Identity, the contemporary and the dancers

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Identity and dance studies. State-of-the-art, history, effects . . .

The singular composition of this section clearly reflects the singularities of its subject and its field of study. The keyword "identities" crystallizes the theoretical efforts of the several decades of research in the human sciences, outlined by Andrée Grau in her introduction. From work in anthropology to the various aspects of cultural studies approach, the last few decades of social science research have given the field of dance new insights into the customary boundaries between high-brow and low-brow dance, between concert and social dance, and between western and non-western dances. It is no longer possible to think of dance as anything but a human and social practice, to ignore the bonds between dance's staged forms and its everyday practices or, even more, to ignore the fact that dance, like any other human practice, is subject to the pressure of political relationships and is in itself a place in which power is exercised.

This aside, numerous theoretical boundaries continue to operate in both choreographic practices and theoretical research, as attested in the introduction to this section regarding the anthropological perspective and in the three case-studies focused on contemporary "avant-garde" dance works. Take, for example, the analyses of "identitarian" issues in contemporary dance orienting the three studies devoted to performances and representations of identity in selected works (masculinity/femininity, Black Atlantic/European American, and so forth). But what about contemporary dance as a social environment and a place where identity is formed, beginning, for example, from a dancer's education and training? This issue has been explored by Hubert Godard and Isabelle Launay, who, investigating contemporary dancers' memories, have shown that one of the key guiding factors of their training is identity. The question is whether to succeed or not in "becoming a dancer," in conforming to real or

fictional images of this "being a dancer" and its identity, perceived as both repressive and desirable. And, starting from these very same stratagems, how to come to terms with these norms to preserve or to invent one's own identity as a dancer? These are the issues that come out of this study,[1] which, paradoxically, owes nothing to research on the concept of identity, but rather to an ethnological process that uses French contemporary dancers as a field of inquiry.

What I would like to consider in the following pages is how the dyad identity/contemporary dance condenses a certain number of theoretical issues that are part of dance research in general and go beyond, or actually traverse, methodological variations and the choice of subjects. I will begin this discussion with the problem of analyzing contemporary choreographic works and hope to show how this is tied to the issue of identity.

The field of the contemporary dance seems to pose different issues than those of more or less distant historical periods. In historical dance research the question of sources is always a problem, whereas contemporary choreographic works are clearly better and ever more documented. Yet the question regarding the relationship between the "analogous" document (film or video) and the work itself is rarely raised. And theorization is rendered more difficult (perhaps?) by the necessarily live relationship between the scholar and the subject in its context. It seems harder to isolate and compartmentalize, for example, the frameworks of reference, to separate the cultural, political, and theoretical context, the spectator's experience, and so on. Nonetheless, the questions raised about contemporary dance and the relationships between theory and experience seem to be the same regardless of the period in question. What changes is the way in which the relationship between the researcher and the subject is organized.

Three case-studies

The history of theories of identity is a succession of analyses of relationships between the ruler and the ruled, be it through feminism, post-colonial, gender, or cultural studies. In France, and through the work of the research team of which I am a part,[2] other relationships may also be included, such as the relationship between dancers and the individuals producing discourses on dance or the disciplinary relationships between practitioners of gesture and masters of discourse, the latter of which was first analyzed by feminists based on the norms assigning women to the sphere of body and feeling and men to the mastery of discourse. All of these relationships are successive variations of the same model derived from feminism and, as such, I will allow myself to group them under the generic term of

"culturalism." Though the subject varies, the major characteristic of these theories is the consideration of identity as a cultural as opposed to natural construct, the fruit of power relationships that have to be analyzed and deconstructed. Obviously, the common scope of these many theoretical currents is political and ideological. And it should also be remembered that this theoretical body is not at all limited to contemporary dance and that many studies have investigated dance history from the perspective of feminism, gender,[3] ethnic identity, and so on.

The three case-studies presented in this section take into consideration culturalist practice as applied to contemporary dance. They approach identity from a theoretical point of view and attempt to see how this operates in dance. Starting from a given point of reference, which varies for each study, they attempt to observe how dance reproduces, re-invents, reflects, or contradicts the identitarian productions and the inter-identitarian relationships that have been described by others. In their analyses Ramsay Burt, Thomas DeFrantz, and Hélène Marquié each rely on a specific theoretical corpus (Burt on Jaques Lacan/Maurice Merleau-Ponty, DeFrantz on Paul Gilroy, and Marquié on materialist feminism). In addition to their choice of subjects, there is an essential difference between what I would call their posture. The first two use the choreographic work to demonstrate or illustrate the pre-selected body of theory; the third does the opposite, using her own theoretical framework to criticize the work and to demonstrate its contradictions.

Whatever the motive of same and other in identitarian analysis may be (man/woman, white/black, homo/hetero, western/non-western, dancer/spectator), these three analyses reunite the two major poles of the definition of identity that organize the entire theoretical field and that Grau addresses in her introduction. I would define the first as geographic. This notion of identity organizes territories, establishes a sense of belonging (to a community), and signals through recognizable signs of a certain "sameness." It is identity in terms of cultural, national, ethnic belonging. On a theoretical plane it is constructed primarily from semiotic models and is focused on signs. It confers primacy to predominantly visible and discursive signs of identity. It defines a community on the basis of a set of common signs (skin color, physical features, territory, religious belonging) and considers individual variations secondary in relationship to primary belonging. DeFrantz, for example, introduces David Byrd's *Giselle* by immediately opposing the interpreter of Giselle, "a ferociously accomplished African woman, the lone black woman," to the rest of the company. For her part, Marquié is interested in a work situated explicitly in the territorial issue of its choreographer Alain Buffard: "Sharing or erasing borders, especially between masculinity and femininity, is a recurring aspect of my work."[4]

Marquié's analysis, in turn, seeks to show how the gender frontiers held to be erased have actually been consolidated in the work:

> But what does one actually see? In the first place, in *Dispositif 3.1,* only the male sex has any freedom from prescribed gender identities, while the female sex remains assigned. In the second place gendered identities are not abandoned but, on the contrary, gender (and only one gender) is actually staged. [. . .] [T]he dualism isn't abolished and, what is more, attention is focused on one of the two terms [. . .][5]

Here identity is a territory, and it is defined first and foremost through its fixedness. Identity is thus a set of constant traits that are maintained (and would be evident) despite any variation in the subject or the community. It is often perceived as restrictive in as much as it reduces the individual or the groups to just one aspect of their identity (Grau), and its theorization does not fare well in the inevitable fluctuations of history (see Grau's example of Maalouf's inhabitant of Sarajevo). Even the "subversive" nature of the work would eventually be tied to calling this territoriality into question.

The second aspect of identity is somewhat historical or at least temporal. It places the accent on identity as singularity and difference. Whereas geography endeavors to define a stable identity, history considers it as a constantly changing process, a fluid state: not as something that one has been from the very beginning, but rather something that each one of us fabricates (or *performs*)[6] in our daily lives. Before anything else, identity immediately establishes itself in a temporal and historical context and is thus unstable and fluid. On a theoretical plane, therefore, it is no longer a matter of locating signs but of understanding how identity is produced. This is how, for example, one can understand the difference DeFrantz proposes between "the visible" and "the spirit" of Black Atlantic identity. On the one hand, it is an identity marked by the visibility of skin color and perhaps by the cultural signs of belonging to a black American community; on the other, it is an identity formed by the recognition of an experience and a history. This "historical" conception of identity could lead, I think, to a phenomenology of culture and this is, without doubt, the aim of DeFrantz's and Burt's essays, the latter of which is concentrated on the spectator's experience of the two works considered.

The question of the *oeuvre*

Rather than entering into the debate on identity itself, the first problem I would like to pose is of an epistemological order and concerns the status

of the choreographic work in culturalist discourses. It has been said that, if identitarian issues and culturalist theories have, in principle, allowed one to think of dance as a social practice that goes beyond the production of works alone, the works remain an important part of the touchstone for culturalist analyses, and the three studies that follow are by no means exceptions. Identitarian theories pose the following question: "How can this or that work put the question of identity into play?" In responding to this question, however, another is unavoidable: "Under what conditions and according to what methods can works be 'made to speak'?" In other words, applied to dance (or to any other artistic form), can the theory of identity do without a specific methodology and a reflection on the medium? Laura Mulvey's seminal text on the construction of the masculine gaze and the feminine subject in Hollywood cinema (which served as a model for many choreographic analyses in the 1980s) was often readapted on the basis of the "content" of the work alone. It should be remembered, however, that Mulvey also proposed a model of formal analysis of the film medium. As Mulvey notes in Sternberg and Hitchcock, the use of framing and editing, and not only the narrative structure, organizes the masculine gaze and the objectification of the feminine figure.[7]

Choreographic works cannot be made to speak in identitarian terms or taken as the crystallization of identitarian stakes in the context of dance without a certain number of presuppositions that seem to be rather paradoxically forgotten in dance studies. It would be impossible to imagine musicology, the history of art, or the history of literature addressing their respective works without a theory of *analyse d'oeuvre*.[8] The university programs that provide training for research in these fields are rich, at least in France, in specific subject matter such as film analysis, painting analysis, and text analysis, and these sub-disciplines themselves are the object of varied theories, debates, and conflicts. Thus the question I would pose here is that of the status of choreographic works in our theoretical apparatuses and especially in culturalist discourses.

The work's identity

In the first place, it is surprising that the theoretical texts, whether they are constituted by *analyse d'oeuvre* or rely on them to illustrate a broader goal, take, as indisputable evidence and as ascertained fact, the existence of the choreographic work, a stable object containing a meaning that can simply be deciphered according to a more or less complex level of codification. A wide branch of aesthetics in the figurative arts, literature, and music is devoted to the discussion of the notion of the work of art.[9] In dance history itself, even a canonical period like Judson Church's is

marked by a critique of this notion. What is a dance work and what sort of reality do identitarian or other readings claim to interpret? Above all, on what ideological basis does the notion of work and its cortege of categories (work/author, process/product, choreographer/performer) rest? Every attempt to define the dance work, which is bound to run into numerous difficulties, comes up against the same issues as the definition of identity. The choreographic work poses, first of all, a geographic problem. Where does it start and where does it end? What is its place and what are its spatial limits? What has to do with the choreography and what has to do with interpretation? Where does the process of creation end, and where does the work itself begin? There is also a historical problem. How, through different performances (because the dance work only exists in the form of successive updates), can the "contingent" variations of the work's "truth" be distinguished? Is it possible to think of a "performativity of the performance" and is it possible to think about how the work's identity is reinvented each time it is performed?

Identitarian analyses (including the three studies that precede) treat works as cultural and social micro-spaces in which identities are produced and interact with each other. The hypothesis is that of a social site that reflects the relationships and the norms of the world in general. Take, for example, the way in which the relationships and treatment of male and female performers exemplify or contradict social norms (Marquié)? Or how the relationship between a role performed by an African-American woman dancer and a group of European American dancers narrates abandonment and exclusion (DeFrantz), and so on. The way in which they are read is organized around an axis of the recognition of signs and the locating of their more or less conformist or transgressive nature with respect to the dominant norms.

"What is a work" and what effects does the question produce?

While avoiding the temptation to answer the question "what is a work," we will make an effort to trace some of the effects produced by merely introducing this problem into critical work. Pierre Bayard has shown that even in the case of the literary work, whose stable material nature and objective existence seem evident, "the work does not exist." It exists only in as far as it is reinvented by each critical text. Let me linger a bit longer on the first modality of invention Bayard has identified: the work of selection, or rather the choice of the excerpts the critic emphasizes and to which he or she confers a particular value, thereby recomposing a text that differs from that of other critics on the basis of the quotes selected.

For Bayard, it is a matter of making a difference between the *subject* and the *referent*: "Between two people discussing the work of Shakespeare the *subject* is absolutely the same provided they are using the same edition. But the *referent* of the discourse – which is to say the virtual world populated by the imaginary creatures with which they are conversing – is not equally so." And a bit further on: "The change in perspective is bound to a decentering of the text toward the reader, who has become, to the detriment of the text, the measure and the unit."[10]

If the stability and the "reality" of the literary work can be a problem, what about that of the choreographic work, with its innumerable perennial variants? From a point of view not far from that of Susan Manning, for whom every description of a work is a reconstruction,[11] I am interested in the different ways in which the choreographic work is invented in various discourses, including that of identity. By treating the work as a cultural reality that is historically anchored but, paradoxically, transcends the moment of the representation, identitarian criticism presumes that the work contains a stable meaning, pre-codified by culture. This register of meaning is privileged through the exclusion of all others. Identitarian criticism addresses the work on the basis of its decodable aspects and an important part of this research lies in revealing these elements. (See, for example, how DeFrantz isolates the stylistic elements emphasized in African-American dance and compares them to other traits of classical ballet technique, codified by European culture, or how Marquié emphasizes the elements of the costumes and the visibility of the performer's male and female physiques; or again how Burt establishes the distortions operated in Lea Anderson's work in relationship to a certain norm of physical form.) The work is assumed to have an existence that transcends the various updates of successive performances (or occurrences). It is a carrier of a meaning that, if not univocal, is at least stable and for the most part verifiable, as it is organized on the basis of a code that goes beyond the work in itself. (By stable meaning, I mean that the relation between the work, assumed to be stable, and its interpretation, assumed to be verifiable, is stable; the possibility that the "meaning" produced is that of an identity which is fluid, mobile, and perhaps in the process of transformation is obviously not excluded.) As such, everything that has to do with the spectator's presence, interpretation, or individual "here and now" perception appears contingent. Comments on variations in interpretation, for example, are rare and are always considered peripheral or superficial in relationship to "the meaning of the work."

All of the theories of identity, at least those one encounters in the field of dance studies, rest on what Mark Franko calls the "contextualist" trend,[12] which considers dance as a product of a social and cultural

context. Franko contrasts this trend (which I would risk defining dominant) to another that he identifies as "formalist," whose followers "favor movement analysis over all other critical methods."[13] This surprising shortcut has the merit of clarifying the theoretical and methodological issues that, in my opinion, implode when they are compared with *analyse d'oeuvre*. The trend of movement analysis, as it has developed in France, is above all a current of thought among dancers. What I mean by this is that it is a body of theoretical and practical knowledge developed first and foremost by and for dancers. The works of Hubert Godard, Odile Rouquet, Nathalie Schulmann, Dominique Praud, Emanuelle Lyon, and many of the other contemporary French movement analysts to which I am referring, are part of a long tradition of the theorization of movement elaborated by dancers such as Isadora Duncan, Rudolf von Laban, Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham, and many others, along with the tradition of movement studies now assembled under the name "somatics." This tradition presumes that movement *is knowledge* and not merely an object of knowledge or a passive vehicle of other fields of knowledge. This is not the place to discuss the summary introduction Franko has made on the trend of movement analysis in dance criticism – a current of which I myself am a part – but to try to reflect more profoundly on the apparent opposition he outlines between "contextualist" and "formalist."

The critical trend that Franko defines as "movement analysis," which is actually a phenomenological current that borrows its tools from movement analysis, considers the meaning of the work as bound to the dancer's and the spectator's experience *even* during the work. That is to say that it does not exclude the cultural dimension but, if necessary, includes it in the gestural praxis. One must therefore consider that there is also a "culture of feeling" and the different ways in which it appears. Vice versa, one must not assume that the gesture is impermeable or inaccessible to culture and the effects it produces. This current considers "meaning" as that which comes out of the encounter between the dancer's and the spectator's gesture in the present moment. This does not mean excluding the cultural and codified aspect, but taking into consideration, and at times giving priority to,[14] the aspect of the invention and exchange of gesture and thus of meaning here and now of the performance. In the same way, the spectator's task is considered not only as that of recognition (identification) and de-coding, but also as an individual effort in inventing and re-inventing the work, in the moment in which it is seized, and in the work of re-elaborating memory.[15]

The first current of thought (the "contextualists" according to Franko's terms) considers the work as something that has a stable existence of meaning that goes beyond its occurrences (beginning in particular from

the relationships of the signifier/signified), and that refers to semiotic tools. The spectator's variations in perception, and thus in interpretation, are considered negligible, and the work, in so far as it is polysemous, is potentially *exhaustible* by critical discourse. This is the criticism Bayard qualifies as hermeneutic, in which the work of selection "is secondary with respect to the core of meaning the work already conceals and the critical approach has to know how to identify. A similar presupposition tends to unify the text and to put aside any authentic reflection of the referent."[16]

The second current of thought (the "formalists") considers the meaning as unstable, *produced* by the exchange between the dancer and spectator, which comes to modulate, or to transform, the stability of the codes otherwise put into play by the choreography. Here, the work exists solely in the variations of its occurrences and its meaning is mobile, always starting over again in the moment of the performance. Cultural codes and constant choreographic traits are no longer the only pertinent parameters but merely parameters among others. The work is considered as an ongoing process rather than a product, even in the case of what we could call "written work" or a work for which the choreography is, not necessarily notated, but fixed once and for all. "A relativist conception, based on the importance given to the referent, will not for this be foreign to all signification. It would seem however all the more de-multiplied to the extent the text is not put down once and for all as univocal and the idea itself of meaning is then profoundly transformed."[17]

Methods

The silence that separates these two points of view, these two ways of looking at the works, no longer seems insurmountable but concerns the disparity of the respective methodological tools. As previously noted, identitarian criticism draws from an ample theoretical and methodological corpus that has been developed and proved primarily outside of the field of dance. The phenomenology of dance, which takes a certain number of references from movement analysis, places the work of the dancer and the observer at the heart of its approach. What changes in the relationships made possible by these two points of view is the nature of the question posed, the status given to a certain number of parameters such as the dancer's and the observer's subjectivities (seen in one case as a negligible factor, in the other as an integral part of the work), and, of course, the methodologies employed. In other words, if the critique is an invention of the work, it is the methodological issues that make possible and visible the different modes of invention. The "work of selection" that Bayard describes for literary works is based on the selection of extracts or quotations

from the work under analysis. In dance this question is even more crucial in as much as – of course – every dance work is first and foremost heterogeneous, composed of gestures, sounds, costumes, lights, and perhaps words or texts, as well as different layers. One can isolate its elements, for example, in function of the sequence (privileging certain moments of the work), or in function of the nature of the medium (gesture, music, costumes, lights, and so on), in function of aesthetic genres (assigning it to a choreographic or aesthetic style). The work can be translated into a story (see DeFrantz's analysis of Donald Byrd's *Nutcracker*). It can even be analyzed considering first and foremost its para-textual apparatus (declaration of the choreographer's intent, criticism, commentaries, programs) or intra-textual apparatus, as for example in Franko's analysis of *American Document*,[18] which rests essentially on the ballet's plot and the texts that accompany it. The question of the para-texts' status in analyzing dance works would actually merit a study of its own. Much too often, in fact, the discourses, texts, and critiques accompanying a work are taken as sufficient "proof" to justify interpretations of the work. From this point of view, Marquié's procedure, which compares the para-textual apparatus and the work, without presupposing their a priori convergence, is quite rare. Finally, the accent could be placed on the gestural dimension of the work, which is evidently the choice of movement analysis. Yet, even in this case, the way in which gesture is dissected can vary. Gesture is often described through a particular glossary: spatial figures (circles, diagonals, triangles, lines, and so forth), the names of repertoire steps (pirouette, arabesque, contraction, curve, and so on), or actions more or less effortlessly described (she lifts her hand and throws herself against him; he pushes her away, and so on). Movement analysis, on the contrary, as applied, for example, by Christine Roquet to works of dance,[19] is interested in the qualitative register of movement, with parameters such as the dynamosphere, gravitational shifts and, even more specifically, in the relationships between duet partners analyzed from the point of view of these qualitative parameters.

One understands that these variations in selection bring about important divergences in interpretation. How does the critical text organize the "identifications"; with which aspects of the work does it begin; and what criteria does it use? Can the question of masculine and feminine in a choreographic work only be grasped on the basis of conventional signs such as costumes or the relationship between the performer's and the character's gender (when there is a character)? If the analysis tries to approach the marks of "masculine" or "feminine" gesture, what norms of reference can it use? Is it possible to imagine a reading of gender based on the experience of gesture? Similarly, can the question of race or ethnicity in a work be read solely on the visible signs of skin color, for

example, or by a terminology drawn from classical vocabulary, as DeFrantz proposes in analyzing Byrd's vocabulary of movement in contrast to what comes out of African-American tradition? Or, is the identity of a dancer and of a spectator (be they male or female) defined solely on the basis of traditionally delineated performer–audience territories, and is the re-configuration of these domains enough to break down the boundaries between the two categories? The three case-studies by Burt, DeFrantz, and Marquié have a number of aspects in common. They have all chosen to interpret one or two choreographic works. They have organized their analyses on the basis of preliminary theoretical frameworks, the first two explicitly, the third more discreetly. They have also cut across, peripherally, the question of the relationships between theories of norm and theories of experience.

Norms, subversions, transgressions: what is a subversive work?

The identitarian question is always articulated around a project of political analysis: relationships of power, relationships with the norm. The question formulated for the *analyse d'oeuvre*, whatever the works may be, is always organized more or less in terms of adhesion to or subversion of these norms. Does the work comfort a certain number of patriarchal or racial stereotypes, or does it oppose them? The answer to this question presupposes two preliminary choices that are interdependent: first, the definition of the level on which these norms are considered to be expressed and legible and, second, the alleged nature of the relationship between the work and its audience.

In the culturalist hypotheses, one assumes that the audience identifies and de-codifies culturally clear signs – which does not exclude the fact that they are stratified, contradictory, and ambiguous – and that, in the end, it interprets the more or less consensual or at times subversive "message" of the work. These signs, more often than not visual or discursive, can also include an empirical aspect. This is clearly the aim of DeFrantz, who wants David Byrd's audience to recognize "black spirit" through the action, that is, the "perception of the fullness of gestural execution and the manifestation of spirit." Here, one assumes that the spectator shares something of the dancer's experience through phenomena defined as kinesthetic empathy, gravitational contagion, or trance.[20] It is not a matter of limiting the identification process to the register of the visible, but of attaching it to a culture, or to a codification, of the experience itself. While differences can be observed in the nature of the decipherable elements (which is to say in the workings of selection previously questioned), the

work remains, in its relationship with the audience, a simple place of social practice. The dancers produce signs or traverse a culturally engrained experience of gravity, and the spectators decode them, all within a meta-structure of conventions. The existence of the work and the way it operates (from its production to its reception) are cultural products. Thus, the identitarian question passes first through an "identitarian making" of the work itself. To analyze the identitarian game in the choreographic work, one must first invent the work as a territorial geography implying different identities: that of gender (Marquié), that of race (DeFrantz), that of the dancer and of the spectator (Burt), or that of any of the other categories (classical/contemporary, high-brow/low-brow, child/adult, and so on). Paradoxically, therefore, the analyses of the transgressive or, on the contrary, the "conformist" nature of the work is based on the presupposition that the work is above all, if not solely, the product of these norms. The identitarian relationships will be analyzed as consensual, conflicting, transgressive, normative, and so on, but the initial and shared presupposition of these different possible interpretations is that the entire work is situated in the territorialized spaces of identities that exist independently of and beyond the work itself. The possible subversive nature of the work is thus subordinated to its inscription in the culture and in the norms of its identitarian relationships.

"This public observer conforms to a broader context; its perceptions of the work and its reactions to it are inserted into a more global logic that, in itself, has determined the conditions that led to such a work. The scheme thus seems to form a closed world, where risks are limited, a system without inner flaws in which the freedom of movement appears non-existent. In this case, it would be fairer to speak not so much of the work of art but of the show in the sense in which it was previously proposed. For, in these conditions, how could an artistic work just crop up, extract itself from an environment that predetermines it? According to this scheme, the work itself (choreographic or theatrical) conforms to the context that surrounds it."[21] In her Ph.D. dissertation on the relationships between the spatiality of choreographic work and the audience's make up, Julie Perrin demonstrates how one can think of the "community of the work" not as sociality that pre-exists and pre-determines the work, but as something constituted by the work itself. This does not mean that the work and its audience elude every norm and power relationship, but that it is not constituted solely by these norms. In other words, it is a matter of thinking of the work as a possible heterotopia, a space in which a "dis-identification" (which is to say a partial dissolution of these identitarian phenomena) can be put into play . . .

We have, therefore, on one hand, identitarian theories that only hold up under the condition that the work is considered a priori as a product of these identitarian norms and, on the other, works that are a possible place of escape from this normative world. Yet the emergence of a choreographic work cannot be totally predetermined by context, nor can it completely escape it. This tangle of the work's contextual predetermination and heterotopic nature does not pose problems from the perspective of the works themselves, but from the point of view of the theoretical formulas that attempt to possess it.

Conclusion

Examined in relationship to the contemporary context and from the perspective of *analyse d'oeuvre*, the question of identity crystallizes a theoretical issue that pervades dance studies: the status of gesture, of what is alive, and of perception in a given culture. As Burt and Franko remind us, the culturalists have rightly reproached phenomenology of universalizing experience and disregarding cultural differences. Reciprocally, it is possible to criticize a theoretical trend that fails to grasp, in the field of dance, that which clearly determines the singularity of the subject, or rather how gesture is experienced by the dancer and by whoever is watching, including the case in which the spectator is a critic. The *analyse d'oeuvre* is a privileged field of study to be taken on in a way that goes beyond this theoretical silence. Can experience be considered in cultural terms? Is there a code of feeling and how can it be analyzed? This path was initially opened by Merleau-Ponty's theory of the sensorial chiasms and furthered by Michel Bernard with the fourth chiasm, called para-sensorial, which makes every feeling contemporaneously an experience and an enunciation. Recent trends in historiography that attempt to construct history around sentiments, passions, and emotions follow this second route.[22]

This question of the relationship "from presence to presence" appropriate to every contemporary dance performance is the explicit theme of numerous works from the mid-1990s on.[23] Yet, even if it has become a *thematic* of recent works, it remains nonetheless at the core of every choreographic performance that is "modern and historical," "classical," "contemporary and neo-classical," and so on. Keeping in mind this aspect of the "presence," which is necessarily relational, unstable, and contextual, or, in other words, keeping in mind what is generally referred to as the dancers' *and* observers' interpretation (the re-writing of the instant of the work) prohibits treating choreographic works as objects, as tools, or even as illustrations of an identitarian theory or anything else. Keeping in mind the aspect of presence in dance studies (and not the "eternal

present" as Franko suspects but a "cumulative" present that is also charged with history) is probably the node around which the predetermination and heterotopia of the work can be articulated or in which the identitarian geography does not prohibit historical or temporal fluidity. The aim of this sort of project is clearly one of an aesthetic order (understanding how the piece works in relationship to the audience), but it is also political, in the multiple meanings of this term as applied to dance. It is political because it imposes "an upheaval of the usual categories of thought"[24] and of perceptive organization. It is political because, for each work, as Perrin has shown, it invents a unique way of being together. But it is also political because it ceases to ignore the dancer–interpreter in his or her status of subject. Giving the work a stable meaning that transcends the different occurrences of its performances and the variations in the onlookers' perception means considering the work of the dancer–interpreter as a negligible quantity, as an instrument or vehicle, as one still often hears, of the "choreographer's thought." In short, it means basing an entire theory on the instrumentalization and the negation of the work without which the work would not be visible. This question seems indisputably political.

Notes

1 For a report on and an analysis of this project see I. Launay, 'Le don du geste', *Protée*, 2001, vol. 29, no. 2, pp. 85–98.
2 The research group of the dance department at the University of Paris VIII.
3 See for example the works of Sally Banes, Ann Daly, Ramsay Burt, Susan Foster, Susan Manning, and so on.
4 Alain Buffard quoted in H. Marquié, 'Dispositif trouble: when what is said is not what is shown', in this volume, p. 239.
5 Ibid., p. 254. There is another interpretation of this performance: see R. Huesca, 'Homme, danse et homosexualité', *Revue d'esthétique*, 2004, no. 45, pp. 139–51 [eds].
6 Reference is made here to the terminology introduced by Judith Butler. See in particular J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter. On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, London and New York: Routlege, 1993.
7 "[. . .] for [Sternberg] the pictorial space enclosed by the frame is paramount rather than the narrative or identification processes. While Hitchcock goes into the investigative side of voyeurism, Sternberg produces the ultimate fetish, taking it to the point where the powerful look of the male protagonist (characteristic of traditional narrative film) is broken in favor of the image or in direct erotic rapport with the spectator. The beauty of the woman as object and the screen space coalesce; she is no longer the bearer of guilt but a perfect product, whose body, stylized and fragmented by close-ups, is the content of the film and the direct recipient of the spectator's look. Sternberg plays down the illusion of screen depth; his screen tends to be one-dimensional, as light and shade, lace, steam, foliage, net, streamers, etc., reduce the visual field." See L. Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', *Screen*, 1975, vol. 16, no. 3, p. 14.

8 The French term *analyse d'oeuvre* has been kept because it echoes its equivalents in other artistic fields. In France one talks of *analyse d'image*, *analyse de tableaux*, *analyse de film*, *analyse musicale*, *analyse littéraire*, and these sub-disciplines constitute an important basis for every theory of literature, film and visual arts.

9 See in particular the works of N. Goodman, *The Languages of Art*, Indianapolis, IN: Bobbs-Merrill, 1968; M. Guérin, *Qu'est-ce qu'une oeuvre*, Arles: Actes Sud, 1986; G. Genette, *L'œuvre de l'art. Immanence et trascendance*, Paris: Seuil, 1994; G. Genette, *L'oeuvre de l'art. La relation esthétique*, Paris: Seuil, 1997; B. Vouilloux, *Entre poétique et esthétique*, Paris: Belin, 2004. For a reflection on the status of the work in dance see F. Pouillaude, *Le désoeuvrement chorégraphique. Étude sur the notion d'oeuvre en danse*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Lille III, 2006.

10 P. Bayard, *Enquête sur Hamlet. Le dialogue de sourds*, Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 2002, pp. 42–3.

11 See for example S. Manning, 'Introduction', in *Ecstasy and the Demon: Feminism and Nationalism in the Dances of Mary Wigman*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993, pp. 1–14 (2nd edn *Ecstasy and the Demon*: *The Dances of Mary Wigman*, Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2006).

12 See M. Franko, 'Dance and the Political: States of Exception', in this volume, p. 18.

13 Ibid.

14 For a rather unique example of oeuvre analysis centered on performance analyses see C. Roquet, *La scène amoureuse en danse. Codes, modes et normes de l'intercorporéité dans le duo chorégraphique*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Paris VIII, 2002.

15 M. Bernard, *Esquisse d'une théorie de la perception du spectacle chorégraphique*, in M. Bernard, *De la création chorégraphique,* Pantin: Centre national de la danse, 2001, pp. 205–13. Suggested in some way in view of a reflection on the conditions of spectator's perception in dance. See also J. Perrin, *De l'espace corporel à l'espace public*, Ph.D. dissertation, University of Paris VIII, 2005.

16 Bayard, *Enquête sur Hamlet*, p. 43.

17 Ibid.

18 M. Franko, 'L'utopie antifasciste: American Document de Martha Graham', in C. Rousier (ed.), *Être ensemble. Figures de la communauté en danse depuis le XXème siècle*, Pantin: Centre national de la danse, 2003.

19 Roquet, *La scène amoureuse en danse*.

20 The hypothesis of kinesthetic empathy (or of John Martin's metakinesis) or of gravitational contagion (Hubert Godard), which provides the basis of numerous ideas on the workings of the relationship between dance works and the audience, is being revived today, sustained by the growing interest in phenomena of perception and sensorial chiasms in the cognitive and neuro sciences.

21 See Perrin, *De l'espace corporel à l'espace public*, p. 63.

22 See for example A. Corbin, *Le miasme et la jonquille. L'odorat et l'imaginaire social, XVIIIème et XIXème siècles*, Paris: Flammarion, 1986, or A. Vincent-Buffault, *Histoire des larmes, XVIIIème–XIXème siècles*, Paris: Rivages, 1986.

23 For an analysis of this issue see F. Pouillaude, 'Scène et contemporanéité', *Rue Descartes*, 2004, no. 44, pp. 8–20.

24 See Perrin, *De l'espace corporel à l'espace public*, p. 63.