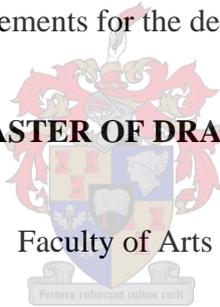# WHERE DANCE AND DRAMA MEET AGAIN:

ASPECTS OF THE EXPRESSIVE BODY IN THE 20TH CENTURY

by

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Declaration

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted at any university for a degree.

Signature:_____   Date:_____

ABSTRACT

Acknowledging theatrical styles such as physical theatre, *Tanztheater* and poor theatre as forms of 'total theatre', and recognizing that there has been a prolonged process of development to reach such a point, the first chapter investigates the historical divide between dramatic dance and drama as starting point. Subsequently, in considering the body as expressive medium, the impact of content and form on the training of the performers' body for the theatrical context is also evaluated.

Using Russian theatre of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century as the focal point, Chapter Two examines the paradigm shifts that took place, firstly, in the choreography of ballet and, secondly, in the perception of the actor's body as an expressive medium for performance.

Chapter Three discusses the search amongst theatre makers of both dance and drama for an authentic theatrical language. Opening with a debate on the Industrial Revolution, it moves to a discussion of movements such as symbolism, dada and surrealism which challenge the audiences' way of perceiving information. In terms of the developments in dance the chapter debates the decline of ballet, leaving its primary focus on the development of American modern dance.

Continuing the enquiry into the development of an authentic theatrical language, Chapter Four deals specifically with the development of European modern dance and the theories of Antonin Artaud. In addition, this chapter reflects on the political and social impact of World War WI and World War II as I believe they had an immeasurable impact on society and thus theatre.

Chapter Five moves with theatre history into alternative performance space and the work of post-modern choreographers is debated along side the innovations of theatre makers such as Grotowski, Brook and Brecht, highlighting the treatment of the actor-audience relationship.

Chapter Six discusses the work of Pina Bausch in relation to relevant theorists and theatre makers of both dance and drama discussed throughout the course of this thesis.

OPSOMMING

As begin punt word teatergenres en -style soos fisieke teater, Tanztheater en "poor theatre" erken as teatervorme wat insluitend is van 'n breë spektrum van style en kan dus beskou word as "total theatre". Dit in ag geneem, word daar gedebateer dat teater, in die vorm van dans en drama, 'n lang proses van ontwikkeling ondergaan het om by hierdie punt uit te kom. Die eerste hoofstuk handel gevolglik oor die geskiedkundige skeuring wat plaasgevind het tussen dans en drama. Die invloed van estetiese vorm en konseptuele inhoud van teaterwerk word bespreek teen die agtergrond van die teater se geskiedkundige ontwikkeling. Die vormingsproses en opleiding van die kunstenaar se liggaam as instrument is integraal tot die gesprek.

Hoofstuk twee plaas die fokus op die ontwikkelings in Russiese teater vanaf die laat neëntiende tot vroeg twintigste eeu. Die paradigmaskuif wat plaasgevind het rondom die skep van ballet, sowel as die "akteur se liggaam as instrument" in optredes word ondersoek.

Die soeke na 'n egte taal vir die teater vorm die basis van die bespreking in die derde hoofstuk. Die invloed van die Industriële Rewolusie speel 'n groot rol en belangrike aspekte word vir die leser uitgelig. Daarna word ondersoek ingestel na die invloed van simbolisme, dadaïsme en surealisme op die gehoor en die manier waarop hulle informasie interpreteer. Die hoofstuk hanteer ook die afname in die populariteit van ballet teenoor die opkoms van kontemporêre dans in Amerika.

In hoofstuk vier word die gesprek rondom die soeke na 'n egte teatertaal voortgesit deur die ontwikkeling van Europese kontemporêre dans te ondersoek. Gevolglik word die teaterteorie van Antonin Artaud ook vanuit hierdie oogpunt bespreek. Verder probeer ek vir die leser 'n indruk gee van die sosiale en politieke impak wat die twee wêreld oorloe op die gemeenskap en dus die teater gehad het.

Deur die werk van post-moderne choreograwe te bespreek, beweeg ons in hoofstuk vyf saam met die teatergeskiedenis na alternatiewe teateruimtes. Die hantering van ruimte in die werk van Grotowski, Brook en Brecht komplimenteer hierdie gesprek, met die fokus op die speler/gehoor-verhouding.

Die finale hoofstuk ondersoek die werk van Pina Bausch. Daar word parallelle getrek tussen haar werk en dié van choreograwe, regisseurs en teoretici, wat reeds in hierdie studie bespreek is.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my Heavenly Father for the gift of dance and countless blessings

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

How does it all begin? I suppose it never begins. It just continues.
(Martha Graham in Carter 1998: 71)

As human beings and as artists our products and we ourselves are markedly affected by, and indeed may be seen to be the net result of, a complex set of processes evolving about us over time. This evolutionary principle also applies to the role of physical expression through the body in the arts, including dramatic dance and dramatic theatre. Over the course of the 20th century, right into the first decade of 21st century, we have seen a variety of "new" genres appear under the impact of political, social and cultural theories and philosophies, for example. The result has been the evolution of a range of alternative forms, sporting revolutionary theories of the dramatic and new approaches to performance. Among them, we find concepts such as physical theatre, total theatre, and *Tanztheater*, all of which seem specifically to privilege physical expression through the body.

What is notable about these changes is the extent to which these movements often share a belief in the idea of somehow fusing the various art forms, of incorporating dance, drama and other theatrical elements in the creative processes and outcomes.

However, this view is not necessarily the norm in academic and artistic circles, where there is, in general, still a definite segregation between dance and drama, clearly reflected in diverging and opposing methodologies towards aspects such as the training of the body. Theories regarding the preparation of the body for expressiveness in performance may often differ vastly across the spectrum of dance and drama schools. I have long found this opposition intriguing and the ensuing study arises in part from my attempts to understand something about the nature and the roots of this dichotomy.

Purpose of the Study

In light of these observations, the primary focus of this study will be the historical changes taking place in dramatic dance between 1870 and 1980. From the changes wrought by Russia's *Ballet Russe de Diaghilev* to the practice of modern and post-modern theatrical dance, and specifically the way in which the use of the expressive body in theatre changed over time. This will be done by providing a historical overview of the shifts in perspective about the role of the expressive body in dramatic and theatrical dance, which took place over the past century.

Of course socio-political changes, art movements, scientific progress and the increase of knowledge all played a role in this development, but a key factor in these changes in perspective must be the numerous and contradictory cultural ideas spawned by the 20th century. Of particular importance for this study are the many ideas about drama, theatre and performance that inform our current thinking about the performing arts, and which naturally informed and complemented those developed in the fields of dance and performance art. So this study also seeks to find out to what extent key theories about the use of the 'expressive' body in the theatrical space, as developed by selected theorists and practitioners may have influenced dance practice – and vice versa.

In discussing the changes that have taken place, I shall focus on three seminal issues, namely (a) the ongoing debate about the importance of content versus form, (b) the quest for a universal, authentic theatrical language in dramatic dance as well as drama and (c) the relationship between performer and spectator.

Throughout history, it is remarkable that these issues appear to lie at the heart of many new genres as they were forged. While all three these arguments may seem to relate to separate issues, they are in fact closely related and interdependent, all three directly influencing the way the expressive body is used in the theatrical context.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the vast field of study and the constraints of this thesis, it is impossible to include all practitioners of dance who contributed to the processes discussed over the centuries. I have therefore selected a restricted time-period between 1870-1980, which I believe was the most prolific time in the advancement of dance. Bearing this in mind, I have only selected a number of primary instigators of new movements in dance for discussion, and have applied the same argument when dealing with theatre and drama. In view of the central concern, I have as a rule selected only theories and developments for discussion where these appear to represent a confluence of interest between dance and theatre practitioners. For the same reason I have focused my study on Western theatre, and only include elements of other traditions (for example, Eastern and African theatre) where specifically appropriate.

The embedded timeline of this thesis follows the development of dance, and this takes preference over the parallel development of theories and practice in related cultural fields such as drama, art and politics. The latter may be drawn in where relevant and thus a theatre practitioner may be discussed some years before or after his/her theories had been developed and/or practised.

Methodology of the Study

The primary research methodology used in this study is literature study, with video material on various theatre makers of dance and drama and interviews with selected practitioners as additional material. In addition, my personal experience as a student of dance, drama and physical theatre, and as a teacher of movement and dance at tertiary level, informs my perspective for this study.

Terminology

Authentic: Unpacking the term 'authentic' would entail a thesis in itself, as the meaning of the term is multifaceted, yet despite this complexity I chose to use the term frequently throughout this dissertation. I realise that its meaning changes from one individual to another in the same way that all humans have a unique way of expressing themselves. Therefore, the notion of an 'authentic language' in theatre is even more complex, but does feature constantly in the content of this work. Historically the notion of an authentic theatrical language moved through different phases and became increasingly inclusive of various systems of communication. Thus for the purpose of this thesis the context of an 'authentic' language or expression refers to a language – physical, spoken or symbolic, that seeks to communicate meaning to the audience in the most genuine, honest and effective way possible without added tricks or feats.

Dramatic Dance: When I refer to dramatic dance I am referring to dance, that takes place within the confines of a designated theatrical space and that relates a 'story' to its audience by means of codified movements. I am hereby excluding folk dances from dramatic dance and will refer to them as *folk dance,* if necessary. For the purpose of my argument in terms of this thesis, I regard dramatic dance as a form or aspect of dramatic theatre.

CHAPTER ONE

The struggle between content and form

No artist can tell to what extent his work is the result of the influence of others and to what extent it is his own. (Michel Fokine in Cohen & Copeland 1983:261)

1.1 What is physical theatre?

When I initially embarked on my research for this thesis, I was intrigued by the notion of physical theatre. What is it actually? Much like the 'artist' in Fokine's testimonial, physical theatre seems to embrace much of the 'influence of others'. Like Peter Brook's work, it strives to become a total theatre form and has appropriated the ideals and methods of different forms of theatre to such an extent that its eclecticism has become part of what defines it. Consequently, the question can be asked: what exactly is physical theatre? It remains a difficult question to answer, because as theatre genre it is still very much in search of an unambiguous definition.

When the question is posed, 'What is classical ballet', most people with a Western/European education (except avid dance lovers) will immediately imagine a graceful ballerina (in a tutu and *pointe* shoes) floating across the stage to the accompaniment of (classical) music. When the same individuals are asked what physical theatre is, they will find it difficult to answer (in my experience) for they either have never heard of the term or have a limited exposure to it. To most there is no connection to be made to anything other than the abstract meaning implied by the words '**physical**' and '**theatre'.** While the word '**theatre**' may still conjure up images of a stage, lights, actors, décor, and costumes, there is a multitude of connotations for the word '**physical**' that relate to a range of unrelated fields (for example sport, medicine and art). Furthermore, it is probably from the ambiguity created by the word '**physical**' that a belief originated among some that as all theatre can be regarded as physical, the genre physical theatre is just another term for total theatre.

The predicament does not end here. When looking at the different theatre companies that define their work as physical theatre or companies whose work has been defined in this way by critics or theatregoers, one will often find that the products presented by these companies are quite diverse, making it difficult to find common threads between them. To some it may seem that physical theatre is a genre where the inclusion of any theatrical form or activity is acceptable and which - on the surface seem to be inclusive of all systems of theatrical communication. I believe that this so-called inclusiveness plays a significant part in making this genre so difficult to define, for its inclusiveness or culture of appropriation means that physical theatre is a form that is in a state of constant flux. For this reason the term physical theatre is also sometimes used by the uninformed as a loose term for any form of theatre that does not conform to traditional forms of theatre (Callery 2001:6).

All these elements caused me to further conduct research into the roots of this physical theatre, and I was certain that my findings would enhance my understanding of the genre and lead me to a more concrete definition.

When I started my journey of acquaintance with the genre of physical theatre, my views were firmly rooted in the traditions of formalistic dance. Since Gary Gordon, director of the First Physical Theatre company, maintains that physical theatre "*sits on that continuum between drama and dance*" (Gordon 2002), this background seemed an appropriate starting point for reflection and research. I believed that if I studied the historical developments in dance it would deepen my understanding of where physical theatre originated and thus my understanding of the genre. As a result, I began by looking at the changes in dance from classical ballet to modern and the post-modern dance. Since my physical training was predominantly rooted in classical ballet, it served as a philosophy through which I perceived and understood the expressive nature of my body. As my experience of physical theatre has been a practical submersion, the role of dance technique in physical theatre became an important subject of inquiry in my research. This also directed the way I approached my historical research.

I began to notice that a symbiotic relationship seemed to exist between dance and theatre throughout history. More frequently, parallels began to surface between the

methodologies of dance and drama directors and the question, 'How and where does dance and theatre meet?' became more urgent. Historically of course, it can be shown that dance and drama were once seen as one concept, that is part of the same theatre, before developing in separate directions. Of the official separation between dance and drama Eugenio Barba says:

> *The tendency to make a distinction between dance and theatre, characteristic of our culture, reveals a profound wound, a void with no tradition, which continuously risks drawing the actor towards a denial of the body and the dancers towards virtuosity. To an Oriental performer, this distinction seems absurd, as it would have seemed absurd to European performers in other historical periods, to a jester or a comedian in the sixteenth century, for example.* (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:12)

Keeping this in mind, I wanted to look at how dance and drama met ***again*** after having been separated, using the historical treatment of the expressive body in dramatic theatre as the focal point in studying forms such as physical theatre, *Tanztheater* and poor theatre.

1.2 The separation of dance and drama

When Nicola Savarese examined the historical changes that occurred in Western theatre at the end of the nineteenth century, he discovered that theatre practitioners of that time had been studying ancient theatre traditions. This brought on a re-emergence and re-evaluation of the principles of some of the older theatre traditions in which a distinction between dance and drama was unimaginable. For example, these theatre makers, of both dramatic dance and drama, revisited the traditions of Commedia dell'Arte, ancient Greek theatre, and Oriental theatre to serve as forms of inspiration. (Savarese in Barba & Savarese 1991:165) Savarese further concludes "*more popular performance forms such as circus and cabaret*" were also studied by theatre makers in conjunction with the older forms and that these traditions

> *…could inspire a viable alternative to the theatre of the nineteenth century, provide arguments for a new cultural strategy and, above all, more diversified*

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and richer means for the performer's language. (Savarese in Barba & Savarese 1991:165)

Before this severance that both Barba and Savarese refer to, dance and drama were inseparable. For example, the Commedia dell'Arte performer, "*not only had to speak, sing and play at least one musical instrument, but also had to be a dancer and acrobat.*" (Savarese in Barba & Savarese 1991:166) Correspondingly, the first ballet ever created shared many of the qualities of Commedia dell'Arte. Catherine de Medici produced this first so-called ballet in France, but the work entitled *Ballet Comique de la Reine* (1581) was a result of the creativity of De Medici's personal servant the Italian violinist, composer, and choreographer, Balthasar Beaujoyeux (Koegler 1982:49). This spectacle for which intricate sets and scenic devices where created did not only consist of dancing, but also included original compositions of music, poetry and song. The theme for the production was assembled from an appropriation of stories and myths originating from the Bible as well as Greek and Roman mythology (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:70). While this event had a strong resemblance to pantomime, it is also evident that in the sixteenth century the actor and the dancer were not seen as separate entities in European theatre.

There is a belief that the shift from performers who could act, sing, dance, and mime to performers who were only trained for pure[1] theatrical forms happened,

> *…when ballet and dance professionally separated the actor from the dancer. In the Renaissance period, and above all in the performances of the Commedia dell'Arte, the performers sang, danced, recited as did the actors of the Kabuki and the Peking Opera.* (Savarese in Barba & Savarese 1991:165)

This separation of ballet and drama began a process of refinement, which resulted in the development of pure forms. Savarese further concludes that;

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[1] By pure forms, I am referring to a school of thought within which performers are trained and expected to conform and perform in a specific style or genre to be precise, romantic ballet or the romantic actor. This could also be seen as a formalist approach.

All these discoveries enriched the doctrines and practices of theatrical art and had a decisive influence on Occidental performance. These theatre forms had certain characteristics in common which could be used both to oppose the bourgeois theater of the nineteenth century and to revitalize the then current traditions of the performer's language. It was first of all a question of refusing a certain naturalism in favour of an aesthetic based not on mimesis but on a system of signs; secondly, the elimination of the barrier between performer and spectator – the famous 'fourth wall' – in order to discover new possible relationships between the performers and their audience; and finally, the rupture of the dramatic unities by means of a montage of symbolic spatial and temporal sequences. (Savarese in Barba & Savarese 1991:165)

The human body has always been an integral part of theatre, past and present - as it is the performer's instrument through which he or she communicates. Savarese points out that the new ways of thinking would alter the language of the performer in the theatre of the twentieth century specifically the way the performer uses his or her body to communicate with the audience. More attention was given to the communication in theatre at this time in history and therefore also the source of communication i.e. the body. As a result of different cultures, religions and different theatre practitioners there have been many discrepancies through history regarding the different techniques or methods used to train the dancer and actor.

1.3 A body subjected to content and/or form

Techniques of the body in performance, and techniques to train the body for performance have always been reliant on the struggle between the superiority of the content of the theatrical work over the aesthetic form of the work, or vice versa. The choreographer or director, depending on their aesthetic preference, enforces this choice. The training techniques used for the performer is affected by it, rendering their training subservient to the emphasis on either content or form. This divide between content and form is also what separates the actor from the dancer, as Barba stated previously. In the same way that a musician has to master the technique of playing his instrument before he can begin to find freedom in playing, a dancer trains extensively before finding freedom in the restriction of a codified technique such as

ballet, and the same principle is relevant to acting. When considering Savarese's' point of view that the refinement of ballet technique had caused a divide in Western theatre, and similarly the denial of the body in acting, then we should believe that the technique, which should give freedom, seems to separate theatre, turning it into a sphere of pure forms. It could be argued that codified techniques should be discarded in order to avoid conventional theatre. I doubt that this would be the best solution. Eugenio Barba has concluded that "*what we call technique is in fact a particular use of the body*" (Barba & Savarese 1991:9). This offers a slightly different view on what bodily techniques could contribute to theatre.

To clarify I would like to relate Barba's philosophy of technique to the philosophy of content and form in theatre, through using the 'technique of walking' as an example. To walk normally an individual uses their limbs in **opposition** while moving forward in space. This means that as one arm swings forward the other arm swings backwards and while this takes place the foot, opposite to the arm that swung forward, will take a step forward into space (forward with the left arm and right leg). This is the most natural, comfortable and energy-efficient way to travel forward for humans. Should the same individual use the **corresponding** arm and leg simultaneously to travel forward in space (forward with the left arm and left leg) they may find that the body is struggling, because it is not balanced. By using the body in two different ways, the (walking) individual will receive two different responses from the body, at the same time the spectator will perceive two different visual signs. In other words, if you should call these two approaches 'methods' and we name them the '**method of opposing limbs'** and '**the method of corresponding limbs'** it can be said that the end result of both methods will lead the individual to walk. Each method employs a specific technique or '*particular use of the body'*; correspondingly the outward appearance of the two walks will differ depending on which method the individual chose to use. Ultimately if you were the director/choreographer and you would like to achieve a specific aesthetic state through someone walking on stage, the aesthetic quality you desire will determine the method and therefore the technique you will employ and thus the form (aesthetic) stipulates the content (meaning). However, if you as the director/choreographer for example began the process of creation by using the walk of corresponding limbs - because the character in the work is perhaps uncoordinated as a result of illness or disability, the work will be based on content

(meaning) rather than form (aesthetic). In other words, the aesthetic becomes subservient to the meaning through the method used. In essence, whichever technique is chosen, the body is essentially utilized to express meaning within a theatrical context.

Bearing in mind that technique is simply a way to utilize the body to, in an aesthetic sense, achieve form - or more specifically a particular visual result - Barba divides bodily techniques into three specific categories: the daily technique, the extra-daily technique and the virtuoso technique. He states that each technique or 'use of the body' has a different and unique purpose.

> *The purpose of the body's daily techniques is communication. The techniques of virtuosity aim for amazement and the transformation of the body. The purpose of extra-daily techniques, on the other hand, is information: they literally* **put the body in-form.** *Herein lies the essential difference which separates extra-daily techniques from those which merely transform the body.*
> (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:10)

I quoted Barba previously where he makes a distinction between the use of the body of the actor and that of the dancer. He argues that in Western theatre the dancer is drawn to virtuoso technique while the actor frequently denies the body. At its simplest both techniques are purely forms. The fact remains, however, that the body is the main instrument of both dancer and actor. If so, knowledge of the body's mechanics is invaluable to both dancer and actor, thus performer. Barba believes that "*... the performer's life is based on an alteration of balance. When standing erect, we are never immobile even when we appear to be so; we are in fact using many minute movements to displace our weight*" (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:11).

Thus Barba is saying that the body remains in a constant state of flux, it is never motionless.

> *These micro-movements are a kind of kernel which, hidden in the depths of the body's daily techniques, can be modelled and amplified in order to increase*

the power of the performer's presence, thus becoming the basis of extra-daily
techniques. (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:11)

In my opinion, this is also applicable to virtuoso techniques. The body's transformation; from its daily role into that of communicating ideas through performance - is an integral debate throughout the history of dance and drama. Thus without further ado, the focus of this research shifts to the end of the 1800s where theatre makers began to challenge the role of the body in theatre pertaining to how the body in performance should look and function in the realm of performance. They also re-evaluated the way in which the actor and the dancer were trained in order to refine these methods.

CHAPTER TWO

Russia - The beginning of the end for traditional forms

Modern dance can be likened to the phoenix, the magical bird of Arabian mythology that, after living out a cycle of years, regularly burned itself upon a funeral pyre, only to arise renewed from its ashes. The phoenix of the arts, modern dance has had its own cycles of creation, and it remains in a perpetual state of metamorphosis.

(Anderson 1992:165)

I believe that this *perpetual state of metamorphosis* is true of all art forms; within each form, there are theories or schools of thought that are supported or pushed to the limit. After reaching its maximum potential, it is discarded and exchanged for the next theory and, as a result, the creative cycle continuously renews itself. Historically many examples can be found of established techniques or schools of thought that were challenged by a new avant-garde movement. This is, as Anderson describes, exactly how modern dance came to life. Modern dance was a revolution in the approach towards the expressive body in performance, and thus its roots are of consequence to this discussion. The cycle of metamorphosis that would lead to modern dance and that which followed began much earlier.

After their separation, as noted in Chapter One, dance and theatre developed separately to become what can be seen as pure forms. In Paris in the early 1900s through the influence of Meyerhold, the Ballet Russe de Diaghilev, the cubists, fauves and the post-impressionists, these two forms became more intertwined. Yet, much preceded this reunion.

2.1 The transition from romanticism to realism in theatre

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a process of metamorphosis began to take place in theatre as the *well-made-play* of the Romantic[2] period came under scrutiny. Soon the trend towards naturalism and realism[3] in theatre would replace the soap opera style popularly associated with the romantic drama. Author Émile Zola was the first to put the theory of naturalism to paper. His novel *Thérèse Raquin* (1873) explored the consequences that are brought upon the characters because of their hereditary origin and social conditions. This work "*was widely regarded as the first milestone of the* (naturalistic) *movement.*" (Styan 1981a: 6-7) Contrary to the content of the well-made play of Eugene Scribe, Zola's work explored the human condition in a more accurate manner. While Zola's theories addressed the content of the written text, other theatre makers challenged the traditional use of form in theatre.

One such important event that set in motion the development of realism in theatre was the exposure of Europe to the Saxe-Meinigen company of Duke Georg II. This German theatre company worked as an ensemble, discarding the star system used by companies that performed romantic dramas. Concerning outward form, the actors playing crowd members would sometimes turn their backs to the audience. Their individuality was emphasized by changes in posture and pose while conventional

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[2] The **Romantic Movement** in the arts developed in Western Europe and the United States between 1770 and 1840. This movement, mainly found in painting, was a reaction against establishments such as the church and the aristocracy. Moreover, it rebelled against the notion of '*rational Enlightenment*'. For these artists the '*emotional experience*' took preference over stylistic choices in their work. In addition the romantic movement was a precursor for many late nineteenth-century art movements such as symbolism, which made an effort to surpass rational thought. Well-known artists of the romantic movement were William Blake and William Turner, both from Great Britain; Francisco de Goya from Spain and French painter Eugène Delacroix (Atkins 1993:185-186).

[3] Between 1840 and 1880, Western Europe (mainly France) and the United States saw the rise of **Realism** in art and literature. Influenced by the Industrial Revolution these artists emphasised the ordinary things in life. Some realists "…*depicted members of the rural or urban working classes with the same dignity previously accorded only to aristocrats*" (Atkins 1993:184). This movement, illustrating the concerns of the bourgeoisie, was closely linked with the various political revolutions of the time in Europe. The main contributors to this movement were mostly French artists such as Jean François Millet, Honoré Daumier, Edgar Degas, Eduard Manet and Gustav Courbet (Atkins 1993: 183-184).

symmetry was avoided. (Styan 1981a:11-13) Thus, the Meinigen company addressed the use of the body and its function in the theatrical space. Their practical example spiralled through the work of many theatre makers until it became standard theatre practice.

The Meinigen company's work influenced various theatre directors such as Constantin Stanislavski and André Antoine.[4] Christopher Innes describes Antoine's simplistic treatment of scenery and attention to the detail of props for his version of Zola's *Jacques Damour* (1887) to have been a catalyst for the naturalistic style of stage presentation. (Innes 2000:13) The company also left a strong impression on playwrights like Anton Chekhov and Henrik Ibsen,[5] who contributed greatly to the movements of realism and naturalism. While some playwrights (as these mentioned) became more aware of the possibility of the existence and thus inclusion of a physical text in the written text, the works of Chekhov and Ibsen only came alive through the careful direction of great theatre makers. One such visionary was Constantin Stanislavski, who wanted to find the inner truth on stage by creating a physical text for the actor. In Russia from 1890 onwards Stanislavski formed part of a:

> *…volcanic eruption in the arts, bringing in its wake an entire social, religious and ideological upheaval – the emergence of a new society. A roll-call of that*

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[4] "Antoine and Stanislavsky both claimed that it was the Meinigen Company which inspired their new approach to the theatre, and detailed rehearsal, disciplined ensemble playing and the unity and consistency of a production became the hallmarks of the Théâtre-Libre and the Moscow Art Theatre" (Styan 1981a:13-14).

[5] As Zola's work, the content of Ibsen's writing was controversial. His play *A Doll's House* (1879) not only challenged the accepted subject matter of a play but also gave much attention to subtext, consisting of many non-verbal cues for the main character, Nora. Moreover Ibsen paid attention to the background of his characters, their memories and experiences, thus creating a more three dimensional character. (See Styan 1981a:17-22) "*Compared with the romantic drama, Ibsen's social plays in fact have little physical action; the emphasis is all on a new psychological contest of minds as the characters circle and evade the taboo subjects*" (Styan 1981a:28) With the introduction of subject matter that addressed woman's rights in the 1800's, Ibsen inevitably delivers strong commentary on the content of plays, mostly the romantic dramas of the early 1800s. Ibsen's dedication to creating performance that is more honest paved the way for others to follow. Therefore, it could be argued that Ibsen began to pay attention to a physical text.

period catches some of the excitement – Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekhov, Gogol, Tchaikovsky, Rimsky-Korsakov, Chaliapin, Diaghilev, Pavlova, Karsavina, Nijinsky, Bakst, Benois, Fokine and, of course, Stanislavsky. (Roose-Evans 1989:6)

A movement began with Stanislavski and some of his Russian contemporaries. This notion contemplated some traditions of the Russian theatre of the time, bearing in mind the influences of the Saxe-Meinigen company with whom Stanislavski spent a year, as well as the contributions of realist and naturalist playwrights and theorist of the time. The notion was to re-evaluate the way that theatre should be presented and thus the way the actor should be trained to express the ideals of such a theatre. This meant a re-evaluation of content and form, and consequently the way the actors' body is used.[6] Stanislavski was not the original instigator of realistic performance; his contribution was in the development of a system to teach the actor how to give a more realistic performance.

The greatness of Stanislavsky lies as much in his own flexibility as in his adherence to the cardinal principle of inner truth on the stage. (Roose-Evans 1989:6)

2.2 Stanislavski and training the actor

According to Innes (2000:11) the romantic style of acting was commonly associated with the clichéd use of gesture. Stanislavski, echoing Innes's point of view, describes the typical use of gesture of an actor in this melodramatic style.

…spreading your hand over your heart to express love, or opening your mouth wide to give the idea of death. (Stanislavski in Innes 2000:11)

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[6] Victor Hugo expressed similar ideas in 1827 through a manifesto declaring that life is the only example for the stage (Roose-Evans 1989:14). Although Hugo's manifesto resulted in the well-made play, it did open a door that led the way for the theories of playwrights such as Zola and Ibsen to contribute to the philosophy of realism and naturalism.

Stanislavski furthermore accused the romantic drama and actor of over-dramatization, exaggerated methods of speech, a focus on showing of aesthetics rather than real expression and a spoilt ensemble due to the star system. (Stanislavski in Innes 2000:8, 12) In reaction against this 'untruthful' use of the body to express in performance, Stanislavski developed a system of actor training. Through this system, he believed he could equip the actor to create a role that is believable and truthful. It is a system that is still being used all over the world today almost a century after it was developed to train actors. James Roose-Evans describes Stanislavski as the pioneer of theatre, whose innovations and influence spread furthest in the Western world, as evidence of his vision is to be found everywhere in twentieth-century theatre (Roose-Evans 1989:6-7).[7] My main concern, however, is the attention he gave to the development of the actors' instrument not only to create truth internally on stage, but his belief in incorporating physical training for the actor which was contrary to the stylised use of the body of the romantic actor.

As a child Stanislavski was exposed to a great deal of theatre and, amongst other things, he received ballet training with ballerina Yekaterina Sankovskaya (Roose-Evans 1989:10). Therefore, it is not surprising that his training system for the actor also included physical training that originated from careful studies of the body. He compiled a programme of physical exercises for his actors with which his aim was to train the body, the actors' physical instrument, to be "*more mobile, flexible, expressive and even more sensitive*" (Stanislavski 1968:38). Training included aspects such as gymnastics, circus skills and dance such as modern dance and ballet. He firmly believed that movement was motivated from within: "*Movement and action, which take their source in the recesses of the soul and follow an inner pattern, are essential to real artists in drama, ballet and other theatre and plastic arts*" (Stanislavski 1968:61).

Stanislavski spent much time studying the body's mechanism. Through his studies, he pointed out specific training methods and what they could contribute to the actors training to better his/her physical expressiveness on stage. For example, in *Building a*

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[7] In 1896 Stanislavski met with Nemirovich-Danchenko, together they founded the Moscow Art Theatre, which served as a platform from which they could experiment.

Character he maintains that ballet training is an excellent means to correct faulty posture and to teach the actor how to place and use the vertebrae correctly in the spinal column. It is also beneficial to help those with certain physical defects, specifically turned in knees (common amongst his female actresses) due to ballet's emphasis on the turned-out position of the legs. He also recognized the value of ballet and other dance forms to develop articulation and expressiveness in the feet (Stanislavski 1968: 42-44). While he found these elements of ballet and dance training useful, he was not in favour of ballet's and dancing's "*over-refinement of form, to an exaggerated grace, to affectation. That is bad*" (Stanislavski 1968:44). Similarly the Stanislavski actor had to perfect a variety of skills such as acrobatics and the aim of such physical training was to enable the actor to produce movements that are precise yet at the same time have elements of fluidity and grace (Stanislavski 1968:44). Clearly, he placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of dance technique training to inform the actor's body. For Stanislavski the body as an instrument of communication for the actor was very important; the more fluent the instrument, the easier it is for the actor to correct faulty posture and to embody specific physical characteristics.

Stanislavski started something in Russia which would be developed and used by many other theatre makers as a basis or springboard for new forms. While he cannot be called the original instigator of realism in theatre, he is noted for his contribution in starting a more physical approach to acting.

In Stanislavski's lifetime, Meyerhold, one of his own pupils, began to challenge his work. Barba states: "*The 'old theatre' (Stanislavski's naturalistic theatre) has formed actors who are skilled in the arts of metamorphosis and reincarnation, but plasticity (plastika) plays no part in their work*" (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:154).

Although both Stanislavski and Meyerhold experimented with training methods for the actor, the difference between the outcomes of their work seems to lie within their individual attitudes toward the role/importance of the actor. Stanislavski believed in "*the essential creative power of the actor as the only source of vitality for the theatre*" (Roose-Evans 1989:7), while Meyerhold have been seen by some as a director who treated his actors like puppets (Roose-Evans 1989:21-22).

Roose-Evans further states that some people were of the opinion that "…*the productions of such avant-garde directors as Meyerhold and Taïrov who often cared more about the form than the content of the play*" (Roose-Evans 1989:21).

2.3 Forming the actor through Meyerhold

> *The revolution in the form and content of the modern theatre is being delayed only by the lack of funds to re-equip our stage and auditorium…We must consider the demands of the contemporary spectator and think in terms of audiences not of three to five hundred (the proletariat is not interested in so-called 'intimate' or 'chamber' theatres) but of tens of thousands…The modern spectator demands the kind of thrill which only the tension generated by an audience of thousands can give.* (Meyerhold in Drain 1995:184)

Meyerhold seemed to be greatly concerned with the aesthetics of theatre. He was also interested in the role of the spectator in theatre and believed that the audience should contribute to creating meaning in the theatrical process.

> *The theatre must work on the spectator in order to awaken and strengthen in him a militancy strong enough to help him conquer the oblomovism, manilovism, hypocrisy, erotomania and pessimism within himself.* (Meyerhold in Drain 1995:100)

In his time Meyerhold experimented a great deal with the theatrical space with regard to the actor-audience relationship. For example, influenced by the development of machinery, Meyerhold applied the principles of constructivism[8] to his production of

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[8] Picasso's assemblage created of sheet metal and wire in 1912, served as a catalyst for the work of constructivist, Vladimir Tatlin and subsequently the **Constructivist Movement** in Russia came into being in 1913. In the same year Marcel Duchamp created his first *readymade* and the revolutionary ballet *Le Sacre du Printemps* made its debut (Atkins 1993:29). By 1921, when the official term Constructivism emerged, the art movement had already begun its decline. The movement rejected art for art's sake; rather the notion of creating useful designs for the masses was part of their theory. This movement was very much concerned with the use of space in their creations. Their treatment thereof

The Magnanimous Cuckold (1922). The set consisted of ramps, staircases, and walkways. He exposed the traditional stage space through taking away the curtains and flats. (Pitches 2003:34-35) In doing so, he revealed to the audience the, usually hidden, space behind the proscenium arch. Meyerhold continued experimenting with the perception in his production of *Hedda Gabler* (1906), in which he removed the proscenium arch and in his version of Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* (1906) he made an attempt to reduce the space between the audience and actors by moving some of the scenery down stage (Roose-Evans 1989:22).

Based on Ivan Pavlov's theory of 'chain reflexes' and Frederick Winslow Taylor's obsession with efficient production line work, Meyerhold established his theory of biomechanics between 1913 and 1922 (Pitches 2003:32-33).   The aim of biomechanics was to improve the actors' physical ability, and while the biomechanical exercises were not created to be seen in performance, they informed everything the actor physically did on stage (Pitches 2003:67-68). According to one of his students, Ilinsky, Meyerhold believed that if the outward form or posture were correct, it would generate the correct reaction from within the actor (Ilinsky in Barba & Savarese 1991:156-157). Roose-Evans gives a short outline of what biomechanics intended to achieve.

> *Its aim was to discipline both the emotional and muscular response of the actor. As with the dancer, so every movement or gesture made on stage would be calculated, controlled and never spontaneous. The actor was taught to use the space around him as well as to relate in spatial terms to his fellow actors and the objects around him. Just as Alwin Nikolais demands from his dancers motions rather than emotion, so Meyerhold demanded from his actors the vigorous elimination of all human feeling and the creation of an order based upon mechanical laws; the actor was to function as a machine – a somersault, salto-moratale, or head-spring would suffice to convey different sates of emotion.* (Roose-Evans 1989:28)

made their work revolutionary thus serving as an example for stage design (as we have observed in the work of Meyerhold), as well as architectural and industrial design. After the group disbanded, the individual constructivist artist joined various other art movements across Europe and America, thus spreading the principles of constructivism wherever they went (Atkins 1993:80-82).

Through biomechanics, Meyerhold was creating an alternative method to that of Stanislavski. The notion to make the performer's body more expressive and find inner truth on stage did not only begin with the playwrights and directors of German and Russian theatre, but in the realm of Russian dance. Some years before Meyerhold, dancer, a teacher and choreographer of ballet, Michel Fokine, began to break away from the choreographic conventions of classical ballet.[9] Marius Petipa, who preceded Fokine, left behind a legacy of rather formalized choreography to the Russian ballet. This legacy is so strong that his most famous ballets, *Swan Lake* (1895) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1890) are still performed today by ballet companies all over the globe. Succeeding Petipa in the books of history, Fokine set out to change many of the conventions Petipa established.

2.4 New forms in ballet

Similarly, Diaghilev, a former pupil of Alexandre Benois,[10] was to become a true visionary in the world of art and was in many ways the catalyst in the rise of the Russian ballet in Europe. Diaghilev had the ability to spot talent and initiated artistic collaboration amongst the greatest Russian artists in ballet, art, and opera. Among these artists were Leon Bakst, painter and stage designer; Enrico Cecchetti, Italian dancer and ballet master; Jean Cocteau, French writer and Igor Stravinsky, Russian composer who later would become George Balanchine's right hand in American ballet. (Buckle 1971:XV – Xvii)

Benois introduced Fokine to Diaghilev who, in turn, invited Fokine to work with his ballet company (Au 1997:76). Under the direction of and collaboration with

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[9] Classical ballet refers to the dramatic dance tradition established in Russia (after the romantic ballet) in the second half of the nineteenth century by Petipa and Tchaikovsky. Ballets choreographed and composed by them, such as the *Sleeping Beauty* (1890), *Nutcracker* (1892) and *Swan Lake* (1895) were originally created in this style (Koegler 1982:32). Succeeding romantic ballet with its soft poetic lines, classical ballet introduced a more rigorous technique that required the execution of stronger lines and placement. It also introduced the classical tutu, which is the shortened tutu where the dancers' legs are fully visible.

[10] Alexandre Benois was a painter, art historian, and stage designer (Buckle 1971:XV).

Diaghilev and the *Ballet Russe de Diaghilev,* Fokine's innovative choreographies became known throughout Europe. Fokine's ballets - such as *Sheherezade* (1910), (Koegler 1982:379) *The Firebird* (1910) (Buckle 1971:119), *Petrushka* (1911) (Koegler 1982:325), *Le Spectra de la Rose* (1911) (Koegler 1982:391) - are still performed by ballet companies all over the world. Progressively Fokine's work became more daring.

> *He attacked the ballet's blind conformity to tradition, such as its dependence upon highly stylised and artificial form of mime that was meaningless to most of the audience, and the ballerina's inevitable costume of tutu and pointe shoes. Although he did not advocate the complete abandonment of academic ballet technique, which he considered the only form of training that could equip a dancer with the necessary strength and versatility, he believed that the choreographer should be able to dispense with it if the ballet's theme so required. He considered pointe work inappropriate to many themes, and replaced it with his own conceptions of various period and national dance forms.* (Au 1997:72)

Furthermore, Fokine began to work differently with each composer, for example, "The *'Firebird'* (1910) *has always been quoted as the earliest example of close collaboration between a composer and a choreographer*" (Buckle 1971:121). Fokine created the ballet and Stravinsky wrote the music according to his requirements.[11]

Not only did Fokine challenge the traditional relationship between composer and choreographer, the costumes, mime and choreography of ballet, but he also challenged the dancer-audience spatial convention. Fokine stage a ballet entitled *Carnaval* (1910) of which a few elements surrounding this work are particularly noteworthy. First, some parts of the choreography were executed amid the audience. To put this into perspective, it should be noted that ballet evolved to a form that revolves around the concept of illusion, fantasy and gravity-defying movements. The

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[11] "I like exact requirements…To speak of my own collaborations with Fokine means nothing more than to say that we studied the libretto together, episode by episode, until I knew the exact measures required of the music…Fokine taught me much, and I have worked with choreographers in the same way ever since" (Stravinsky quoted in Buckle 1971:122).

restriction of the proscenium arch protected this concept of illusion, as it is there to preserve the magic of theatre.[12] It purposefully places a divide between the performer and the audience. The public was passionately involved with theatre in Fokine's time and had very specific ideas around theatre conventions, one of these being the use of the proscenium stage. The conventions were so specific that the Imperial family dismissed Nijinsky from the Mariinsky theatre in 1911 (due to political and some personal vendettas) because he wore an unsuitable costume (Buckle 1971:170).

Consequently, it was a bold step by Fokine to infiltrate what was traditionally thought of as the audience's space. Why did such a shift take place in Fokine's approach? It could be argued that Fokine had been pushing the boundaries of traditional ballet choreography for a while and therefore this would be a natural development. It could also be argued that Fokine had been collaborating with some of Russia's most forward-thinking and talented artist, musicians and designers who constantly challenged the norm. Accordingly, it could be seen as a mere coincidence that Meyerhold took part in this production (Buckle 1971:128-129), I feel, however, that these connections have much greater importance. When considering Meyerhold's approach to the actor-audience relationship (as discussed previously in this chapter) and in the work of some of his contemporaries, a visible shift begun to take place in approaches to the actor-audience relationship. This idea were to be echoed and expanded by theatre innovators of the 1930s and onwards.[13] In addition, the work of stage designers Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig re-evaluated the approach to the use of the body in space.[14] Thus when considering Meyerhold's involvement in

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[12] This was not always the case. Before the rise of professionalism in ballet, most ballets were viewed from the top. *"The audience's perceptions of the dancer began to alter as the performing conditions changed. The proscenium stage created both physical and psychic distance between the performers and the spectators, who were no longer encouraged to identify with the former as they had been in the days when the court ballet was a symbolic means of creating unity among different factions"* (Au 1997:23).

[13] For example, Bertold Brecht, Merce Cunningham, and Jerzy Grotowski explored different approaches to the actor-audience relationship. For a detailed discussion on these developments in drama and dance, refer to **Chapter 5**.

[14] In **Chapter 3,** links are made between the work of Appia and Craig and the relevant dance and theatre makers discussed.

this production I do not find it surprising that Fokine's ballet *Carnaval* challenged the traditional spatial arrangement between actor and audience. In retrospect, Ramsay Burt reminds us "...*Fokine is a transitional figure between the nineteenth-century ballet tradition and twentieth-century modernism*" (Burt in Carter 1998:250).

In 1914, with the outbreak of World War I, a year after the first production of *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913) (still to be discussed), Fokine wrote a letter to *The London Times* outlining his philosophy and approach to choreography and production of his so called new ballet. I include these five points, as I would like to suggest that some of Fokine's ideas could be paralleled to those of the theatre practitioners discussed previously in this chapter. Fokine did not discard the academic ballet[15] technique, but in this letter he outlined some of the principles that would lead to a more expressive use of the body in ballet as well as ideals that would bring dance and theatre closer together.

> *Not to form combinations of ready-made and established dance-steps, but to create in each case a new form corresponding to the subject, the most expressive form possible for the representation of the period and the character of the nation represented – that is the first rule of the new ballet.* (Fokine in Cohen & Copeland 1983:260)

Fokine's argument here is two-fold. First, he realized that it is important to research the background of the work you want to present and correspondingly the movement should reflect the historical time and subject matter of the work presented.[16] Fokine's argument resonate the philosophies on the realistic theatre of the Meinigen company, Stanislavski's Moscow Art Theatre and others.

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[15] When referring to academic ballet I am referring to the new forms in the ballet tradition that followed classical ballet.

[16] Many of the foremost physical theatre companies in the world base their work on extensive research whether historical or based on individual experiences. For example, *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* by DV8 was based on the life of serial Killer Dennis Nilsen (www.dv8.co.uk), and *Bessie's Head* a documentary dance play by First Physical Theatre was structured around the events surrounding acclaimed South African writer Bessie Heads birth. Both companies conducted extensive research to create these works (Gordon 2002).

Secondly, Fokine argues that a choreographer should create a new vocabulary and not only rely on the outlines of a set technique. To me this statement could also be a starting point for the realisation of the choreographic potential of improvisation. Duncan[17] created a vocabulary that was fresh and stemmed from the solar plexus. Yet her work, like Fokine's, was also based on an original framework; in Duncan's case that of Greek dance. On the other hand, someone like Mary Wigman[18] moved even further forward and created a completely new movement vocabulary. This was a landmark in German expressionist dance (Koegler 1982:448) with a philosophy of expressing the self at the centre of it.[19] This philosophy correlates with that of the creators of ancient tribal dance, folk dance, and ballet who fused new dance movements into specific codified forms. Likewise, Doris Humphrey[20] is an earlier example of someone who broke away from set traditions/techniques (that of Denishawn) to find her own authentic expressive movement form and in effect with her theories on fall and recovery codified a specific technique.

It is quite evident that Fokine did not completely sever with the ballet technique, yet it seems as if he, like Nijinsky, began to question the accuracy of it.

> *The second rule is that dancing and mimetic gesture have no meaning in a ballet unless they serve as an expression of its dramatic action, and they must not be used as a mere divertissement or entertainment, having no connection with the scheme of the whole ballet. The third rule is that the new ballet admits the use of conventional gesture only where it is required by the style of the ballet and in all other cases endeavours to replace gestures of the hands*

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[17] The contribution of Isadora Duncan is discussed in **Chapter 3.**

[18] Wigman was a leader in the development of German modern dance, who studied under Jaques-Dalcroze and Laban and made her debut in 1914 (the same time that Fokine published his manifesto). For a more detailed discussion on Wigman's work refer to **Chapter 4.**

[19] She would be closely examined and judged for her experimentation of improvisation. "…*he* (Lincoln Kirstein) *sharply criticized her custom of releasing students in the studio to improvise freely movements such as joy, terror, or grief, to percussive accompaniment. Finally, Kirstein suggested that Wigman's dance was based on the era's "loose thinking' on progressive education and adolescent self-expression*" (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:132-133).

[20] For a more detailed discussion on Humphrey's work, refer to **Chapter 3**.

> *by mimetic of the whole body: Man can be and should be expressive from head to foot.* (Fokine in Cohen & Copeland 1983:260)

Fokine is questioning the role of traditional gesture-language, or pantomime but, more importantly, he is seeking a more genuine manner of bodily expression, stating that the whole body should participate in expressing meaning.

This 'total' expression of Fokine correlates with the ideas of Artaud.[21] In his struggle to find a truer form of theatre than the one that existed in his time, Artaud battled with the idea of Western/European theatre. He questioned the use of text as the dominant form in theatre, rebelling against the idea that words had to be used to express obvious ideas, or that words were the only means to describe a character (Artaud 1977:27). Fokine essentially did the same with pantomime. Similarly Peter Brook[22] established conversations without words with his audiences in African villages, firstly, because they did not speak the same language and, secondly, because he was in search of a theatrical language that did not rely on a specific spoken language. Thus, a theatrical language took its place in the improvisations. (Williams 1991:202-224)

Following on this train of thought, Artaud continues to explain that the stage is a perceptible physical place waiting to be filled; a space that should speak its own authentic language. This physical language, as he refers to it, should appeal to the senses instead of the mind of the audience. This physical language composed of everything that fills the stage as well as all the things that can be shown and expressed on stage, attempts to deconstruct the intellectualised response of the audience, the kind of response that comes from an appeal on the mind. (Artaud 1977:27) Thus, the link between Artaud, Brook and Fokine is their agreement on the use of the body to communicate ideas. Fokine may have been more bound by tradition and technique as a framework, but essentially all three were seeking a more genuine means of bodily expression.

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[21] For a discussion on the contribution of Artaud, refer to **Chapter 4.**

[22] This event is discussed in more detail in **Chapter 5.**

> *The fourth rule is the expressiveness of groups and of ensemble dancing…The new ballet, on the other hand, in developing the principle of expressiveness, advances from the expressiveness of the face to the expressiveness of the whole body, and from the expressiveness of the individual body to the expressiveness of a group of bodies and the expressiveness of the combined dancing of a crowd.* (Fokine in Cohen & Copeland 1983:260)

The fourth rule I interpret to be a reaction against the role of the *corps de ballet* in the ballets of the Romantic and Classical eras. Here the *corps de ballet* mostly moved as one unit, often becoming a decorative stage element, and were hardly ever responsible for the conveyance of meaning or individual expression. This notion of Fokine also coincides with the reaction, begun by the Saxe-Meinigen company and continued by André Antoine, against the treatment of crowds in romantic dramas.

> *The fifth rule is the alliance of dancing with other arts. The new ballet, refusing to be the slave either of music or of scenic decoration, and recognizing the alliance of the arts only on the condition of complete equality, allows a perfect freedom both to the scenic artist and to the musician…It does not impose any specific 'ballet' conditions on the composer or the decorative artist, but gives complete liberty to their creative powers.* (Fokine in Cohen & Copeland 1983:260)

Dymphna Callery, author of *Through the Body* states that a significant characteristic of physical theatre is that "*the working process is collaborative*" (Callery 2001:5). It should be noted that in the case of physical theatre this collaboration is not only between the different arts such as Fokine highlights, but also between performers and choreographers. Lanon Prigge[23] believes that in physical theatre "*everyone is involved in developing vocabulary, and it is not merely the choreographer setting form and content. Thus I believe that the choreographer needs to be a facilitator and not a director; a creative director*" (Prigge 2005). In effect, this means that the performer becomes a part of the creative process; in other words, it becomes a collaborative process between the choreographer and the performer. Just like the later

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[23] Lanon Prigge was a former member of the First Physical Theatre Company.

Wagner and Craig, both Fokine in his manifesto and Diaghilev through his life work believed that collaboration is essential, at least between the different art forms. Artaud, a firm advocate of total theatre, believed that by separating the arts one dissolves its power of communication.

> *Although we have come to credit art with nothing more than a pleasurable relaxing value, confining it to the purely express use of forms, to the compatibility between certain surface relationships, this in no way diminishes its deeply expressive value. But the mental weakness of the West, where man has especially confused art and aesthetics, is to believe one can have painting used only as painting, dancing as a plastic form alone, as if one wanted to cut art off from everything, to sever the links with all the mystical attitudes they might adopt in confrontation with the absolute. One therefore understands that theatre, in as much as it remains confined within its own language and in correlation with it, must make a break with topicality.* (Artaud 1977:51)

Fokine's exposure to Isadora Duncan and her widespread influence over Europe led many to believe that Fokine's new ballet was an offspring of Duncan's work and ideals. Fokine, who denied the new ballet to be an extension of Duncan's work, also stated in his letter that he could not "*judge to what extent the influence of the old traditions* [traditional Russian classical ballet] *is preserved in the new ballet and how much the new ideals of Miss Duncan are reflected in it*" (Fokine in Cohen & Copeland 1983:261). One might speculate that Fokine's choreographic endeavours influenced Duncan. It is evident that a part of the evolution of modern dance and from that the build-up to physical theatre began at the beginning of the 20th century in Russia with Fokine and Diaghilev. To give this history more depth, there is one more participant in this revolution whose contribution should not remain unnoticed.

2.5 Nijinsky's sacrifice

The perpetual state of metamorphosis in theatre can be followed from Zola, Ibsen and Stanislavski through to Meyerhold; in dance, this metamorphosis also continued. In an almost sacrificial rite, the old form had to be sacrificed to create an opportunity for a new form to grow. Vaslav Nijinsky (contemporary of Meyerhold and protégé of

Fokine), with his avant-garde choreography in *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1913), literally and figuratively made such a sacrifice. Nijinsky - viewed by many in the dance world as the greatest male dancer who ever lived - trained at the Imperial School of Ballet in Petersburg from 1898 onwards (Buckle 1971:7). He continued to dance with the Mariinsky theatre and later became the focal point of Diaghilev's *Ballet Russe*. Formed and shaped by both the choreographic invention and genius of Fokine - who created roles that suited Nijinsky's exceptional technical and interpretive ability - and the protective guidance of Serge Diaghilev and his group of artist friends, Nijinsky was destined to play a role in the turning point of ballet. I believe that the combination of Nijinsky's talent, technical mastery over the classical ballet technique, his unique acting ability and his choreographic invention, played a part in instigating the fusion that would take place between dance and theatre almost a century later.

While Stanislavski and Meyerhold challenged the established forms of theatre, Nijinsky through the creation of the *Le Sacre du Printemps* challenged the established form of academic ballet of the time. In *Le Sacre du Printemps* Nijinsky explored new movement possibilities for formal dance and therefore questioned the traditional way of expression through the body.

Many factors influenced Nijinsky's creativity. Apart from the fact that both established a foundation for modern dance, historically a connection can be found between Nijinsky and Duncan. Duncan travelled to Russia in 1904, where she encountered Fokine as well as Nijinsky, who was still a student at the time (Buckle 1971:32). According to Richard Buckle, author of *Nijinsky*, Duncan placed many under her spell, including Fokine. "*For several years he* [Fokine] *had been dreaming of new forms and here was a goddess moving to sublime music. It was his moment of release – of explosion*" (Buckle 1971:35). Therefore it could be argued that Duncan influenced Nijinsky directly and indirectly through her influence on Fokine, bearing in mind that Fokine was responsible for the dances Nijinsky performed for the greater part of his dance career.

At the same time that Nijinsky was exposed to the above-mentioned environment, there was great change in the world of fine arts in Europe from the early 1900s onwards. Similar to the dance practitioners, artists began to challenge the old and

create the new. Impressionism led to fauvism (1905-1907), fauvism spilt over into cubism (1908), and out of this the expressionist[24] movement developed. Expressionism, a reaction against the lack of articulation and emotional commitment of impressionism, showed traces of fauvism and cubism (Copplestone 1962:21-28). Inevitably Nijinsky, who was exposed to a great deal of art by Diaghilev, must have been influenced by these developments.

> *Nijinsky wanted to create choreography and Diaghilev wanted him to. What form was it to take? Just as Fokine had rebelled against the academic dance, throwing out tutus, turn-out and virtuosity for its own sake, so where two friends feeling for different reasons dissatisfied with the results of Fokine's revolution…Diaghilev foresaw a dead-end to the ballet of local colour and the evocation of the past periods or distant lands. And he had a prejudice against stories and drama in ballet.* (Buckle 1971:162)

Egyptian art inspired Nijinsky's first choreographic work, *L'Après-midi d'un Faune* (1912). Accompanied by music of Debussy, the movements of this ballet derived from the idea of a moving Greek frieze, which led many to consider the choreography radical for its time (Buckle 1971:164). Then followed the revolutionary *Le Sacre du Printemps,* of which Jacques Rivière wrote in 1913 that the innovation of this work of Nijinsky far surpasses that which Fokine attempted in his choreography. He argues that it is "…*above all the body that speaks*" (Rivière in Cohen & Copeland 1983:120).

A body that speaks is the foundation on which physical theatre builds. *"At its simplest, physical-theatre is theatre where the primary means of creation occurs through the body rather than through the mind. In other words, the somatic impulse is privileged over the cerebral in the making process"* (Callery 2001:4). According to

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[24] Atkins maintains that while the naissance of **Expressionist art** is not clear, artist categorised as such share an urge to convey emotion, "*by distorting color or shape or surface or space in a highly personal way*" (Atkins 1993:98). Atkins further observes that while there were many expressionist movements, they are not necessarily termed as such for example German expressionism and fauvism. Modern art movements such as futurism and abstract expressionism are also a derivative form of expressionist art (Atkins 1993:98-99).

Rivière, Nijinsky's work echoed this truth. Thus through *Le Sacre du Printemps* Nijinsky managed to plant a seed of change in European dance.[25]

Here is Susan Au's description of the *Le Sacre du Printemps.*

> *The action takes place in prehistoric times among a hypothetical Russian tribe, which celebrates the coming of spring by compelling a chosen maiden to sacrifice herself by dancing until she dies of exhaustion. Once aging Nijinsky abandoned the academic ballet technique and devised a novel type of movement. The illusory lightness and effortlessness of the classical ballet as replaced by a sense of heaviness; symmetry was eliminated; and the primeval quality of the score was expressed through repetitive passages of walking, stamping and heavy jumps.* (Au 1997:83-84)

Hodson[26] is of opinion that the choreography of *Le Sacre du Printemps*

> *…was a precursor of modern dance. It was the first time, for example, that the dancer's fall to the ground became an integral part of a dance idiom; many of his other movements resembled early modern dance far more than they did traditional ballet.* (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:146).

Hodson's statement that *Le Sacre du Printemps* was the first time that a dancer's fall to the ground became part of the dance idiom is debatable. Perhaps this is true in the realm of classical ballet, but Isadora Duncan also explored this element, possibly not with such violent dynamic range as Nijinsky (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:117). In addition, in forms of Eastern dramatic dance, such as Kabuki dancers fall to the floor.

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[25] Because of its unique subject matter and its revolutionary way of using the body to express emotion *Le Sacre du Printemps* is seen as a precursor of modern dance and have since been reconstructed and re-choreographed by many choreographers across the globe (see Koegler 1982:361).

[26] "*Millicent Hodson, is a dance scholar who helped to reconstruct the choreography of Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) *for a 1987 Joffrey Ballet revival*" (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:146).

It is evident that a part of the evolution of modern dance and a more physical approach to acting began at the beginning of the 20th century, because of the contribution of the Saxe-Meinigen company and that of Russian dance and drama makers. Barba declares that:

> *The freedom and commitment of the theatre practitioner are fragile, conditioned as they are by media culture and and* (sic) *the making of performances in a specific societal context. But at the beginning of the 1900's, this freedom seemed to have been rediscovered in a new development of the creative process, by means of the expansion of the methodological and technical horizons.* (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:27)

It is from this established base that other theatre makers, of dance and drama, could now leap into the unknown toward new discoveries.

CHAPTER THREE

The information age and the search for an authentic theatre language

…history is not something simple.
(Kant in Carter 2004:108)

History is made up of a vast array of perceptions. One story can be seen from many different perspectives as each individual contributes his or her own unique point of view to the same story. Therefore, as Kant suggests, the (hi)story can become complicated. As technology advanced at the dawn of the twentieth century, the opportunity to travel across continents became more accessible to the average person. Thus the exchange of knowledge and accessibility of other cultures became faster and easier. Consequently, life became less simple and history appeared to become more complex.

As we progress through history, it can be observed that even the simplest historical event could potentially be consequential in the development of theatre across the globe. The end of the nineteenth century was a time saturated with new invention and creativity in all forms of science, technology, psychology, art and theatre. The work of Meyerhold is a prime example of the influence of technology on theatre. The effect of the Industrial Revolution resulted in further technological advancement in all fields. For example, more affordable automobiles were made possible due to Henry Ford's '*assembly line of mass production*' in 1910. The first flight in an aeroplane, constructed by the Wright brothers, hastened the development of aviation. The invention of steam-driven ships advanced ocean travel, while Thomas Edison's light bulb, invented in 1879, revolutionized life and theatre. In the field of psychology, the Freudian philosophy that human behaviour can be directly related to the subconscious had profound influence on artists, writers, and ordinary human life. Whilst Darwin presented his theory of evolution and Einstein his theory of relativity, Lister and Pasteur made medical breakthroughs in '*the germ theory of disease*', leading to the invention of penicillin (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:671-675).

Taken as a whole, the scientific, industrial, and technological developments in western Europe and the United States from 1870 to 1914 changed the way of living of the peoples concerned much more than they had been changed in the two centuries preceding 1870. (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:675)

Not only did this change the conditions of living, but it also affected man's way of thinking. Due to these developments, man became more critical in his analysis and observation of not only science but also art and theatre. A few developments in this time are of vital importance to the development in theatre. For example, Wagner's idea of a *Gesamtkunstwerk* set in motion the development of symbolism. The implementation of the symbolist theory affected the way the body was interpreted in the theatrical context. Additionally it paved the way for new artistic and theatrical movements that would have a profound impact on the perception and creation of theatrical work, be it dance or drama. Lastly, symbolism had a profound influence on modern stage design and it laid part of the foundation for some of the most profound art movements of the early twentieth century.

3.1 Symbolism: The precursor of Dadaism and Surrealism

Many regard Richard Wagner as the father of symbolism. Styan maintains that Wagner's theories, which advocated

…the desire to present a full emotional and spiritual experience on the stage, advanced an idea of symbolism more profound, more embracing and more tremendous than anything the French lyric poets had achieved or conceived… (Styan 1981b:9)

From Wagner's theories, the work of symbolist stage designers Appia and Craig could progress, and while they introduced symbolism into stage design, realism in the written word became endangered.[27]

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[27] Around 1919 in America, Kennith Macgowan in conjunction with Cheney and Robert Edmund Jones, began a new movement for modern stage art. They based their principals on the work of Appia,

> *Against the major realistic trend in European letters was a series of reactions*
> *or counter trends of some significance. One was toward 'symbolism,' which*
> *sought 'not a literal exactness but a suggestive use of word.* (Baldwin, Cole &*
> *Hayes 1970:677)*

The critical writings and works of Mallarmé, Mouclair, Yeats,[28] Maeterlinck and Jarry as well as the evolvement of the Théâtre de l'Oeuvre (founded by Mouclair) contributed greatly to the symbolist movement in Europe (Carlson 1993:288-295). Accordingly, an important shift took place in theatre. Symbolist theory challenged and changed the way in which words, actions, lighting, and costume were presented and perceived on stage. The 'what you see is what you get' point of view from both director and audience no longer applied, and theatre became more than just a picture or an aesthetic. Form and content became more integrated, and all the elements present on stage, formed a part of the message presented. As can be expected, the theory of symbolism greatly influenced the way in which the expressive body could be used in the theatre. While the practical implementation of these theories was not immediately realised in theatre, symbolist theory naturally opened the door for the development of art movements such as expressionism and surrealism.

It is therefore imperative that we should discuss the symbolist movement in France where, as Styan maintains, symbolism took a different path. (Styan2 1981: 45) The work of playwright Alfred Jarry was rooted in symbolist theory. For Jarry "...*the stage was a mirror which must distort the characters in proportion to their vices, just as the mask distorted the features*" (Styan 1918b:49) Jarry introduced his principles of symbolist theatre in practice through his play *Ubu roi ou les Polonais* (1896).[29]

Craig, Symons, and Evreinov. Similar to the latter the American movement rejected the realistic stage for theories owning traces of symbolism (see Carlson 1993:362).

[28] Yeats further explored Craig's idea of the Über-Marionette (see Carlson 1993:304-305).

[29] *Ubu roi ou les Polonais* produced in 1896 was out of the ordinary. Jarry's stage instructions stipulated that the entrances and exits should be accompanied by originally composed music performed by an orchestra in the wings. Visible to the whole audience was an old man responsible for changing a placard indicting the location of the particular dramatic moment in the play. This reminds of the work of Loie Fuller (To be discussed later in this chapter) and the later Bertold Brecht (refer to **Chapter 5**).

Consequently, *Ubu roi* was a precursor of avant-garde movements such as Dadaism and surrealism.

In Zurich, 1916, representing a form of rebellion against so-called bourgeois theatre, the Romanian writer Tristan Tzara founded the Dada movement.[30] Due to its aggressive iconoclastic nature towards some theatrical and artistic forms, the Dada movement was often labelled as an anti-art movement (Drain 1995:26). Dada advocated the necessity of anarchism in the arts, objecting to the presentation and perception of popular art/theatre of the time.

> *If politically dada wanted to change the establishment, aesthetically it wanted to change how people perceived the world about them. Its final goal was to bring down the barricades of form and idea which art and tradition had erected between artists and the public. Tzara sought to return to simplicity and spontaneity, and to enhance the values of the personal and the subjective. To do this, he had to disorientate the spectator- and perhaps the artist too.* (Styan 1981b:52)

In turn, surrealism was a natural development from the rebellious Dada movement.[31]

> *If dada chiefly tried to denounce art by disrupting it, surrealism refined the application of dadaist principles by exploring through the arts all the mysteries of the irrational mind. The rational control of our perceptions was to be disturbed and questioned by whatever means could be devised, and to do so the surrealist artist would use elements of surprise, the involuntary and the unconscious. Pure dada had wanted only* chance *to rule human activity; surrealism was more purposeful and wanted to* arrange *the derangement of the senses.* (Styan 1981b:52)

The characters wore masks that Jarry invented and were to physically assume a mechanical style of movement while acting. Utilizing symbolism the lead character uses a lavatory brush as a sceptre when he becomes the king (Styan 1989b:46-47).

[30] André Breton (1896-1966) is also associated with the development of Dada (Styan 1981b:51).

[31] Dada festivals continued until 1921 in Zurich.

This careful arrangement of deranged senses advocated by the surrealists coincided strongly with the ideas of Guillaume Apollinaire and Antonin Artaud,[32] but would only proliferate in dance through the work of the American post-modern dance choreographers[33]. Styan maintains that

> …*surrealism was a way of carefully dislocating logical thinking, confounding causality and argument, and disarranging time and space for everyone to understand. The consequent disorder may even have the effect of lifting its audience on to a new, heightened, 'poetic' level of perception.* (Styan 1981b:53)

While Dadaism and surrealism criticized a specific theatre aesthetic, modern dance also challenged established norms in theatrical dance. There were some commonalities shared between these forms, but each had a unique approach that would surface in their own specific theatrical context. The approach of these new theatrical developments had in common the fact that they challenged the perception of the body in the theatrical context as the search for a more genuine theatrical language became more urgent amongst theatre makers of both dance and drama. As a result, many new forms were born through the experimentations of theatre makers and against the backdrop of a threatening war (World War I and World War II) and consequently much political unrest; most of these experimentations were reactions against the norm. To find a point of departure for the developments in dance in this chapter we will continue from Diaghilev's achievements through the Ballet Russe de Diaghilev. The perception of the body in the theatrical context of dance continued to be challenged through Diaghilev's collaboration with avant-garde artists.

3.2 The decline of ballet

As can be observed from the debate in the previous chapter, theatre makers such as Stanislavski began to focus more on the physical training of the actors' body. Concurrently in Europe Fokine and Nijinsky began to rethink and criticize the use of

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[32] For a discussion on Artaud's work refer to **Chapter 4**.

[33] For a discussion on these choreographers, refer to **Chapter 5**.

the body in academic ballet. While Stanislavski and Meyerhold's work had a profound and almost immediate affect on actor training (especially within Russia) and therefore the way the actor chose to express him-self on stage, the tendency of ballet to emphasise virtuosity and technical ability more than the expression of emotion, remained. Ballet resisted this kind of reformation and the revolution in understanding and utilisation of the expressive body in dance, predominantly came from modern dance. In America the innovators of modern dance were rebelling against the state of dramatic dance in theatre. They were fighting for a way in which the body could be used to express emotion in the theatrical context of dance, rather than the aesthetic form of ballet. Much of this so-called theatrical context of ballet derived from the trends set by Diaghilev. The Ballet Russe de Diaghilev (as seen in the previous chapter) served as a basis for development regarding the treatment of the body in academic ballet by Fokine and Nijinsky. However, the company's work remained fixed on the same physical technique.

Diaghilev's frequent collaboration with artists from numerous areas of expertise for the productions of the Ballet Russe de Diaghilev affected the treatment of the dancer's body. The company presented work that often displayed the most contemporary trends in European art, such as cubism, surrealism[34] and Dadaism. Amongst the collaborators were Picasso, Miró, Cocteau, Satie, Stravinsky and Prokofiev (Au 1988:103-112). The Ballet Russe served as Diaghilev's mouthpiece through which he coordinated the introduction of new trends, ideas, and experimentations in European art. The counterpoint of this argument would be that these collaborations with artists of avant-garde art movements began to focus more on stagecraft than actual body movement. Considering that there was a growing interest amongst theatre makers in the mechanics of the stage due to the innovation of stage designers such as Appia and Craig, it is not surprising that Diaghilev too began to emphasize this area in the work of his ballet company. The result was that the dancer's body became subjected to being a mere mannequin on which the artist could prop his or her creation. This trend

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[34] The ballet *Parade* (1917) by Cocteau, Picasso, and Satie contained in its programme notes Guillaume Apollinaire's first definition of surrealism. He regarded the ballet as a surrealist work (Carlson 1993:343).

set by the Ballet Russe de Diaghilev in Europe echoed in American dance; as Susan Au indicates in her account of American ballet at the time:

> *Ballet in America in the late 19th century mirrored the state of contemporary European ballet: an increasing emphasis on technical virtuosity and visual spectacle had resulted in the loss of expressional content and depth. Ballet scenes often formed a part of sprawling extravaganzas calculated to dazzle the eye with the splendour and ingenuity of their settings, costumes and stage effects. In this context, dance became little more than an extension of the decorative scheme: entertaining, enjoyable and undemanding.* (Au 1997:87)

In the light of Au's description, it is not surprising that a revolt began against the aesthetics of ballet. The dancer became part of the stagecraft rather than the focus. This aestheticism promoted a more depersonalised approach towards the body.[35] In addition to this attack on ballet's aesthetics, Erik Hawkins believed that the vast development in technology, natural sciences and psychology encouraged the development of modern dance, as it changed the way people thought and lived.

> *Modern dance came into existence because it had to. It came into existence in recognition of some obvious facts: namely, that the codification of movement, technique, and aesthetics called 'ballet' was only a part of the way Westerners, including and especially Americans, could dance; that as the ideas of the good life altered with time, so the ideas of how dance could be danced altered; that as the philosophical ideas of the other arts were changing, so those of dance would change.* (Hawkins in Cohen 1966:40)

As indicated by Hawkins, the problem here is not necessarily what ballet stands for, but rather the fact that, at this point in history, ballet was the only accepted embodiment of dramatic dance in Western theatre culture. Therefore, its so-called unsensuous attitude towards the body became the accepted norm. From Diaghilev's cross-pollination between the art forms, we can observe that ballet was the result of a

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[35] This notion would be echoed in the work of Cunningham and Nikolais, as discussed in the **Chapter 5.**

particular academic approach to dance that coincided with a specific time in the history of theatre. In ballet's defence, Cohen describes the essence of ballet in the following manner:

> *The classical ballet could never have been accused of imitating everyday actions. As the ballet saw it, the miraculous aspect of the human being was its potential for dominion over the forces of nature – over its own weight, in the exultant leap; over gravity, in the joyously sustained balance; over its natural stiffness and awkwardness, in the high extension of the leg, effortlessly attained.* (Cohen 1966:6)

Cohen highlights the aestheticism of ballet, the same aestheticism, or form that Hawkins and others like him seem to attack. The argument here, which becomes apparent in Au's description, is that ballet's objective is essentially to explore the possibilities within a specific aesthetic and not to oppose its form. Put in other words, it is emphasising the form rather than the content. There was a time when choreographers, to articulate political viewpoints, used ballet as a form of proclamation. A focus on the technical feats of the form seemingly replaced this notion. The question one should thus pose is whether ballet has reached its expiry date, despite the fact that it is beautiful and aesthetically pleasing? In other words, the question is whether aesthetics is enough and/or must the art evolve? Modern dance brought on this evolution as its practitioners felt that ballet's form was not sufficient to convey meaning. They sought a new way of utilising the body to express feelings, desires, and ideas. Hawkins, comments that:

> *Ballet did not satisfy me because it was too much like a diagram and, for me, too much of the indescribable pure poetry of movement had to be left out. It moved like a diagram because it had developed at a period in Western culture that emphasized theoretical knowledge and – if not puritanical – at least extremely unsensuous* (sic) *attitudes toward the body.* (Hawkins in Cohen 1966:39)

The reaction against ballet that came through modern dance can be divided into two approaches. One is the American modern dance that began with Isadora Duncan and

the second would be the European modern dance, predominantly situated in Germany.[36] Both these streams began with a similar dissatisfaction with the form that ballet imposed on the body and both searched for a more expressive physical language. The outcomes of the two streams, however, were quite different.[37]

3.3 The development of American modern dance

American modern dance began with three main focal points, namely Loie Fuller, Isadora Duncan and Denishawn, each offering a unique contribution to the form. The work of Loie Fuller stood apart from the others as it was clearly influenced by the Industrial Revolution. In her dances Fuller began to experiment with material on stage, while utilizing the invention of Thomas Edison's light bulb. She used vast amounts of material to wrap around her body. With the reflective quality of coloured glass, electrical lights and lanterns Fuller created an effect on stage that was not seen before and she therefore became known as an innovator of modern stagecraft[38] (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:114-116). Tzara comments that in Fuller's productions her "…*lighting crew are on stage with their reflectors, and...the stage-hands lets down the scenery in full view of everyone*" (Tzara in Drain 1995:26).

Tzara argues that, similar to his ideas, Fuller does not want to hide the fact from her audience that they are watching theatre. This technique of exposing the mechanics of the stage would later be explored in more detail by German playwright Bertold Brecht in the early to mid-twentieth century.[39] Fuller was clearly influenced by the more academic, analytical inquisitiveness of the time. In her writings it becomes clear that

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[36] **Chapter 4** follows the development of European modern dance.

[37] For a discussion of these differences, refer to **Chapter 6**.

[38] More than fifty years later following in the footsteps of Fuller, an avant-garde choreographer of the 1960's Alwin Nikolais would become known for his unique exploration of the various stage elements. See **Chapter 5**.

[39] It is important to mention that Bertold Brecht instigated much of the changes in the actor-audience relationship. When looking at the historical timeline, he created work during the two world wars; however, his work and theories run parallel with the post-modern dance choreographers. Therefore, his work will be discussed in more detail in **Chapter 5.**

Fuller, like Appia[40], believed that colour enhances mood, thus sharing his symbolist ideas. Fuller's dance in the traditional sense was very different from the codified techniques of theatrical dance of her time and she clearly challenged the idea of an expressive body. Her firm belief in the art of improvisation shows that Fuller does not believe that dance has to adhere to a specific aesthetic (Fuller in Drain 1995:246). Thus, Fuller is challenging the concept of expression through the body, specifying that it does not have to be predetermined.

> *What is the dance? It is motion. What is motion? The expression of a sensation. What is a sensation? The reaction in the human body produced by an impression or an idea perceived by the mind.* (Fuller in Drain 1995:246)

In other words, dance is a reaction to thought. Fuller's innovation in American dance/theatre touched and complemented the work of Isadora Duncan and Ruth St. Denis, who "…*objected to the rigid formality and artificiality of the classic technique, to the superficiality of the themes it was using, to the triviality of its current aims*" (Cohen 1966:5).

Together with the artists of the expressionist movement, these two women were seeking expression in physical movement. St. Denis, through her exploration of oriental dance and its connection to spirituality, and Duncan,[41] through ancient Greek dances, rebelled against the lack of emotional commitment in the current form of dramatic dance. Both used content to negate form.

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[40] "For Appia light served not merely to illuminate what was happening on stage but to highlight the emotional mood of a scene form moment to moment" (Roose-Evans 1989:49).

[41] Due to Diaghilev's innovation, the Ballet Russe became a focal point in the world of theatre and art. Therefore, it is not odd that Isadora Duncan toured to Russia in 1904 where she encountered both Fokine and Nijinsky. Fokine acknowledged Duncan as the creator of a new form; therefore, the acquaintance between Nijinsky and Duncan would become symbolic of two worlds meeting. (Buckle 1971:32-35) On the one hand, it is the dance of Eastern Europe meeting the dance of America. On the other, it is two different approaches challenging the same established form, namely academic ballet.

Duncan proclaimed not only that she first danced in her mother's womb but also that she discovered dance. In her work she displayed the rare talent of creating contrasting qualities (Anderson 1992:166-168). She

> *…was the first dancer in the West to intuit a kinesiological truth: that human movement starts in the spine and pelvis, not in the extremities – legs and arms…human movement, when it obeys the nature of its functioning,…starts in the body's center* (sic) *of gravity and then – in correct sequence – flows into the extremities.* (Hawkins in Cohen 1966:41)

Duncan traced all movement back to the solar plexus, a point in the body from which she moved spontaneously (Cohen 1966:7). "*Isadora described how…she would stand in the dark for hours, with her hands on her solar plexus, plumbing the forgotten sources of natural movement*" (Buckle 1971:163). Thus Duncan became a forerunner in the rediscovery of the origin of human movement.   Unlike ballet, Duncan's movement/dance originates from within: similar to Stanislavski's theory on inner truth.   The impulse to move, coming from this centre point, negates movement through the rest of the body. In other words, the way in which Duncan used the body to express thoughts and ideas was subservient to a desire to move.

In Duncan's approach to life and dance, she placed much emphasis on what is natural in contrast to "*…the dictates of convention*" (Au 1997:89). Building on her belief in the importance of acknowledging and using what is natural (a belief most likely inspired by the trend to return to more truthful performance in the theatre of the time), Duncan disagreed with an unnatural use of the body, and accordingly the technique used in ballet, such as ballet's use of turnout in the legs. Consequently, she devised new movement vocabulary grounding her

> *…ideas in natural phenomena such as the movement of wind and waves, and her dancing drew upon ordinary actions such as waking, running, skipping and jumping: the normal 'movement repertory' of human beings.* (Au 1997:89)

From this we can deduce that Duncan was opposed to the tendency to exhibit the virtuoso dancer on stage.[42] Duncan's utilization of ordinary actions to generate vocabulary would re-emerge in the choreography of post-modern dance in America.[43] Furthermore Duncan's work was based on "…*the soul: universal emotions, responses and aspirations. Much of her dancing predicated her belief in positive human attributes such as the thirst for beauty and harmony, and courage and endurance under trial*" (Au 1997:89).[44]

While Duncan's vocabulary could seemingly be paralleled to the ideals of naturalism and realism in the way it placed emphasis on the importance of natural movement on stage, it opposed the stage design of realism and exchanged it for a more symbolist approach. Seeking more clarity of theme, Duncan did not crowd her stage with elaborate scenery, such as was the trend of ballet at the time. Her use of costume, scenery and theme was simplistic and uncluttered. She believed by doing so she could reach her audience more directly through movement. Au explains that Duncan

> …*scorned the elaborately detailed realistic stage settings that had come into fashion during the 19th century; instead she used a backdrop of simple grey-blue or blue curtains. In this her ideas coincided with those of progressive stage designers such as Adolphe Apia and Edward Gordon Craig, who were then evolving a new approach to stagecraft, economical in its means yet all the more telling in its effects.* (Au 1997:89)

First, it can be assumed that Duncan's primary source of creating form was content. In other words, Duncan used the emotional context to guide the creation of movement

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[42] Sharing Duncan's view on the exhibition of virtuosity was composer Richard Wagner, who challenged traditional opera in the same way that Duncan challenged the traditions of dance choreography.

[43] For a more detailed discussion of this notion amongst the post-modern dance choreographers, refer to **Chapter 5**.

[44] These notions resonate with Paul Kornfeld's ideas on pre-WWI expressionism. Kornfeld opposed realistic acting where the actors reproduce life as they observed it, thus basing the drama on a 'character'. To be more precise Kornfeld believed that drama should be based on the soul (Carlson 1993:348).

vocabulary, making her work more expressive than that of academic ballet.[45] Later she became more intrigued with Greek dances, which influenced the form of her movement's vocabulary. Secondly, when examining the way that Au describes Duncan's works, she emphases the importance Duncan assigns to the use of that which is 'natural'. Thus in terms of content it seems Duncan's work has some common ties with the principals on which the naturalists based their work. For example, in *Thérèse Raquin* Zola explores man under the stress of the human condition and the results that follow; similarly Duncan explored 'human attributes' through dance. Yet, in terms of stage design Duncan followed the symbolist approach of Appia and Craig.

Ruth St. Denis joined forces with her husband Ted Shawn (former pupil of Delsarte) and together they established a school and company called Denishawn. St. Denis created work through which she explored and incorporated the religious and spiritual side of art. Fascinated by the Orient, she choreographed dances to this theme, making use of gesture and the manipulation of materials as an extension of her body. Through this incorporation of alternative dance forms Denishawn was an institution that gave the opportunity for young dancers to develop in a direction other than classical ballet. The school's diverse curriculum included forms such as Oriental dances, Spanish and American Indian dances and basic ballet (Anderson 1992: 168-170). St. Denis used the essence of different cultural dances (not necessarily the correct techniques) to try and introduce more foreign forms of dance in the USA. It is said that Denishawn became one of the pillars of American modern dance. In addition, Ted Shawn was responsible for establishing the male dancer in America through his work with his all-male dance company (Koegler 1982:378 - 379). Duncan, Shawn and St. Denis were uncompromising in their approach and dedication and it has been written that

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[45] I am not hereby implying that the ballet is not expressive, but I am pointing out that it remains restricted, as the emotional display within the dance primarily has to adhere to the principles of its movement technique. Thus making it exceedingly difficult to portray emotion as one would in an everyday situation, conversely Duncan's movement technique adhered more closely to everyday actions, placing its emphasis on where movement originates from and thus where emotion originates from.

The intuitions of these three were glorious and are still to be built upon. All three were bright enough to see how much more was possible in dance movement that traditional ballet offered. They saw that, for all the virtues of its technique, it was partial in scope. (Hawkins in Cohen 1966:41)

3.4 The second generation of American modern dance

As an institution, Denishawn attracted many young dancers and it is from this fusion that the second generation of American modern dance innovators emerged. Both Doris Humphrey and Martha Graham trained with Denishawn, and both disassociated themselves from the company towards the end of the 1920s as they felt that their artistic ideals were being compromised (Anderson 1992:170-171). This move marked the beginning of the second generation and/or phase in modern dance. Graham and Humphrey created a different kind of dance. Both shared Duncan and Denishawn's need for a more genuine means of physical expression,[46] but they took it to another level.

Where Graham depicted the conflict of man within himself, Humphrey was concerned with the conflict of man with his environment. In both approaches, drama was inherent. But it was the kind of drama the public was unaccustomed to seeing. It was brutally honest; it was not pretty; it was not 'nice.' (Cohen 1966:8)

Graham and Humphrey's work was also shaped directly by the influences of the technological advancement, labour problems, the socio-political climate (particularly considering the world wars), theorists such as Sigmund Freud, paintings of Picasso and the music of Bela Bartok (Cohen 1966:5).

If the attack of Graham and Humphrey was more violent, it was because they had more un-doing to accomplish. Both generations were concerned with

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[46] As early as the 1920s (abstract) paintings by Wassily Kandinsky were described as **Abstract Expressionism**. In the 1940s the term was applied to a select group of American artist such as Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko and Lee Krasner. Influenced by both European and American art movements abstract expressionism's focus was psychic self-expression (Atkins 1997:40-41).

externalising personal, authentic experience. They differed radically, however, in their ideas of what kind of experience was important. The second generation of the modern dance had to reject the idioms not only of classical ballet but also of Duncan and Denishawn. (Cohen 1966:5-6)

This inclination to show-off virtuosity is what sent many a modern and post-modern dance maker raging. Ballet seemingly has not evolved much in this regard; it appears that the core importance always remains technique and without this frame a dance work cannot be performed. The first generation of modern dance innovators such as Duncan, St. Dennis and Fuller moved away from technically based ballet dance, but already in the second generation technique slipped back into the framework of 'dance' with none other than Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey at the fore. In doing so both Humphrey and Graham's approach to the mechanics of the body coincided with that of Laban,[47] Stanislavski and Meyerhold.

Doris Humphrey could no longer express herself through the means taught to her by others, such as Denishawn, and thus had to find her own way of expressing herself.

In exploring for new ways of moving, she spent hours in front of a mirror just observing how the body moves. It was during this period that she hit on the great mechanical principles of body movement – fall and recovery. She discovered that if the human being is to progress through space he must first lose balance (in other words, fall) and then recapture his balance by taking a step. The human walk is just that – a series of falls and recoveries. On this principle she built her new technique. (Schurman in Fallon 1978:63)

Graham's approach was primarily less technical and more emotional; she wrote:

I do not want to be a tree, a flower, or a wave. In a dancer's body, we as audience must see ourselves; not the imitated behaviour of everyday actions, not the phenomena of nature, not exotic creatures from another planet, but

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[47] For a discussion on Laban's work, refer to **Chapter 4**.

> *something of the miracle that is a human being, motivated, disciplined, concentrated.* (Graham in Cohen 1966:6)

Her intention was to create work that originated from the basis of core emotion, yet like Humphrey, she codified a specific technique, and today all over the world, especially in America, training is available to dancers in mastering Graham technique.

> *While Graham continued to explore new forms of movement throughout her creative life, her dance was characterized by certain movement principles and sequential techniques which where codified and recorded in the film* A Dancer's World-*the basic forty-five-minute warm-up used in Graham classes. These principles and techniques rejected the serene and smooth control characteristic of classic ballet, in which all the strain effort, or uncertainty of the body is hidden. Instead in Graham's technique, the "engineering, the effort" are revealed.* (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:124)

This codified form, initially constructed from an emotional base from which the performer could present emotive movement, inevitably became a very refined, painstakingly technical approach toward expressing emotion via contraction and release. I speculate that originally the ballet arabesque, just like ancient tribal dances that began as a simple extension of the leg, might possibly have been someone's truthful way of expressing pure joy, exhilaration or anger. From there, it was shaped and altered until it became the arabesque we know today. Now, centuries down the line, it has become an expression of grace, virtuosity and a symbol of a very specific kind of aesthetic devoid of its original meaning. Graham's contraction and release is perhaps not so politicised, but the fact is it has done the same through embodying a very specific kind of aesthetic. The theory behind realising or accessing genuine expressiveness of the body relies heavily on a theory opposing technical development that Graham and many other modern dance innovators supported and developed in the formative years of modern dance. To clarify this I quote John Martin, dance critic of *The New York Times*; modern dance, he says,

> *…was movement devised not for spectacular display, as was the ballet; not for self-expression, as was the interpretive dance current at that time; but it was*

movement made 'to externalise personal, authentic experience.' The ballet aesthetic, he contended, was concerned with visual beauty rather than emotion; when ballet did deal with emotion, it did so in a manner so remote, so abstracted from realistic feeling that its creators in no way expected, or even desired, the audience to respond to its emotional content. (John Martin in Cohen 1966:4)

At the turn of the twentieth century the modern dance creators set out to correct the lack of expression in dance, yet in the course of its development modern dance too would be accused of having depersonalised dance (Cohen 1966:12). This occurred in the codification of new techniques as well as in the structured form within which the post-modern and avant-garde choreographers created dance. This in turn would later pave the way for the innovation of physical theatre. It is clear that from Duncan to Graham an emphasis was put on changing the content of dance performances to such an extent that it negated the form it used.

CHAPTER FOUR

Ideologies, Methodologies and Anarchy:
Domination of Europe's authentic theatrical voice

As with all art, there are different elements that influence the direction of its creativity. While American dance and drama developed under specific influences and socio-political conditions the environment in which the European dance and drama developed was quite different. The most profound difference being the effect of the two world wars. Although World War 1 and World War 2 made a great emotional impact on Americans, there was no physical war in the United States. The same cannot be said of Europe[48] and therefore one cannot contest that this socio-political climate radically influenced the development of the arts in Europe.

Various reasons and conflicts lead to World War 1. On a social level, more people began to believe in ideas such as the superiority of one culture over another in accordance to Darwin's social theories propagating, "*that the fittest nation (in a military sense) would survive and grow, or that war was a healthy part of the 'struggle for existence'...*" (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:709). Additionally there has been a growth in religious scepticism since the 1700s. This scepticism escalated between 1870 and 1914 because of the immense advances in natural science and social philosophies such as the theory of evolution and literacy and democracy among masses. The outcome of these advances led to secularisation over and above the development of ideologies such as anarchism, atheism, marxian socialism and communism. Nations that had previously faithfully based their decision-making on the principles of Christianity or so-called higher powers now adhered to the principles advocated by theorists such as Darwin, Marx and Freud. Systematically ambiguity began to creep into humankind's sense of social obligation and ethics toward his fellow man. After all, "*In a materialist world, what was wrong with the use of material force to gain material ends?*" (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:709).

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[48] With this statement I am not implying any political implications, nor am I making a judgement over which country suffered most. I am simply noting that the social condition and the psychological and emotional impact during World War I and World War II in America and Europe were different. I believe this difference is noticeable in the theatre produced in this time.

World War 1 (1914-1918) was the inevitable result of a political chain of events. Germany and Austria went to war against France, England, Russia and Italy, among others. It is said that thirty nations were involved in this war, the damage immeasurable and at the end of the war

> *…an era ended, an era of optimism and 'progress.' The new age that was dawning began with high hopes at the peace conference, but those hopes soon gave way to disillusionment. For the next two decades Europe was in an unstable equilibrium, which, when it finally broke down, plunged the world into a second and even greater disaster.* (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:722)

World War 1 resulted in a divide between Germany and the Allies; accordingly, this changed atmosphere influenced the arts. While American theatre developed in a more isolated environment away from the raging war in Europe, the socio-political environment of those in Europe irrevocably formed part of their process of discovering and creating new theatrical forms.

4.1 German expressionism

Parallel to the development of surrealism and futurism was the expressionist movement in Germany. Unlike the futurists, an offspring of the Industrial Revolution, who eagerly interpreted the war as yet another means to further depersonalise the social system, German expressionism was concerned with denunciation of the war (Carlson 1993:348).

> *The futurists' fascination with modern machinery and the products of industrial society was by no means shared by the majority of the expressionists; on the contrary, they tended to feel that the spirit of the individual was being crushed by these developments. Futurism stressed externals - light, color, speed, physical risk – while expressionism, like the surrealists after Breton, sought to explore the mysteries of the inner life.* (Carlson 1993:346)

The formative years of the expressionist movement in Germany were strongly influenced by individuals such as Strindberg (his later plays), Wedekind and Sternheim. In turn, Paul Kornfeld led the pre-World War 1 expressionist movement, while the Bauhaus movement also had expressionist concerns (Carlson 1993:346-8). This concern with an emotive experience escalated in the fine arts and spilled over into theatre, where an increasing emphasis was placed on the emotive quality of theatrical work. In the midst of this expressionist inclination in Germany modern dance evolved.

4.2 The birth of European modern dance

Preceding and perhaps instigating part of the development of modern dance in Europe and America was Delsarte (1811–1871). Equally concerned with the idea of expression, this French teacher of music and acting devised systems in expressive movement and gesture specifically related to the tensing and relaxation of the body. Rudolph von Laban would later communicate Delsarte's theories to German modern dancers. Similarly Jaques-Dalcroze (1865–1950), a Swiss music teacher and composer and former pupil of Delsarte, concerned with the lack of expression in his music students, devised a system combining movement and rhythm known as eurhythmics, widely used by choreographers and dancers such as Vaslav Nijinsky, Ruth St Denis, Mary Wigman and Kurt Jooss (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:114-116). Thus in music, art and drama there was a growing concern for the manifestation of emotion in theatre performances.

Incorporating this concern in his work was German dancer and choreographer, Rudolph von Laban, who is often noted for initiating German modern dance: "*...an artistic movement that provided the ideas and structures for a fundamentally new and historically different dance in Europe. Laban saw himself as both a reformer and revolutionary*" (Marion Kant in Carter 2004:107).

Au is of the opinion that expressive dance in Germany or Ausdrucktanz was the result of Laban's "…*multifaceted explorations into dance and movement*" (Au 1997:96). Laban's intensive study of movement led him to believe that there are two groups into which all movement can be divided. The first is his theory of centrifugal movement,

which states that movement travels from the core of the body to the periphery, thus it is **outgoing** movement (similar to Duncan's theory of movement from the solar plexus.) The second is **incoming** movement; therefore, the movement travels form outside, inwards. The latter Laban termed peripheral movement (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:129).

To further categorise movement in terms of space, intensity and direction Laban used the icosahedron, a twenty-faced geometrical form (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:129). Should one break these three categories down into simpler forms, speed can be interpreted as time. Thus, the time used to move from one point to another equals the speed. Intensity is equivalent to energy - in other words, the intensity or amount of energy you expend to perform a movement. Lastly, when analysing the direction in which a movement is performed, your argument is essentially concerned with the analysis of space. Thus while the body is performing a particular movement, it covers a singular or a multiple directions in space.

By using the icosahedron to analyse movement Laban concluded

> *…that people's movements are both spherical and related to the three dimensions and also on diagonals and inclines, limited only by the anatomical possibilities of the body; Laban used the imaginary points in space dictated by the icosahedron to develop a complicated movement scale that provided a systematic basis for training.* (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:129)

In his detailed analysis of movement possibilities, Laban on dance can be likened to Stanislavski's and Grotowski's[49] ideas of theatre; they spent their lives and energies to analyse in order to understand and improve their form of art. From this interest Laban developed a unique form of movement notation namely Labanotation. Laban is known throughout the dance world for this development in the documentation of dance.[50]

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[49] For a detailed discussion on Grotowski's work, refer to **Chapter 5**.

[50] Up until today Benesh movement notation developed in 1955 is the only alternative form of movement notation contesting Labanotation.

Additionally Laban invented the concept of a movement-choir, constituting of many bodies moving together, "*...somewhat similar to Dalcroze's music visualisation but with a greater degree of aesthetic purpose and emotional content*" (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:129). According to Au, the Nazis 'perverted' the movement-choir, using it as a means of mass manipulation. They also banned Laban's work, after which he fled Germany in 1936[51] (Au 1997:97).

4.3 Towards a second world war - the rise of ideologies

In the 1929 the Wall Street crash led to world economic depression. As a result of the economic stain, countries began to place trade restrictions on imports and exports. As if these conditions were not severe enough, the possibility of liberal democracy, much needed in Europe, was diminishing beneath the onslaught of ideological conflict and possible dictatorship (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:753).

The first of these totalitarian ideologies found its roots in Russia. In 1917 communist leader Nikolaj Lenin overthrew the Russian tsardom, seized power and the communists banned all opposing political parties. After his death in 1924, Stalin, who based his leadership on the principles of Marxist socialism, succeeded Lenin. Stalin suppressed all varieties of historical Christianity in Russia as well as any form of capitalism, especially in agriculture (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:739-742).

After World War 1 Italy flourished under a liberal democracy, but suffered from economic instability and comparative military weakness. Mussolini, who amongst other things was anti-Catholic and anti-imperialist, managed to lead a communist movement in Italy, called fascism. By 1921 the fascists were a consolidated political party in Italy. The party opposed liberalism, socialism and Catholicism (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:742-745).

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[51] In her article, *German Dance and Modernity* Kant explores the interesting angle of Laban's possible involvement with the Nazi regime in Germany (Kant in Carter 2004:107-118).

The Nazi movement in Germany was conceived and led by Adolf Hitler. This political party had its foundations in both communism (Russia) and fascism (Italy), thus also opposing ideologies such as liberalism and pacifism. Inspired by the theories of Wagner and especially Nietzsche's theory of the 'super-man', Hitler ardently despised the Jews, destroying their art, literature and music (Baldwin, Cole & Hayes 1970:746-749). Nazism became the most damaging of the totalitarian regimes.

Austrian choreographer Johan Kresnick believes that there is a tradition of German dance theatre formed in the period before World War II and continued after the war by Mary Wigman, Kurt Jooss,[52] Herold Kraustberg and others (Kresnick in Bergsohn & Patrisch-Berghsohn 1997).

4.4 The second generation of European modern dance

Kurt Jooss began his studies with Laban in 1920 and, amongst other things, assisted Laban in developing his system of notation. Jooss worked all over Germany as ballet master and his choreographic style was noted for its blend of "*academic ballet technique (omitting the use of pointes and virtuosic steps such as pirouettes) with the freer, more expressive movements of Ausdrucktanz*" (Au 1997:100). Jeschke and Vettermann[53] maintain that Jooss (in the 1930s) founded the principles on which *Tanztheatre* was built (Jeschke & Vettermann in Grau & Jordan 2000:60).

After the First World War Laban began to train a group called 'Dance Stage Laban' in a form he termed 'dance theatre'. In this form the focus was on 'spatially harmonized movement'. The role of music, décor and pantomime was of lesser importance. Jooss developed this theory of Laban into the reality of theatre (Bergsohn& Patrisch-Bergsohn 1997).

Jooss' greatest choreographic contribution was his work *The Green Table* (1932). This work explores the repercussions of war, showing the devastation caused by

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[52] Both Wigman and Jooss were students of Laban; therefore, I refer to them as the second generation of European modern dance as they built upon the innovations of Laban.

[53] Jeschke and Vettermann, are the authors of *Between institutions and aesthetics: choreographing Germanness?* (Jeschke & Vettermann in Grau & Jordan 2000:60).

Death, a central character in the work. Jooss openly contrasts the suffering of the war victims with the indifferent pompous attitudes of the diplomats responsible for it. The Nazi regime did not tolerate such vehement political criticism and Jooss and his company were forced to leave Germany (Au 1997:100).

According to his daughter, Kurt Jooss believed that his art is an "*autonomous art that does not have to borrow. The most concise most economical means is the one for his art form*"[54] (Markard Jooss in Bergsohn& Patrisch-Bergsohn 1997).

After training with Jaques-Dalcroze in his musical movement form eurhythmics, Mary Wigman continued to study with Laban. Wigman along with other followers of Ausdruckstanz*;*

> …*proposed a devaluation of a 'language' of technical virtuosity in which the body is bound to ideal forms which exist outside of it and which leads to the body's objectification and reification (exacerbated by its links to music) and eliminates the a-priori relationship between the body and space. Rather, they put forth a vision of dance based on the experience of the body in space capable of revealing 'the inexplicable, the unfathomable in Nature'.* (Sanchez-Colberg 1996:45)

Wigman, like Humphrey and Graham in America, contemplated the nature of physical movement. Isa Berghsohn relates her experience of the fundamentals of Mary Wigman's training:

> *Even in choreography she stressed the tactile nature of dance and warned us away from purely aesthetic manipulations. We had to feel our way in space…there was no distinction made between dance patterns and everyday movement. We worked directly from body awareness.* (Berghsohn in Fallon 1978:46)

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[54] Markard Jooss, daughter of Kurt Jooss, staying true to her fathers' belief in an autonomous art form is of opinion that today's Tanztheater borrows form everything they can get their hands on (Markard Jooss in Bergsohn& Patrisch-Bergsohn 1997).

Wigman grasped the essence of true bodily expression. For her it is not locked up in aesthetics, but it is part of the constant state of flux the body finds itself in. She built a strong foundation from which the culture of German dance theatre developed. She broke many a convention with her debut work *Witch Dance* (1914):

> *…much of which was danced from a seated position: a far cry from Taglioni's airborne Sylphide. Wigman wore a mask that she has described as a demonic translation of her own features. The sense of evil and animality that emanated form the grasping, clawlike gestures and the earthbound heaviness of the dancer's body were very remote indeed from the contemporary ballet's insubstantial prettiness, Duncan's emphasis upon harmony, or St Denis's glamour.* (Au 1997:98)

Bearing in mind that Wigman was surrounded by a war-torn society- the content of her work communicated these difficulties.

> *In many of her later dances Wigman confronted subjects that many people find hard to face whether in the theatre or in real life: the dark side of human nature, the ravages of war, the inevitable coming of old age, the irrevocability of death.* (Au 1997:99)

This is evident, for example, in works such as *Totenmal* (1930) and *Song of Fate* (1935). Both Wigman and Graham do not shy away from difficult subject matters in their work. Because of the expressive nature of Wigman's work parallels have been drawn between her work and that of the German expressionist movement in painting. While Wigman experimented with movement, masks and costume, her approach to musical accompaniment too was different from that of the traditional choreographer. She experimented with dancing to percussion, spoken text, and performing in silence (Au 1997:99-100).

> *Wigman's approach to music differed radically from that of Isadora Duncan's, in that Duncan had used music as a primary source of inspiration, whereas Wigman often danced without music, or with a simple melodic line of a woodwind instrument, or primitive percussion accompaniment. She made*

> *much use of such Oriental instruments as Hindu drums and Balinese gongs,*
> *sometimes held in the dancer's hand. Dance and accompaniments were not*
> *composed separately but developed together in an organic fashion.* (Dixon,
> Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:132)

From *Ausdruckstanz* came *Tanztheater,* which advocated

> *…what constitutes our inner and outer realities and how they are manifested*
> *on stage is central to production in both. Given that the focus is on the nexus*
> *of the body and space, movement becomes subordinate and intrinsically linked*
> *to the environment which contextualizes it.* (Sanchez-Colberg 1996:45)

Wigman's work was clearly created as a result of the context of her environment and
this gave her work form.

> *She broadened the scope of dance concern and represented a major influence*
> *on beginning modern dancers in America, who were operating in an*
> *educational and intellectual climate which did stress a growing concern with*
> *self-expression and a psychologically oriented creativity.* (Dixon, Hilsendager
> & Kraus 1997:133)

While the first half of the twentieth century was richly laden with dance
choreographers grappling with the idea of an authentic expressive body, drama still
seemed unable to find this practical expressiveness in the actors' utilization of the
body. With the luxury of hindsight, we know that this would still be established.
Playing an incredibly important role in the formation of this expression in the actors'
body was Artaud, who truly expressed the same ideal that modern dance propagated.

4.5 Artaud's expressive body

It is difficult to draw exact factual parallels between the work of Artaud and that of
other artists, as his ideas remained theories and therefore its exposure to other artists
cannot always be pinpointed. The fact that Artaud's first and second manifesto of the
Theatre of Cruelty were produced in 1932 and 1933 respectively give us a vague

indication of the time; however, there is a belief that the "…*text-orientated critical tradition of Copeau and Jouvet prevented the ideas of Artaud from exerting much influence in France for many years*" (Carlson 1993: 396). Nonetheless, Artaud shared with the modern dancers a desire to seek out a more authentic language to express ideas in the theatrical context.

> *For me obvious ideas, in theatre as in all else, are dead and finished.* (Artaud 1977:30)

Artaud was involved for some time with the surrealist movement[55] and hence his theories on theatre questioned the idea of perception. Artaud was critical of the importance that was given to language in traditional theatre. In letters he wrote to Rivière he tried to explain his distrust of language. Styan summarizes this:

> *Emotion may be evoked by words, but is not itself verbal, and words cannot communicate the fullness of human experience, especially in there.* (Styan 1981b:108)

This distrust was rooted in his dissatisfaction with Western/European theatre. He pondered the following question,

> *…how is it that Western theatre cannot conceive of theatre under any other aspect than dialogue form? Dialogue – something written and spoken – does not specifically belong to the stage but to books.* (Artaud 1977:27)

Artaud struggled with the specific codified form in traditional Western theatre in the same way that, for example, Erik Hawkins, Isadora Duncan, Vaslav Nijinsky, Mary Wigman and Martha Graham struggled with the codified language of the body in dance. Artaud's theories share with the work of these dance innovators his belief in the existence of an authentic language for the stage. Artaud rebelled against the idea

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[55]   In later years, André Breton expelled Artaud from the surrealist movement due to political differences (Carlson 1993:393).

that words had to be used to express obvious ideas, or that words were the only means to describe a character. Martha Graham confirms Artaud's belief:

> *There is a necessity for movement when words are inadequate. The basis of all dancing is something deep within you.* (Graham in Roose-Evans 1989:94)

This necessity is what drove the dancers mentioned in the previous paragraph to search for a new more authentic means of expression through the body. Incidentally, Artaud in his search found this authentic language in the performance of the Balinese dancers, whom he believed in their performance "*avoided the pitfalls of language*" (Carlson 1993:394).

In his theoretical writings Artaud further explored this idea, where he explains that the stage is a perceptible physical place waiting to be filled; a space that should speak its own authentic language. Artaud believes that this authentic language composed of everything that fills the stage as well as all the things that can be shown and expressed on stage, attempts to deconstruct the intellectualised response of the audience, the kind of response that comes from an appeal to the mind. Thus, according to Artaud, this language should appeal to the senses instead of the mind (Artaud 1977:27).

How does Artaud propose to achieve this? His theories explore the idea of inversion, to change obvious ideas into unlimited possibility. To explain this I will stay with Artaud's dissatisfaction with the use of spoken text. He argues that by taking the obvious spoken words and putting it into a different context, using it in unusual, abnormal ways, giving it shock potential, to disperse the word into space or to even consider it as a form of mumbo-jumbo, the word or words can finally become the unexpected. This brings back the quality of surprise and danger that Artaud felt theatre had lost. In this way he succeeds in letting language convey something that it does not normally convey (Artaud 1977:35).

Even though Artaud's ideas remain theoretical, he shares with the modern dancers a need to search for a more genuine emotional and physical expression. Artaud's theories aim to create a visceral physical experience for the audience and performer.

Accordingly, he became an important precursor of forms such as physical theatre where the physical language of the body has preference over spoken and written text.

It is quite evident that from Delsarte through to Graham, Humphrey, Laban and Wigman there was a certain quest amongst teachers, writer, directors and choreographers to find a way to express more clearly what they wanted to say. Alongside this need there was a more direct focus on the body as an instrument of expression and how it could be fine-tuned to communicate more clearly. This growing need to emancipate the body's authentic expressiveness gives me reason to believe that the perpetual state of metamorphosis continued when the second generation of modern dance innovators not only discarded ballet but also many of the beliefs of their mentors. The metamorphosis continued and modern dance changed its appearance many times.

It becomes clear to me that these dance and theatre practitioners were dissatisfied with a form devoid of content. They therefore in search of more content based, expressive and meaningful theatre created new forms through which they believed they could express these ideals. However, in the next chapter we will see that this too would become outdated or seen as conventional, and the avant-garde would continue to enforce the perpetual state of metamorphosis. It is, however, apparent that these innovators battled to create a more authentic theatre language which paved the way for possibilities in crossing the divide between performer and spectator.

While European theatre makers searched with an equal passion to their American counterparts for a more authentic theatre language, it is undeniable that their ideas, emotions and expressiveness was often stifled by the political implications of the two world wars. I do believe that these political undertones also coloured the products of theatre to come. While World War 2 left Europe, and especially Germany, with a disillusioned youth, the growing popularity of the post-modern mass culture[56] in

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[56] **Popular culture** (previously known as *mass culture*), consist of a wide variety of cultural communication forms, for example "…*illustrated newspapers, movies, jazz, pop music, radio, cabaret, advertising, comics, detective novels, television*". Atkins is of opinion that this trend (a modern Western-European occurrence) began in the nineteenth century when the working class began to demand art forms that are more accessible (Atkins 1997:150).

America promoted ironic detachment in the arts, promoting forms such as surrealism and Dada.

CHAPTER FIVE

Who are the participants?
Towards the performer-spectator relationship

What is a "performance"? Where does it take place? Who are the participants? Not so long ago these where settled questions, but today such orthodox answers are unsatisfactory, misleading, and limiting. "Performance" as a theoretical category and as a practice has expanded explosively. It now comprises a panoply (sic) *of genres ranging from play, to popular entertainments, to theater, dance, and music, to secular and religious rituals, to "performance in everyday life," to intercultural experiments, and more.* (Richard Schechner in Schechner & Wolford 2001)

In this dissertation we have mostly discussed the more unorthodox or avant-garde movements in dance and theatre: makers of theatre that asked '*Who, Where, What*'? Through the ages theatre makers have shaped, evaluated and re-evaluated all these aspects of performance and, as we have seen, in doing so have developed a multitude of styles, genres, beliefs and methods. Adding to this advancement is the fact that the twentieth century was an era bombarded with information and change. Therefore, it is inevitable that theatre, having constantly pushed the boundaries of performance as well as socio-political developments, would be a principal player in this so-called proliferation of genres. At the end of World War 2, the world indeed had begun to change and gradually modernity changed into a more post-modern approach. The possibilities of a new and, subsequently termed, authentic theatre language had been explored in the theatrical context of both dance and drama, and there was a belief that this language had been found. Consequently, this quest became outdated amongst the avant-garde and was substituted with the next theatrical 'problem'. The question of how such a language could be communicated between performer and spectator arose frequently. This in a way was seen as a more authentic way of communicating in theatre and therefore a more authentic theatrical language.

In questioning the essence of theatre, Polish stage director Jerzy Grotowski came to the conclusion that "*…while theatre could exist without make-up, costume, décor, a*

stage even, lighting, sound effects, it could not exist without the relationship of actor and spectator" (Roose-Evans 1989:147).

For centuries this relationship, especially in dance, had been treated in a very specific way, almost one of performer versus spectator. Samantha Pienaar comments that,

> *The proscenium arch is one of the most visible scars, predetermining and ultimately short-circuiting any potential dynamic relationship that may exist between stage and auditorium, performers and spectators, presentation and interpretation/perception.* (Pienaar 1999:138)

I have mentioned previously that German playwright Bertold Brecht's theories and practice coincided with some of the post-modern dance choreographers - not in his treatment of the actors body, but in his treatment of the performer-spectator relationship. In this way, I believe Brecht was a visionary and, like Artaud, far ahead of his contemporaries. While individuals such as Wagner and Meyerhold touched on the idea of the performer-spectator relationship, Brecht's approach was much more precise. Therefore, I have chosen to discuss his work in relation to those who in their work shared Brecht's methodological point of view rather than chronologically with his contemporaries.

5.1 Brecht and the art of dislocating perceptions

Brecht's life work spanned the period from 1918 until after World War 2. He saw the end of naturalism and realism as well as the experiments with expressionist and symbolist theories. Brecht's work, like many of his German contemporaries in dance, showed a great concern with the socio-political dimension. While many avant-garde movements such as Dada rebelled against the theatrical preference of the middle class, Brechtian theatre was cleverly and perhaps nobly intended to educate the bourgeois theatre (Carlson 1993: 382-383).

Intrigued by the socio-economic theories of Karl Marx, Brecht adhered to the Marxist theory that the only constant in life is change and therefore his ideas on theatre

constantly evolved.[57] He used various techniques to incorporate Marxist theories and other personal political views into his dramas. One such method was the 'alienation technique', which derived from a socialist theory which states that the selling of labour alienates the working class and impedes self-development (Martin & Bail 2000:2). Through alienation Brecht wanted to distance the audience from the play, but engage them in such a way that it forces them to become self-reflective of their circumstances. He did this by taking the character or event and stripping it of everything familiar and then recreating it with a sense of astonishment for the audience.

Brecht was not a master in the field of actor training, but he did require a special kind of actor. Alienation technique obligated the actor to be able to comment on the current events happening on stage, while being there himself. The actor had to be able to step out of character at any given point in time and deliver commentary on their own character and/or the immediate events. At the same time the actor was not allowed to indulge in the character's own emotions and experiences. By using this technique Brecht successfully emphasized the contradictory nature of every human being and tries to show that every person can be both good and evil. In effect, he 'alienated' the audience or in other words helped them to become detached from the character's emotions so that they are able to think critically about the action happening on stage.

To further distance his audience, Brecht encouraged a typical boxing-ring attitude of 'smoking and observing' from his audience; particularly in the play *The Threepenny Opera* (1928). Brecht interrupted the work by announcing what would happen in the following scene by using songs, sub-titles, posters and slides. This could be seen as an attempt to 'literify' his work, delivering a strong commentary on other institutions of literature such as the newspaper, poster hoarding, and so forth (Willett 1959:174). It could also be reflective of the political propaganda popular with the ideological and physical conflict in Germany at the time.

[57] Brecht attacked the exploitive nature of capitalism. For him Marxism became an explanation of the social conditions of his day and acted as an answer to fascism, which had overwhelmed Germany. Brecht went so far as to publicly denounce capitalism and fascism, which eventually got him exiled from Germany (Martin & Bail 2000:2).

Similar to Fuller's stage art and Jarry's conception of *Ubu Roi*, but with more deliberation, Brecht revealed the stage mechanics to his audience. He took illusion away and revealed to the audience 'how theatre is made' by, for example, using visible lights, visible musicians and a half curtain. This treatment of the elements of performance gave Brecht a reputation for dislocating performance perceptions for the audience. Clearly, the Marxist influence of 'constant change' is deeply imbedded in Brecht's work.

> *The fragmentary, episodic style of acting … was meant to show man not as a consistent whole but as a contradictory, ever-changing character whose unity comes 'despite', or rather by means of, interruptions and jumps.* (Willett 1959:175)

To achieve this the delivery of lines was fragmented in order to show the succession of 'Gestus'. The showing of a whole consequential sequence of 'Gestus' or attitudes had to be done in slow time. This gives the audience member time to piece together the actions taking place on stage (Willett 1959: 175). Unlike the popular expressionist movement,[58] the representation of emotion in Brecht's work therefore became clinical and external, again forcing the audience to take a less conventional angle of interpretation. As a result, one may often find characters with contradictory actions in Brecht's plays.[59]

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[58] The expressionist movement in theatre ran parallel to Brecht's earlier work in Germany.

[59] For example in '*Mother of Courage and her Children*'(1941) Mother of Courage is portrayed as a hardworking, skilled tradeswoman. This particular characteristic proves to be her greatest asset as well as her biggest character flaw in life. It is because of her dedication to her profession, that through the course of the play she looses all her children to death, for she was always busy trading while her children tragically died (Anon 2003: Example essay from English IB course).

In Brecht's play *Baden Lehrstuck*[60] the issue addressed by the narrator and the chorus is whether men want to help each other. Brecht appeals to the audience member's reasoning facilities rather than their emotions. He alienates them through the satire of the clown act and forces them into critical thinking to reach their own conclusions. This is the essence of Brecht's alienation technique, to show the dualistic nature of the human being is often a direct result of the socio-political situation of that time and then forces his audience to engage in critical thinking and decision-making. Thus, like the surrealist movement, Brecht dislocates the audience's perception to enforce critical thought.

Because of political unrest, Brecht went to America between 1941 and 1947, where his work was of great influence, but also created great controversy (Carlson 1993:391-392). While American theatre in the 1940s saw Tennessee Williams and Arthur Miller defending tragedy as a modern drama, the 1950s saw the birth of anti-realist drama by Beckett, Ionesco and Adamov. In Europe, on the other hand, there was a growing interest in the use of semiotics for the analysis of theatre[61] (Carlson 1993: 404-411). The Dada and surrealist movement that were established in France from 1916 onwards only came to America around the sixties and, according to Carlson, in this time period "*American theatre entered into its richest period of experimentation since the time of new stagecraft*" (Carlson 1993:454). 'Happenings' (improvised performance), an offshoot of these art movements, began to take place in

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[60] *Baden Lehrstuck* is a narrated story within the play that is also performed. It is the tale of three clowns; one is called 'Mr. Smith' and the other two simply 'first' and 'second'. The tale begins where Mr. Smith is in a bad mood, brooding and irritable, the other two are uneasy in his company and are eager to please him. As the tale progresses Mr. Smith starts to complain about all sorts of things and eventually about pain in his left foot, the other two clowns try to convince him to sit down or use a cane to ease his pain, but to no avail. Eventually they decide that it would be best to cut the leg off and Mr. Smith complies. This continues, Mr. Smith complains about a limb and the other two trying to do good convince him to cut it off. Eventually Mr. Smith has no limbs and no head, still uncomfortable he complains about a rock is pressing into his back. The other two, now tired of all the effort simply tells him that he simply can't have everything and burst out laughing. The play moves back to the chorus they decide that man indeed does not want to help man (Martin & Bail 2000:91).

[61] In Czechoslovakia in the 1930s/40s, the Prague Linguistic Circle was a prominent group who based their semiotic studies on the theories on Russian formalism and Ferdinand de Saussure's structural linguistics (Carlson 1993:407).

America, with the artist Allan Kaprow at the forefront, in 1959 (Styan 1981c:164). While some modern dance practitioners became increasingly technique orientated, others focused on alternative methods of creation. The latter, strongly influenced by the declarations of avant-garde art, paved the way for more alternative choreography.

For example Dadaist and surrealist Marcel Duchamp, who invented ready-mades and (like Brecht) illustrated that art is "*a matter of dislocating the perceptions*" (Copeland in Cohen & Copeland 1983:315), believed that art should become an intellectual expression rather than spring form an emotional core, in particular the abstract expressionism and thus the work of Graham.

5.2 What is a performance in the company of Merce Cunningham?

According to Copeland, co-editor of *What is Dance?,* common threads can be found in the approaches of Brecht and Cunningham to their work. Copeland is also of the opinion that Cunningham is the artist who got the closest to perfecting this notion of perceptual art (Copeland in Cohen & Copeland 1983:316).

Cunningham's choreographic development derived from a time when technological advancement not only affected the arts but very much the everyday life of the average person. He was convinced that our natural intuitive reactions to things are already influenced by the exterior world (Copeland in Cohen & Copeland 1983:316-317). Being a former Graham dancer, Cunningham was one of the first modern dancers to break the convention and study ballet with George Balanchine (Copeland in Cohen & Copeland 1983:317). Consequently, he chose to root the style of his choreography in ballet technique. Contrary to Graham and the other first- and second-generation modern dancers, Cunningham enjoyed experimenting with form rather than emotional expression. It is written of his work that, "*In general, his choreography is an imaginative, no-hold-barred commentary on life, visually exciting and often highly demanding of the audience*" (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:203).

The fascination with technological advance in Cunningham's approach is contradicted by his choice to work with the ballet technique in choreography. This stylistic choice

to revive the 'old' ballet is a clear indication of Cunningham's devotion to the post-modern culture.

5.3 Take a *'chance'* with Cunningham and Cage

Through experimentation, he transformed ideas around choreographic methodology with, for example, his "*choreography by chance*". Cunningham regularly upset his audiences by his bizarre illogical arrangement of repertoire work in a performance. He also worked with contemporary composers such as avant-garde, post-modern pianist John Cage (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:201-203) and Cunningham insisted on "*freeing choreography from a dependency on music*" (Copeland in Cohen & Copeland 1983:310).

John Cage, American composer, pianist and writer, is renowned mostly for his long collaboration with Merce Cunningham.[62] Cage created the work *Theatre Piece* (1952) for Cunningham, which today is regarded as the first musical 'happening' (Kennedy 1996:117). Cage experimented with the creation of sound; for example, in 1938 he experimented with the idea of a prepared pianoforte, an idea originally conceived by American avant-garde composer Henry Cowell. The pianoforte is prepared "…*by inserting various objects, from rubber-bands to hatpins, between the str.* [string] *to create new effects*" (Kennedy 1996:116-117, 167). Cage further experimented with chance technique (also employed by Cunningham); he rejected formal structure and was intrigued by the notion of music of the environment.

> *His stated belief was that any noise constituted music. 'Nothing is accomplished by writing, hearing or playing a piece of music', he wrote (1961). He regarded 4'33" as his most significant work: the performer or*

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[62] An experimental group of the sixties, The Living Theatre, founded by Judith Malina and Julian Beck drew much of their inspiration from Cage's work. For a time also they were drawn to Brecht's work whom they later abandoned in favour of Artaudian theory (Carlson 1993:419-420).

performers sit silently on the platform. The 'music' is whatever sound comes from the audience or outside the hall. (Kennedy 1996:117).

Copeland argues that Cunningham's art "*insists on maintaining an ironic detachment form the world*"; he further states that Cunningham's creations where born amidst the popularisation of television in the mid-50's (Copeland in Cohen & Copeland 1983:310-311).

> *…Cunningham choreographs using an almost balletic technique. Yet this classical technique is in strange contrast to the random unplanned appearance of his works in which the real interest is in the interaction of time patterns and stage space. The timeless improvisational quality, evident in Nikolais' work also, is pervasive in Cunningham's dances as well as is the lack of a central focus of interest on the stage.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:152)

5.4 Alwin Nikolais's modern stage art

On par with Cunningham's work is the choreography of Alwin Nikolais, whose work as I mentioned earlier lies parallel to some principles followed by Loie Fuller. Nikolais

> *…since the late 1950s, became noted for a new kind of dance theatre which is almost completely abstract in terms of dramatic content but which represents a unique and imaginative fusing of sound, color, light, bizarre props, shapes, and movement to create a remarkably theatrical set of illusions on the stage.* (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:205)

Nikolais's work was critiqued for being impersonal and dehumanising towards the body. He in contrast believed that "*…all the arts have today become freed from the need to portray literal subject matter and are able to directly translate the 'abstract elements that characterize and underline an art object'*". Like Wagner and his disciples, Nikolais also believed in the concept of a more integrated theatre "*I find my needs cannot be wholly satisfied by one art. I like to mix my magics* (sic)*. We are*

now in a new period of modern dance, and it is a period of new freedom" (Nikolais in Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:207).

Thus Nikolais's focus, like Cunningham's, is to experiment with form in theatre. The kaleidoscope of styles thrown together creates a visually based theatre. This theatre places its emphasis on the role of the body, its relationship to space and the audience, and not so much on its physical abilities. Page observes that

> *Although Nikolais' dancers do not move in obvious intense "dance-like" fashion, their thorough training in improvisation prepares them to respond with computer exactness to the various elements making up the intricate stage patterns. There is not the sense of a carefully set and timed composition, yet a Nikolais work has no real chance element to it.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:152)

Both Cunningham and Nikolais moved away from dance as a vehicle to convey meaning based on expressionist principles, but rather they used it with the inclusion of other arts as an experimentation of perceptual performance.[63] Page observes that in both Cunningham's and Nikolais's work,

> *…the dancer's body is used in intrinsic collaboration with the stage space, lighting, sets, and sound (less often music), and not as the sole or major focus of interest. Set designs are at times of equal importance with the dancers on the stage*. (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:152)

Many of the trends that followed in modern dance including the choreographic endeavours of Cunningham and Nikolais continued to move further away form emotional expression and had

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[63] In the 1960s **Op art** (optical art), sometimes also classified as *retinal art* or *perceptual abstraction* surfaced in Europe and America. These paintings were always abstract and created the illusion of movement. After its decline principals of this art movement was recaptured in fabric and interior design. Artists commonly associated with this movement are Bridget Riley and Victor Vasarely (Atkins 1997:137-138).

…a base in the other arts-particularly the graphic and plastic arts. There, the surrealist, abstract expressionist, and action schools of painting prepared the way, through the 1960s, for pop and op movements. Characteristic of the latter are(sic) *that they frequently are based on, or make use of, commonplace objects.* (Dixon, Hilsendager &Kraus 1997:217-218)

The effect of these distinct developments in the fine arts of the 1940-1970s can be seen clearly in modern dance through the approach of the more avant-garde choreographers toward the use of costume, space and musical accompaniment in their work.[64] The younger choreographers leaped from Cunningham's methodological basis to establish new forms and choreographic approaches. Birringer argues that

Cunningham's influence has been so strong in the United States that today's postmodern dance can only be understood in relation to his programmatic rejection of Graham-style modern dance with its emphasis on emotion, theatrical décor and costumes, character, dramatic phrasing, and narrative. (Birringer 1991:142)

We can now establish that contrary to the modern dance innovators discussed in the previous chapter, Cunningham and Nikolais are strictly concerned with the aesthetics of theatre. They share with Wagner, Appia and Craig the fascination with the body in space and the idea of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*. They are also, like Brecht, concerned with the way the audience perceives their work. Their approach is much more scientific and academic, borrowing from other traditions and invention, to enhance their work. This practice of appropriation is a notion born of a postmodernist approach. To contextualize post-modern dance it is imperative to define postmodernism.

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[64] **Pop art** (popular art) originated in the 1950s in Great Britain, America, and Germany. Sharing dada's interests in consumer objects and urban waste, Pop art celebrated post-war consumerism. This interest is clearly reflected in the works of Andy Warhol, Claes Oldenburg, and Roy Lichtenstein. Whilst rejecting abstract expressionist, Pop art set an example that fuelled the innovations of postmodernism, Neo-Geo and appropriation art all of which were rooted "*…in popular culture, mass media, and SEMIOTIC interpretation*" (Atkins 1997:148-149).

5.5 A definition of post-modernism

What is there to perform? What 'Reality'? (Birringer 1991:211)

Here Birringer questions two of the most profound post-modern statements. The first question supports post-modern theory, which believes nothing that is created is truly new and unique. Whatever 'new' creations we come up with are in essence a pastiche. Both Cunningham and Nikolais employ this approach in their work. The second question contemplates a much deeper issue within the human psyche – the question 'what is reality'? Post-modernity discarded the notion of reality, or rather that the reality we believe in is the actual truth. The truth is seen as just another illusion that we can create for ourselves to help us cope with our circumstances. This notion has also spilt over into the individuals' perception of the self. One of the most prevalent post-modern symptoms is the fact that people have lost their identity in a world overwhelmed by technology and an information overload. It has become a place where people are seldom shocked by grotesque images, due to the gruesome and explicit elements of human nature as seen through the media. It is a world where humans are easily influenced to follow the current trends, thus losing grip on their own reality or realization of self. This notion is clearly visible in the work of Cunningham and Nikolais, where the dislocation of perception and play with sensory information are apparent.

5.6 The New Experimentalists

During the 1960s and 1970s (following in the footsteps of Cunningham and Nikolais) an avant-garde dance/theatre movement established itself, also known as the New Experimentalists. Their work was often labelled as anti-dance or non-dance as most of the content appeared to be unstructured, improvised and the movements frequently

extra-daily.[65]   Thus, the natural/daily movement once employed by Duncan and Wigman became fashionable again. The spaces within which they chose to perform were everything, but the proscenium arch theatre and musical accompaniment was often replaced by silence or text. In terms of costume, they steered away from traditional dance costumes, which at the time was mostly simplistic body hugging outfits and rather wore everyday clothing. Not only did the New Experimentalists break a multitude of theatre conventions, but the more informal style of their work and approach to the spectator opened-up the possibility of a larger consortium of audiences (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:215). Happenings in avant-garde dance featured more often as well as improvised dance to the accompaniment of improvised music. Many new styles/techniques also developed in this time such as contact improvisation established by Steve Paxton, which gained much popularity (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:219-220).

> *What strikes one first when viewing these performances is that the choreographers have moved outside the realm of dance movement into the general world of movement: often pedestrian, mundane, and athletic. Like their counterparts in the avant-garde theatre, the new choreographers often use performers who have little conventional training in their craft.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:153)

In the same way that Andy Warhol, through his unique presentation of everyday objects such as soup cans, initiated Pop art, these choreographers moved away from established techniques and as an alternative made ordinary everyday movements theatrical.

Established in the early 1960s the Judson Dance Theatre became known as one of the leading avant-garde dance movements in New York. It was said that "*The Judson-plain choreographers celebrated human physicality without frills and borrowed dance ideas from pedestrian activities, work movements, games and athletics*"

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[65] Extra-daily movements are daily movements put into the realm of performance (putting the body in form). I have deemed it suitable to appropriate this term, originally termed by Eugenio Barba, into the dance genre.

(Anderson in Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:216). Choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown and Steve Paxton were all involved with Judson Dance Theatre.

Formerly a Cunningham dancer, Paxton's choreographic endeavours

> *…simplified movement to the basic actions of walking, standing, turning, and jumping, and has at times used nondancers because they where more natural and personal in their approach to movement than dancers. Indeed, he has incorporated animals such as dogs and chickens in his work, seeking to express the casual untidiness of everyday life.* (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:224)

Paxton not only broke away from the convention of using dance technique as a basis for performance and aesthetics, but also began to break away from the idea that a dancer should have a specific outward appearance and focused more on the individual quality that a performer exuded. If one considers the technique behind Paxton's contact improvisation, it is almost a *"technique of no technique"* (Lanon Prigge 2005). A solid background in contemporary dance technique could aid an individual in contact improvisation in terms of strength, vitality of movement and ease in floor work. It is, however, also something, which is possible to master without formal dance technique training as it relies on the human body following a pathway of energy rather than an exteriorly imposed placement of the limbs/body. Thus, the role of academic dance technique seems to begin to diminish amongst the post-Cunningham choreographers.

While focusing on improvisation as a means of creative expression, Trisha Brown rejected the constraints of the traditional stage to explore the idea of alternative performance spaces. She has created work that dancers performed on the roofs of buildings and walking vertically up the wall of the Whitney Museum of American Art.

> *Improvisation was typically used as a means of having dancers work together to develop a dance structure and jointly create a group work before*

performing it. In the more contemporary sense, it involves dancers actually creating new movement solutions or relationships while in the processes of performing before an audience. (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:220)

Thus Brown's emphasis is on creating new '*movement solutions'* or vocabularies. Despite all these engaging choreographic endeavours,

Brown's work is concerned first with the subjective experience of the dancer, then with the vicarious experience of the audience. Presentation, or how it looks as a theatrical show, comes pretty low in her priorities… (Siegel in Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:221).

Brown seems to oppose Cunningham and Nikolais, as her dancers are not just props that create a perception for the audience, but perhaps her work can be described as an exploration of the perception created between performer and audience together. Overall, the choreographers of the Cunningham and post-Cunningham era radically broke the theatrical rules of not only the body in space but very much the perceived or conventional role of the performer-spectator relationship. Conversely the expressive body changed, so that it can be argued that it became similar to the dancers of the Ballet Russes's later works: mannequins, part of a perceptual orchestration of elements. Alternatively it could be argued that finally dancers/performers had the freedom within performance to express themselves in vocabulary much more relevant to the human body

While avant-garde dance vocabulary moved towards the everyday strongly relying on improvisational techniques. Theatre makers of drama considered more and more the question of using the expressive body to communicate. Part of Peter Brook's theatrical contribution in this regard came through his tours in Africa where he, using improvisation, tried to discover the language of theatre, specifically expression through the actor's body.

5.7 Peter Brook and the art of improvisation

While Brook made many theatrical contributions, his search to find an international/authentic language in theatre, a notion he shares with Artaud and the modern dancers, is the most relevant to this study. His travels to Africa and his integrated programme of creating the International Centre for Theatre Research was in a sense an attempt to explore this possibility. But what would such a language consist of? Words, gestures or sounds? According to quantum physicist, Basarab Nicolescu:

> *This new language involves the participation of body and emotions. Human beings in their totality, as an image of reality, could therefore forge a new language. We do not only live in the world of action and reaction, but also in that of spontaneity and of self-conscious thought.* (Nicolescu 2003:15)

The actor alone cannot conceive this language; it is completely reliant on the coexistence between actor and audience. Brook, like Jerzy Grotowski, believed that theatre could not exist without the presence of at least an actor and an audience.

> *The only thing that all forms of theatre have in common is the need for an audience. This is more than a truism: in the theatre the audience completes the steps of creation.* (Brook 1977:154)

This outlook on theatre becomes vitally important in Brook's search for an international language. In his attempts to test this notion Brook discovered that children are the perfect audience. They do not hide their boredom or surprise; they do not judge the way adults do with preconceived ideas. They are uncorrupted by cultural or religious rules and bounds. They do not give the socially acceptable response or one bound by theatrical convention, but they react with 'a vital and innocent honesty'. Brook paralleled the response of an audience of children to that of the African audience he encountered on his travels through Africa[66]. He found that, similarly to the response of a children's audience, the African villagers would simply turn around and leave when their demand for interest was not met, whereas the

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[66] Brook had many projects; however, I found his discoveries on his tours to Africa the most suited in conjunction to my thematic choice for this study.

European audience so deeply rooted in theatrical convention expects a certain amount of monotony through the course of a performance (Williams 1991:201).

Let us consider for a moment Brook's International Centre in Paris. According to Janet Savin, Brook created two new possibilities through this centre. The first was to create an ensemble of actors ranging from a variety of different cultural and religious backgrounds. This led to the rejection of cultural and religious differences, or as Brook termed it 'unlearning'. Brook did not want his actors to think of themselves as European, African or Asian, yet his productions drew strongly on his actors' roots. The second very important possibility was that of 'exploring theatre and acting in an open-ended way without the usual constraints of a standard repertory house' (Savin 2003: 2) – or put into other words, an alternative exploration of space.

Brook could fully explore this aspect on his journeys through Africa. Working with improvisation he and his company went from one village to another asking the chief if they are allowed to perform. Their aim was to find a way to communicate with the villagers, even though they shared no common spoken language. The actors would then set out a carpet and start improvising with a single prop and/or a simple scenario. These scenarios where based on simple human truths such as love, hate and jealousy. As a result of the language barrier Brook's actors had to find a way to communicate their ideas to the audience. This approach had both negative and positive outcomes.

> *In general, it was felt that the aims of the work were compromised by the actors' submission to the tempting but false security of the easy laugh, thereby establishing an artificial and insincere complicity. At the same time, moments of great comedy built upon a common human truth were created; at such moments, the response became the shared laughter of liberation and enlightenment, laughter which has its roots in our deepest inner impulses.* (Williams 1991: 203)

In *The Shifting Point,* Brook tells many tales of his African experiences, and of the collaboration between actor and audience, which shared the responsibility of ultimate creativity. Brook relates the story of their first performance in Algeria and how they realized that they were the first people to ever attempt doing a performance of this

kind in the market place. This aspect of the unknown was an exciting prospect for the company. They set out to start an improvisation with a pair of boots, and it was as if everyone saw these boots for the first time.

> *Through the boots a relationship was established with the audience, so that what developed was shared in a common language. We were playing with something that was real to everybody, and therefore the things that came out of it, the use that was made of them, as an understandable language.* (Brook 1988:115)

Like Trisha Brown and other members of the New Experimentalist, Brook's style of improvisation as well as his utilization of a non-traditional performance space creates a different response from his audience and an altered experience for the performer; an altered performer-spectator relationship. In using improvisational yet mostly universal physical language or gesture, and the immediate spatial environment to communicate with his audience, his work is a far cry from dance and theatre makers concerned with aesthetics.

While their methods and outcomes are different, Twyla Tharp's interest in aesthetics means that she shares Brook's interest in exploration of the spatial environment. She employs the post-modernist idea of throwing together various styles, often mixing a variety of dance and musical styles in her work[67]. Tharp's work consists of these various dance styles and is noted for its 'inexhaustible invention' and dynamic energy (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:225-226). It has been noted that this talented choreographer's main purpose is "…*to throw lines of movement across and through space and thereby establish a zone of human mastery over the real estate that is our environment*" (McDohagh in Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:231). It seems as though Tharp is in search of a different kind of virtuosity, mastery over the environment, which sound very much like the attempt of classical ballet to defy the laws of gravity. Perhaps this is true of all dances. Clearly in Tharp's work

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[67]   Tharp has choreographed for Joffrey Ballet Company, American Ballet Company, Mikhail Baryshnikov, ice dancing Olympic medallist John Curry and various musical films (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:225-226).

conventional technical proficiency in dramatic dance forms are more important than in Brown and Paxton's, but in contrast it does not set the genre or style of the work.

> *In the mid-1980s, Anna Kisselgoff discussed the changes that were occurring in modern dance. Increasingly, she concluded avant-garde choreographers were concerned about their 'meaning' reaching the public and no longer considered communication to be irrelevant.* (Proscenium arch) *More and more, she wrote, the newest generation of choreographers were rediscovering words such as **emotion** and **narrative** and were dealing with significant social themes. Beyond this, avant-garde dance was becoming far more concerned with using varied media to create vivid, high-impact stage effects. More and more dance was becoming part of a multimedia approach using light, sound, movement, painting, poetry, mime, and other forms of expression to create what some have described as performance art.* (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:230)

Page is of the opinion that the avant-garde choreographers "…*have little or no interest in communicating personal emotions or experience. Their concern is with pure movement and the kind of kinetic reaction it produces in an audience*" (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:151).

It is quite evident that Kisselgoff and Page agree on the choreographic approach of the avant-garde dance movement regarding emotion. It is, however, undeniable that vast progress has been made by avant-garde dance: the choreographic process has been changed, recreated and redefined, but at what cost?

> *…the younger experimental choreographers have expanded the art form in ways interestingly parallel to current productions in the avant-garde theater. Choreographers, such as Yvonne Rainier, Meredith Monk, and Twyla Tharp, and drama groups, such as the Living Theatre, the Performance Group, and the Open Theatre, have moved outside the accepted vocabulary of their crafts (in dance away form dance movement per se, in drama away from a literary text) and have broken from the confines of the stage and theatre space itself. Their lack of concern with the "purity" of their art, their interest in the extra-*

> *aesthetic experience and, in some instances the dissolution of aesthetic distance seem to threaten more traditional performers and audiences as well.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:151)

Certainly more pedestrian, gestural and/or so-called extra-daily movement forms have substituted a fair amount of ballet and modern dance technique in a quest to find more authentic alternative '*movement solutions*'. Many probably agreed with Page that

> *On the whole, there is a refreshingly little concern with the peacock strutting quality of the trained dancer. There is a desire, particularly for Miss Rainier, to abandon the narcissistic focus of most dancers.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:153)

Inevitably, the perpetual state of metamorphosis in dance has forced codified forms of technique to make way for the more pedestrian movement style in the realm of performance. However, it was not the only 'space' that was transformed:

> *The conventional theater space is no longer adequate for the avant-garde, who have moved into other spaces – a lawn, a museum, an armory – the inevitable extension of Cunningham's open field stage.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:153)

We have seen that since Meyerhold's time the performance, space was re-evaluated, and consequently, the actor-audience relationship, clearly a continuous theatrical debate throughout history. This perpetual inversion of traditional spatial convention, continued through Grotowski.

5.8 The phenomenon of Grotowski's theatre

Similar to the efforts of Peter Brook and the New Experimentalists, Grotowski[68] amazed audiences with his refreshing ideas on theatre. It is Carlson's estimation that

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[68] Jerzy Grotowski founded the Polish Laboratory Theatre in 1959 (Styan 1981a:178)

in the mid-60s the public performance of Grotowski's *Constant Prince* (1969) in Paris left most French critics to believe that this production was truly the fulfilment of Artaudian theatre. Gradually Grotowski would replace Artaud as the modern spokesperson for theatre (Carlson 1993:454). Grotowski did not produce theatre for the masses; instead, he preferred to have small audiences. This intimacy between performer and spectator derived from a belief that the spectator is simply a witness to the unfolding events.[69] In his productions Grotowski tried different approaches to the actor-audience relationship.

> *…so I began with completely naïve things. Actors spoke directly to spectators, or actors played in the entire hall including where the audience was supposed to be. Then it became necessary to change everything.* (Grotowski in Schechner & Wolford 2001:48)

As a result of these experiments Grotowski produced a very interesting work entitled *Kordian* (1962), which explored the spatial relationship between actor and audience in a fresh and innovative way. The production was spatially set to resemble one of the halls of a mental hospital; the performance space therefore was filled with hospital beds. Grotowski placed his audience members in-between his actors on beds. The audience member is then pulled into the production and become part of the action. To give a practical example from the production of *Kordian* I will quote Grotowski in an interview with Richard Schechner.

> *The actors were on beds along with the spectators. The actors were either doctors or patients, the most interesting cases. The Chief Doctor sometimes provoked the patients, pretending to be Pope or Satan. He treated some of the spectators also as patients. Those spectators who were treated as patients were sometimes furious; it happened also that others were proud because they had been judged 'normal'.* (Grotowski in Schechner & Wolford 2001:48)

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[69] This notion of bearing witness comes through strongly in Grotowski's treatment of *Akropolis* and *Action*. Both Grotowski and his student Thomas Richards administered the investigation for *Action* (Schechner & Wolford 2001:409).

It is clear from this example how Grotowski, by changing the spatial arrangement, managed to change the context of his production. Firstly, by making the deliberate choice to stage his production 'in' a mental hospital Grotowski chooses to highlight a different aspect of the original text of *Kordian*, which according to him was, a play filled with romanticism, glory, and individuality (Schechner & Wolford 2001:48).

On the first thought these aspects are not necessarily the qualities that one would associate with the patients that occupy the beds of an insane asylum. By changing the context by means of the environment created, it leaves room for the director to focus on other elements that the play might address. Secondly, by placing the audience members in the role of patients, they automatically empathize with the actors playing patients instead of only passively observing and maybe feeling sympathy. Thirdly, both actor and audience now find themselves in unknown territory. The text is no longer 'set' and has the ability to change at any point in time due to the unpredictability of the audiences' reactions. The audience in turn is no longer able to sit passively and observe, as they are part not only of the performance space, but also partially responsible for the action. Samantha Pienaar puts this actor-audience interaction into the context of a physical reaction toward specific spatial use:

If an individual walks into an unknown space, the body is less likely to fall into old habits of interaction; perception is heightened, critical awareness is sharpened and the individual is forced to freshly navigate the space both on a physical and an emotional, spiritual level. (Pienaar 1999:138)

In finding a balance between the use of the content of the work and the aesthetic form in which it is presented, Grotowski creates meaningful theatre for both the performer and the spectator.

Akropolis (1964) is another example of Grotowski's work were he inverts, changes and informs the meaning of his play by reinventing the spatial context. According to Ludwik Flaszen, literary adviser to the Theatre Laboratory, the Galician symbolist poet, Wyspianski, who wrote the original text for *Akropolis*, "*conceived his work to be a panoramic view of the Mediterranean culture*". (Flaszen in Schechner & Wolford 2001:64) He had this idea of a 'cemetery of tribes'; Grotowski took this idea but literally transformed it into a paradox. Grotowski's *Akropolis* unfolds in a Nazi concentration camp. The play deals with a group of inmates confined to an extermination camp and how this extreme exposure to violence and deprivation drives them to become like animals, responding to their most basic human needs.

By placing the text in the specific physical environment of an extermination camp, Grotowski again chooses to address a specific topic. Human nature is the subject and what better way to decode the nature of a human being other than putting them under the banal harsh conditions of an extermination camp. Grotowski's performance space is cramped with rusty metal props and half naked actors clothed in torn rags. It is a space constantly consumed with rhythms created by the actors through their metal props, their wooden shoes, the songs of sorrow, and the screams of anger, pain and disillusionment. As a result, these elements become symbols of the physical but also mental and spiritual suffocation that the inmates experience (Schechner & Wolford 2001:66).

Contrary to the production of *Kordian*, where the audience members were interspersed between the actors, it was decided that for the production of *Akropolis* there would be no direct contact between the actors and the audience. Ludwik Flaszen explains that

> …*the actors represent those who have been initiated in the ultimate experience, they are the dead; the spectators represent those who are outside of the circle of initiates, they remain in the stream of everyday life, they are the living. This separation, combined with the proximity of the spectators,*

contributes to the impression that the dead are born from a dream of the living. The inmates belong in a nightmare and seem to move in on the sleeping spectators from all sides. They appear in different places, simultaneously or consecutively, creating a feeling of vertigo and threatening ubiquity. (Flaszen in Schechner & Wolford 2001:65)

Like his contemporaries in the avant-garde theatre and post-modern dance, Grotowski did groundbreaking work through challenging the boundaries of the traditional actor-audience relationship.[70] What made Grotowski such a unique director was his versatility. While creating astounding work as a director, he also understood the training of the actor. What initially started out as a continuation of Stanislavski's actor training resulted in the theory of 'poor theatre' through which Grotowski trained his actors to master incredible physical techniques. According to Grotowski,

'Poor Theatre' gives up the trappings used in the other visual arts. It is a theatre that concentrates on human actoins only, and the relationship between the actors and the audience. It gives up all conventional stage effects like lights, music, scenery makeup, props, and spectacular effects because they are not essential. These effects are mechanical and often autonomous and can be used separately outside the metier. Make-up, for instance, is unnecessary because the actors are trained to use their facial muscles like masks and, thus, actors have a variety of masks to choose from. We do not need elaborate and expensive props either. In <u>Akropolis </u>we use pieces of scrap iron, two wheelbarrows, a bathtub, and a rag doll. We use these props in any way we chose; we make of them what we wish. Material things prevent our real confrontation with art. We wish to confront our art without costly devices or commercial accoutrements. We want to use ourselves only; we want to work through our own impulses and instincts, through our own inner beings and

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[70] In physical theatre, the relationship between the context of a work and the choice of the environment/space it is performed in is inseparable from each other and together they inform the meaning that the work creates. Grotowski did groundbreaking work and in many ways can be seen as one of the forefathers to physical theatre, especially in terms of his theories on the utilization of the performance space.

through our own individual responses. To be poor in the biblical sense is to abandon all externals. And that is why we call our theatre 'poor theatre'. (Grotowski interviewed by Margaret Croyden in Schechner & Wolford 2001:83)

What Grotowski recognizes and thus addresses through his work is that the physical expression of the performer in the designated theatrical space is integrally connected to the performers' relationship with the spectator. Stripping his actor of all that is superfluous and focusing only on the most basic concept of impulse and reaction, he shares with all those concerned with bodily movement that,

Before a small physical action there is an impulse. Therein lies the secret of something very difficult to grasp, because the impulse is a reaction that begins inside the body and which is visible only when it has already become a small action. The impulse is so complex that one cannot say that it is only of the corporeal domain. (Grotowski in Richards 1995:94)

Undoubtedly at the end of the twentieth century the relationship between audience and performer has been addressed thoroughly and perceptions about the performer-spectator relationship have been changed. With the more academic or scientific approach of experimentation in dance much of the emotional content that originally moved choreographers such as Duncan and Graham to create a new form, have disappeared. One approach was to say that avant-garde dance

…stands or falls strictly on the basis of superficial and transitory audience appeal. And, based on many of the works that have been presented thus far, many of the most experimental pieces have little to offer once the novelty of improvisational freedom or the surprise of seeing dancers in uncustomary activities or states of dress (or undress), has passed away. (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:234)

While these elements may be described as the negative consequence of this phase of experimentation phase in dance, Anita Page highlights a counter-argument:

In abandoning accepted theatrical time and space, the new choreographers have broken the usual physical distance between audience and performer. As a result, some aesthetic distance is exchanged for a casual, voluntary involvement of the audience. In some ways, audience participation in these performances seems more genuine and successful than experiments in the avant-garde theater. Dance, by its nature, is more abstract than drama and does not so directly challenge people's inhibitions about personal involvement, outside of a conventional theater, where viewers feel constrained, dance performances in open spaces allow the audience members to leave when they no longer want to participate. (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:153)

In this chapter of history we observe that a definite shift has taken place in the treatment of the performer-spectator relationship in dramatic theatre. With that a different response was sought and expected from the audience, to the extent that sometimes the audience became performers. Secondly, the choreographer or director gave much more room to the art of improvisation in the realm of performance as well as the conception of the work. Additionally the post-modern notion of appropriation became not only a way of creating theatre, but also the way in which it could be perceived. The physical performance space moved decisively from the proscenium arch theatre to anywhere and everywhere. It becomes markedly clear that, while Grotowski experimented with aesthetic form through dislocating perception, he still managed to maintain a balance in giving equal attention to the expression of content through the body of the performer. On the contrary, the post-modern choreographers had elevated the importance of form so much that they lost the depth of content that the modern dance brought to theatre. They did, however, contribute richly to altering the conventional approach and understanding of the performer-spectator relationship.

CHAPTER SIX

Split Roots: Post-modern dance & *Tanztheater*

We have debated the notion of post-modern dance to revert ultimately to an obsession with aesthetic form. While Grotowski, in my opinion, crossed the divide between content and form in drama, dance has always struggled in this regard. With the post-modern view of eclecticism and intellectualisation of art, hope of a continuation of the modern dance's search for an expressive body turned into an obsession with aesthetics. Birringer observes of German *Tanztheater* and American post-modern dance that "*Both traditions share common roots but have gone in different directions*" (Birringer 1991:141). Post-modern dance in America had clearly moved towards an approach that derives form a theoretical and philosophical core.

> *Through the use of nondance* (sic) *movement and non-dancers, the involvement of the audience, and breaking from the confines of conventional theatrical space and time, the new choreographers are clearly pointing to an expanded and freer function for the dance form, a closer integration of art and life, their use of everyday movement compels us to view these activities beyond their practical significance. These dance artists are asserting that the theatrical experience should go beyond what we now accept as an aesthetic experience.* (Anita Page in Fallon 1978:153)

Page argues that not only is the space of dance re-evaluated and could and should it have a '*freer function*', but also that by moving away from a set dance vocabulary the audience becomes less estranged. I believe that the dislocation of perceptions that Cunningham started in dance led to a place where dance alongside avant-garde theatre and art became a philosophical exploration of the interplay between theatrical elements (space, lighting, sound and props) and in the process the human body became just another item on the list.

Tanztheater, although born from the same roots as American post-modern dance, was moving closer to what triggers human expression in other words, it was in search of man's emotional core. Dance critic, Jochen Schmidt, points out that for him "*The*

dance of the USA became more about motion than emotion. Tanztheater was sometimes more motion and sometimes more emotion, but it depends on the choreographer" (Schmidt in Bergsohn & Patrisch-Bergsohn 1997). Schmidt claims that *Tanztheater "began as a very German very precise kind of dance. As Bausch started, speaking and singing it changed. It became a mixture of many things*" (Schmidt in Bergsohn & Patrisch-Bergsohn 1997). In an article on her work, Birringer notes that Bausch appears not to be incredibly concerned with "*how people move*", which is a manner of thinking I parallel, in a broad sense, with the mindset of the American Post-modern dance choreographers as well as the ballet choreographers (Birringer 1991:144). It resonates with Schmidt's belief that the dance of the USA, in the post-modern era, was primarily concerned with motion. Cunningham's focus on aesthetic form rather than subject matter has spilt over into the work of the generation of choreographers to follow. Contrary to that, Bausch's fascination lies in '*what moves them*', a statement I interpret not only as an apt description for the approach of *Tanztheater,* but also that of physical theatre to follow (Birringer 1991:144).

Pina Bausch trained in Europe and America and the influence of that is evident in her work.[71] Since, "*…she has directed and choreographed works for opera and film and has evolved a 'total theatre' approach that is highly emotional and disturbing*" (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:228). What makes Bausch's work so unique and controversial is that, like Grotowski, she pays great attention to the basic human impulses, the actions and reactions. Some regard this kind of openness as disturbing, others as truthful. Thus, the essence of Bausch's work is an exploration of the human condition, in which she displays through movement that which cannot be expressed in words (Narrator in documentary film on *The different theatre of Pina Bausch,* date unknown)

Her choreography *Le Sacre du Printemps* (1975), created sixty-two years after the original work choreographed by Nijinsky, would reserve Bausch a place in history in the same way it did Nijinsky. The result of Bausch's binary training is reflected in

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[71] After her training at the Folkwang School in Germany under Kurt Jooss, Bausch went to New York (in 1959) and trained at Julliard School of dance with amongst others Paul Taylor and José Limón. She became a soloist in Folkwang Ballet Company and later director of Wuppertal Opera Ballet (Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:228).

this work where it is argued "…*Bausch created a highly original synthesis between German tradition and American modernism*" (Norbert Servos in Carter 1998: 37).

Based on the same narrative followed by Nijinsky and Stravinsky's original score, Bausch's interpretation of *Le Sacre du Printemps* concentrates on the selection of the victim, highlighting the "*cruel yet universally valid core of the ritual*" (Narrator in documentary film on *The different theatre of Pina Bausch,* date unknown) Sacre remains one of the landmarks of modern dance, due to the way that Bausch arranged

> *…[the] composition of clarity and expressive content of the choreography which against the background of Stravinsky's martial sounds are intensified to the point where the tension becomes almost unbearable.* (Narrator in documentary film on *The different theatre of Pina Bausch,* date unknown)

Bausch's movement vocabulary may not always seem as skilful as traditional codified dance technique but, like the notion followed in the Graham technique, it does not strive to hide the engineering effort and is most certainly demanding on the body. Dancers reach extreme points of extension, contraction, tension and release. In *Sacre* the drama needs no verbal explanation,

> *…it's formulated and carried forward solely by the expressiveness of the body, until the dancers and movements restricted by the thick layer of turf on the stage, are completely exhausted.* (Narrator in documentary film on *The different theatre of Pina Bausch,* date unknown)

Furthermore, it is argued that in "…*Sacre the form and content of the victim's physical and psychological suffering are identical*" (Narrator in documentary film on *The different theatre of Pina Bausch,* date unknown) Bausch regularly explores the power of repetition in an attempt to help her audience see what is wrong with the given situation. For example in her work *Bluebeard* (1977) the incessant repetition of gestures "…*opens up a whole new understanding of content.*" (Narrator in documentary film on *The different theatre of Pina Bausch,* date unknown).

Bausch's alteration of the theatrical space in terms of stage design plays a part in the utilization of the expressive body of the performer as well as the audience perception. For example, in the production of *Nelken* (1983)*,* the stage is filled with an abundance of carnations, in *Arien* (1979) the stage is covered with ankle-deep water and in *Sacre* the stage is covered in a layer of earth. In the latter the dancers become completely exhausted, which ties into the theme of the victim dancing herself to death.   All theatrical elements contribute to the overall theme and cannot be separated.

> *Her choreography, with its uninhibited gestural style and distinctive, often disturbing imagery heavily laced with eroticism and male-female violence, has been a subject of controversy wherever the Dance Theatre has appeared.* (Galloway in Dixon, Hilsendager & Kraus 1997:228)

After the emotional drought enforced by the post-modern, post-Cunningham choreographers the expressionistic approach of Duncan, Wigman and Graham returned in Bausch's work. Her work have developed into a more humanistic clear-cut interpretation or representation by the body, where a definite focus on subject matter rather than aesthetic form can be detected. Clearly in both approaches the role or part of a formal dance technique persistently diminishes as it forms part of a conventional aesthetic form that was no longer accepted among the pioneers of new theatrical genres.

> *Rather than develop a plot in order to tell a story, or to display a dramaturgy consistently and logically, Bausch visualizes and theatricalizes her themes associatively from diverse viewpoints, and presents them as an open structure, a collage that eludes definite, objective or rational descriptions and interpretations. In her productions movement, speech, music, and scenery develop an independent dynamic, which she welcomes because they expand her (and the audience's) sensory experience and intuitive understanding.* (Jeschke & Vettermann in Grau & Jordan 2000:65)

It can be observed that Bausch's *Tanztheater* includes almost all the innovations discussed in this thesis. It combines the form of academic dance, with the authentic language of the body and it values the relationship of the audience and the performer.

It further employs the Brechtian method of dislocating perception through showing the situation from many angles, forcing the viewer to become critical of what they are seeing. Like Wagner's *Gesamtkunstwerk,* it embraces all forms of theatrical communication to convey an idea and like Artaud's theatre the audience is exposed to an experience that appeals to the senses. In accordance with Grotowski, Bausch employs improvisation to draw authentic work from her performer to create meaningful work that springs from the individual.

Both Grotowski and Bausch have given themselves to their art. Both, with the luxury of hindsight, have been able to realize the theories, ideas and consequently the dreams of many involved with dramatic theatre before them. Conversely, they have been the subjects of controversy for many who did not believe in their interpretation of performance. However, both have found a balance between aesthetic forms and content in their work, and a way through which they could achieve expression through the performer's body. While others have also elicited an expressive body from the performer, Bausch and Grotowski have included the spectator in such a way that this expression became meaningful even though the language used was not the traditional spoken or physical language in theatre. While it can be argued that neither of these approaches is the correct way to go for theatre, it is true that Grotowski and Bausch closed the gap between dance and drama through making the body expressive in performance. Consequently, they have created a platform for other innovations such as physical theatre to build on.

CONCLUSION

Having traced the development of attitudes to and theories about the expressive body over the past century, one may draw a few conclusions. In the first place it is clear that notions about the use of the expressive body in dance frequently tended in the same direction as theories developed in drama. Much of the tension between the two fields seems to have arisen from a constant state of flux existing between notions of aesthetic form and the content of a work in dramatic theory, while dance's attraction to virtuoso technique, regardless of the artistic choices, often influenced the way in which the body was utilized in both forms.

Another point of interest emerging from this study is that cultural trends and theories, such as surrealism, symbolism, realism and expressionist movements, and technological and psychological progression, historical transformation and socio-political change, all clearly influenced the way in which the expressive body has been employed in dance, all forcing it to move into a space somewhere on the continuum between, the virtuoso technique of the dancer and the daily body of the realistic actor.

A third point relates to the importance of the body as a means of expression and communication in theatre and performance. We have seen that choreographers such as Cunningham and theatre makers such Meyerhold and W.B. Yeats denied the body a certain level of expressiveness.

When studying forms such as Grotowski's poor theatre and Bausch's *Tanztheater,* it is apparent that both these practitioners had found more of a balance between aesthetic form, content of the work, authentic language, and the use of the theatrical space. In their work all the theatrical elements are joined together to support the performer in order to attain the optimum level of expression, where the formerly rigid division between the virtuoso technique and the daily technique, becomes blurred. In this sense, the theatre of Grotowski and Bausch tends to create a synergy of contradictory forces and may be seen as the epitome of the integrated use of the expressive body.

To return then to the original premise, and Eugenio Barba's argument that there is a wound that exists between dance and drama (Barba in Barba & Savarese 1991:12), it would seem that the study has served to reaffirm Mark Fleishman's statement that "*It is in the space between dance and theatre that I believe performance should be located. We need to heal the wound so to speak* (Fleishman 1997:209). I have concluded that, ironically, this wound has been inflicted on theatre by the very same elements that served to form theatre: dance, drama, art, technological and psychological progression, historical transformation, and political change.

Moreover, after studying the history of the expressive body in theatre, I believe even more passionately that this wound situated between dance and drama has been inflicted on the performer's body. For the body is what connects dance and drama more profoundly than any other theatrical element. Furthermore, if we believe with Grotowski and Brook that the performer and spectator are the only two elements needed to create theatre, we must recognize that the greatest point of common reference between those two theatrical elements is the body, whether it is repressed or celebrated it belongs to both the audience member and performer. Therefore, the body lingers in the '*performance space*' between dance and drama. It is through the body that we express and interpret.

I believe that the struggle between content and form, the search for the authentic theatrical language and the quest to communicate between performers and spectators (which are all symptoms of cultural developments) will always continue and be reflected through performance. As this struggle continues, I conclude that points of harmony can be found in the recognition of the fact that theatre essentially revolves around the human and his/her relationship with and to everything else. The body as the codified 'sign' of that, which is human, is therefore the most central 'sign' or connection to the human concern and our communication thereof to each other. Therefore, it is the most powerful tool of expression we have in the theatrical context. The theatrical realization of expressive body; through the genius' of individuals such as Pina Bausch and Jerzy Grotowski serves as an inspiration for all of us that realize that we are centrally connected through this 'sign': **the body**.

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