiders. Fortunately, Bay Area audiences have already sampled the work of  
5 significant figures from that continent, like Vincent Mantsoe and Faustin Linyekula. Both of these artists have contributed to the work of South Africa's Gregory Maqoma, whose Vuyani Dance Theatre made a sometimes compelling, sometimes elusive local debut Thursday at the Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum.

10 In this first American tour, the Vuyani Dance Theatre breaks down into a 55-minute solo, incorporating movement, live and recorded speech and the collaboration of four splendid South African musicians. When this quartet, seated at the rear, is not conjuring moody and propulsive sounds from the intriguing combination of violin, cello, sitar and percussion, they chant, sing and click in the manner of the Xhosa language.

15 Maqoma, a sinewy, barefoot performer in his mid-30s dressed in a loose-fitting top and trousers, also believes this work, "Beautiful Me" (the final panel of a trilogy), represents a collaboration with the audience, whom he often addresses in a spontaneous manner, flattering the venue and gratuitously taunting the pope, George W. Bush and Queen Elizabeth II. In between his movement forays, he addresses his  
20 father in his native tongue, he cites important moments in the African liberation movement (delivered in a barely comprehensible mutter), addresses his African choreography colleagues and conducts a one-way conversation with Franklin Delano Roosevelt. There's even a request for audience participation.

25 A bit of a muddle, to be sure. But those observers in quest of lucidity can simply bask in Maqoma's riveting movement style. He begins the evening in a pool of light, isolating his arms, which at one moment, seem to embrace the universe, at the next, wrap the performer in their tentacles, and in the next, slice through air with startling vehemence. Once you have seen Maqoma navigate the forum space, his torso twisting, his feet stamping out an obsessive rhythm, he is not easy to forget.

30 This piece, one understands, is a search for a unique kinetic identity and it does seem enviably original. Maqoma permits ripples to run through his torso, occasionally dips into a plie, hops around the place, slaps his buttocks and generally transforms his body into raw clay, ready to be sculpted by its owner.

35 Maqoma has studied in Europe (with Belgium's iconic Anne Teresa de Keersmaeker) and he has absorbed influences where he has found them. In the final third of the piece, he and the musicians seem to riff off each other in a way that recalls American jazz dance at its most pristine. We are not told how much of this section has been improvised, but the torrent of polyrhythms sweeps away any lingering doubt. In seeking an African identity, Maqoma strikes a universal chord.

<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2009/11/07/DDN61AGAC8.DTL>

6. Critique: Rita Felciano (Yerba Buena Center for the Arts Forum, San Francisco)

November 8<sup>th</sup>, 2009

**Roaming to Find Your Voice**

1 In its American premiere South African Gregory Maqoma's mesmerizing meditation  
on finding his own voice in the pool of contemporary and traditional African dance  
glittered and flitted like a trout in a sun-speckled dream. Though ragged at its edges,  
"Beautiful Me" was held together by the sheer force of Maqoma's thrilling

5 performance and the astounding collaborative input of four exceptional musicians:  
Poorvi Bhana (sitar), Bongani Kunene (cello), Isaac Moleleka (violin) and  
Mandienkosi Nhlapo (percussion). Feeding the restless energy of this remarkable  
dancer's own imagination were choreographic contributions from colleagues Akram  
Khan, Faustin Linyekula and Vincent Mantsoe. The result was intimacy that spilled  
10 beyond the borders of the personal into something akin to the global.

Initially trained in South Africa, then in Vienna, at P.A.R.T.S in Brussels and with  
Kahn, Maqoma is a truly global dancer thinker. He brings to his work the multiple  
influences from his early street dance and traditional African dance experiences, a  
highly stylized sense of theatrical space, and the theatrical savvy of someone who has  
15 seen a lot and absorbed more.

Maqoma divided "Beautiful" into three sections through which he entered into  
conversation with his fellow artists, starting with the focused intensity of Khan's  
approach to Kathak, followed by the drama of Linyekula's political engagement and  
concluding with fellow Sowetian Mantsoe's Afro-Fusion evocations of life in the  
20 townships.

He balanced these high intensity encounters with the recurring image of a long-legged  
bird that strutted and roamed the landscape, its wings at bay or grandly flapping, its  
darting head taking everything in. While the avian provided continuity in an at times  
too loosely structured work, it also connected Maqoma to nature. It looked like the  
25 piece's most consistent traditional African element. Maqoma used it first at the  
beginning when he verbally addressed his father in a poem (reprinted in English in the  
program) "Baba I am a peacock."

It's in the Kathak section that Maqoma was at his most spectacularly expressive,  
topping his heel and flat-footed beats with butterfly Flamenco wrists, scooping and  
30 slicing arms that disappeared in a blur of motion like accelerating propellers. More  
than once his body simply became another musical instrument. At one point the  
vibration of his footwork created a bass rumble beneath soaring string melodies. You  
watched the energy soar in his torso, and the ground started to respond. The way he  
traveled downstage in a narrow beam of light only to intersperse the close to the body  
35 movements with simple strides and running patterns spoke of freedom and discipline  
all combined in one human being.

For part two, Michael Mannion's throughout excellent lighting design created a wide-  
open space in which an arm swinging Maqoma traveled, accompanied by a lone cello.  
But gradually the tension built as he moved and crouched down around a projected

40 compass, calling up historical periods and the dictators that came with it. It was a  
ritualistic evocation of a time and place that—with the name of Mobutu —clearly has  
not yet come to the end. Maqoma seemed to call up ancestral spirits—his father among  
them—in dancing that became increasingly agitated, twirling, spiraling and kicking. In  
an odd image, he violently beat his own bottom, trying to egg himself on or mutilate  
45 his body? The piece moved towards a kind of ecstatic rant that can happen when  
musicians and dancers step beyond technique into the realm of intuition. For a split  
second you could see where jazz had come from.

The third “change is possible” part, proved to be the most problematic since it  
involved a lot of spoken, not always comprehensible text. Here Maqoma spoke about  
50 his (and presumably Mantsoe’s) experiences as the “good kid.” He giped at the Pope,  
President Bush and the Queen; he recalled the poverty which meant a sharing band  
uniform and the conflict with his father (“I wouldn’t play football”) who made him  
incessantly practice his “R”s.

The index finger became a central motive, pulling Maqoma into space but also  
55 exploring his own body. A lot of the dancing became hard edged with dropped poses,  
stiff-legged spins, Voguing and a furiously propelled run on his knees. But he also  
returned, one more time, to some of the movement material from the opening Kathak  
material, here to the purity of Bhana’s voice and sitar.

Two final observations. The contribution by the playing, clucking and clapping  
60 musicians, cannot be overstated. Their sensitivity and tuning into the dancer was  
extraordinary. Percussionist Nhlapo, in particular, often became a direct extension of  
Maqoma’s body. No wonder the dancer often looked as if he wanted to melt into the  
band.

The most problematic decision—one that rarely succeeds—was Maqoma’s stepping  
65 outside his persona in trying to bridge the space that naturally separates the performer  
from the audience. It started when he blew little breaths at us, and ended with us being  
asked to help him repeat his “R’s” so he could claim his first name. Of course,  
everyone, myself included, obliged. The sincerity was captivating, but also sounded a  
little false because a performance is a performance is a performance.

<http://www.danceviewtimes.com/2009/11/roaming-to-find-your-voice.html>