

**UNIVERSITÉ DE QUÉBEC À MONTRÉAL**

**EMBODYING THE BALLET FORM: AN INQUIRY INTO  
THE BALLET DANCER'S  
FORMATION & BODILY EXPERIENCE**

**DISSERTATION  
PRESENTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DOCTORATE IN SOCIOLOGY**

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## RÉSUMÉ

Cette thèse entreprend de problématiser le corps au travers de la théorie sociologique, en développant un argument critique à l'égard des approches socio-constructionnistes qui envisagent le corps comme étant formé et construit par la société; celles-ci en effet sont trop étroites et ne permettent pas d'accéder à l'expérience incarnée du corps. L'enjeu principal de cette thèse est ainsi de développer la théorisation sociologique contemporaine sur le corps en l'ouvrant à ses dimensions matérielle, biologique et physique. Afin d'assurer un développement théorique qui inclut ces dimensions avec la dimension socialement construite du corps, et qui jette un éclairage sur le phénomène de l'incarnation, ou de l'incorporation (embodiment), nous tablons sur l'analyse d'un objet qui est le corps des danseuses et danseurs de ballet, en explorant sa formation et sa transformation. La formation et la transformation des danseuses et danseurs de ballet dépendent de leur capacité à maîtriser la technique du ballet, c'est-à-dire de l'apprentissage du langage physique du ballet et de son incarnation dans la forme du ballet. Il s'agit d'un processus à la fois dynamique et de composantes multiples dont l'expérience se décline sur les plans mental, physique et émotionnel. Le processus de formation des danseuses et danseurs de ballet représente une expérience culturelle hautement créative, et dépend de l'engagement complet de tous leurs sens, comme de leur présence totale aux niveaux spirituel et physique. Afin de développer une compréhension de cette expérience de l'incarnation, nous avons procédé à des entrevues, en demandant des détails biographiques sur la formation et la transformation de cette expérience. Le processus va au-delà de l'entraînement physique du corps et inclut un engagement créatif vis-à-vis de sa propre auto-transformation. Ce processus en est un d'auto-création, et requiert des danseuses et danseurs une imagination active ainsi qu'une intense préparation physique. Cela occasionne une transformation entière sur les plans mental et physique, qui est éprouvée à de multiples niveaux et s'exprime dans leur soi artistique. Notre étude avance que lorsque l'on change l'expérience corporelle, on change l'expérience vécue et ainsi, l'expression de soi. Au travers d'une analyse détaillée des dynamiques et des jeux complexes entre l'expérience corporelle, l'expérience vécue et l'expression de soi, nous explorons l'incarnation de l'expérience du ballet par le biais de ce que les danseuses et danseurs décrivent comme leurs propres formations et transformations personnelles. Les données de cette étude proviennent de quinze entrevues en profondeur menées auprès de danseuses et danseurs de ballet professionnels à la retraite. L'étude empirique révèle une description détaillée de l'expérience d'incarnation des danseuses et danseurs de ballet, et de leur façon d'habiter la forme idéale du ballet. Nous envisageons d'abord le développement de l'institution ainsi que l'émergence de la forme idéale du ballet. Nous retraçons cette histoire et décrivons le pouvoir ainsi que les exigences de cette forme esthétique. Afin de décrire et d'analyser la formation et la transformation des danseuses et danseurs de ballet dans leur entièreté, nous décrivons trois niveaux d'expérience; nous examinons l'expérience esthétique, à l'aide de la théorie des formes littéraires de Mikhaïl Bakhtine; nous examinons ensuite l'expérience institutionnelle, à l'aide de la théorisation sociologique de George Herbert Mead; enfin, nous examinons l'expérience vécue, avec l'aide de la phénoménologie de la



perception développée par Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Nous concluons que l'expérience corporelle, l'expérience vécue et l'expression de soi sont inséparables, et que quelle que soit la conceptualisation du corps utilisée, celle-ci doit comprendre l'expérience au travers de niveaux multiples de l'activité sensorielle. Le corps des êtres humains en est un qui vit au travers d'une expérience incarnée, engagée de manière sociale, physiologique et spirituelle dans le monde.

Mots-clés : Danseuses - Corps - Ballet - Formation - Incarnation - Théorie - Art

## ABSTRACT

This dissertation problematizes the body in social and cultural theory and argues that theories that emerge from within the social constructionist paradigm, which claim that the body is shaped and constructed in, and invented by society, are restrictive and do not allow for an embodied existence. The main goal of this dissertation is to encourage social and cultural theorists writing on the topic of the body, to extend their views beyond that of the social constructionist paradigm and to include the material, biological and physical dimensions of the body. The ideas on the body that emerge from under this theoretical scaffolding tend to avoid human being's embodied experience and therefore, limit the possibility of a responsive, creative and embodied human experience. Therefore, to encourage the development of a theoretical space that merges the physical and material body with the socially constructed body, and which sheds light on the phenomenon of embodiment, we select as our object of research retired professional ballet dancers, and explore and describe their formation and transformation into dancing bodies. The ballet dancers' formation and transformation is dependent on their ability to master the ballet technique—that is, to learn the physical language and embody the ballet form. It is a dynamic and layered process and is experienced simultaneously at a mental, physical and emotional level. The ballet dancers' process of formation is a highly creative cultural experience and is contingent on the dancers' full and complete engagement with all of their senses as well as their total physical and mindful presence. To gain an understanding of the phenomenon of embodiment we asked how ballet dancers are formed and transformed? The process goes beyond the training of the physical body and includes the dancers' creative negotiation with their complete self-transformation. The process is about self-formation and self-creation, and requires both the dancers' active imagination and active physical presence. The formation of ballet dancers is an entire physical and mental transformation, which is experienced at numerous levels and expressed through their physical self. This study purposes that, if you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience and therefore, self-expression. Through a careful breakdown of the dynamics and complex interplay at work between the bodily experience, lived experience and self-expression, we explored the embodied experience of ballet dancers as they themselves describe their own personal experience of formation. The data for this study is drawn out from 15 in-depth life story interviews with retired professional ballet dancers. This empirical study provides a detailed description of the ballet dancers' embodied experience, and with the inhabiting of ballet's ideal form. We explain the development of the ballet institution and the emergence of the ideal ballet form. We trace its history and describe the power of its aesthetic presence. To describe the ballet dancer's entire transformation we breakdown the process into three levels of experience. We began with the ballet dancers' aesthetic experience and turned to Mikhail Bakhtin's essay, *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity* to help us understand this level of experience. Next we described their institutional experience and explored the social context through which their self emerges as dancers. In order to understand the communicative dynamics at work in their self-formation, we turned to George Herbert Mead's, *Mind, Self and Society*. Finally, we

explored and described their lived experience, and turned to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's, *Phenomenology of Perception* to help us understand their embodied experience. We conclude that the bodily experience, lived experience and self-expression are inseparable and that no matter the cultural conception of the body it is nevertheless experienced at multiple levels of sensorial activity. The human beings body is one that lives an embodied experience and is socially, physiologically and mindfully engaged in the world.

Key Words: Dancers- Body- Ballet- Formation- Embodiment- Theory- Art

## INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation I shall explore and describe the ballet dancer's transformation and formation into a dancing body. Through a careful breakdown of the dynamic process involved in training and forming a ballet dancer, I will invite my readers into a highly creative cultural experience where we shall learn something about the relationship that dancers have with their body and with the social context through which they emerge as dancers. The main focus of this inquiry will center on the embodiment of the ballet form and on the layered process through which ballet dancers' body and self are transformed. Furthermore, we shall describe their bodily experience and lived experience as they creatively negotiate their transformation and formation.

The transformation and formation of the ballet dancer is primarily based on the mastering of the ballet technique and the transformation of a lay person's body into that of a dancing body. In recent years there has been an increase in scholarly writings on the topic of the body especially in the field of sociology and cultural studies. Since the body is our primary means of expression and representation in western theatrical dance, one would suppose that social and cultural analysts interested in the body would have taken an interest in dance and dancers as an area of research. Few social or cultural theorists of the body have been drawn to dance as an aesthetic practice that can generate insight into the body and bodily practices. There is, however, an emergent interest in dance within the margins of more established academic disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and literary theory. This, in part, is due to an increase in interdisciplinary studies that have been consistently developing since the 1980's. Nevertheless, there has yet to be a systematic scholarship in dance studies or research, however, the field is expanding and drawing insight from sociology, social and cultural theory and anthropology. The problematic of the body in connection with issues involving representation and difference has become a key area of research for a number of dance scholars (we will discuss this at length in chapter 1). These studies generally aim to critique the representation of the woman's body in ballet and although this has a significant

place in the study of the body in society, this dissertation will instead explore the body in ballet as a means to gain insight into the relationship between the body and self-formation. Furthermore, much of the sociological theorization of the body has been primarily dominated by the social constructionist paradigm, which generates the idea that the body is shaped and constructed in, and invented by society. This paradigm is limited in its thinking and is, as I will argue, a one-dimensional theory. Therefore, through an empirical study on the ballet dancer's formation, I shall challenge scholars whose perspective emerges from within the social constructionist paradigm by suggesting that the body is firstly, a highly communicative and dynamic entity that is actively involved in, and responsive to, its own transformation. And secondly, no matter what the cultural conception of the body, thoughts, and ideas that reside in the active imagination of the human being, are not disconnected from the body and are in fact experienced at all levels of sensorial activity. That being said, I shall argue that theories that emerge from within the social constructionist paradigm are restrictive and do not allow for an embodied existence. For the most part, in sociology, there have been very few empirical studies on embodiment; through this study I hope to make a significant contribution to the sociology of the body, and to future theorization of the body. Furthermore, this dissertation is a continuation of my master's thesis, *The Dancing Body*, where, in fact, I employ the social constructionist paradigm as my theoretical scaffolding. After careful review of my master's thesis (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 1) I discovered that there was more that we could learn from ballet dancers and their body and, as a result, I decided to expand my original study of the ballet world's conception of the body to a study on the embodiment of the ballet form. From this point of departure we will begin chapter 1 by problematizing the body in social and cultural theory and raising questions about the ballet dancer that will help us develop a better understanding about the body. We will situate this study within the contemporary discourse on the body and proceed to explore the absence of dance from sociology. Through a review of the pertinent literature on dance, I will encourage the further development of a sociology of dance and explain its potential usefulness.

In chapter 2 I will detail my research plans and develop the logic and rationale behind this study. We will begin with the following proposition: If you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience and thus self-expression and will proceed to develop a series of

questions that will help us develop an understanding of the ballet dancer's formation. I will also explain my choice of a qualitative methodology and the use of in-depth interviews to answer the research questions. This dissertation will be divided into six chapters; chapter 3 will describe at length the evolution of the ballet form and the construction of the ideal ballet body. Understanding the history and complexity of the ballet form is important to this study because, we will show how the ideal ballet form, which has been evolving for the past 400 years, is the central power source to the ballet dancer's transformation. Since our goal is to describe the ballet dancer's embodiment of this ballet form, chapters 4, 5 and 6 will describe the ballet dancer's aesthetic experience, institutional experience, and the lived experience. In chapter 4 we will turn to Mikhail Bakhtin's essay, "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", in order to help us understand the dancers' aesthetic experience. In chapter 5 we will focus on the social environment through which the self of the dancer emerges, and in order to better understand the complex dynamics of self-formation and the dancer's institutional experience, we will turn to George Herbert Mead's, book *Mind, Self and Society*. Through Mead, we will also learn about the communicative dynamics at work in self-formation. Finally in chapter 6, we will focus on the ballet dancers' lived experience and their embodiment of the ballet form, and we will develop our discussion around Maurice Merleau-Ponty's *Phenomenology of Perception*. In these last three chapters, we will also include quotes from the dancers' interviews.

## **CHAPTER I**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **1.1 Introduction**

I will begin this chapter by posing numerous questions about ballet dancers and their formation. Since ballet, dance in general, and the body are clearly marginal areas of research in sociology (I will develop this argument further on), it is important to begin this dissertation with specific questions that are thought provoking and which might lend themselves to sociological inquiry. Therefore, in light of the fact that sociologists seldom look outside the more prevalent research issues and tend to shy away from areas that have not acquired a solid discourse within the field, I want to demonstrate in this chapter how, in fact, the ballet dancer and the social foundation from which they emerge can be a fascinating and enlightening phenomenon for sociologists to inquire about. As I already mentioned above, I will open the chapter with questions that one might ask about the ballet dancer if they were to study them. I will then proceed to develop a discussion on the theoretical foundation through which our understanding of the body in contemporary Western culture has emerged, and through this demonstrate how a study of ballet dancer's formation can contribute to the sociology of the body and, furthermore, how it might also provoke new research ideas. Since there is not much in the way of research on dance, nor dancers, in sociology, I will venture to explain why the field might have neglected this area of study. I will proceed to review the various studies that have emerged from other fields such as: dance studies and research, anthropology of dance and dance history, in order to illustrate how rich dance can be as a topic of sociological research. In so doing, I will discuss how this dissertation can find a place in numerous disciplines and contribute to both the discourses on the body and on dance.

Let us then begin with some thought provoking questions. What defines the ballet dancer? Is it the intentional stylization of a body—the specialized training that transforms the lay body into a bodily figure bearing the aesthetic line of the ballet form? Might they be defined by ballet's signature "turn out"—the rotation of the thighs, legs and feet turned outward from the hip socket—which gives the ballet dancer's body its distinctive character? Perhaps it is the compactness and control of their jumps and turns? Or, the drawing up of the thigh muscles; the pulling up of the torso and the lengthening of the spine and neck; and the lifting and extending of the entire body of the dancer towards the heavens—that define them? Certainly, when we imagine a ballet dancer in our mind's eye, we tend to think of his/her incredible flexibility, high-speed footwork, dynamic movements, power, brilliance and the lightness of his/her geometrically perfect body. Is this what defines ballet dancers? Conceivably, it may be the game they play with the earth's gravitational pull—the taunting and teasing, the effortless movement through space as though they have mastered the secret of earthly weight and transcended it—that defines them? Which is it that gives the ballet dancer his/her definition? Is it the actual construction of a ballet body—the formation of the ideal body capable of meeting the demands of the art form? Or, is it the construction of a superhuman figure whose mystical essence transcends the weight and heaviness of the body and thus, elevates it through the gift of Grace? For the very essence of the art of ballet lives within the phenomenon of Grace—the eternal desire to be liberated from the weight of flesh and bones and to embrace the freedom of flight and thus, weightlessness. The dancer's ability to conquer the human body's natural tendency to be weighted down by gravity is a trick that is learned through years of disciplined training. The acquisition of this skill occurs at some point, and somehow, within their bodily transformation. It is, in fact, at this point when the dancer's body and his/her movements—that is, his/her dancing—are consummated by the gift of Grace. So, when does this happen for them? And, how does it occur? Is this what defines the ballet dancer? It seems obvious to assume that the body plays an important role in defining the ballet dancer, however, so does the transformation of the dancer into a sublime presence. This raises the following question: Is it only the transformation of the body, in and of itself, that forms a dancer? Is the ballet dancer simply a body that dances? Is not the achievement of Grace—the conquering of the body's natural weightiness—not a kind of



transcending of the body? Given that the ballet dancer demonstrates his/her lightness through his/her body, would it not be logical to consider that this achievement of the perfect state of physical balance might actually be the liberation of the essence of ballet itself? If the internal expression of ballet is liberated, or externalized through the ballet dancer, can we not consider that he/she might in fact be a work of art? The ballet dancer unaffected by gravity may not be of this world but from a world uncommon to most—a world where bodies are no longer bound by earthly weight. If this is true, can we still assume that the dancer is defined by his/her body? The ballet dancer appears to their audiences as: a body; as a sublime being; as a trickster—a master of balance and flight—and as a work of art. All this, the audience sees yet still, are uncertain why they are enchanted by the ballet dancer, and why they are drawn to their performances. Is it the art or the dancer's bodily movements?

In light of these questions about the ballet dancer I hope that I have provoked my readers to look beyond just the beautiful and sublime body of the dancer and to question who they are and how they were transformed into this exquisitely expressive body. How did they become ballet dancers? Was it simply the training of the body or was something else transformed in the process? Who were these dancers before the training, during the training, and who are they once the training and dancing has stopped? What took place in the transformation process? How did this happen? There is an obvious interest in these people because audiences continue to attend their performances. What makes them so interesting to watch? Is it simply that people are generally drawn to the sleek and tight body? Or, is it something about the art of ballet itself? Certainly, we can suggest that ballet dancers have enchanted us through not only their well trained bodies but through their capacity to suspend the natural conditions of their body by being fully present and recognizing the limitations of living in a human body. That being said, it seems important then to inquire about how the transformation into this ethereal figure takes place? If ballet dancers were, in fact, works of art, what role would they themselves play in their creation and in their transformation? If their mystic lies in their bodies, would one say that they are a work of art or simply a well-trained body? The interplay between this artistic form, which is completely at the mercy of the human body, and the dancer themselves, are phenomena that do, in fact, merit an investigation.

What kind of scholarly commentary can be made about the ballet dancer? Would the ballet dancer not be an ideal object of inquiry if one were to be interested in gaining invaluable knowledge about both dance and the body? We can learn about the dancer's formation—how all the elements of ballet are synthesized and brought to life through the human body. We can gain a better understanding of how the body is at once a cultural product yet naturally inclined to be an outwardly expressive object. Furthermore, we can learn how the body is filled with possibility—the possibility to be extended to a realm beyond nature where the internal essence of an art such as ballet might actually transcend the body through the actual physical formation of the body itself. Is the body and the dancer simultaneously transformed by the formation? So much can be learnt by studying the ballet dancer; for the sociologist, the social foundation through which the dancer emerges—through which they are transformed into a work of art—can be quite compelling. Certainly, we can come to a clearer understanding of what defines the ballet dancer by understanding the complex and dynamic interplay between the dancer, their bodies, themselves, their peers, their teachers, choreographers, and their rigorous training, rituals and codes. When we look at a ballet dancer we see the final product of layers and layers of social, physical, mental and emotional experiences. When we look at their bodies and their movements, again, we see the end result of years and years of formational training. And when we see them move and enchant us with their sublime essence, we see a work of art that is extended beyond the body and lures us into a place outside our experience—a sensuous place where the body becomes the dance.

Every piece of scholarly writing is inspired by a particular discourse—by a question or by a phenomenon that needs attention—whatever the reason behind any research endeavor, it usually attempts to fill a gap within a particular discursive field. This dissertation, however, has an added challenge: firstly, it seeks to contribute to the newly expanding field of sociology of the body, which has only until recently developed into an actual field. Secondly, it hopes to provoke an interest in the sociology of dance, a field that has yet to be fully developed and which relies on research which has emerged out of anthropology, dance

studies, research and dance history. Finally, this dissertation would like to contribute to all fields interested in a sociological study on ballet dancer's lived experiences.

In order to create a clear narrative that draws the ballet dancer and their body into the theoretical ideas on the body, the following section will first discuss how my past research on the ballet world's conception of the body has led me to expand this study and to strive for a more developed notion of the body in this dissertation. I will, therefore, explain some of the relevant claims that emerge out of our contemporary discourse on the body and in so doing, situate this study within the field. Finally, I will explore the absence of dance from sociological thought and demonstrate, through a review of the literature on dance, the potential for the sociology of dance as it prepares to expand.

## 1.2 Theorizing the body in dance

It has become undeniable that one of the most consumed images in contemporary Western culture is that of the body. Although, the body has been highly topicalized in the media and is at the very core of a billion dollar industry which promotes beauty and well-being, it is, nonetheless, a topic that has taken until the 1980's and well into the 1990's to finally gain momentum in mainstream academic discourse. It is a topic that has, throughout the 1990's, inspired several academic books (Turner 1984, 1992; Ussher 1989; Featherstone et.al. 1991; Shilling 1993; Synnott 1993; Burkitt 1999; Weiss and Haber 1999) and presently continues to make headway by generating numerous conferences and journal publications. Much of this scholarly work is devoted to the exploration of the relationship between the body and its social and cultural environment and furthermore, inspires those interested in social and cultural analysis and criticism. The body has also been one of the major topics in dance studies and research, and also one of the main inspirations behind this dissertation.

This dissertation is an actual evolution from my past research on ballet dancers and the ballet world. Beginning with the idea that the body is given meaning and conceptualized through discursive practices, my master's thesis, *The Dancing Body* (1998), sought to examine the ways in which ballet dancers *see* the body, *use* it and *speak* about it in order to

render a description of how the body is conceptualized within the ballet culture. The primary motivation behind this work was to demonstrate how the meaning of the body is socially or culturally constructed through discourses and thus, is contingent. What emerges from this study is that the body in the ballet world is thought of as a vehicle of self-expression and all of the rituals and practices within this culture are designed in order to form these intentionally expressive bodies. Furthermore, the construction of this conception is also necessitated by the art itself. The ballet dancers are trained based on their social conception of the body and are taught the formal rituals and practices—the language and vocabulary of the art. Each technical move has a name and an aesthetic requirement and is very much entrenched in ballet's strict ideals.

My master's thesis was inspired by the theoretical assumption that the body is, firstly, socially constructed through discursive practices and, secondly, is also a virtual microcosm of a culture, or society. The idea of the symbolic body, which is described through the works of Hertz, Mauss and Douglas, and which is developed from the idea that through an examination of how the body is treated and maintained in a society, we can gain an understanding of its social value. Much of our present day understanding of the body as socially constructed develops from, and is influenced by, the naturalistic view of the body. From this paradigm emerges the idea that the body is a pre-social, biological entity upon which "the superstructures of the self and society are founded" (Shilling 1993:41). Based on the premise that there exists a natural biological body with natural tendencies, naturalists believe that the body is coerced into a mode of conduct reflective of the ideological foundation of the society from which it emerges. In other words, if one were to study the way a body is managed and maintained in any social system, one would draw out the norms and values of the system itself.

Having roots in the Durkheimian school of thought, Robert Hertz in 1909, Marcel Mauss in 1934, and much later Mary Douglas in 1960's and 1970's, develop a tradition which sought to examine the relations between the body and society, in terms of 'body symbolism' (Polhemus 1978). They considered the social aspects of body expression in order to illustrate the rules and the categories that are constituted through the 'social body', or society. Hertz,

Mauss and Douglas applied Durkheim's ideas on the social construction of knowledge to the study of the body. In essence, they argued that the ways in which the body is viewed and treated in society reflects the rules and values inscribed in the social order.

Hertz (1973 [1909] ) turned his attention to the study of the left/right body symbolism arguing that there was a tendency towards the primacy of the right hand in 'primitive' religious belief systems. The right hand was accorded a privileged status because it was categorized as sacred, while the left hand was despised because it was affiliated with the profane. Mauss (1973 [1934] ) on the other hand, examined everyday 'techniques of the body' such as running, sleeping and walking, arguing that these so-called 'natural' bodily behaviors are learnt through formal and informal educational processes within a given culture. This concern with bodily techniques reemerges many years later in Pierre Bourdieu's idea on bodily hexis and habitus, in Foucault's work on technologies of the body and in Goffman's analysis of everyday bodily behavior in public places. Both Hertz and Mauss were concerned to incorporate the 'natural' aspects of the body into their accounts. Hertz argued that biological considerations should be included in the study of the body in society. Mauss, argued that the analysis of the bodily techniques should involve physical and psychological elements as well as the social.

Mary Douglas, best known for her work in *Natural Symbols* (1973), explains that the body is a natural symbol of society or receptor of social meaning. Here she develops her theory of two bodies where she explains that "the two bodies are the self and society: sometimes they are so near as to be almost merged; sometimes they are far apart...the tension between them allows the elaboration of meaning" (Douglas 1973:112). As we explained above, the human body is given meaning by the society through which it emerges and that one can search for the meaning of a society through its conception. Douglas explains that, "the social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived" (Douglas 1973:93), thereby, suggesting that there are various forces which maintain notions of the body. She suggests that, "the physical experience of the body, always modified by social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society" (Douglas 1973:93). The ideas about the human body, then, in this respect, are linked to prevalent ideas of the social

body and thus, the two bodies are involved in a complex interplay. In her earlier book, *Purity and Danger* [1978 (1966)], Douglas explains that, “the body provides a basic theme for all symbolism” (Douglas 1978:163-4). It represents the social system from which it emerges and therefore, represents its people. She says, “Just as it is true that everything symbolizes the body, so it is equally true that the body symbolizes everything else” (Douglas 1978: 122). Hence, we can see a clear reflection of society in the human body and thus, in turn, clearly expressing the social body. The body, then, for Douglas, is determined by each individual culture as well as the symbolism it carries. The human body then, is a metaphor for an entire society.

Although, the naturalistic view of the body has influenced popular images of the human body, contemporary social theorists have become more interested in “ideas and theories that are based on the premise that the body is a receptor, rather than generator, of social meanings” (Shilling 1993:70). The term *social constructionism* is used as the theoretical scaffolding under which theories that suggest the body is shaped and invented by society are situated (Shilling 1993). Although there are varying social constructionist views on the body, they tend to agree that an analysis of the body as a purely biological phenomenon is unsatisfactory. They are more interested in how the body’s character and meaning is shaped by society—how it is managed and controlled. They are generally interested in the social forces at work in the development of the body as a social product, and cannot see how it is even possible to speak of the body as a biological phenomenon. When I was working out the theoretical basis for my master’s thesis, I was drawn to the idea that the conception of the body is socially determined. With this in mind, I researched the varying theories that focused on social forces at work in shaping a culture’s knowledge of the body. I was drawn specifically to Michel Foucault’s work and his phenomenological questioning of the body. His interest in ‘how’ our knowledge of the body was shaped and maintained as well as his focus of the discourses that shape our understanding of the body, were the actual inspiration behind my master’s work.

In the following section I will, firstly, explain the influence Foucault’s work has had on the body in social theory. Secondly, I will explain how the Foucauldian view of the body was

the foundation upon which, and through which, my master's thesis was developed. Finally, I will explain how a Foucauldian theorization of the body allowed for a limited understanding of the body in ballet. Hence, I will end this section through a reevaluation of the body and of my own past work, thereby, laying the groundwork for what is to follow in this dissertation.

### 1.2.1 Foucault's body

Michel Foucault is one of the most influential political and cultural theorists who has had an enormous impact on the Western contemporary theorization of the body. Through his critical method of historical analysis—his 'genealogical' methodology—Foucault traces the emergence of certain practices, concepts, forms of knowledge, social institutions and techniques of government, which have contributed to shaping modern European culture, in order to diagnose the parameters within which our present day existence is lived. That is, by asking 'how' we have arrived at certain knowledge and therefore, negotiate our daily practices around this knowledge, he illustrates that our present is a constructed evolutionary process and therefore, by virtue of this, Foucault dispenses of any kind of possible idea of human nature. For Foucault, the idea of a 'natural' or 'biological' body, or any universal claims to truths, is replaced by a radical anti-humanist stance and opposes any consideration that human nature exists.

The central premise to Foucault's historical studies is to unravel the power relations between specific scientific disciplines and particular social practices. In particular, his treatment of the relations between power, the body and sexuality, has been highly influential in feminist scholarship. The idea that both the body and sexuality are cultural constructs rather than natural phenomena has made a significant impact on the work of feminists' critique. What makes Foucault's contribution unique and interesting to those theorists wanting to break from any idea of human nature, is his genealogical analysis in that it is, "a form of history which can account for the constitution of knowledges, discourses, domains of objects etc. without having to make reference to a subject which is either transcendental in relation to the field of events or runs in its empty sameness throughout history" (Foucault 1980: 149). Instead of assuming that changes throughout history can be explained by the

intentions and aims of individual actors, genealogy investigates the complex and shifting network of relations between power, knowledge and the body which produce historically specific forms of subjectivity. Genealogy, therefore, or rather, genealogical studies, are forms of social critique of the present and seek to determine possibilities for social change and ethical transformation of ourselves.

One of the central threads of Foucault's genealogy of the present is an analysis of the transformations in the nature and functioning of power which mark the transition to modern society. Foucault's genealogy of modern power challenges the commonly held assumption that power is an essentially negative, repressive force that operates purely through the mechanisms of law, taboo and censorship. According to Foucault, this 'juridico-discursive' conception of power (Foucault 1978: 82) has its origins in the practices of power characteristic of pre-modern societies. In such societies, he claims, power was centralized and coordinated by a sovereign authority that exercised absolute control over the population through the threat or open display of violence. From the seventeenth century onwards, however, as the growth and care of populations increasingly became the primary concerns of the state, new mechanisms of power emerged which centered around the administration and management of 'life'. This new form of 'bio-power', on one hand, is concerned with efficient government of the population as a whole and focuses on the management of the life processes of the social body. It involves the regulation of phenomena such as birth, death, sickness, disease, health, sexual relations and so on. On the other hand, that which Foucault labels 'disciplinary power', targets the human body as an object to be manipulated and trained.

The body is a central concern in Foucault's critique of history and to his key concern with subjectivity. For Foucault, the body is not fixed nor stable and generated through various discourses and practices. Shifts in discourses about the body places it in a relative state. In *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1* (1978), Foucault demonstrates a concern with a "'history of bodies' and the manner in which what is most material and vital in them has been invested" (Foucault 1978:152). That is, he does not only concern himself with the meaning and value imposed on the body through "the modern technologies of power" (ibid). In this first volume, Foucault describes how, in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, sex and



sexuality because crucial political issues in a society concerned with managing and directing the life of individuals and populations. He explains that the spread of bio-power, which proliferated during this period, is directly and intimately connected to the social science discourses on sex and sexuality. These discourses, he claims, tended to understand sex as an instinctual biological and psychic drive with deep links to identity and thus, had the potential to have far-reaching effects on sexual and social behavior of individuals. By inciting sex to discourse, sexual drive was placed into the category of either 'normal' or 'pathological'. These discourses delineated what was considered healthy sexual behavior or perverted sexual behavior and by establishing the parameters around these categories, various political technologies aimed at treating, reforming or even sanctioning that which was considered deviant or pathological. This was considered to be in the interest of both individual and the society. Through his analysis, sex and the body become the principle targets of power/knowledge relations, transmitted through discourse. The rise of modernity was accompanied by a shift in discourses that produced a profound impact on the construction of the modern subject. The target and object shifted away from the 'body as flesh' to the 'mind'. In traditional society the body was controlled through brute force, however, the body of the modern subject is incited to discourse and managed and maintained through strategies of surveillance.

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977), Foucault studies the practices of discipline and training associated with disciplinary power. He suggests that these practices were first cultivated in isolated institutional settings such as prisons, military establishments, hospitals, factories and schools but were gradually applied more broadly as techniques of social regulation and control. The key feature of disciplinary power is that it is exercised directly on the body. Disciplinary practices subject bodily activities to a process of constant surveillance and examination that enables a continuous and pervasive control of individual conduct. The aim of these practices is to simultaneously optimize the body's capacities, skills and productivity and to foster its usefulness and docility: "What was then being formed was a policy of coercions that act on the body, a calculated manipulation of its elements, its gestures, its behavior. The human body was entering a machinery of power that explores it, breaks it down and rearranges it... Thus, discipline produces subjected and practiced bodies, "docile"

bodies” (Foucault 1977: 138-9). It is not, however, only the body that disciplinary techniques target. Foucault presents disciplinary power as productive of certain types of subject as well. In *Discipline and Punish*, he describes the way in which the central technique of disciplinary power - constant surveillance - which is initially directed toward disciplining the body, takes hold of the mind as well to induce a psychological state of ‘conscious and permanent visibility’ (Foucault 1977: 201). In other words, perpetual surveillance is internalized by individuals to produce the kind of self-awareness that defines the modern subject. Hence, for Foucault, in modern society the behavior of individuals and groups is increasingly and pervasively controlled through standards of normality which are disseminated by a range of assessing, diagnostic, prognostic and normative knowledges such as criminology, medicine, psychology and psychiatry. Modern individuals, moreover, become the agents of their own ‘normalization’ to the extent that they are subjected to, and become invested in, the categories, classifications and norms propagated by scientific and administrative discourses which purport to reveal the ‘truth’ of their identities.

Foucault’s view, that the body is a product of discursive practices, has contributed further to the idea that the body is a socially constructed phenomenon. For Foucault, the far-reaching effect of social ‘structures’ determines our experience of the body and thus, exists beyond the reach of the individual (Shilling 1993: 71). Foucault has also contributed to the concerns that Shilling has of sociologists having “traditionally adopted a dual approach to the body, and have rarely focused explicitly on the body’s social importance” (ibid). He claims that “social constructionists’ views challenge this tendency by bringing society into the body” (ibid). Although, social constructionists have given the body social importance, Shilling argues that if it is true that the body is “indeed shaped by society, then its study can no longer be left entirely in the hands of other disciplines” (ibid). He says: “By highlighting the ways in which social roles, meanings and resources can be seen as determining the body, and how it becomes important in society, social constructionist views have much to offer a distinctive approach to the body in sociology” (Shilling 1993: 71-2). Shilling’s argument is further extended to the question of what exactly is this body that the social constructionists postulate as having important social significance and which, is constructed and generated by society? What is meant by this ‘body’? And why is it that the body is “named as a theoretical space”

yet “left uninvestigated” (ibid)? Furthermore, Shilling contends that, “it is as if the body itself does not exist, or is constantly pushed to one side by this perspective in focus on other phenomenon” (ibid). For Foucault, the body is not only given meaning by discourse, it is also “wholly constituted by discourse” (ibid) and in this respect, the body as a material and biological entity disappears into the realm of language.

Foucault’s analysis of the body as being incited to discourse and as a “highly malleable phenomena which can be invested with various and changing forms of power” (Shilling 1993: 79), suggests that the body is wholly constituted by external forces and given meaning imposed by discourse. The body does not tend to exist as a real or concrete object for Foucault, rather it is constituted in a disembodied form. It has no tangible physical connection to the world around it nor does it seem to be responsive in any way, shape, or form to the discursive power relations that constructs, maintains and manages it. His notion of the body is a virtual *tabula rasa* and, as both Turner and Shilling argue, Foucault ignores the *phenomenology* of embodiment and ignores the sensual relationship the individual’s body has with the world. The Foucauldian body does not engage in a responsive or dialogical relationship with the very discourse that affects it, nor does it react back to affect discourse.

Although, Foucault’s ‘history of bodies’ has had an enormous impact on Western contemporary theory, his lack of consideration of the individual’s embodied experience with the world tends to confine the body to the realm of linguistic categorization, rather than to the realm of dynamic, physical and sensorial engagement with the world. On one level, Foucault’s theory of the body allows one to think about how a culture or a society might generate a conception of the body based on economical, political and cultural necessity. It was for this reason that I based the work in my master’s thesis on the Foucauldian view of the body. Although, it was only after a careful reevaluation of my research data, and a reassessment of Foucault’s theory, did I discover that a more profound analysis was in order. As I explained earlier, my master’s thesis set out to articulate the ballet world’s and dancer’s conception of the body. Through in-depth life story interviews designed to find out how dancers *see* the body, *use* the body and *speak* about the body, my research drew out and described their shared conception of the body. As I looked more carefully at the interviews

and thought about the stories that were told to me, I discovered that the social construction of the body was limited as a theory and did not leave room for a theory of embodiment. The interviews revealed a very interesting and complex transformation process where the dancers' lived experiences were being expressed. It was obvious that further inquiry into the formation and transformation of the ballet dancer would lead us to a more in-depth analysis of their relationship with their bodies, their social environment and the strict and rigorous training demands of the ballet world. Understanding their formation from the very place they stand—from within their bodies, through their bodies and with their bodies, can teach us much about the relationship of the human being and their bodies. The social constructionist view of the body, which is quite prevalent in sociology or even anthropology, does not take into consideration that humans 'are' in fact bodies, rather, they tend to think of humans as 'having' bodies instead. To think of the body as something that represents or symbolizes society is legitimate, however, this only attends to one aspect of the body. It is also important to ask what it is like to be a body in the world. For Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962), for example, human beings are embodied subjectivities and any analysis of the relation of the self to the world has to begin from the fundamental fact that we are embodied. The body is not simply a house for the mind, rather, it is through our bodies that we are conscious of the world, and it is through our lived experience of our bodies that we perceive of, are informed by, and interact with the world around us.

The ballet dancer spends almost all of their waken hours completely aware of their bodies. They are fully present in their embodied experience, fully conscious of the constructed bodily ideals, which emerge out of the ballet world, and fully consumed by their desire and passion for ballet. Their entire experience of their formation and transformation is (as will be developed further on) held within their bodies, and through it become masters of embodiment. It is for this reason that I have chosen to study ballet dancers. Through this dissertation, then, I hope to bring to sociology a study that might ignite more interest in embodiment. Through the work of Merleau-Ponty, and in addition Mikhail Bakhtin and George Herbert Mead, I will describe how ballet dancers are fully engaged and fully active in the creative process which transforms not only their bodies but their entire self into works of

art. The details of this research—the questions, theoretical propositions and methodology—will be developed in chapter 2.

The main point of the preceding discussion was to situate this dissertation and its intention within the sociology of the body. As I mentioned earlier, this study will also make a contribution to dance studies and to the sociology of dance. Therefore, in the following section I will begin by explaining why the study of dance has been marginalized, followed by a literature review on the kinds of studies that have emerge from dance studies. Finally, I will situate this study in the dance literature in order to illustrate how a sociological study of dance and dancers can make an important contribution to dance studies.

### 1.3 Towards a sociology of dance:

The study of dance, particularly that of modern Western society, has, for the most part, been absent from the social sciences and cultural studies research; it has, in fact, occupied a marginal role in much academic thought. Dance criticism, dance history, dance studies, and the anthropology of dance have, however, over time contributed a diverse array of writing on the subject; the development of a clear and systematic scholarship of dance has, nonetheless, remained elusive. One of the main problems in researching dance is actually finding a suitable and available body of reference material produced within the various social science disciplines. It is rather odd that a discipline like sociology, for example, would have neglected an area of research that is undoubtedly a cultural product and which is actually situated in our cultural tradition.

Dance, as either performance art or as leisure activity, is a site with a viable potential to flourish and inspire new and innovative scholarly writing. The study of gender differences and the body, for example, has occupied a central place in feminist writing yet few have realized how dance forms and dance context within particular socio-cultural environments can in fact speak of and to a variety of subjects including gender differences and the body. One would expect the fact that physical behavior is a socio-cultural phenomenon, that an individual's first experience of his or her social surroundings is via bodily manipulation, and

that the most fundamental foundation of being a member of a particular society are inevitably corporal (Polhemus 1993:6), would be enough encouragement to catapult a discipline like sociology into a site such as dance. That being said, it is important to note that my work has and will continue to respond to this intellectual blind spot with hopes that I might demonstrate that dance can provide a rich resource for sociology. Furthermore, sociology may bring forth a new understanding of dance that might have been overlooked by dance research itself.

Over the past several years, the body and dance, particularly performance dance, have become the central theme in my work. My focus on dance stems from an interest in the non-verbal communicative system of dance which inevitably draws into its analysis the role of the body; at the most fundamental level of analysis dance and the body are deeply intertwined and generate many provocative questions on both corporal experience and lived experience. Bodily conduct, movement, gestures, stance, muscle tonus, and so forth are saturated with symbolic meaning; they have the capacity to transmit all sorts and various levels of socio-cultural information including, most importantly, those meanings which exceed the limits of verbal language (Polhemus 1993: 6). Furthermore, it is a physical style system, which embodies what it means to be a member of a particular society (Polhemus 1993:7). The formation of the classical ballet dancer, their bodily and lived experiences and their membership, which are dependent upon the integration of this particular culture's: daily rituals and practices, the learning of the physical vocabulary and language, the formation of the dancer's body and of the dancer in accordance with an idealized physical style system, the '*physical self-expressing*' of the dancer, and the appropriation of, and attachment to, the particularities of the classical ballet world, are the principle motivating factors from which this dissertation will extend. Although my work focuses exclusively on performance dance, more specifically, the artists themselves and their social context, it is nonetheless important to set the scene by introducing the range of dance scholarship produced overtime, thereby, situating this dissertation in the larger-scope-of-things. It is, therefore, important to note that the study of dance is not traditionally seen in sociology, however, its marginalization by sociology, subcultural analysis and feminism has been topicalized since the 1990's (Polhemus 1993, Thomas 1993, Ward 1993) and is worth discussing here. Since my work

focuses on the classical ballet world and the ballet dancer, I will review the pertinent literature and show how my study will both fill a hole and contribute to a greater understanding of the ballet dancer's lived experiences.

### 1.3.1 Dance studies

Francis Rust's (1969) functionalist analysis on the history of dance, Edit Cope's (1976) interactionist account of group dynamics of a small dance troop, Janet Wolff's (1975) study on the sociology of art with a passage on the sociology of dance, are the scarce few sociological studies on dance produced from the late 1960's and 70's. Peter Brinson's (1983) attempt to set out the parameters of a sociology of dance from within the confines of a developing dance scholarship in the UK did not have a prodigious impact at the time yet it, nonetheless, contributed to a space that at present seems to be steadily expanding. Throughout the 1970's and 80's the emerging fascination and interest in popular culture within cultural analysis prompted such studies as Frith's (1978) work on the social role and importance of dance within youth culture. Although cultural studies and cultural analysts (Redhead 1993a, 1993b, 1993c, 1990, 1998; McRobbie 1993; Rietveld 1993; Jordan 1995; Bennett 2000) have shown an interest in popular dance forms such as: raves, disco, break dancing, just to name a few- basically, dancing as a leisure activity- "it has not ventured into the enclaves of 'high' art and has thus maintained a virtual silence on performance dance" (Thomas 1995:4); Peter Wollen's (1987) "Diaghilev's Ballet Russe Productions to the aesthetics of modernism", stands as an exception (ibid). The neglect of dance altogether in sociology and latent interest in cultural studies, Helen Thomas (1995) explains, " is that the specificity of dance and, hence, its difference has not been addressed in a sustained and systematic manner" (Thomas 1995:4). For the most part, dance studies draws upon the theoretical and methodological insights generated from anthropology, history, sociology and cultural studies, in order to develop a more cultural and textual basis for studying dance. Susan Foster (1986), for example, draws on cultural critics such as Foucault and Roland Barthes for her intertextual analysis of the work of four choreographers. Ann Daly's (1987) discussion of the dancer's body in Balanchine's work relied on both feminist and semiotic notions of representation. Cynthia Novack's (1990) anthropological analysis of contact improvisation is influenced by developments in cultural studies. Christy Adair's book (1992)

*Women and Dance* also draws from cultural studies, feminist cultural criticism and sociology. According to Helen Thomas (1995) these mainstream academic publications indicates an emergent area of interest for both the social sciences and cultural sciences.

In her book *Dance, Modernity & Culture* (1995), Helen Thomas, who one can call an expert in the sociology of dance, sets out a case for generating a systematic approach to the sociology of dance. She suggests that, "as dance is simultaneously a feature of the socio-cultural context of its emergence, creation and performance and a reflexive practice realized through the medium of the body...such an approach needs to be interdisciplinary in character (Thomas 1995: 3)." Illustrated by means of a case study focusing on the emergence and development of American Modern dance, Thomas typifies the development and establishment of modernism in the arts in America and its decline and the subsequent emergence of postmodernism. The blurring of lines between the traditional boundaries of 'high' art and popular culture in terms of form and context- a tendency which can be observed in the other arts and between academic disciplines- is, Thomas says, "a feature of much new or postmodern dance" (Thomas 1995: 3). Although not all people in Western society participate in the evening leisure rituals of social dance nor train in performance dance, it is nonetheless a cultural product which can be located within our Western tradition and which should somehow fall under the gaze of sociology. Thomas argues that one of the problems in analyzing dance from a sociological perspective "...is that it expresses itself non-verbally" (Thomas 1995: 6). The body is the primary instrument and means of expression and representation in dance in the West. The key to understanding sociology's neglect of dance has everything to do with the way in which the body and dance have been perceived within Western culture (Thomas 1995: 6). The privileging of the mind over the body has varied over time and throughout culture (Synnott 1993). Descartes inscription of the mind/body dualism has been, however, the central most important factor in classical thought. Thomas explains:

Rationality takes precedence over emotions, idealism over materialism, culture over nature, objectivity over subjectivity. In a rationalised and technocratic culture such as ours, the mind and the body stand in binary opposition, with the former being placed under the category of culture and the latter under that of nature.



...While we think that speech as an exemplar of language and culture can cover over the 'real' attitude of the speaker, body movement, it is thought, does not; it reveals it. Here speech becomes the representation and body movement the material reality.

...But the representation/reality, culture/nature, mind/body associations of speech/movement are also to be found lurking in the background of theories that seek to call into question the Cartesian mind/body dualism and reinstate the power of the body into the cultural framework.

...The perceived nearness of the body to nature rather than culture has consequences for dance (Thomas 1995:6-8).

Sparshott's (1988) argues that dance was traditionally considered to be one of the oldest art forms and was believed to have existed prior to language and other arts. It was situated at the cusp of prehistory and humanity and as 'the art of gesture', it constituted the first symbolic activity from which language and music stemmed (Sparshott 1988:3). "Dance came to be associated with formal ritual and rites of passage, which, in turn, were viewed as essential components of 'traditional' structurally simple, pre-literate cultures" (Thomas 1995:8). Within modern sociological and anthropological texts, these forms of social organization are placed in binary opposition to those of 'modern' complex industrial cultures (ibid).

Over the past century anthropology, unlike sociology, has generated a substantial body of work on dance (Royce 1980); in general, the anthropology of dance focuses on dance within non-Western cultures. Anthropology, influenced by the increased development of critical dance studies and cultural studies, became theoretically sophisticated. Dance has been analyzed anthropologically by way of 'a symbolic structural, or semiotic approach' (Royce 1980:31), or as 'cognitive, sensory non-verbal communication' (Hanna 1979:57-82). The meaning of gender and sex in dance, with respect also to gay dancers, is explored in Hanna (1988). In a review article on dancing culture, Susan Leigh Foster (1992) recognizes that works by Jane Cowan (1990) on Greek dance and Cynthia Novack (1990) on contact improvisation in the United States apply the concept of culture that takes process and diversity into account, and regards dance as an embodied discourse, and the body as culturally constructed. In a recent article by Sally Ann Ness (1997), a Philippine neoethnic

ballet is analyzed in terms of postcolonialism and transnationalism. Although, anthropology's main focus was non-Western cultures, it nonetheless acquires quite a diverse array of research. One of the preoccupations, which emerged from this body of work, was the attempt to find a cross-cultural definition of dance. This concern developed into an almost impossible task due to the many kinds of meanings of dance from a purely aesthetic activity to one that primarily served some ritual function. In the case of classical ballet, for example, the fact that it is steeped with conventions and standards would not be a central problem. In contemporary ballet and dance, as in the work by William Forsythe, the boundary between dance and physical theatre is extended, challenging the definition of dance.

Sociology, unlike anthropology, was directed towards the problem of modernity. The main project was to understand the problem of 'social order' and how people operate in the rapidly changing social environment. As sociologists became increasingly preoccupied with analyzing major social issues, art and dance became increasingly marginalized (Thomas 1995: 9). Thomas argues that if the arts have been neglected by sociology then dance has been neglected threefold: as an art, as a practice which places the body at the center of its discourse, and as an activity which is viewed as a predominantly feminine mode of expression and representation (Thomas 1995: 9). Furthermore, she contends that although anthropology extended itself to the realm of the body, classical sociology did not generate an analysis of the body in society. "The dualisms which enabled anthropology to direct its attention towards the body and dancing in traditional cultures, were contributory factors in sociology's neglect of the body and dance" (Thomas 1995:9) It is important to note, however, that sociology has taken interest in dance rituals where it involved youth or working class subcultures. Thomas suggest that in relation to dance, "subcultures is to dominant culture as primitive is to modern culture: a dangerous, exotic, non-rational, marginal 'other' " (Thomas 1995:10). Art is still very much a minor concern in sociology; fine arts, drama, literature and music are seen as forms that have made "significant contributions to the life of society, enriching its fabric and expressing the life and times" (Thomas 1995:11). "It is necessary that the art should occupy at the relevant time a culturally relevant position, or that the ideology of the art could be integrated with a culturally prevalent ideology" (Sparshott 1988:95). Sparshott argues that dance at no time has ever fulfilled the above criteria and for this reason

did not stimulate an interest nor generate a significant body of philosophical literature and, as Thomas argues, sociological literature either. Focused on the problematic character of modern industrial society, sociology persists in neglecting dance even though there does not seem to be a forthright articulation of its reasons. However, as Sparshott (1988) points out, the fact of neglect is not as important as the consideration of what has occurred to bring the neglect into focus. It remains that dance whether performance art or leisure activity, whether 'high' art or popular culture, it is without dispute, a 'social fact' (Thomas 1995: 11) and as such is an appropriate object of sociological inquiry. However, if sociology is to make headway and address its neglect of dance, certain shifts in its discourse would have to take place (Thomas 1995: 11). Work like that of Helen Thomas' offers a sociological approach to the study of performance dance in Western cultures and provides a concrete working model for empirical study; it contributes to the development and expansion of a space allowing for such recognition to take place. As it was mentioned above, Thomas explains that one of the major problems in analyzing dance is that it expresses itself non-verbally. "In a rationalised and word oriented culture, the non-verbal also comes under scrutiny of rationalism" (Thomas 1995:21). Implicate in the wording used to describe the form of communication of dance- non-verbal- is its difference vis-a-vis the dominant mode of communication- the verbal (Thomas 1995:21). Although, sociology has approached dance extrinsically in the past, it is possible to see the specificity of art and view dance as a reflexive bodily practice which "inheres sets of emergent meanings (the aesthetic dimension)" (Thomas 1995:21). Thomas' intention then is to "generate an approach that seeks to elucidate these meanings and thereby preserve dance's reflexive character" (Thomas 1995:21).

As we have seen so far, there is very little or no guidance on dance from within the discipline of sociology. We are grateful, however, that such people as O'Neill (1985), Shilling (1993), Synnott (1993), Turner (1984) have contributed to the development of sociology of the body- an area which sociology has been slow in topicalising- and work like that of Helen Thomas' (1993) has begun to encourage others to contribute to this fairly new space. Given the upsurge of interest on the topic of the body in a range of disciplines, the research of dance practices has increased as a relevant site of inquiry. In Thomas's most recent contribution to the sociology of dance, *The Body, Dance and Cultural Theory* (2003),

she integrates the field of cultural studies with the sociology of the body. In so doing, she demonstrates in a very comprehensive manner, the relevance and sheer richness of studying dance. She opens up the field to those social and cultural theorists interested in the body and who have not ventured into the realm of dance. Thomas's earlier work and attempt to highlight dance as a viable and interesting cultural phenomenon has matured and through it she produces an excellent synthesis of the theorization of the body with the various areas of dance studies. The recent multidisciplinary trend is highlighted and encouraged in this book; Thomas skims the outer limits of established academic disciplines in order to show how many of them have in fact begun to take an interest in dance. The blurring of boundaries between academic disciplines has, in fact, made it easier to draw dance into their discourse. Ironically, as Thomas explains, the erosion of boundaries has also affected the boundaries within dance scholarship as well.

As we have witnessed post-structuralism, postmodernism and feminism instigate their respective attacks on the human subject, the enlightenment project and patriarchy as a direct reaction towards the 'cries of representation' and certainly justice- feminists have turned their attention and focus on the body. In a post-Foucauldian era, the centrality of the body as a site of social control has stimulated a discourse around the 'writing and rewriting' of the body and around the objectification of woman's bodies through numerous post-structuralist feminists like Luce Irigaray and Helen Cixous. As Helen Thomas (1995) suggests: "By elucidating how bodies have been objectified and subjectified through a range of discourses, post-structuralism and postmodernism have contributed further to the possibility of dance being afforded a more substantial cultural voice" (Thomas 1995: 20). The body in Western theatrical dance is the 'primary vehicle of self-expression' (Khudaverdian 1998) and its representational form, at least in the nineteenth century, has been associated with the feminine body (Thomas 1995). It is interesting to note Thomas' suggestion that through the material rewriting of the dancing body, modern dancers such as Martha Graham and Doris Humphrey were breaking through the dominant symbolic order of both dance and language (Thomas 1995). Their iconoclastic image worked against tradition in an aesthetic modernist fashion. Hence, such dance scholars as Adair (1991), Dempster (1993), Foster (1986), Sanchez-Colberg (1993), have been drawn towards the discursive spaces generated for dance,

the body, and women by postmodernism and post-structuralism; this excitement, in a sense, has afforded dance the possibility of a new found legitimacy. As Thomas would agree, I do not want to suggest that the analysis of dance should be launched from within a postmodern/post-structural sociology. However, it is nonetheless important to note the recent shifts in the social sciences that have been motivated by the challenge to distribute power in this post-Foucault era. Thomas (2003) takes this opportunity to “harness the interest in the body in social and cultural analysis to the concern with body in dance studies” (Thomas 2003: 2).

Ethnomethodology has also become a visible strand running through the studies of popular culture and due to the crossover between disciplines, has found its way to dance research as well. Since dance anthropology has tended to use this method to analyze dance in the context of culture (see Royce 1980; Spencer 1985; Kaeppler 1991; Grau 1993; Thomas 1997) and has influenced other areas of dance studies. Many recent dance ethnographers and feminists interested in dance (Cowan 1990; Novack 1990; Sklar 1991, 1999, 2000; Ness 1992, 1996, 1997; Gore 1999) have drawn from the feminist theory and other postmodernists in order to critique some of the more traditional ethnographic approaches. Much of their research is influenced by feminists who have challenged the very foundation of traditional ethnographic methodology within anthropology, thereby changing the character of this method. Dance ethnographers (Cowan 1990; Novack 1990, 1993; Sklar 1991; Ness 1992; Browning 1995) raise these kinds of issues by incorporating into the research arena their reflexive self-awareness as experiencing, moving and dancing bearers. Although dance anthropology has been around for well over a century (Hanna 1980; Royce 1980; Kaeppler 1991; Reed 1998) in the 1960's and 1970's there was an emergence of dance anthropologists in America who were influenced by the anti-ethnocentric mode of research (Thomas 2003). During the 1970's dance ethnographers challenged the commonly held view that “dance is a form of natural (essentialist) behavior which, with its roots in ‘primitive’ cultures, has developed into a fully fashioned, stylized western theatre dance, commonly regarded as the most advanced ‘civilized’ form” (Thomas 2003: 81). In so doing, the ethnocentric hierarchical us/them mentality was challenged. For example, Joann Kealiinohomoku (1970) argued that ballet should be treated as a form of ethnic dance and thus dared and challenged

us to look at ourselves with the self-knowledge of how we approach 'other' cultures. This classic paper directed the ethnographer 'at home' to study his or her own dance culture as if it were 'anthropologically strange' (Garfinkel 1967). Dance anthropologists (Novack 1990, 1993; Koutsouba 1999; Williams 1999) have turned their anthropological gaze towards their own familiar dance cultures and dance ethnographers (Kaepler 1985; Novack 1990; Sklar 1991; Grau 1993) embraced the cultural relativism implied in Kealiinohomoku's 1970's argument. Dance and movement ethnographers in the 1980's and 1990's (Cowan 1990; Novack 1990; Sklar 1991; Grau 1993; Farnell 1994) also followed suit. "The dance ethnographer is constituted as a culturally situated embodied individual who has to approach the area of study in a self-reflexive manner" (Thomas 2003: 81).

So far in this section we have discussed the marginalization of dance from sociology and have also showed how the recent shift towards multidisciplinary studies has opened up dance to numerous possibilities in academic discourse. Although we have discussed ethnomethodology as the preferred method in dance research, we will take up this discussion in more detail in chapter 2. Since, the object of research in this study are ballet dancers, in the next section I will review the pertinent studies on ballet and ballet dancers and in so doing situate this dissertation within the field of dance research. We have already discussed where it is situated within the sociology of the body and as I situate it in dance studies and research, I will briefly discuss how these disciplines can benefit from a sociological study on dance.

#### 1.4 Ballet scholarship

Throughout its four hundred-year history, classical ballet's historical evolution and emergence in the Western world has been very well documented in numerous history of ballet books, academic journals, films, documentary pieces, dance magazines and so on. The preservation of the history of ballet—its continual evolution and movement as well as its social history and cultural impact—are central to history of dance scholars' research. Its long-standing tradition along with its cultural rituals and practices are very much alive in ballet studios around the world; all ballet schools and all ballet companies participate in the daily ceremony and celebration of ballet's aesthetic form and through this daily ritual, manage and maintain the language and vocabulary which is at the very root of its form (this will be

explained and described in more detail in chapter 3). Both its historical activities and its performance activities are diligently recorded and thus, provide a substantial array of information about the ballet world in general. Characterized as a hermetic culture, however, the inner workings of the classical ballet world—that is, the dancer’s “lived experiences” and “bodily experiences”—have been left virtually unexplored by scholars. In the following section, I will review of the pertinent literature on ballet and show how the ballet dancer’s world and life is seldom researched. Academics, more precisely, feminists, have taken interest in ballet as a cultural product that generates images which contribute to the unequal power relationships between men and women. Most of the studies have more to do with gender representation than it does with the ballet dancer’s “lived-experiences” and “bodily experiences”; ballet dancers’ formation and transformation into the mythical figures that have been criticized, has been virtually ignored.

#### 1.4.1 The Representation of the ballerina

Feminists have had a significant impact on cultural theory and the social sciences since the last 1980’s. Their influence has had a far-reaching effect on dance scholarship as well, and has, in effect, generated a discourse around the subject of the representation of women in Western theatrical dance. The fact that dance is generally dominated by women, feminists have taken an interest in the relationship between gender and dance and have turned their attention and criticism towards the analysis of the idealized ballet form, and on the construction of the ‘ballerina’ image.

One of the most influential approaches to the study of gender representation emerges from Laura Mulvey’s Freudian semiotic analysis of spectatorship and gender representation in Hollywood films. Mulvey’s 1975 essay argued that women in film are objectified and represented from the viewpoint of the male spectator. Whether the spectator is female or male, the idea that women are represented through the viewpoint of the ‘male gaze’ and are subjected to the male look, according to Mulvey, women in film are in effect passive up against this way of looking. She argued that the ‘male gaze’ is replicated in everyday life and perpetuates the unequal power relations between men and women. This theory on the ‘male

gaze’—although criticized for proposing an ahistorical, universal structure of male, heterosexual looking, and for not taking into account differences except for the Freudian male/female binary divide—was nevertheless welcomed by dance researchers. Throughout the late 1980’s and early 1990’s, dance scholars and feminists alike, appropriated this theory without much question (Thomas 1996: 73-84). For feminist critics in dance studies, this theory influenced their analysis of the way women were generally represented in theatre dance. For the most part, these critiques were directed towards classical ballet, where the emphasis was placed on the differences between the female and male form and on the evocation of the power relationship inherent in the ‘pas de deux’ form. Furthermore, feminists’ main target was on George Balanchine (neo-classical choreographer and artistic director of the New York City Ballet) who was held responsible for the ‘unnatural’ construction of the ‘perfect’ female form in ballet. His choreography and his obsession with female beauty provoked many feminist dance scholars to deconstruct the idealized ethereal female figure.

Ann Daly’s (1987) highly quoted study of *“The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers”*, for example, illustrated how George Balanchine’s ballerinas emerge from a patriarchal foundation. She addressed the problem that although feminists have been deconstructing representations of women in art, theatre, film, and so on, the classical female ballet dancer has been overlooked. “The issues surrounding the ballerina as a cultural icon of femininity have been left virtually unexplored in print and met with impatient, if polite, disinterest in most public discussion” (Daly 1987:8). She criticizes Balanchine’s idealized woman and claimed that ballet is misogynistic and “is one of our culture’s most powerful models of patriarchal ceremony” (ibid.). In her essay, *“Classical Ballet: A Discourse of Difference”* (1987/88), Daly problematizes the female form in ballet as having been inscribed as a representation of difference and furthermore, argues that it is this inscription that has entrapped the female form by the ‘male gaze’. Her argument is extended towards critical and scholarly writing for rationalizing this entrapment through the guise of “classicism” and “romanticism” and not confronting patriarchy in representation through the development of an alternative discourse of the female form.



Daly's 1987 paper provoked further attacks on ballet; concerns with the rigorous physical demands of the art form coupled with the idealization of the very slim, prepubescent, unreal female form, which caused many young dancers to starve themselves for the art, inspired further inquiries into the matter. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, feminists took issue with the increase in reported cases of anorexia nervosa as well as bulimia in young women. The 'Twiggy' image was scrutinized and this scrutiny was extended into the world of classical ballet. L.M. Vincent's 1979 book: *Competing With The Sylph*, for example, exposed the sacrifices girls and young women within the milieu would endure in pursuit of the ideal ballet body. A medical professional that worked with dance injuries, Vincent openly criticized the ballet form, as well as the schools and companies that promoted this ideal, and revealed how the ballet training system damages the dancer's body. The main objective of this book was to expose the medical problems in the ballet world. Although, pertinent, Vincent's attack on the ballet world does not question the ballet dancer's quest, rather, it is the ballet body as an ideal and the physical abuse endured by the dancer, that is the main target. This publication ignited a feminist backlash as their work continued to target the ideal ballet body.

Some of the feminist critics who held very strong opinions of the ballet form, however, argued that despite the stereotypical notions of women as fragile and needing the support of men, female ballet dancers endure the same physical demands as the male dancers. Cynthia J Novack (1993) in her essay "*Ballet, Gender and Cultural Power*" makes reference to her own experiences as a dancer in order to discuss gender in ballet. She challenges such views as Daly's and other feminists, who have described women in ballet as frail, delicate, beautiful objects, displayed and controlled by men. She explains the egalitarian rituals and practices—ballet exercises, vocabulary, and language—that are shared by both women and men. Furthermore, she argues that "*ballet allows for great achievement in a physical art by female performers*" (Novack 1993:39). Although, she attempts to develop a fair analysis on gender differences, she does conclude by explaining that ballet is seeped in tradition and the importance of tradition outweighs the desire for the reform of gender representations.

Systems of ballet training and performance have gained greater institutional support than any other dance form in numerous countries, support which involves schools, companies, producing organizations, the media and

government agencies. Ballet is considered the premier art dance form by governments of Europe, North America, Australia, and the former Soviet Union, and enjoys popularity in many other parts of the world. This institutional support means that ballet's ideas and practices gain cultural power, a power which attaches to the concepts of gender it defines (Novack 1993: 39).

Sociologist Janet Wolff (1983) questions whether it is possible to enjoy work that is ideologically troublesome. She looks to classical ballet as an example of art that is 'based on reactionary and sexist stories'. Although Wolff confesses to being distracted by her own critical reading of those kinds of ballets, she nonetheless agrees that it is still possible to enjoy the performance by appreciating the skill, design and choreography as part of the work. She suggests that one can watch a ballet and separate different aspects of its performance. If one rejects or ignores the representation of gender in ballet, one may still enjoy the choreographer's craft and the dancer's skills. Novack comments on Wolff's analysis and suggests that no viewer is 'wrong' from an anthropological standpoint. She says:

Wolff and I ....our responses are not merely personal idiosyncrasies or preferences; they engage both the ballet we watch and the ideological and institutional experiences of our lives.

Wolff follows an aesthetic theory about viewing art which allows her to dislike ballet's ideology of gender but appreciate the choreographer's craft and the performers' skills (Novack 1993:45).

The feminist project to discredit ballet's aesthetic form and physical training system, encouraged the publication of three note-worthy autobiographies—two Balanchine ballerinas who danced for The New York City Ballet Company and the other who failed to attain her dreams of becoming a star ballerina. Toni Bentley's: *Winter Season* (1982) and Gelsey Kirkland's: *Dancing on My Grave* (1986), which revealed the extraordinary daily life of being a Balanchine 'ballerina', and Joan Brady's: *The Unmaking Of A Dancer: An Unconventional Life* (1982), a true story biography of a ballet dancer's life, for the first time, publicly unveiled the world of classical ballet. Gelsey Kirkland's autobiography, for example, exposes the complexity of both the world of classical ballet and the position of the female dancer. In this book, Kirkland expresses her pain and emotional struggles; she reveals

the shattering story of how her dream to dance became a heartbreaking nightmare. She chronicles her love/hate relationship with ballet and tells the story of her tormented association with Balanchine and love affair with Russian ballet star, Mikhail Baryshnikov. At the age of fifteen Kirkland joined New York City Ballet where she was given her first principal role in 'Firebird'- a role that was created for her personally. At age seventeen she would leave New York City Ballet and join the American Ballet Theatre and soon after, rise to fame. This autobiography reveals Kirklands agonizing rise to fame and her unfortunate descent into drug abuse. Her tragic story of the pain she suffered in both her personal and public life, the detailed description of her severe eating disorder and drug addiction, and her struggle with her love for the dance, paved the way for other dancers to come forward and tell their stories as well. Kirkland's open criticism of the ballet world was a kind of sin of indiscretion. Although, many people, both inside and outside the ballet milieu, reacted to this story with much sympathy, to those who support the strict conventions of the ballet world, this was seen as a bitter attack. Whatever the result of Kirkland's candor, the fact remains that her life experiences in the world of classical ballet, highlights some of the interesting problems that a dancer endures within the milieu. Most importantly, it sheds some light on a lifestyle that is 'other' to most people and for the most part, incomprehensible to the 'outsider'. Furthermore, Kirkland's emotional 'telling' of her story and Brady's "Unmaking of a Dancer", for the first time, gave millions of young dancers the opportunity to hear a story that, in many respects, is so familiar to their own. Brady's open account of the sexism in ballet—the starvation of many female dancers and the submission to the male choreographer—took the ballet world to task opening it up to further criticism.

So far I have shown how dance scholarship is generally concerned with the social analysis of performance dance and representation, and its aesthetic value. Generally, academic essays on classical ballet tend to be about 'performance'—the onstage activity and the symbols and meanings it evokes. Unlike the anthropology of dance, which focuses mainly on the study of dance in non-Western cultures, dance studies researchers tend to study kinesthetic, which seeks to understand movement itself as a way of knowing, or semiotics, which studies the signs and symbols and what they mean. Most of the academic research on classical ballet, as I have already explained, deals primarily with representation and gender

issues. Other than the mainstream autobiographical publications by dancers themselves, the backstage world of classical ballet, with all of its potential, has barely been researched. The mystique of the ballet world and the ballet dancer, however, remains elusive.

Helena Wulff's (1998) book: *Ballet Across Borders: Career and Culture In The world of Dancers*, as Turner notes, is one of the only "specific empirical studies in sociology of Western theatrical dance and especially ballet" (Turner 2004: 98). What is interesting about this study is that it examines the backstage practices of the ballet dancer's life; it reveals the competition, camaraderie, sexual politics, intimacies and pressures of this closed world. This ethnographic research of four ballet companies: London's Royal Ballet, American Ballet Theatre, Royal Swedish Ballet and Ballett Frankfurt, examines how the careers of ballet dancers are made and unmade. Wulff's extensive fieldwork shifts the audience's perception from the fairy-tale world captured onstage to the far-removed experiences of the dancers themselves. This book is a kind of 'biography' of the power and politics that is at play in every ballet studio in the world. Whether you are in Frankfurt, Germany or London, England: the rituals and practices, the highly-strung nerves, constant fatigue, pain, injuries and eating disorders, are the same. The ballet world is a transnational phenomenon; dancers are constantly moving between companies, back and forth between classical ballet and contemporary dance, and ballet is now being transmitted across borders through film, television and video. Wulff details the effects of globalization on the dancers' lives and careers. In order to write the ballet culture's 'biography', Wulff spent years observing daily ballet classes, toured with the four companies, and became confidante to the dancers and choreographers. This multi-local ethnography describes and analyzes the culture and its social organization. The book traces the connection between the four companies in order to show how dancing careers are produced and reproduced in a transnational web of ideas, encounters and communications. Wulff's study took place in both 'old' and 'new' centers where she gathered information by way of professional and personal networks. Her investigation included an analysis of how dancers and other ballet people move between localities; she illustrates the patterns of mobility and notions of national ballet style. Furthermore, in relation to the issue of transnationality, Wulff compares how ballet is learned at national ballet schools affiliated with the national companies highlighted in her study. She

discusses the course of a ballet career from the audition process to breakthroughs, and to aging and retiring. She examines in great detail the everyday life of classical ballet companies—from the process of producing ballet performances, to the audience and critics. Her entire work is conducted backstage and generates important and insightful observations. Finally, by mapping-out how ballet people move around (especially on tours)—how they communicate through media and technology, and quite interestingly, how new forms of technology such as computers and videos, are, moreover, increasingly being used in contemporary dance productions, Wulff provides a rich and in-depth account of transnational connectivity in the ballet world.

Both Wulff's backstage research and the feminists' critique of the onstage image of the female ballerina, give very little attention to ballet dancers' perception of their own bodies and their relationship to the ballet form. Although Wulff does divert the attention to the backstage lives of the dancer and focuses mainly on their careers rather than simply on the representation of women, she does not delve deep enough into the social dynamics at work in the *formation* of ballet dancers' career. Her research focuses mainly on transnationalism and explicates, through her description of the uniqueness of this social group, some of the ballet worlds' interesting cultural symbols. Although Wulff gives very little attention to the body, her research is nevertheless an important contribution to the sociology of dance and, more specifically, to the study of Western theatrical dance, and her insights are without a doubt significant and necessary. Since there are very few empirical studies in this area, Wulff's work opens up the field to new and innovative research ideas and encourages further inquiries into the lives of ballet dancers.

This dissertation picks up the cue from Wulff and proceeds backstage as well. My interests, however, have more to do with the internal dynamics of this world and how the institutional rituals and practices are organized and put into place to *form* ballet dancers. The ballet dancer has clear and distinct social and physical markers which define them and which are indicative of their artistry and lives. Although feminists have criticized the construction of the ideal female ballet body, and although injurious as this art might be to ballet dancers, it is nonetheless fascinating to enter the minds, bodies and the world of ballet dancers that is, to

enter their embodied experience and shed light on their *formation* and *transformation*. As I will explain in more detail in chapter 2, I intend to focus on ballet dancers' process of *formation* from the point of view of the dancers themselves. Ballet dancers' specific socio-cultural experiences, dancers' 'experiencing' of the formalities, process of *formation*- that is, the creative negotiation of the ballet world's rigid institutionalized rituals and practices, shaping of the body to 'fit the form' and the complex interplay between the dancer, the body, the self and the institution- will be central to my inquiry.

Sociologist Sylvia Faure, in her book: *Apprendre Par Corps*, (2000) looks at the 'incorporation', or interiorization, of knowledge and competence in young amateur student dancers as well as the pre-professionals. She questions, firstly, the link between the body and language and secondly, the connection between the modes of 'incorporation' and the cognitive procedures of learning. Although, this is not necessarily an exhaustive study on the *formation* of the ballet dancer, Faure generates a study that seeks to understand how dancers come to know through their bodies and through various modes of learning within a particular context. She explains that within the body we can find traces of the past deposited and conserved. It is these traces that generate *savoir-faire* (know-how) in the dancer. This knowledge in the body, she suggests throughout the book, is conserved in the form of habits and is transmitted as common know-how, or *savoir-faire*. Such is the case in the highly specialized body techniques of the ballet world. The dancer, choreographer and dance instructor, are kinds of 'depositories' for this knowledge and through their work they transmit this knowledge from the past to the present; this allows for a continuum of this knowledge and know-how (*savoir et savoir-faire*) and also encourages innovation of movement and technique. It is suggested that the sources of teaching live within the body and spirit of these individuals. Faure proposes that the mode of corporeal learning is completely different from procedures of reflexive cognitive activities. The learning occurs through the body- through habits and physical knowledge. Faure's research, developed in the form of a study of consciousness- that is body consciousness, reminds us that what is learnt, comes to us through others, through the familiarization of certain usage in the world which are concomitant to the usage of language and thus engages forms of reflexivity. Her interests lie in how the dancer comes to know.

Faure's research sheds an important light on the ballet dancer's knowledge of their social world. Through Faure's study, we gain the understanding of how in formal learning situations the body is always a receptor of the entire inter-relational experience where the individual's comprehension and apprehension is constructed as well as their emotions and sentiments. Her main interest- through the comparison of various learning situations- is to gain an understanding of what exactly we learn 'par corps' in a social context of a particular experience. The learning context of dance allows us to see how physical gestures are trapped or caught by the body and learnt corporeally through a rapport with the space, with time and with others within a 'corps-à-corps' relationship. This, Faure contends, is an interaction of language, which sometimes requires a moment of consciousness or reflexivity. Body knowledge is not directly constructed, however, occurs progressively; through the perfecting of the movement it becomes fixed in memory- in motor-sensory skills and in kinesthetic. Hence, the main object of Faure's study is to cease the manner by which the process of 'incorporation', or interiorization, occurs within the dancer's training- how they come to know and know-how.

This analysis of the learning context of the dancer was studied through the comparison of two dance forms—classical ballet and contemporary dance. The research compared the initial formation of amateur dancers ages six to twenty in a number of contexts. The observation was maintained over a period of seven years and data collected was of a qualitative nature. A total of eighty-seven individuals (teachers, students, choreographers, and the student's parents) were analyzed and fifty-two dance sessions were observed and some video taped. With this data, Faure was able to establish a connection between the observed configurations, the institutional structures and the ethics which furnished the rules of teaching dance and which equally generated through the choreography the artistic conventions which orient the dancer's work. Furthermore, socialization within the dance milieu and within their family structures was explored. What was concluded in this study was that the analysis of the process of 'incorporation' relies on the idea that practices and individual's manners are rooted in the past; they are each receptors of this knowledge and generators of habits and of know-how. Furthermore, Faure illustrates that the manners, the modes of thinking, the

competence, and the socialization of the individual is connected to different modes of 'incorporation' and interiorization depending on practices and their context. In dance practices, she explains, 'Apprendre Par Corps' does not rely exclusively on practical procedures, however, takes place in a silent communication of 'corps-à-corps'. Finally, modes of 'incorporation' depend on forms of *savoir et savoir-faire* which do not follow a general rule but which correspond to all situations of corporeal learning. In dance, modes of learning generate motor competence, however, it is also that which forms and deposits morals through the expression of judgement, of evaluation and appreciation. Aesthetic values and ethics, and the motor principals are 'incorporated' in techniques of dance, which is situated and appropriated, body and soul, by the participant. Through the practice they are driven to individualize; individualization, she suggests, depends largely on the perception that others bring to them. This plays a crucial role in the 'making' or 'breaking' of the dancer's careers. The understanding that the process of ballet dancers *formation* relies heavily on the social context, on history and the social situation, Faure's study encourages this dissertation to seriously consider not only the dancer's personal stories of their backstage lives but to consider the development of the ballet *form* and the historical evolution of its values and its ideals. Furthermore, the idea that dancers learn to assimilate and appropriate gestures, mannerisms, behavior, as well as ways of seeing themselves and thinking about themselves within the layered social dynamics of the ballet world, demonstrates that the ballet institution and its relationship with ballet dancers, must be considered in this dissertation. Understanding the symbolic interaction between ballet dancers, their teachers, choreographers and other dancers is essential to understanding their "lived-experiences" and "bodily-experiences".

Bryan Turner and Steven P. Wainwright (2004) in their essay, "Narratives of Embodiment: Body, Aging, and the Career in Royal Ballets Dancers", attempt to "develop a sociological framework for the study of classical ballet that examines the sociology of the body"(Turner and Wainwright 2004: 100). As part of an ongoing research, this paper emphasizes embodiment and presents to the discipline of dance studies an alternative approach to the contemporary emphasis of dance as a "discursive practice" where the dancer, "becomes strangely disembodied" (ibid.). This essay points out, and as I have explained



earlier, that dance studies is greatly influenced by postmodern readings of “dance as text” (ibid.) and as a result neglects the embodied performance. Through in-depth interviews, Turner and Wainwright’s study examines ex-dancer’s perception of their aging bodies and their careers and provides accounts of the dancer’s “lived-experience” of embodiment. This empirical study of dancers’ bodies and embodiment draws on the social theory of Pierre Bourdieu. Some of his key concepts—habitus, capital and field—are discussed in order to elaborate on the idea that specific social worlds shape human bodies. They argue that:

Ballet in Bourdieu’s sociology can be described as a specific social field of cultural practice, that is, ‘a network, or a configuration, of objective relations between positions objectively defined, in their existence and in the determinations they impose upon their occupants’ (ibid.).

Bourdieu’s work focuses on the idea that institutional structures, or fields of social activity, determine a range of social positions; in the ballet context, according to Turner and Wainwright, “The structure of the field shapes the career of the ballet dancer” and “The field is the context within which the habitus of individuals is formed” (ibid.).

We can define “habitus” loosely as the attitudes, dispositions, and taste that individuals share as members of a field.

...taste is neither individual nor random, but organized by reference to social positions, practices, and institutions.

Habitus is an “aquired system of generative dispositions”, within which individuals think that their preferences are natural and taken-for-granted (ibid.).

In the highly specialized context of ballet, dancers’ bodies, which are shaped, formed and given meaning through its institutional structure, according to Turner and Wainwright, express the habitus of the field through which they were formed. The value of the body—that is, its physical and symbolic capital—depends on the status it is given within its respective field. They explore this theory through their empirical research by considering the relationship between identity, the human body, and social practices. They claim, and I would

tend to agree, that ballet generates a certain body type that cannot be separated from the dancer's identity. However, they do make several claims that I argue, are inaccurate:

The purpose of ballet schooling is to make the unnatural natural, to acquire an unconscious ballet habitus (Turner and Wainwright 2004: 103).

Dancers take their particular social world and their embodiment in it for granted. They do not think about their ballet habitus unless they have to, that is until they are forced to as a consequence of some traumatic event of radical change of circumstance (ibid.).

Our research is focused upon a series of epiphanies such as aging, retirement, and injury that all, potentially, require the dancer to become reflexive about their habitus (ibid.).

Although, the research provides some interesting quotes and insights from dancers themselves, Turner and Wainwright's application of Bourdieu's theory limits their investigation. By explaining this phenomenon through Bourdieu's concept of habitus, Turner and Wainwright make the assumption that because the dancer's body and thus, identity, is culturally determined (their tastes, dispositions and behaviors) it prefigures everything that the dancer does. The idea that ballet training "makes the unnatural natural" suggests that the dancer's formation is without struggle and that it is only when a dancer is injured or reaching the age of retirement that they become reflexive. My research, and personal experience, would suggest otherwise: the fact that dancers are always in the process of formation and transformation; that they are constantly being confronted with ballet's institutionalized ideal image of perfection; that the attainment of this perfect image is almost impossible to attain even when the dancer has moments of perfection; and finally, that every movement the dancer makes is made with much forethought and much effort, the idea that it is only through "some traumatic event of radical change of circumstance" that they are forced to become reflexive and that they take their social world for granted, is a superficial assessment. Furthermore, Turner and Wainwright do not consider that dancers do not live in a cultural vacuum and that when they walk out of the studio after rehearsals or after their show, they enter a different social world where they are very aware that their bodies and their stance is not only different but special in a strange kind of way. In my research, many of the dancers

explained how when they walked on the streets of New York or Montreal, they would make sure people recognized that they were dancers. Some would wear their hair in a tight bun and “walk like a dancer” in order to be recognized. This kind of insight is indicative of a people who are in fact self-conscious and self-reflexive. Finally, Turner and Wainwright do not seem to delve into the actual process through which the dancer becomes a dancer or is transformed into a dancing body. If they had, they would realize that regardless of injury or retirement—the very thing they suggest shocks the dancer into consciousness—the dancer is continuously fighting and struggling with their bodies from the day they enter a studio and train to become a dancer. Ballet is not a natural physical disposition for the human body and so, everyday, every moment, every step is highly reflexive. Certainly, the movements—through the learning of the technique—become easier but never do they become “naturalized”. The desire to ‘step into’ the ideal ballet form and the actual accomplishment of this task, as I will show in this dissertation, is a very layered process; in order to gain an understanding of the dancer’s experience of this formation, this must not be reduced simply to the concept of habitus nor to the social constructionist view that, as we have already discussed, ignores the phenomenal body or “lived body”.

Although, the application of Bourdieu’s theory limits this research, what is interesting is the fact that Turner and Wainwright place an emphasis on the embodied experience of the dancer. They agree that old age is a socially constructed phenomenon but that the actual physical and biological experience of aging is not. By focusing on the retirement of ballet dancers and the physical constraints of the aging body, they attempt to “restore the importance of the phenomenology of the body in everyday life through understanding the role of embodiment in the careers of professional dancers” (Turner and Wainwright 2004:107). Furthermore, by highlighting Bourdieu’s concepts, they are able to explain how dancers inherit the social, symbolic, and cultural capital employed in the ballet world. Like in Faure’s study, this knowledge becomes ‘incorporated’ in dancers’ bodies and becomes part-and-parcel with their identity. Finally, in their concluding paragraph they write:

We believe that ballet is an important topic in the broader project of making sociology more cultural and cultural studies more sociological, and in

producing more comprehensive social research on the reciprocal relationships between the body and society (118).

The potential which emerges out of this literature review are threefold: the development of a newly expanding discursive space which seeks to encourage a sociology of dance; a paradigm shift that no longer seeks authority in established figures and institutions but rather, seeks it in the 'voices' of dancers themselves, and the possible variation in the position by which we 'look' at performance dance (i.e. from the audience or backstage); and the further development and expansion of sociology of the body. This dissertation, as I will explain at length in chapter 2, will delve into the *experiencing of formation* of the ballet dancer and will explore this dynamic and layered process by considering ballet dancers' relationship with their bodies as they train to become dancers and the intricate symbolic interaction between the dancer, their perception of their bodies and their selves, and the ballet institution.

## CHAPTER II

### RESEARCH

#### 2.1 Introduction

The purpose of this research is to study ballet dancers' *formation* and *transformation* into "*Dancing Bodies*" and to also explore and describe the relationship they have with their bodies and with the social context through which they emerge as dancers. This study will delve into the dancers' actual experience of their *formation*, as well as the very layered and dynamic process through which their bodies and self are *transformed* into ballet dancers. This kind of transformative process is highly complex and requires a theoretical scaffolding that extends the limits of a one-dimensional discussion that is premised on the idea that the body is a social construct and therefore contingent.

In this study, we acknowledge that the body holds different cultural meanings, however, we make the claim that the material body is nonetheless significant and should be explored within the social sciences. In chapter one we argued that the theoretical position through which social constructionists view the body, which includes the idea that the body is generated and given meaning through discursive practices, is insufficient because it divests human beings, and dancers alike, of having a material existence thereby disembodimenting them. We discussed the theoretical foundation through which our understanding of the body in contemporary Western culture has emerged and argued that a study on the embodied experience of ballet dancers' *formation* would generate a greater understanding of the body and would also contribute an interesting study about embodiment to the Sociology of the Body. Furthermore, by studying the socio-cultural experience of ballet dancers, as well as

their physical and active engagement with the art of ballet as they train to become dancers, we would contribute an interesting sociological inquiry to dance research and to dance studies. Finally, we explained how this study emerged from my Master's thesis, *The Dancing Body* (1998) and is the continuation, or rather deepening of its initial inquiry. Therefore, in order to understand the theoretical rational behind this dissertation I will begin this chapter by describing my Master's thesis further and explain the progression into my doctoral research. This chapter will develop the theoretical rational for this study and demonstrate how the *formation* of the ballet dancer is an act of creation which occurs at the level of a highly aesthetic experience and at the level of a deeper connection between the lived experience and the bodily experience and self-expression.

## 2.2 The dancing body

*The Dancing Body* (Khudaverdian 1998), as we briefly explained in chapter 1, examined the ways in which ballet dancers *see* the body, the way they *use* it, and the way they *speak* about it. The purpose of this study was to articulate as best as possible how ballet dancers and the ballet world conceptualized the body. In order to render the most accurate picture of the ballet world's cultural conception of the body, I selected two methods of data collection: in-depth life-story interviews as well as participant observation. My observations emerged from the recollection of my own personal experience as an ex-dancer coupled with my reemergence into the dance scene. After a seven year absence (I had left the dance scene in spring of 1990 and returned in the fall of 1997) I was very quickly welcomed back by those who were once my peers and who had now become teachers or choreographers. They were very excited about my research and opened up their morning ballet classes to me as well as their rehearsals. By watching ballet class and sitting through the rehearsals—sometimes even giving my opinion—I was able to reintegrate myself into the milieu. The daily rituals and practices were certainly familiar to me and in many ways felt as though I had come home. Nothing that I was observing was new to me except that I was now able to look at the environment and dancers as a Sociologist. My own personal observations, as I recounted in the journals I had kept throughout my training, coincided with what I was now, as an “outsider”, witnessing. My perspective shifted quite easily back-and-forth from the position

of “insider” to that of the “outsider”. I felt that this gave me a more dynamic involvement in this project and also gave me the advantage of insight. Much of the observation took place in the studios that once housed Le Ballet de Montreal Eddy Toussaint and where I had once trained. I did on occasion visit the studios of Les Grandes Ballets Canadiens, however, I preferred the more intimate setting of Eddy Toussaint’s studios because I was able to interact more freely with the dancers. Lunch was often spent with a few dancers; since dancers generally live and breathe dance, it is always on their mind and they are always willing and ready to talk about it. Although I would conduct in-depth interviews with a select few, I conducted many informal interviews and would jot down notes as often as possible. This was invaluable because in this kind of informal setting the information flows freely and because I am part of this “family” I was privy to much unsolicited information. So half of my observation was made outside the studio, however, in order to explore and describe the way the ballet world *used* the body, I was required to review the dancers’ daily rituals and practices. As part of the process, the daily ballet class is a mandatory requirement; everyday the dancer—both female and male—work to perfect the rigorous and highly technical language of ballet. Much of their work takes place in the studio with their classmates and in front of a mirror. I had spent approximately three days a week for three months visiting the studio and taking notes and documenting my observations. Eventually, I realized that what I had been observing was firmly embedded in the memory of my own past experiences as well as in my body, however, I now was able to use these observations to make sense of the theoretical paradigm from which I was working.

The second part of the data collected came from in-depth life-story interviews of retired and almost retired ballet dancers, as well as those who had stopped performing and continued their careers by either teaching dance or choreographing. Those who I chose to interview had an extensive history in the ballet world. The most important criteria for selecting these dancers was dependent on whether they had lived the life of a professional dancer. This was necessary in order for their stories to legitimately represent that of the ballet culture. The study included 13 dancers—seven women and six men—and each were interviewed for approximately one hour and all of the interviews were tape-recorded and were then transcribed. The interviews generated common descriptions of the way they *use* the body, *see*

the body and *speak* about the body. It was concluded that the body in the ballet world is the dancer's instrument and is conceptualized as “*a vehicle of self-expression*”. They described their training using the same terms and concepts and placed a great deal of emphasis on the training and achievement of the ideal ballet body. Each and everyone described the ideal in the same way and expressed their intense desire to the achievement of perfection. Their work is always oriented to the attainment of high levels of performance and to the mastery of the ballet form. All of their struggles, pains, joy and acclaims occur in union with their intimate connection to the image of perfection and with the ideal form.

Although my Master's thesis demonstrated how the body is in fact socially determined, and proceeded to draw out the ballet world's shared conception of the body, as I explained in chapter 1, it mainly focused on the social construction of the body and did not include the embodied experience of the dancer. The complexity of the ballet dancer's *formation* and *transformation* as lived through their bodies surfaced in the interviews and inspired this dissertation. It would not be logical to leave a study such as this one incomplete and without delving further into the actual bodily presence of the dancer—that is, their presence within the artistic world of ballet and also within the *form* itself.

The dancers' connection to the ballet *form* and to their bodies is more complex than a simple description of the meaning it holds within its cultural group. There is a very layered and intricate process to the *formation* of a dancer; it begins with the body and develops into a brilliant act of creation—an act that unites the lived experience and the bodily experience—and is, as I will attempt to describe throughout this study, a never-ending process. This act of creation is deliberate and driven by an incredible desire and will. It requires a deep love for the art, a focused mind and a tuned body. In chapter 1, I opened with a group of deliberate questions that were suggestive of the phenomenal character of the ballet dancer. These questions were intended to raise our consciousness about the body; it implicitly drew our attention beyond the physical training of the dancer to the deeper level of *formation*. Here we are suggesting that the *formation* of the dancer coupled with the *transformation* of the bodily *form* to a new *form*, requires numerous levels of intelligence: it requires a kind of linguistic intelligence—one that knows both mentally and viscerally the ballet language and



vocabulary. It requires: deep bodily knowledge (or kinesthetic); musical knowledge; spatial knowledge; movement knowledge; historical knowledge—knowledge about where ballet came from and what its history is about; knowledge about the codes of ethics and rules—the rituals and practices that are held close to the dancer as though it were a religion; and finally, it requires, like any social context—interpersonal and intrapersonal knowledge, which in many respects is highly emotional by nature. With such a high degree of cumulative knowledge that is required in order to be transformed into a dancer, how can we begin to study the embodied experience of this transformation process? Since the main purpose of this dissertation is to gain greater understanding of the embodied experience of the ballet dancer, we may choose to begin with the following: What exactly is the ballet dancer experiencing and therefore embodying? Let us look beyond the cultural conception of the body that emerges from the ballet world and ask: Who is the ballet dancer? What makes them a dancer? How were they transformed? What experience(s) did they engage in throughout their formation? And where does the transformation occur—where is it experienced?

I began this chapter with an explanation of my Master's thesis because of the unsolicited discovery that was made at the end of the study. What I discovered other than the fact that I had been ignoring the embodied experience of the dancer, was that the *formation* of the dancer was dependent on his/her engagement with the ballet *form*. The dancers interviewed, as well as the ones I spoke to informally, described their extremely emotional relationship with the *ideal form*. It was quite amazing to hear their detailed descriptions of their bodies at very specific points throughout their development. It was as though they had never taken their eyes off the ideal goal of perfection—even for a moment. Each and every morning they faced their body in the mirror and there they would arrive at an assessment of their progress. They described their mirror image and focused on the times they felt trapped by the 'others' image of them. Always fearing exclusion, the dancers I interviewed never ignored that idealized image of 'perfection' and were constantly 'experiencing' their lives and their bodies' vis-à-vis this 'perfect' picture. Although, I had by accident made this discovery, I was unable to develop my research around this phenomenon. It is from this point of departure that I will proceed. In the following section I will develop the rationale that will lead us into the

research and study of ballet dancers' embodied experience of the ballet *form, formation* and *transformation*.

## 2.3 Rational

The *formation* of ballet dancers' is without question dependent at numerous levels on the ideal *form*, which is highly maintained and managed by the ballet institution. In the preceding pages, I have made reference to the ideal ballet *form* and will continue to do so throughout this dissertation. Chapter 3 will be devoted exclusively to the description of this *form* and to its historical evolution—including the evolution of the ideal male and female body. We explain at length the importance of this *form* to the *formation* of the ballet dancer, however, I feel it is important to briefly explain the ballet institution in order to get a sense of what I mean by *ballet form*, and then proceed with the development of our research rational.

### 2.3.1 Ballet institution

Amongst all other performance dance forms within the professional world of dance, ballet tends to hold- both culturally and institutionally—a dominant position. As a performance form, ballet's aesthetics stems from a long and respected tradition. It has long been associated with the social and ideological processes that have been at work within a white bourgeois culture; its unprecedented longevity has been cultivated and well supported by its audiences and by the state. Its institutionalized system of training, which is highly technical and rigorous in nature, contributes to an image of ballet as an art that transcends all cultural boundaries; it is an art form which exists across all Western borders yet owns its own language and cultural practices. It has a professional ideology of exclusivity and is deeply entrenched by an unmitigated desire to reign. It is often portrayed as a self-contained world of absolute perfection where all of its parts fit and run like a well-oiled machine. 'Reforming' this powerhouse to suit the feminist's critics as well as those involved in the Modernist Movement, seems highly unlikely; the idealized image of perfection does not seem to be rattled by the attacks made over the years. Although, to be fair we must acknowledge that many experiments were made with gender representation within the twentieth century, however, tradition tends to hold on to the nineteenth century image. Ballet companies today tend to mix classical repertoire with more contemporary works, however, the ideal ballet

body/form is still very much intact. The image of the 'perfect' ballet dancer- both male and female- is immersed into the institutional practices, which are etched onto the surface of a kind of solid gold document, and exposed as part of the characterization and thus, legitimization of ballet as an art form. The male physique is the embodiment of strength and control over the more fragile looking physique of the ballerina, who is significantly smaller in size and appears to be weaker and subservient. We have already seen in the literature review how some dance critics have problematized the sexual dimorphism in ballet. Although, this seems to be one of the main attacks against ballet, my concerns has less to do with gender differentiation, the subjugation of woman, and the harm that comes from these representations but rather, tends to be more about the '*experiencing*' of these images. In order to appreciate the logic behind this research project; let us continue with an explanation of what I mean by '*the experiencing of these images*'.

### 2.3.2 Experiencing & Formation

Let us begin with this picture: A young girl stares at her body in the mirror and discovers that it is changing. She begins to realize that not only has her body changed but also the physical urges she has been experiencing have now intensified. Fascinated and curious, this young girl who is now experiencing puberty, learns to touch herself in a way she has never before and learns to experience her body in a new way. Her body, thrilled by these new sensations, moves in a newly discovered way. This sexual and sensual awakening engulfs the child who now, to the world, is a young woman. '*Inhabiting*' this new experience, her body moves differently now—seductively and with a new purpose. Soon she is interacting differently with the world around her. A slight glance, perhaps a smile of seduction from an onlooker—the young woman is now living a different experience. A newly '*inhabited*' one. This is the picture of a person whose bodily and lived experiences coincide and engage each other. The new awareness that the body has changed, or that it is changing, transforms the story people tell themselves. In other words: What kind of story did this young girl tell herself as she began to learn about her sexual power? What did she need to believe about herself to feel that power? At one level her sexual presence in the world was not acknowledged until she acknowledged the changes in her body. Belief that she now '*inhabited*' the female form, she was now able to change her everyday lived experience.

Therefore, we know that somehow there is a connection between the bodily experience and the lived experience. We can observe this scene and suggest the following: *If you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience. Or, to change the lived experience you must change the bodily experience.* Either way, it is intriguing how people who discover 'newness' through their bodies begin to walk differently, live differently, and seem different.

Let us return to the discussion of the ballet dancer's '*experiencing*'. I had explained earlier that my interest in ballet and the dancer have more to do with the '*experiencing*' of the idealized image than it does with the criticism of it. Actually, my interest begins with the above proposition. Christine, one of the dancer's I had interviewed for my Master's thesis, struggled for many years after being told that she would never be a ballet dancer because she did not have the body for it. As Christine and I spoke about her body and her training, she explained that prior to this discouraging news, Christine saw herself as a "great dancer"; having been chosen to play Clara in the Nutcracker three years in a row, she was certain that she was, in fact, a dancer. Her training was progressing and before reaching puberty, her body had been accepted and she was seen as having the potential to flourish into a National Ballet of Canada ballerina. From the day she was told her body no longer corresponded to the standards of the National Ballet School, Christine suddenly began to live the worst experience of her life. Her bodily experiences became inconsistent; some days she felt 'on' and others 'off'. Throughout the interview, Christine explains in detail how her whole experience as a student of ballet had suddenly changed by this one heartbreaking comment. Whether it was true or not, Christine always felt trapped by the negative image imposed on her because she said, "deep down I knew they were all wrong and that I was a dancer." She fought to shatter that image, however, was never able to *experience* the dancer she felt she was. Christine's '*experiencing*' of the idealized ballet image occurred, for the most part, from a distant. Always transpiring as a possibility, Christine's actual bodily experience of the dancer she felt she was, was unfortunately never achieved. From, literally one day to the next, Christine explains, she was no longer a dancer in their eyes and was no longer able to dance. The story she told herself began to change; her strong belief that she was beautiful and the perfect dancer was now being challenged and thus began the negative dialogue in her mind and the negative experience with her body. Was Christine a dancer? Each time I asked her it

depended on where she was in her transformation process and whether she was having a positive bodily experience, or not. This connection between the bodily and lived experience and the dancer's process of *formation*, is the central focus of this study. That is, it is the ballet dancer's process as they work to live, breath and dance from within the ideal body.

If we are to understand the logic behind this inquiry, it is important that we explain what is meant by the word '*experiencing*'. As we will discuss further on through the work of Bakhtin and Merleau-Ponty, the experience of the body is always present and actively engaged with itself and the world around it and therefore, its experience is continually evolving. For this reason, I refer to the word '*experience*' in the active '*experiencing*' because so long as we are alive and have a body we are always actively '*experiencing*' in every sense of the word. How I experience my body from within myself. How others experience my body. How I experience other's experience of my body. How I experience my body within a particular space, institution, system and so on. How I experience new body techniques. How I experience my body image. We are constantly in an active state and our experience is forever active. Both the young girl I spoke about earlier and Christine have something in common—they both moved into a new bodily *form*, which changed the way they experience the body and thereby changed the way they express themselves through it. In the *formation* of the ballet dancer, the dancer seeks to '*inhabit*' a new *form*. That is, the dancer seeks to *transform* their bodies and '*inhabit*' a new one—one that is as close in appearance to the institutionalized ideal as possible. The dancer's *transformation* and *formation* requires the learning of the ballet vocabulary and the '*inhabiting*' of the ballet language. The dancer's shape and *form* has everything to do with the learning of this "language"; it is the learning of the rituals, practices, customs, traditions, and of the *formalities* which is ballet. Let us then propose the following: If it is true that the *formation* of the dancer is, in fact, the '*inhabiting*' of a *form* that has been legitimized by a set of rituals and practices and by a *formal* language, then it is true that the *transformation* from one *form*, in the *formation* of the dancer to another, is the *transformation* of bodily experience and therefore bodily expression. That is, if we change the experience of the body we change the lived experience. The dancer's learning of this new "language" is for the sole purpose of being able to dance and express. A person without ballet training—that is, without '*inhabiting*' the ballet *form*—cannot express

with the same ability that the ballet dancer can, or through the same “language”. The successful *formation* of a ballet dancer, then, has everything to do with the way they are ‘*experiencing*’ the body; fundamentally, this process of *formation* always occurs through the technical and artistic training methods which have become a staple of the ballet institution. The ballet dancer does not simply learn the “language” of ballet but rather, ‘*inhabits*’ it totally and completely. All of the dancer’s gestures are part of *experiencing*; bodily expressions are ‘*newly*’ experienced as the dancer lives the process of *formation*. It has been said that one can never separate the dancer from the dance (Hanna 1980). If this is true then we can ask what is it that makes this statement true? Perhaps achieving the ballet *form* then—that is, changing your bodily experience changes the way you live in your body and express through it.

### 2.3.3 Object of research

I have described above two different experiences that raise some interesting questions about the very nature of ‘*experience*’. This dissertation, therefore, will focus on the study of the bodily and lived experiences of the ballet dancer whose specific situation within the complex social arrangement of the ballet world may provide an interesting understanding of how the bodily experience is connected to the lived experience, and to self-expression. In chapter one we raised some questions about who ballet dancers are and what constitutes them as works of art. The questions themselves expand the scope of our inquiry; they suggest that ballet dancers are not simply dancers by virtue of their physical training, however, as a result of their ability to defy gravity and to move as though they were floating on air, dancers are the total embodiment of an idea of a *form*—a *form* that is dependent on so much more than the simple mechanics of the body. In fact, the questions suggest that there is something profoundly, and both physically and conceptually, unattainable to the lay person and that at a certain level, dancers transcend the natural body and occupy a material state that is, in many ways, metaphysical and multidimensional in essence. Their physical ability to command a certain power over the weightiness of the human body and to push the limits of movement itself, exhibits the presence of a kind of mystical knowledge that challenges the natural condition of the body. The ballet dancers’ exceptional mobility in no way represents human reality and instead launches them into a conscious state of intentional abstraction of the

human body as they are led by the metaphysical aesthetic of the ballet form. That being said, the *experiencing of formation* through this kind of metaphysical state would be a phenomenon that would beg for a deeper analysis than simply one that studies the body as a machine where *formation* would simply constitute the training of muscles and the stretching of tendons and ligaments. Furthermore, it requires an exploration of a phenomenon that is the embodiment of an idea rather than simply a study of the idea in its conceptual framework. We explained earlier that the ballet world's conception of the body as a *vehicle of self-expression* clarifies, or rather, concedes with social constructionist paradigm by demonstrating how the body in the ballet world holds a different meaning than in other cultures. The problem with this theoretical perspective of the body is that it negates the physical and embodied experience of an idea of a bodily *form*. As we explained in chapter 1, the social constructionist paradigm is more interested in the body as a concept rather than how that "concept" is physically experienced. Through my past and present research as well as my own personal experience, ballet dancers' experience of ballet dancing is at one level, the human form in its most excessive mobility and at another level, the synthesis of emotional experience with the intangibles of movement itself. Their experience cannot be reduced to simple statements; *experiencing* the world from within a *dancing body* is a different state of "consciousness" and which surpasses the level of material simplicity, or simple mechanics of the body and therefore, requires a method of research that is open and flexible and would, thus, allow the ballet dancer the opportunity to recall and recount in their own voice, their most intimate and personal relationship with the ballet *form* as they lived the process of *formation*.

The ballet dancer has an experienced body and a lived experience that is the total embodiment of a transfigured world—a world that is comprised of the elegant embroidery of multiple sensuous experiences that is located at the heart of the dancer's process of *formation*. How then do we study this phenomenal experience? And, how do we access this experience so that we can better understand it? Firstly, the fact that the embodied reality and experience of ballet dancers surfaced in the data accumulated for my Master's thesis and that the descriptions made by the ballet dancers themselves were rich in detail, we know that the method of in-depth interviews would generate the quality of data necessary for this study.

Secondly, in chapter 1, we explained how Sylvia Faure's (2000) study encourages us to consider the historical evolution of the ballet *form*. Therefore, in addition to the in-depth interviews, it is also necessary to describe the ideals and values that are at the root of the ballet *form* and the institution. The fact that dancers learn to '*inhabit*' the ballet *form*—or as Faure explains, learn to assimilate and appropriate ballet movements, gestures, behaviors, as well as ways of perceiving themselves—it is important and necessary, then, that we consider the world through which this *form* emerges. After all, it is from within the ballet institution's layered social dynamics and symbolic interaction that the dancer lives their *transformation*, embodies the ballet *form* and experiences their *formation*. The ballet dancer's *experiencing of formation* is in many ways a poetic one; it is transcendental because it is driven by a persistent longing for a metaphysical state that is at the core of the art itself and which can only be achieved in its *ideal form*. Although the cultivation and nurturing of ballet dancers is an event that occurs within the rigid parameters of ballet's formal institutional practices, their *experiencing of formation* is one that flows between the institutionalized aesthetic *form* and the intangible graceful essence of the art of ballet. This experience which I am referring to, is located somewhere in the act of creation—the act of *transforming* the lay body into a dancing body. Here within this process lives a phenomenal bodily experience where much can be learned about embodiment. How do we access this experience? This is an experience that lives within the ballet dancer and their world. In order to gain an understanding of the process of their formation, we must gain access to two main areas of the ballet dancer's life. The first is the access to their internal world—the inner experiential world where the story of their personal journey lives. And the second is to the external world—the social and institutional context through which they develop as dancers. These are the two main areas that require our attention and are the main target around which we design our research. The following section will, therefore, focus on the research design, the main propositions and questions that will be central to this dissertation.

## 2.4 Research Design

The above rationale has heightened our curiosity of the physical and artistic nature of ballet dancers. It has led us to a research project that will explore ballet dancers' phenomenal *experiencing of formation* and their *transformation* into dancing bodies, and attempt to



describe ballet dancers' engagement in this creative process. Finally, it has led us to a series of propositions and questions, which will guide us through this inquiry. Let us then begin with the following propositions:

\*If you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience. Or, to change the lived experience you must change the bodily experience.

\*If it is true that the *formation* of the dancer is, in fact, the '*inhabiting*' of a *form* that has been legitimized by a set of rituals and practices and by a *formal* language, then it is true that the *transformation* from one *form*, in the *formation* of the dancer, to another *form*, is the *transformation* of bodily experience and therefore bodily expression.

In order to understand the process by which a person becomes a ballet dancer we must begin with the acknowledgement that ballet dancers' process of *formation* is the engagement of all of their senses and requires that they be physically and mindfully present. That being said, we can raise questions about the mind and body relationship throughout this process. The proposition which suggests that '*if one changes the bodily experience one changes the lived experience*', is actually suggesting that at one level, the bodily and the lived experience are somehow intertwined and at another level, is suggesting that they are connected to self-expression. If in fact, ballet dancers' instrument is their body and as artists they express through it, we can, therefore, suggest that the dancers' *form* is the *physical expression* of their *formation*. The knowledge that one is actually a ballet dancer suggests that at some level or another, this is being expressed. How then does a dancer '*inhabit*' this ballet *form*? And, how is it expressed? How does the process of *transformation* happen? What does it entail? How is the process of *formation* related to the learning of the language of ballet? And, How might this language relate to the way the dancer experiences their body '*newly*'? How does the *transformation* into this new experience change the way the dancer expresses? How does the dancer experience the idealized image and how does that relate to their *formation*—or, sometimes, *malformation*? How is the process of *formation* integrated into the story the dancer's recount to themselves? In other words, how do they come to understand the '*experiencing*' of the idealized *form* in ballet? And, how do they negotiate this?

The above questions and the two propositions pre-empt the development of a discussion where the main focus will be on highlighting and describing the embodiment of the art of ballet. Furthermore, it foreshadows a kind of collective story that will depict how the actual process by which a dancer is *transformed* into an artist is both an active physical and mental experience—or a bodily and lived occurrence. This research will characterize the embodied experience of ballet dancers and will, therefore, penetrate the conceptual *form* of the ballet body and expand our understanding of it. The research will invite the readers to learn about ballet dancers': *formation* and the *transformation* of their bodies; the transformation of their self-perception throughout the process; their physical, emotional and mental connection with the art of ballet; and their creative development. In order to generate the best possible description of this phenomenon, our research design and methodology, as we will explain in the next section, follows that of my master's thesis.

#### 2.4.1 Methodology

Ethnographic research, as we explained in chapter one, has been the chosen method in dance studies and dance research. Selecting this method of research allows the researcher to draw out the subjective beliefs of members of a specific cultural group. This dissertation's central interest is that of the ballet dancers' personal experience of their *formation* and of their lives in the ballet world. Since we are not interested in generating quantitative 'measurements' of ballet dancers' characteristics or behaviors, but rather, are interested in obtaining an in-depth understanding of the meanings and definition of their situation, as presented by the dancers themselves, we have chosen to study their *experiencing of formation* through in-depth interviews. Furthermore, the fact that we require a solid understanding of the context through which they define themselves and within which they participate, we also require a certain level of participant observation and therefore, draw upon my own personal experiences.

#### 2.4.2 Participant observation

As we discussed earlier, the two main areas that must be accessed in order to develop a detailed narrative of the *experiencing of formation*, is, firstly, the ballet dancer's 'internal'

subjective world and secondly, their 'external' social and institutional world. The ballet dancers' *experiencing of formation* is a total cultural experience and wholly experienced at numerous levels and throughout their *transformation*. Since we are interested in the various levels of *transformation* towards the '*inhabiting*' of the ballet *form* and the actual '*experiencing*' of this *form*—that is, the actual '*experiencing*' of self-expression from within this *form*, we require data that will speak of the ballet dancers' *entire* 'lived experience'. Our central focus, then, is to reveal the embodied experience of the ballet dancers and to describe this phenomenon by penetrating the walls built around their 'backstage' lives. Except for the occasional autobiographical or biographical book (Kirkland's, Brady's, and Wulff's) 'insider' information on the ballet world and the ballet dancer has, for the most part, remained elusive. It is the general policy of the ballet institution to promote the 'onstage' performance and to contain, as best as possible, the 'backstage' politics and drama. Normally, this information is held tightly behind a rigid 'closed door' policy. As we discussed in chapter I, Helena Wulff (1998) is one of the only sociological studies on the ballet world and one of the only 'backstage' ethnographic studies on the careers of ballet dancers. Both Wulff (1998) and myself (Khudaverdian, 1998) have participated in the ballet world and because of our involvement, we are well acquainted with its intensely private and hermetic system. Ballet is all about beauty and the illusion of perfection and with this kind of ethic, the reality of the 'backstage' world is highly protected and kept 'in the family'. Wulff and I, early on in our respective research, discovered that our 'insider' and 'outsider' views of the ballet dancers' world and lives allowed us the opportunity to delve into highly sensitive issues such as: drug abuse, eating disorders, weight gain, sexual orientation and AIDS, without seeming like we were stepping over the boundaries of secrecy. These issues are quite common in the ballet world and are openly and freely discussed with members of 'the family'. Interestingly, we both have common experiences; for the dancers we were their 'special' confidants and 'one of them' and as a result, they were quite forthcoming with their stories. There is a definite line separating the 'insider' and 'outsider' and gaining access to the backstage experience can be a rather intimidating and challenging endeavor but certainly not an impossible task. The trick is to learn to navigate between being an 'insider' and 'outsider', shifting back and forth between positions. Wulff notes:

A central dichotomy in the ballet world is the one separating the act of doing ballet from watching ballet: 'You have to do it in order to understand what it's like.' It seems primarily to be the physical exertion of dancing that makes dancers distinguish themselves from the audience in general, and from critics in particular. The vulnerability is another important feature of the stage experience. A leading woman dancer explained to me: "You're completely naked out there. They see what you have inside!" There is also a subtle boundary between dancers who have danced a particular role and dancers who have not. All this goes into a skepticism of translations of dance to other symbolic modes- be it text, photographs, video or film. Something inevitably gets lost on the way. This elusive quality is, however, still a part of the experience of ballet art- in fact often the heart of it. Watching themselves on video, dancers note that the dancing does not look from the outside like it feels from the inside when doing it (Wulff 1998:9).

The position that Wulff and I have discovered to be the most productive in researching dancers' 'backstage' world, is this kind of schizophrenic dance between 'insider' and 'outsider'. Wulff and I both recognized how this navigation between these two positions allowed us the latitude we needed in order to gain access to the dancers' lives.

Fortunately, this dissertation is informed by my own personal involvement with the ballet world. My experience incorporates over thirty years of cumulative knowledge of the art of ballet, the ballet dancer, and the social, cultural and historical context through which professional ballet dancers are born. This kind of knowledge is neither readily available in books nor 'onstage' and is comprised of the artistic vision of a culture coupled with an intimate understanding of the ballet *form* and the *formation* of a ballet dancer. My prior sociological research conducted for my Master's thesis has, throughout the past ten years, systematically evolved; my participant observation notes are the accumulation of my own personal reflections and reflections from informal discussions and meetings with people in the professional ballet world. These reflections are highly reflexive and are saturated with an attentive and conscious effort to describe for the field of Sociology, a phenomenon that most academics would never have intimate access to. The beauty of this study is that it can expand our present understanding of the body as a culturally generated idea and demonstrate how through our bodies we engage and respond to the world around us. It is important to note, and I stress this point, that without first hand knowledge of the phenomena in question, I believe that I would not have been able to pin point the complexity of the ballet dancer's process of

*formation* with such accuracy. I am certain that this point is subject to debate, however, as we proceed with our analysis it will become apparent that my expertise—that is, my participation and observations—will have a significant impact on this study. I am in no way suggesting that I can, or will, speak for the dancers; I am merely explaining that due to my background in the dance world, I am attuned to the subtle yet profound statements made by the dancers, which most sociologists might easily overlook. My experience is important for this study, however, it is important to note that I will in no way substitute my own voice for that of the dancers.

#### 2.4.3 In-depth interviews

Ballet dancers are the true ‘experts’ on their embodied experiences. They train more than eight hours a day, a minimum of five days a week, and often perform on weekends. Ballet dancers’ ‘*experiencing*’ of the ballet *form* is a creative process, which necessitates dancers’ full and undivided attention, and which assigns them the title of ‘expert’ on the process of their *formation*. In order to delve into the core of their embodied experience and learn from their ‘expertise’, we are required to hear their autobiography—that is, the story about their ‘*experiencing*’ of *formation*. Autobiography provides a commentary on the impact of social processes on a life. It provides an ‘insider’ account of what it is *like to live within the body of a ballet dancer or within the body of one who aspires to be a ballet dancer*, or rather, what it is like to live the process of *formation*, to ‘*inhabit*’ the ballet *form* and to express through it and from within it, or simply to live with the desire to ‘*inhabit*’ the idealized *form*. Unlike the traditional autobiographical narrative, such as Kirkland’s who owns the narration of her own life, here, autobiography will be derived from a series of recorded life-story interviews on the ballet dancers’ ‘*experiencing*’ of their lives. These interviews are comprised of open-ended questions that combine life history which a focus on in-depth interviewing. The main task is to build upon, and explore, the participant’s responses to the questions. Here we are oriented to reconstruct the dancer’s lived and bodily experiences within the process of *formation*. In order to accomplish this, we firstly, orient the interview to focus on the ‘life history’ of the dancer. The goal is to allow the dancer the opportunity to talk and give as many details as possible about their lives. In asking them to put their dance training in context with their life history, we reconstruct a range of constitutive events in their past experiences. Secondly, we

concentrate on the details of these past experiences by asking for the ‘story’ behind them. Here we will have the dancers reflect on the meaning of their experiences—on their emotional and intellectual connection to their dance training and careers. How do they come to understand dance in their lives, and what sense does it make to them? This requires that they look at how the factors in their lives interact to bring them to their present-life situations. It also requires that they observe their present experience in detail and within context. The combination of having them explore the past to clarify the events that led them to where they are today, and to describe the concrete details of their present experience, establishes conditions for reflecting upon what they are presently doing in their lives. Understanding their lives through interviews, the dancer is making sense or making meaning; the process of putting experience into language is a meaning-making process (Seidmen 1991: 13). When we ask the dancers to reconstruct details of their experience, they are selecting events from their past and in so doing, they impart meaning to them. When we ask them to tell stories of their experiences they are actually framing some aspect of it with a beginning, middle and end, and thereby making it meaningful. Hence, we focus on the question in context, making-meaning the center of our attention.

The interview process is guided by appropriate questions and probes (see Appendix A) and is designed to draw out descriptions that would best answer our research questions. This kind of autobiography is analytically distinct and this distinctiveness has some important epistemological ramifications. The dancer’s story is distilled by a certain perspective of the knowledge accumulated on dancer’s ‘lives’; we have already been subjected to stories of drug abuse, eating disorders, sexism and so on, which has established a certain perception of this world. Furthermore, it is also distilled by the researcher; a dancer may be perceived as an exotic object of investigation, however, in my view, the dancer and their lives is familiar and often feels like home yet other times their stories feel ‘outside’ of my experience. The use of this autobiographical method gives the dancer ‘voice’; this concept invokes a politics of recognition and places the theorization and experience of the ‘unheard’ at the center of the research activity. The ‘voices’ at the center of our investigation are those of dancers who have lived most of their lives within the ballet world. They are the ‘voices’ of those who have experienced what most exoticize; they have experienced a bodily *form* that is unique to this

culture and have lived within this *form*, expressed themselves through it and from within it. They are the 'experts' in ballet *formation* and their stories are seldom heard. Therefore, in order to draw out the connection between bodily and lived experiences from the point of view of the ballet dancer, it is necessary to hear the dancers' account of their experiences. Furthermore, this methodological approach demonstrates the extent to which the ballet dancer reflects upon their own "*experiencing*" of both their bodies and their lives. It yields data that does not only respond to the questions asked but which can further describe how the relationship between these two experiences are played out in the dancer's minds. Furthermore, the advantage of this method of data collection is that we often witness the 'public' achievements of these dancers careers, however, using this method gives us access into the 'private' experiences of the ballet dancer's lives allowing for their 'private' thoughts to take on a more public character. Hence, as the interviewer I become the alibi to their 'private' reflections, to their memories, to their immediate thoughts and feelings and to the dynamics of the self and other in their stories.

#### 2.4.4 Data collection and number of participants

The kind of data that is generated through life-history, in-depth interviews is valuable and useful primarily because it conforms to the idea that a story told at a particular historical moment is representative of patterns forming the personality of individuals and the character of their culture, and furthermore, that the individuals (or selected groups of them) typify their entire culture (Angrosino 1989: 1). That being said, the question of how many dancers one should interview in order to attain a certain level of reliability arises. In our particular case, the criteria for number of selected participants in this research was drawn from the assumption that the method of in-depth interviewing applied to a sample of participants who all experience similar structural and social conditions gives enormous power to the stories of a relatively few participants (Seidman 1991: 45). Ballet dancers, no matter where they are in the world and where they train, their context within which their '*experiencing*' takes place, is constant; the firmly established daily rituals and practices, the ideal ballet form, the language and the vocabulary and so on, are all part of this world. The rigid organizational structure and the social conditions, under which ballet dancers strive to *inhabit* the ballet *form* and express

through it, are both the collective aim of this cultural group and that of the individual dancer as well. The fact that the social conditions and the goals of all the dancers interviewed are uniform what is interesting here is firstly, the recurrent patterns described by the dancers and secondly, their individual relationship with their context. The number of dancers chosen for this study was determined by the quality of the interviews rather than the quantity. In this research project then, we selected 15 dancers from the following cohort:

*The cohort of dancers who are interviewed for this project fall under one of the following categories:*

- Dancers who have trained in a professional ballet school(s) throughout most of their youth, teenage years and became ballet dancers.
- Dancers who trained in a professional ballet school(s), completed or almost completed the program but did not make it into a ballet company. These are dancers who, nonetheless, continued dancing in contemporary, modern or jazz companies.
- Dancers who have trained in a professional ballet school(s), however, never danced professionally (these are the dancers who taught, choreographed, or quit all together).

For this particular project the '*experiencing*' of this training within a well establish institution like The National Ballet School of Canada was our primary concern in selecting the interviewees. Unlike Helena Wulff's study where she interviewed over 120 dancers and spent years observing four national ballet companies, our funds are significantly smaller making the magnitude of her study out of our reach. It has been our intention, therefore, to look for a variety of stories rather than focus on quantity. We actually interviewed ten women and five men; the reason for choosing twice as many women was because of the unequal ratio of men to women in the ballet world. The exact number is difficult to quantify, however, after several phone calls to various ballet schools (National Ballet School of Canada, Alberta Ballet School, Houston Ballet School) as well as internet searches of ballet schools around the world, it appears that the ratio of men to women enrolled in ballet training programs could exceed a one to seventy-four ratio. Although ballet tends to be dominated by women, interviewing both women and men and hearing their unique '*experiencing*' of the process of formation, we are able to explore both the similarities and differences between the dancers'



experiences as well as between genders. What we were mainly interested in hearing was the story of the dancers' lives from the moment they entered the ballet institution and the evolutionary stages of their *formation*. Because our intention is to highlight the dynamics between bodily experiences and lived experiences we, therefore, seek a great deal of substance from these interviews. The quantity of participants was not as important as was the detailing of the process of *formation*. It is through the information found within the dancers' stories that we are able to answer our research questions and perhaps develop a clearer understanding of this phenomenon.

The interviewing process took place over the course of a six-month period. During that time I was able to gather enough dancers to interview. The benefit of being part of the dance community in Montreal is that by the simple 'word of mouth' technique, I was able to find the interviewees I needed. In Montreal, the dance network is quite small and accessible if you are a member of its community. People in this milieu are quite familiar with each other's work and careers, especially when it comes to the ballet milieu. Montreal tends to be oriented towards modern dance and therefore, has a very small ballet community, which, I must add, has largely impacted the Montreal dance community as a whole. Many of the retired ballet dancers have either moved on to new careers outside of dance but still keep in contact with the community, or they have either become modern dancers or become teachers and/or choreographers. The fact that I was very much involved with this generation of dancers, I was able to track a few down and they in turn, led me to others and so on. From the fifteen dancers interviewed: four were dancers that I knew quite well but who I had not seen for several years and the remaining eleven were referred by other dancer friends. The majority of the dancers I selected were people who I did not know intimately. I made a conscious effort to select as many unfamiliar dancers as possible because I wanted to retain the element of surprise as well as a certain level of curiosity throughout the interview process. The interviews lasted between 60 minutes and 90 minutes depending on the dancer's willingness to continue. All of the interviews were tape recorded and then transcribed by me. Twelve of the interviews were conducted in Montreal and three of the interviews were conducted through long-distance telephone calls and were also tape recorded with the knowledge and agreement of the dancers. The reason for selecting dancers outside the city was to

demonstrate that a ballet dancer anywhere in the world lives the same kind of *formation* regardless of where they trained (this will be discussed in more detail in chapter 3). Each of the dancers were asked to fill out, and to sign, a consent form (see Appendix B). Those who I interviewed over the phone were sent the form via email and prior to our interview was signed and mailed back to me. All of the interviewees agreed to have their names used, if need be, and all agreed to the publication of their interviews. The very nature of this style of interviews tends to generate very intimate and private information. For this reason I needed the dancers to know that I would respect their privacy if they requested. However, the dancers were very opened and passionate about this study and were willing and ready to divulge as much information as possible.

One of the most interesting aspects of the interview process was the interviewees' comfort level and generosity. Almost all of the interviews began with an immediate level of comfort. I would spend time speaking to the dancers informally for a few minutes and would explain who I was—if they did not already know. I also explained that at any moment throughout the interview, if they felt that they wanted to stop and withdraw their consent, that they should feel comfortable enough to do so. All of the interviews evolved without any major problems. The only one obstacle was to carefully lead the dancer away from the general clichés common to ballet dancers when they are asked to speak about “the love of their life”. Since ballet was the dearest and most precious thing in these former dancers' lives, and because they were accustomed to being interviewed by journalists throughout their careers, getting them to break away from the kind of information they were once expected to communicate, took anywhere from fifteen minutes to even thirty minutes. The interesting thing was that approximately forty to forty-five minutes into the interview, the former dancers would finally let all of their barriers down. During the first part of the interviews, the dancers generally felt more comfortable speaking about certain concrete facts such as the age when they started dancing, for example, or their date of departure from the ballet world. However, it was generally in the last thirty minutes where the most interesting and profound information would surface. I did make it a point to memorize my interview guide and kept the main probes noted on a small inconspicuous piece of paper. I wanted to create a relaxed environment and did not want to become distracted by my papers. Instead I kept focused at

all times on the story that was unfolding; at one level I played the part of a former dancer and on the other level, I made sure to always keep in mind the main purpose of this research. Each interview was quite unique, however, the personal stories which unfolded were all part of the same phenomenal experience. They were all connected to a larger story and to the deep desire to '*inhabit*' the ballet *form*. The data generated from these interviews as a whole explore and describe the embodied experience of the ballet dancer. In order to benefit from the theorization that is to come, it is important that the readers understand some of the terms that I have been referring to. Therefore, in the following section I will clarify their meanings.

#### 2.4.5 Workable definitions

We stated earlier that the main focus of this thesis is to research what it is like to live the process of *formation*, to '*inhabit*' the ballet *form* and to express through it and from within it, or live with the desire to '*inhabit*' the idealized *form*. How can we describe the "*experiencing*" of this *form*? In addition we explained the term '*experiencing*' and why it was employed in the active. Before we can proceed into the theorization of the ballet dancer's experience, it is important that we first review what we mean by "*experiencing*".

##### a) Experiencing

- How I experience my body from within myself.
- How others experience my body.
- How I experience my body within a particular space, institution, system, at a particular time, and so on.
- How I experience '*newness*'? That is, throughout the process of *formation* every minor or major step a dancer takes towards the '*inhabiting*' the ideal ballet *form* the dancer takes on the experience of '*newness*'. Whether they are approaching the '*inhabiting*' of that *form* or withdrawing from it, their bodily and lived experience is in a constant process of change.

"*Experiencing*" can be visceral, physical and cognitive, however, it is always relational. Firstly, '*experiencing*' is connected to perception—to my *perception of my 'lived body'* and the other's *perception of my body, my perception of changes in my body and so on*—and

therefore, is aesthetic. Secondly, '*experiencing*' can be further defined as an act of living which implies that 'I' from within my body and through it am living, feeling, interpreting, communicating and negotiating with the world around 'me'. Basically, 'I' is alive 'interactively', 'relationally', and 'communicatively'. If we are to gain an understanding of the dancer's movement into the "*inhabiting*" of the ballet *form*—that is, the process of changing their *form*, living within it and expressing through it- then it is vital that we understand that the constant within the relational experience is the dancer's continual attention and awareness of ideal ballet *form*. This ideal after all is the symbol of perfection and dancers are in a perpetual state of negotiation with this image. That is, they live the process of *formation* over and against the ideal *form* and measure their successes and failures before it. There is a never-ending interplay between the dancers' perception of their actual *form* and the one they desire.

#### b) Inhabiting

'*Experiencing*' is only one of the components in the process of *formation* for the dancer. Change in *form* means a change in the way the body is experienced and lived within and furthermore, expressed through; '*inhabiting*' *form* is yet another component. In order to understand the term '*inhabiting*' let us first recapitulate our two main propositions:

- If you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience. Or, to change the lived experience you must change the bodily experience.
- If it is true that the *formation* of the dancer is, in fact, the '*inhabiting*' of a *form* that has been legitimized by a set of rituals and practices and by a *formal* language, then it is true that the *transformation* from one *form*, in the *formation* of the dancer to another, is the *transformation* of bodily experience and therefore bodily expression.

*Formation* is the actual changing of bodily experience and the stepping into a new *form*. We have proposed that the change in *form* changes "*experiencing*", however, also changes expression. The dancer's *transformation* is part of the "*inhabiting*" of the new *form* – the habituation of a new experience, a new language, a new way of moving and living. If this is

true then the “*inhabiting*” of a new form means experiencing ‘newness’—experiencing a *new mode of communication*—and therefore a *new way of expressing*. The dancer by way of *transformation*, ‘*inhabits*’ a new bodily *form* (that of a dancer’s) as well as the dance world’s *formalities*. Within the dancer, lives the institutional rituals, practices, customs, traditions, history, language and vocabulary of the ballet world. ‘*Inhabiting*’ all that is ballet, the dancer finds ‘newness’ and paradoxically home in the ballet *form*.

It was suggested earlier that ‘you can never separate the dancer from the dance’; if this is a true statement then one can assume that the dancer lives the process of formation at every level and the process is alive within each and every dancer. They are consumed by desire and need to arrive at that *form*; throughout their *formation* the dancer is ‘*experiencing*’ the training, new bodily techniques, new ability to translate music, new language to express with and so on. Furthermore, their ‘*experiencing*’ of ‘newness’ is twofold: on the one hand, it is the ‘*experiencing*’ of the discovered or imagined ideal image—an image that was not part of their reality prior to their entrance to this world—and on the other hand, it is the ‘*experiencing*’ of their actual bodily *form* at various points in their *formation*. It is important to note the distinction between the actual ‘lived body’ and the imagined body. Throughout their training the dancers will go through many phases as they slowly step into *form*. This process is alive in their memories and in their bodies. This dissertation, then, will proceed to journey into the dancer’s lives and theorize about the interplay between bodily experience, lived experience and physical self-expressing. Below is a list of our research questions, which serve as the starting point to our exploration.

#### 2.4.6 Research questions

- How then does a dancer ‘inhabit’ this ballet form? And, how is it expressed?
- How does the process of transformation happen? What does it entail?
- How is the process of formation related to the learning of ballet’s language? And, How might this language relate to the way the dancers experiences their body ‘newly’?
- How does the transformation into this new experience change the way the dancer expresses?

- How do the dancers experience the idealized image and how does that relate to their formation—or malformation?
- How is the process of formation integrated into the story the dancers recount to themselves?
- How do they come to understand the ‘experiencing’ of the idealized form in ballet? And, how do they negotiate this?

In order to begin building on these questions and the propositions discussed earlier, and in order that we understand what in fact the ballet dancers are negotiating with throughout their *formation*, it is imperative that we develop a solid foundation where *the ballet form* is well defined. Without this initial framework, the entire study will lose its relevance. That is, without a clear explanation and description of the object of the ballet dancers’ desire, the reader will not be able to make sense of what they are in fact *experiencing* throughout their *transformation* process. Furthermore, *the ballet form*—in all that it means—is, in fact, the ballet dancers’ ‘external’ world. Therefore, in chapter 3, we will explore and describe the various levels of this *form*.

## CHAPTER III

### THE BALLET FORM

#### 3.1 Introduction

In December of 2000 the *San Francisco Chronicle* ([www.sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com)) published a series of articles highlighting a critical evaluation of the classical ballet institution's aesthetic and artistic standards. As we have already discussed in chapter I, feminist dance scholars, as well as those involved in the modern dance movement, have maintained a highly critical stance against the idealized ballet body imposed on the female classical ballet dancer because it creates what many deem to be unrealistic and unattainable standards for the natural female form. The modern dance movement, which will be discussed in more detail further on in this chapter, launched an unrelenting attack on classical ballet's form specifically because it set strict standards of excellence and delineated rigid parameters within which the ideal body type is managed and maintained. In a sense, the idealization of this institutionalized form sets unnatural standards for the human body to attain and as a result, is realized only by a select few. By having established such rigid standards, the ballet institution, in effect, has created uncompromising exclusionary practices and cultivated values that continue to uphold their elitist posture. Although this *form*<sup>1</sup> has mesmerized audiences for centuries, it nevertheless continues to provoke criticism because it is saturated with exclusionary undertones and is responsible for the maintenance of classical ballet's status as a 'high art'. At a time when the world is fighting for democracy and surveillance mechanisms, under the rubric of political correctness, are in place to monitor the practices of those institutions that promote any form

of inequality, and to hold them accountable, the ballet world continues to subsist by its autocratic rules. Ballet is an institution that is intensely private and once again its controversial standards and elitism is highlighted in the series of articles published by the San Francisco Chronicle.

It began on December 7, 2000 when the Chronicle reported a law suit that had been filed by Krissy Keefer, a dance professional who directs two dance schools in the city of San Francisco, against the San Francisco Ballet School for rejecting her eight year old daughter, Fredrika Near Keefer, from their regular ballet training program.<sup>2</sup> The suit was based on a new San Francisco law that prohibits the discrimination of people based on height and weight. According to Krissy Keefer, her daughter is “exceptionally talented” and “anyone who sees her perform is impressed by her talent”(ibid.). The San Francisco Ballet School, however, did not feel that Fredrika had the right body type to pursue a professional career as a ballet dancer and stated that “This is a school that trains professional dancers. We are not a recreation department”(ibid.). The debate centered around the issue of whether a law such as this one should be imposed on artistic institutions that receive funding from the city. In this case, the San Francisco Ballet School “receives \$550, 000 annually from the city’s Grant for the Arts program” (ibid.) and some feel that since it is funded by taxpayers, the school should be subjected to city laws. The debate developed into quite an interesting and intense argument, which further emphasized the strength and tenacity of the ballet institution to preserve and uphold its standards of perfection. Although the young girl succeeded in landing the lead role of Clara in the Nutcracker, which was being presented by the Pacific Dance Theater that season, her “short and muscular” body type did not meet the requirements for the San Francisco Ballet School as stipulated on the school’s Web site:

The ideal candidate is a healthy child with a well-proportioned body, a straight and supple spine, legs turned out from the hip joint, flexibility, slender legs and torso and correctly arched feet, who has an ear for music and an instinct for movement (ibid.).

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<sup>1</sup> The body type that represents this form today has developed out of a four hundred-year evolutionary process. This chapter will trace the evolution of this form in order to explain and describe to my readers what this form represents and what it looks like.

<sup>2</sup> “Girl Fights For A Chance to Dance Complaint Filed over school’s body type.” Edward Epstein, San Francisco Staff Writer. Thursday, December 7, 2000.  
(<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/12/07/MNW134594>)



Krissy Keefer's complaint with the city's Human Rights Commission not only attacked the ballet body and ballet's aesthetic standard but also launched an assault on artistic freedom in general. One side of the debate stressed the importance of re-examining the ballet body and pressed to change these high standards while the other side raised the question of "whether the ballet school is a public accommodation, something open to everyone, or whether it is truly a select professional training ground?" In raising these issues, the San Francisco Chronicle forced the public to evaluate those who are actually in the position to judge who has the ability and talent to become a professional ballet dancer. In so doing, the ballet institution was unwillingly drawn out into a public arena where its aesthetic form was debated and challenged.

On December 8, 2000, Jon Carroll (San Francisco Staff Writer) made some very interesting comments that opened up the debate even further:

Well, so why shouldn't the Ballet be allowed to set its own standards? ... We have been through this before. Remember when the NEA wanted to take grants away from sundry artists because certain conservative senators did not like the content of their art? ... At the time, I took the unpopular position that withholding public money was not the same as censorship and that artists who depended on the dole were reaping the whirlwind. ... NOW WE HAVE another public money/private art clash, except the players are different. On one side, we have acolytes of an aesthetic perfected by George Balanchine, the formal ideal of the ethereal woman, always poised for flight, enigmatic, doll-like, brainless. It is astonishing to see great ballerinas at work. The illusion they project is convincing and heartbreaking. It is easy to understand why the art form has outlasted its cultural context. ... Still, as time has passed, as element of deep creepiness has sneaked into ballet. The high incidence of eating disorders, the numbers of orthopedic problems... Other choreographers—Mark Morris is the most visible example at the moment—have shown that dance need not be based on the Balanchine model. Chunky dancers, fat dancers, dancers with odd spines and thick legs and stubby hands; they too can interpret music with their bodies. ... And be beautiful.

ARTISTS WHO ACCEPT public money are shaking hands with a large, unpredictable devil. The taxpayers of San Francisco have certain ideas, and these ideas often set them apart from the rest of the country, but there you are. If you want to get paid for yelling at children that are TOO FAT, you

may at some point have to answer questions. ...It will be interesting to see how the sides line up.

Is artistic freedom as important when the art in question is an artifact of vanishing tastes?

Both, in essence, are fights about regulating content, which means they are fights about freedom of expression. How tolerant are we? How much do we want the courts meddling in the training of the artists? ...No, no, no NO—first take the bundle of cash, then do the plie.<sup>3</sup>

Carroll's response to this story created quite the uproar in the city of San Francisco—other newspapers joined the debate and soon the story found its way to television. The next day Octavio Roca, the Chronicle's dance critic responded in support of the San Francisco Ballet School. He made the following statements:

A little girl has been denied admission to the San Francisco Ballet School for many complex reasons that basically boil down to this: Competition is stiff, and that's the breaks.

The San Francisco Ballet School is one of two finest in the United States... What the school has done is simply to go by its published requirements... These guidelines are no different from those of the School of American Ballet, the Bolshoi Ballet School, the Ballet Nacional de Cuba or the Ecole National de Ballet in Marseille.

These are tough times for the arts. We are in a world where artistic canons are devalued, and every opinion, no matter how biased or uninformed, is worth the same as every other. Perverse educational trends neglect art education but preach the lie that everyone can be an artist while teaching no one how to be part of an educated audience. In the name of democracy, with the laudable goal of nondiscrimination, we end up bypassing excellence while popping up the mediocre and the bland.

That is what may happen here if the San Francisco Ballet School is somehow forced by the city to lower its professional and educational standards if only to avoid being tainted as undemocratic.

Classical ballet, unlike modern dance, calls for superhuman technical training and aptitude as well as for extraordinary qualifications. That is why

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<sup>3</sup> "Just Like A Ballerina". Jon Carroll, San Francisco Staff Writer. Friday, December 8, 2000. (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/12/08/DD157621.DTL&typ>).

so few are able to do it, and that will not change. ...we can't all be onstage...it is unfair but nevertheless understandable that a blind person will probably not be admitted to a painting program at a major visual arts school. A deaf person will not be admitted to the San Francisco Opera's Merola Program. ...A ballet dancer's body is the instrument of ballet, as necessary to her art as sight is to a painter or hearing to a singer.

...It is responsible, moral and correct for the San Francisco Ballet School to decide admissions according to its high standards. That is aiming high, which is what our arts and artists should do.<sup>4</sup>

Roca's public commentary and his defense of the very nature of classical ballet brought forth the longstanding battle between modern dance and classical ballet. Here on these pages we see a modern democratic city take offense to the autocratic nature of ballet companies and to the elitist status, which is being upheld by the ballet institution's high aesthetic standards. As Allan Ulrich, another Chronicle staff writer, notes: "...what is being challenged is the very language of ballet, an art form that, in the fourth century of its history, still attracts major choreographers, brilliant dancers and enormous audiences".<sup>5</sup> Ulrich's argument in his article suspends the illusion that ballet companies and the schools that train professional ballet dancers would ever consider lowering its standards despite the controversy and the funds that are at stake. He writes:

Classical ballet is not modern dance. Ballet depends on uniformity of body type, on rules and on protocol. The art is predicated on physical architecture, on rotation of the hips known as turn-out, on bodies moving through space in a certain way, on symmetry, on the absence of idiosyncrasy.

Democracy is not an issue here...the company, in all likelihood, would reject even a dollar of public funding before lowering the artistic standards that have impressed audiences from Copenhagen to Cupertino (ibid.).

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<sup>4</sup> "The Barre Shouldn't Be Lowered". Octavio Roca, Chronicle Dance Critic. Saturday, December 9, 2000.

(<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/12/09/DD141289.DTL&typ.>).

<sup>5</sup> "Body Type Controversy. Ballet Is No Place for a Real Body". Allan Ulrich, San Francisco Chronicle Staff Writer. Wednesday, December 13, 2000.

(<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/12/13/ED133935.DTL&typ.>)

The public debate that played out on the pages of the San Francisco Chronicle during the month of December 2000 said more about the intolerance of elitism than it did about the ballet form itself. Although it has become a point of contention, I have, nevertheless, chosen to open this chapter with the politics that has become inherently part of the ballet form; if we are to understand the ballet dancer's journey through the transformation process, it is crucial that we understand that which is the form. That is, if we are to understand whom the ballet dancer is, it is important to know that those who are invited to partake in the ballet begin their journey with the understanding that they are somehow special and gifted. It suggests to the select few that they are superhuman and part of a very special and elite group.

In the final article of that month, Kathryn Castle, a former professional dancer with the San Francisco Opera Ballet and now choreographer and artistic director of her own company—Anima Mundi—responds with a dancer's insight:

I am that rarity, a dancer with the "perfect" body. I was accepted and trained on scholarships at the late George Balanchine's School of American Ballet in New York and at the San Francisco Ballet School. My perfect body was not enough, however, for my dream to come true of becoming a prima ballerina with a major company. As every dance professional knows, a successful career involves many ingredients, including access to good training, timing, perseverance and the good luck of avoiding major injury.

What I discovered on my journey through the professional dance world is that there is a tremendous amount of talent—and an equal amount of talent wasted. For every Evelyn Cisneros, there are many equally talented dancers who fall by the wayside. Perhaps the company is looking for taller dancers that year, or maybe the artistic director becomes fixated on one dancer over another.

When a person is driven to dance, having the "wrong" body rarely stops her. If it did, we wouldn't have the remarkable talent of San Francisco Ballet's own Joanna Berman, who isn't sylph like, or Cisneros, whose physique is more that of an athlete than a classical dancer.

As for Balanchine, the choreographer (1906-1983) who supposedly imposed some unreal physical "ideal" on modern ballet, his most famous muse, Suzanne Farrell, had wide hips, ample thighs and a foot that had been broken and healed in an odd way. The dancer's idiosyncrasies shape the talent.

The current controversy over body type ignores male dancers. Sexism has always haunted classical ballet. Men in ballet enjoy a double standard because they are in short supply. Few males admitted to prestigious schools have physical facility or technical ability of the females. As for physical criteria, Mikhail Baryshnikov and Rudolph Nureyev didn't fit the true masculine ideal for ballet; both were relatively short and stocky.

There are those who want ballet to stay unchanged, wedded to its origins in Czarist Russia. ...We are addicted to our ideal image of the ballerina as a woman forever young, trapped in a prepubescent body. We are stuck with the idea of the fine arts as something that belongs to the privileged few.<sup>6</sup>

In these articles we are introduced to various perspectives pertaining to the classical ballet form and although these commentaries openly debate its physical standards, they nevertheless agree that this form constitutes a superhuman bodily standard. Whether the form is challenged or supported, the fact remains that the classical ballet institution encourages excellence and refuses to bend its requirements.

I have opened this chapter with this controversial story that unfolded on the pages of the San Francisco Chronicle in order to show how the classical ballet form is not merely a physical body type but is loaded with meaning, seeped in politics and laden with historical significance. As this chapter will illustrate, within this form we find the merging of a bodily ideal with an artistic ideal. This is a form that has evolved for over four-hundred years into an aesthetic that assumes an unnatural standard of perfection yet, nonetheless, and regardless of its unreachable standards, holds an expressive power that drives the way for the dancer. Therefore, it is very important to this study that the reader fully understand everything there is to know about it. This form is the very thing that shapes the dancer's imagination of their special world. In all of its sensuous beauty and grace, it constitutes the very essence and spirit of classical ballet. This form goes beyond the pure and simple conception of physical form and is the classical ballet dancer's ultimate state of being. The force at the core of its essence cannot be measured scientifically, however, it is nevertheless experienced and lived out at multiple levels by all ballet dancers and is also best described by them.

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<sup>6</sup> "Gotta Dance—a New Take On the Ballet Controversy." Kathryn Castle, former professional dancer. San Francisco Chronicle, Friday, December 29, 2000.

In chapter 2 we proposed the following question: What exactly is the ballet dancer experiencing and therefore embodying? Since the main purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the embodied experience of the ballet dancer, and also, since the formation of the ballet dancer is dependent on his/her engagement with the ballet form, it is important that we begin this study with a clear depiction of the form itself. The dancers' focus on this form is central to the layered dynamics of their formation and without a comprehensive understanding of what this form constitutes, the dancers' experiences will not make much sense. As we will be describing throughout the coming chapters, the formation of the ballet dancer is a phenomenal act of creation which occurs at the level of a highly aesthetic experience and materializes at the level of a deeper connection with both the bodily and lived experience. In chapter two we also suggested that the formation of the dancer coupled with the transformation of the bodily form to a new form, require numerous levels of intelligence on the part of the dancer. To review, we proposed that ballet dancers' formation requires the following: a type of linguistic intelligence, that is, the ballet vocabulary and language; musical, spatial, movement skills; historical knowledge (where ballet comes from); knowledge of the codes of ethics and the rituals and practices; a deep bodily knowledge and finally, an understanding of the social context within which their transformation occurs. It is key to our understanding of the ballet dancer's formation that we recognize the significance of the ballet form because it is in fact the nucleus around which all this required knowledge circulates. It is through the intelligibility of all this vital knowledge that the dancer wholly experiences the ballet form. In a sense, the ballet form's complex aesthetics generates the need for the organization of this network of knowledge and through it maintains its controversial structure and high standards. Everything about the art of ballet is alive within its form and all experiences of ballet is the experiencing of the form itself. The ballet dancer's training and transformation—as we will describe in detail in the chapters that will follow—centers around the desire to inhabit this form. Since the ballet dancer is the embodiment of this whole body of knowledge, then it is accurate to suggest that the ballet form is alive within the core of all ballet dancers and is the very center of their universe. Therefore, in

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(<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/chronicle/archive/2000/12/29ED166641.DTL&typ.>).

order to proceed in a comprehensive manner, it is imperative that we explain what this form constitutes. Constructed over four hundred years ago, the ballet form has been influenced by the social and political world from which it was born and its evolution has been further influenced by the growth, development and transformation of the many social worlds through which it traversed. Since time has left its mark on the ballet form and because the form is the central force that drives the ballet dancer, we will, in the following section explain where it came from and how it evolved into the controversial form debated on the pages of the San Francisco Chronicle and throughout the dance world.

### 3.2 The evolution of the ballet form<sup>7</sup>

The pure academic style of classical ballet, or what is termed *danse d'école*, has its roots in the regal world of European Renaissance culture. First born in Renaissance Italy, ballet was the product of a time of tremendous intellectual excitement and great advances in science, literature and the arts. It was an age of richness and rivalry where the upper classes were becoming increasingly preoccupied with human potential rather than the hereafter. Freed from complete domination of the church, there emerged a great flowering of creative activity and an intense desire for knowledge. This was a time when Italy was divided into small states ruled by princes and where the ruling houses were vying with one another to develop the most civilized, glittering court, to amass the most brilliant and creative minds, and to produce the most grandiose spectacles. These great patrons of the arts discovered that great art enhanced the reputation of the state that produced it. Every prince in Italy during the fifteenth and sixteenth century hired resident dancing masters to create grand court dances. Amongst the nobility it became a social necessity to participate in the graceful and intricate court dances of the day. The dancing masters were responsible for instructing the courtiers and for staging the elaborate entertainment that became essential to the court atmosphere. What was once called *balli* bore little resemblance to classical ballet as we know it today. The *balli* consisted of a series of scenes that combined music, dancing, song and poetry, all staged with elaborate costumes, scenery, lighting and stage effects. These scenes were

generally connected to a theme and took the form of ‘dinner ballet’: interludes with themes that complemented the food being served. This became a custom that gave opportunity to a prince to impress his peers. The competitiveness of the courts placed the dancing master in great demand all over the European courts. One of the most famous of the early masters was Pompeo Diobona who taught at the court of Sforzas in Milan before moving to Paris. In 1462 he published the earliest known book on dancing, *De Arte Saltande st Choreas Dudende* (On the Art of Dancing and Conducting Dances) and made the distinction between a *danza* (a dance with a regular rhythm throughout) and a *ballo* (a dance production with varied patterns and rhythms). This was an important distinction because it signified a difference between ballet steps and those of the usual court dances where the ballet steps were a little more polished. Many of the dancing masters followed in the footsteps of Diobona publishing their own books and staging some of the most extravagant and lavish dinner ballets of the time. In 1489 one of the dancing masters, Berginzio de Botta staged a magnificent dinner ballet at Tortona to help celebrate the marriage of Galeazzo Visconti, the Duke of Milan, to Isabella of Aragon. Each course of the dinner was presented with the appropriate interlude, all connected by a theme based on the story of Jason and the Argonauts. The production was so impressive that accounts of it circulated throughout the courts in Europe—almost a century before Catherine de Médici sparked the beginnings of ballet in France with the *Ballet Comique de la Reine* in 1581. France soon discovered the beauty and grandeur of these lavish ballets and throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries dominated these spectacles. It should be noted however, that two very important books that documented technical advances in technique, emerged out of Italy during that period: *Il Ballarino* by Fabrizio Caroso (1581) and *Nuove Inventioni di Balli* (1602) by Cesare Negri.

France was first introduced to *balli* in 1494 when Charles VIII invaded Italy. On their return the French princes were soon eagerly producing their own court ballets, usually with the assistance of Italian dancing masters. All productions, however, were relatively small scale until the arrival of Catherine de Médici, who came to France from Florence in 1533 as the bride of the duc d’Orleans, and later Henry II. In the early sixteenth century Baldassarino

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<sup>7</sup> All the historical facts in this section have been taken from the following texts: *The History of Ballet and Modern Dance*; *The Oxford Dictionary of Dance*; and *Ballet, an Illustrated History*. See



di Belgiojoso<sup>8</sup>, an Italian-French violinist, composer, choreographer and personal servant to Catherine de Médici and music tutor to her sons, choreographed the *Ballet Comique de la Reine* in 1581. This five-hour extravaganza, which celebrated the duc de Joyeuse's marriage to the queen's sister, Margaret of Lorraine, is considered to be the first ballet de cour and the ballet that gave Beaujoyeux (Belgiojoso) the title of first French choreographer. The ballet was danced by aristocratic amateurs in the Salle Bourbon of the Louvre. It was produced at an immense cost and viewed by ten thousand guests. The extravagance of this ballet left its mark and news of its magnificence spread throughout Europe. The intricate, sophisticated and mannered world of the French court became the perfect breeding ground for ballet to flourish. The popularity of court ballets continued after Catherine's death. No king was ever able to afford to produce anything as lavish as *Le Ballet Comique de la Reine*. Louis XIII, who reigned from 1610-43, had a decidedly gloomy disposition and preferred ballets that were either fantastic or grotesque. Each ballet was still a collection of entrées but as time went on there was more of a tendency to group them into acts and relate them to a central theme.

During the first few years of Louis XIV's reign, (1643-1715) his mother Anne of Austria, acted as regent. She preferred opera (another Italian import) to ballet, and for a brief time ballet took second place. However, the young king, like all well-bred and well-born children of royalty, received instruction in dancing and soon became completely consumed by the art. His first public performance was at the age of thirteen and he continued to perform in all the court dances for the next twenty years. Court ballet, by definition was dependent on the policies and preferences of the ruling monarch. As Louis XIV became Europe's greatest king and archetypal aristocrat, so dance was transformed into a respectable and dignified art form, which reflected the spectacle (and artifice) of the glittering French court. In the process, it lost none of its value as a political tool; Mazarin, Louis's chief minister, encouraged him to appear in impressive roles in public to help consolidate his position. His appearance in 1653 in *Le Ballet Royale de la Nuit* is a case in point. Between 1648 and 1653 France had been torn by bitter civil war, but by 1653 the rebels had almost been defeated. Thus the ballet's

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bibliography.

<sup>8</sup> He later changed his name to Balthazar de Beaujoyeux.

story, which records the course of the hours of the day, conceals a political allegory obvious to audiences at the time. As the king, portraying *Le Roi Soleil*, the Rising Sun, drove out the demons and robbers who ruled the night, so would he triumph over the rebels who threatened to bring everlasting darkness to France and in the process, become one of the finest of noble dancers.

Louis XIV's love and passion for the art of ballet is responsible for sustaining the high status that it had received during his reign. His interest in ballet pushed this courtly dance ritual to a professional status. By hiring some of the best musicians and artists to lead the court productions, Louis XIV opened the door for the unprecedented growth and development of ballet and its form by some of the most creative artists of that time. After the 1650's, Pierre Beauchamps, Louis's dance teacher and the main choreographer of his court ballets, was an important influence on the development of ballet. He was a dancer, choreographer, ballet master, composer and violinist who is credited with inventing the five classic positions of classical ballet. Beauchamps's innovation gave performers a formal vocabulary of steps to follow. The codification of the dance movements established ballet as an art form distinct from ballroom dancing. As the monarchy became more firmly established, ballet lost its political role, but the court ballet continued to rise in popularity. Ballet was not yet as advanced as the opera in its capacity to tell a story without words, however, with the guidance of composer Jean-Baptiste Lully and others, opera-ballets became the fashion. Most of the entertainment performed in ballrooms or gardens like Versailles placed importance on pattern and formation and gave very little room for the depiction of human emotion.

As the 1660's wore on, Louis danced less and less. The ever-more demanding nature of ballet steadily increased the requirements and greater skill to perform became essential. Though many court ballets were still little more than excuses for the nobles of the court to dress up in elaborate costumes and masks, professional dancers had been part of the dance scene since 1630. As the king became less interested in dancing and performing, so did his court. Ballet performances after 1669 eventually moved from the palace ballroom to the royal theatre. The new venue changed the distance between the audience and the performers and

thus, removed much of the amateur quality and camaraderie experienced in the palace. This was a significant moment for ballet; the general atmosphere of the court productions was altered and replaced by an atmosphere of greater professionalism. The entire audience's perspective changed from surrounding and looking down on performers to a one-sided view, which forced the choreographers to move away from group patterns and forms and to emphasize the individual performers movements instead.

Although, Louis retired from public performing, he did not loose total interest in ballet. In 1661 he founded *L'Académie Royale de Danse* where he commissioned a group of thirteen dance masters to establish standards of perfection for the art of dance. They became responsible for the codification of the existing court and character dances, and for the implementation of dance teacher's examinations. The academy stayed in existence until the French Revolution. In 1669 Louis founded *L'Académie Royale de Musique*, known today as the Paris Opera and is the oldest ballet school in the world. By 1672, a school of dance was finally attached to a company and this marked the end of the noble amateur as ballet dancer.

So far in this section, I have described the very beginnings of the history of ballet and traced the ballet form right back to its royal origins. This is the very first layer of the essence and spirit that is still, and in many ways, alive within ballet today. Born from the courts of the noblemen, ballet's status as a high art is symbolic of its aristocratic beginnings. Although the ballet of the past does not hold the aesthetic sophistication of our present day ballet form, it nevertheless has sustained the regal posture and gracefulness displayed in the king's court. The exclusionary practices of that time had less to do with body type and ability, as we saw unfold in the Keefer case, and more to do with title and position. However, ballet has always been guided by a set of standards that promoted excellence and excluded the average and mediocre. Developed by the ruling classes of Europe, this art form has always been part of an autocratic rule. By virtue of its origins the ballet of today is still very much a symbol of power, prestige and wealth.

One of the differences that we encounter in today's ballet is the position of the female dancer. In 1681 the first professional female dancers appeared on stage in Lully's, *Le*

*Triomphe de l'Amour*. Up until that point, women had certainly appeared in court ballets, however, propriety did not permit noblewomen to dance in public, especially if the king happened to be dancing as well. Generally, men held center stage as they would throughout most of the eighteenth century. In addition to Beauchamps, the list of early dancers included: Louis Pécourt (1665-1729), considered the best *danseur noble* of his day; and Jean Balon (1676-1741) whose name became synonymous with lightness and elevation. Men did not only dominate onstage but also dominated the choreography, music, and dance teaching during this time. In 1713 a new school was established at the Opéra, marking further separation of social and professional dance and the ballet technique continued to develop. By the 1730's, although male dancers were still paramount, women were beginning to make progress. Two of them, Marie Camargo and Marie Sallé, were responsible for causing a rivalry that sparked a public interest in ballet. They are also responsible for pioneering long-needed reforms in both costumes and technique. Previously, men's costumes included elaborate masks, plumed helmets and short tunics which had been wired to project from the hips and stretch out as far as the dancer's arms could stretch. Women were trying to dance in long, heavy, hooped skirts, usually decorated with tiers of ruching in lace or feathers. They would also have to balance towering wigs. These tightly fitted costumes that all dancers wore, were accompanied by high-heeled shoes, which restricted the dancer's movements and allowed them enough motion to strike a series of graceful or impressive poses. Marie Camargo who debuted in Paris in 1726, was one of the most outstanding ballet technicians of that time. She was poised with brilliant jumps that surpassed most female dancers. In order to execute these quick jumps she shortened her skirts so that audiences could see her quick steps and wore ballet slippers instead of high-heels so that she could jump higher. Her rival Marie Sallé relied on dramatic expression rather than technical virtuosity, and insisted that costumes should reflect character. These two women marked the birth of the ballerina.

By 1760 the Opéra had reached a state of acute artistic stagnation, however, Jean-George Noverre believed strongly that the future of ballet lay in its development as an art form independent of opera. He also realized that technical skill alone would not be sufficient—ballet would have to rid itself of cumbersome conventions and costumes of the seventeenth century and begin to incorporate dramatic action if it was to have a chance for survival. He

published his theories in *Lettres sur la Danse et les Ballets*, a cry for reform which had a tremendous impact in the ballet world. He argued for the abolition of masks, wigs, clumsy panniers and inconvenient hip pads. Instead he advocated light, non-confining costumes that would allow dancers to move freely. He insisted that every ballet have a plot, a simple theme developed without words through the coordination of dramatic, expressive dance mime with music, setting and costumes. The new concept came to be called *ballet d'action* and was publicized throughout Europe.

By the time the French Revolution ballet was becoming increasingly popular with the general public. In response, choreographers began using stories from ordinary life in addition to traditional plots based on classical mythology. Noverre's theories were now being put into practice but it was the philosophy behind the French Revolution (1789-99) that effected every aspect of life including ballet. Its influence was most visible in costuming. The old-style costume, reminiscent of the aristocracy, completely disappeared and was replaced by simple tunics inspired by the Greek and Roman republics. They used material that was slightly transparent in order to display the beauty of the human body; the introduction of tights was the only piece of clothing that stood between the dancers and complete exposure. The trend from everyday life continued and ballet—like the other arts—was to some extent used as political propaganda. At the end of the eighteenth century, France was still the world leader in both dancers and choreography and Frenchmen were in evidence in the ballet world all over Europe and Russia.

As we have described, throughout the eighteenth century, ballet was revolutionized through the development of a serious technique that grew out of five basic classical positions. The development of what we have come to know as the ballet 'language' and 'vocabulary' is still today the basic foundation of the art form. Noverre's reform of the traditional role of dance from its decorative role in the opera to that of a serious dramatic art, set into practice his rules and principles and in many ways, elevated the status of the body in ballet. As its technical language developed, and changes in costume allowed for greater physical movement, the physicality of the dancer became an important vehicle for ballet. Even toe dancing began to develop at this time, although the dancers were able to balance on their toes

for only a moment or two, blocked toe shoes had not yet been invented, and dancers strengthened their slippers by darning them. So, for the first time in its early history, the body was playing a more significant role than the costumes and décor of the royal court dances. This was the very beginning of the evolution of ballet's physical form. Both men and women by the end of the eighteenth century were performing in ballets and great innovators such as Noverre and others like him, were preparing the ground for a new form of dance.

The nineteenth century is dedicated to the movement and mobility of ballet around the world and to the Romantic story ballet. Emerging all over Europe during the 1830's and 1840's was the Romantic ballet- a style of ballet which moved with the new trend for the exotic, escapist fantasy which dominated Romanticism in all the other arts. The Romantic ballet, inspired by the woman dancer, created settings which would elevate woman to the level of a soft, gentle, ethereal being often enveloped by a white light that presented her as a mysterious spirit like entity. These ballets were often fascinated with the supernatural; the stories they told spoke of the spirit woman, or sylph, that were said to enslave the hearts and senses of mortal men and made it possible for them to live happily in the real world. Women dancers were dressed in diaphanous white frocks with wings at their waist, and were bathed in the mysterious poetic light created by newly developed gas lighting in theatres. Their movements were technically more proficient and they danced with a more fluid and ethereal quality than eighteenth century dancers. They became experts at the art of flight and with their mastery of the *ballon*<sup>9</sup> they would project the illusion of being suspended in the air. On occasion they would achieve this by suspending the dancer in the air with a harness and wires, however, it was more-often-than- not achieved by the new technique of dancing on *pointe*. The lightness, grace and modesty, the prodigious elevation and feathery delicacy of landing, was a complete novelty and through dancers like Marie Taglioni—one of the first women to train herself to dance on the tips of her toes without *pointes*—an entirely new image of the female dancer emerged. Taglioni highly trained body was quite muscular compared to most women and with her strong form, she was able to seemingly hover just above the stage. The two greatest surviving ballets of that period is *La Sylphide*—danced by

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<sup>9</sup> A term commonly used to describe a dancer's proficiency in jumping. In the strict sense, it designates the dancer's ability to seemingly hang suspended in the air during jumps.

Taglioni in 1832, and *Giselle* first performed in 1841. Male dancers during that period, were frequently relegated to the role of *porteur* in the Romantic ballet with much less scope for dramatic or technical display. There was a general decline in the male dancer all over Europe and because the Romantic ballet was female centric, the Romantic ballet was short-lived. Although this era saw ballet develop into a truly international art, with European ballerinas travelling to Russia and the Americas, and more and more individual works being staged by companies around the world. In the main European centers it then degenerated into formulaic spectacle, and fashionable audiences drifted away from ballet to opera. The craze in Europe only lasted two decades, and after *Coppelia* in 1870, very few ballets of note were produced at L'Opéra de Paris. Denmark, however, managed to maintain the standards of the Romantic ballet. Danish-French choreographer August Bournonville proceeded to establish a system of training and also created a large body of work including his own version of *La Sylphide*, which is still performed today by many companies around the world.

Although ballet seemed to be losing its grip in France, those dedicated to this art continued to sustain its importance by influencing the world with their creations. One single most influential choreographer in the history of classical ballet was French-Russian, Marius Petipa who created famous pieces such as: *Swan Lake*, *Sleeping Beauty*, and *The Nutcracker*. Petipa's work was responsible for the Russian Imperial Ballet's great success. He brought with him the superior technique of the French and Italian schools and combined it to the grandeur and nobility of Tsarist Russia. It is through the work of Petipa that the form and structure of classical ballet reached their apogee. Perfecting the full-length evening story ballet that combined set dances with mimed scenes, as ballet declined in popularity in Europe, Russia, Petipa's work, was responsible for preserving the integrity of the ballet during the late nineteenth century.

By the end of the nineteenth century the ballet form had now developed a fully engaged partnership with the human body. Freed from the lavish costumes of the courts that had once engulfed the body and restricted its movement, the classical ballet form was no longer determined by song and poetry but was expressed through the technical skills of the human body. In fact, the dancer's body elevated the art to a new level and vice versa, the body was

elevated by the pure desire of the art itself. The art of ballet became about lightness and defying the laws of gravity. It became a master of the laws of nature and created a mystique around its supreme mastery of the physical world. It pushed the human body to a level of excellence never yet seen or experienced before, and became one with it. Without the human body the art form would not exist and without the technical language and vocabulary that made 'flight' possible, the human body would not experience the art of ballet. In the past, princes and kings impressed their peers through lavish costumes, scenery, lighting, music, and unstructured dancing. By the end of the nineteenth century Nations impressed with the newly developed technical skills of the classical ballet form. Ballet's usefulness as a political tool for the aristocratic world was no longer in vogue. Instead, as companies and schools opened up around the world, the classical ballet art form was now representing the cultural character of different Nations and reflecting the creative potential of human beings. The body was now liberated to partake in the further evolution this art form. As the evolution of ballet continues we will see the development of a highly complex aesthetic and the maintenance of very high standards of perfection. Up until this point, we see the institutionalization of the form through the establishment of ballet instruction, ballet schools and companies. We have not yet discussed the discipline and rigor involved in training ballet dancers, nor have we discussed the changing demands placed on dancers' bodies. Throughout the Romantic period the female body was still very much curvaceous and womanly. There does not appear to be great aesthetic demands, however, the potential is there. The language is there, the vocabulary is there and now we will see the refinement of the form and the emergence of the standards described in the Keefer case.

The greatest impact on ballet emerges out of the twentieth century. Russian impresario, Serge Diaghilev's founding of Les Ballets Russes in 1909 in Paris was the highlight of this century. This was an enormously famous and revolutionary ballet company made up of the most technically proficient dancers; immensely creative ballet masters and choreographers; and lead by the brilliant and progressive mind of Diaghilev. This was the company that ignited the ballet boom in Paris (1909- 1929) and generated excitement all over Europe and the United States. Its astounding dancers like Nijinsky, Pavlova, and Karsavine, and their performances in Paris before the First World War launched the international success of ballet.



Les Ballets Russes was energized by creative people like Russian dancer, choreographer and ballet master, Mikhail Fokine who was responsible for changing ballet by establishing a formula based on five principles. This formula demanded greater expressiveness and more authenticity in choreography, scenery and costumes. Diaghilev encouraged Fokine to develop his principles and thus, opened the door for the creation of classical ballet's greatest pieces. Amongst Fokine's most successful pieces are: *Les Sylphides* – restored by American Ballet Theatre – for example, and *Dying Swan*, *Scheherazade*, *Firebird*, *Le Spectre de la Rose*, *Petrushka*, *Le Dieu Bleu* and so on.

Diaghilev was a genius at spotting new talent and for setting up collaborations with artists. He believed that ballet should be a complete theatrical art and that music, design, and choreography should equally break new ground. His ballet's reflected, and were sometimes even catalysts, for new artistic trends. Most of his designers were painters creating vibrant imagery, patterns, and colors for the stage. Great talent emerged from this company and many of his dancers eventually moved on to found their own schools and companies throughout Europe and North America. Along with the foundation of these schools emerged various theoretical approaches to ballet. The Diaghilev dancers moved around into various metropolitan areas around the world and although they were on one hand united by Diaghilev's work and theories, these dancers eventually allowed the places in which they settled to inspire and motivate their work.

Originally Diaghilev dancers, Dame Marie Rambert and Dame Ninette deValois were two of the pioneers of Modern British Ballet who built their careers in the city of London. In 1920, Marie Rambert opened her London school, which in 1926 evolved into a performing troupe known as Ballet Rambert. Eventually, it became Britain's leading modern dance company and was known as the Rambert Dance Company. This was the birthplace of the three of the most important British ballet choreographers: Sir Frederick Ashton, Anthony Tudor and John Cranko. The most powerful exponent of classical British Ballet, however, was the Royal Ballet. Dame de Valois opened her school in London in 1926 and in 1931 her ballet company – the Vic-Wells Ballet, debuted at Sadler's Wells Theatre. For fifteen years this became its home until it moved in 1946 to Covent Garden and ten years later, in 1956,

after receiving its royal character, became the Royal Ballet. This was the company that defined the British national style. Ashton, who was the chief architect of British Classicism, and who was greatly influenced by the purity of Petipa's work, developed his own distinct style. Ashton's style was made up of sensual arm movements, brilliant footwork, supple twists and curves in the body and idiosyncratic angles of the head. He believed that dancers should not be afraid of letting go, yet his work had an element of simplicity and calm and thus, placed an emphasis on pure movement. With his first ballet *Symphonic Variations* (1946), he demonstrated to the British audience that ballet could stand alone without a story. He, thus, opened the door for the creation of the 'plotless' ballet. *Cinderella* (1948) and *Onedin* (1958) were amongst his most successful pieces. From 1963 to 1970, Ashton became artistic director of The Royal Ballet and thus, established the purity of the 'English' style. The "story ballet" was one of the main feature of The Royal Ballet: the "story ballet" (as we refer to them today) generally speak about traditional values and ideals. The ballet that tells a story, which emerges out of the eighteenth century, is a style of ballet whose usefulness is very much debated amongst people in this milieu. Should performance dance tell a story or not? Or, should it simply express emotions through the movement of the body? There are several theoretical positions that a ballet company – whether it is a classical company, neo-classical, contemporary or modern – can take today.

George Balanchine—regarded as the foremost contemporary choreographer in the world of ballet—and another of Diaghilev's dancers and chief choreographer—came to the United States in late 1933 following an early career throughout Europe. Son of a composer, Balanchine early in his life, gained knowledge of music that far exceeded that of most of his fellow choreographers. He began studying the piano at the age of five and following his graduation from the St. Petersburg's Imperial Ballet School in 1921, where he had been studying ballet from the age of nine, enrolled in the state's Conservatory of Music and studied piano, musical theory, composition, harmony and counterpoint for three years. His extensive musical training made it possible for Balanchine as a choreographer to communicate with great composers such as Igor Stravinsky and it also gave him the ability to reduce orchestral scores on piano—an invaluable aid in translating music to dance.

Diaghilev discovered Balanchine's talent as both dancer and choreographer and hired him as ballet master where he eventually became a full-time choreographer for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes until the company dissolved after Diaghilev's death in 1929. His piece *Apollo* created for Les Ballets Russes is recorded as the world's first neo-classical ballet. In 1933 Balanchine was invited to America by Lincoln Kerstein—a patron of the arts—and in 1934 founded the school of American Ballet in NYC. One year later in 1935 the company of American Ballet was established and made its first appearance. The American Ballet was resident at the MET from 1935 until 1938 after which it disbanded. Balanchine continued to work in the United States as a choreographer in Hollywood and on Broadway. In 1946 he and Kirstein founded the Ballet Society which in two years became The New York City Ballet based at the City Center. The New York City Ballet's first tour to Europe was in 1950 and in 1962 performed for the first time in the USSR. In 1964 the company moved to the New York State Theatre in Lincoln Center which was built to Balanchine's specification. His exceptional talent made The New York City Ballet one of the most successful companies in the world and was the inspiration behind the most outstanding creations of the twentieth century. His greatest achievement, however, was to take the classical ballet of his St. Petersburg roots and redefine it in a totally different and 'plotless' context. Balanchine's style has been described as neoclassic, a reaction to the Romantic anti-classicism, (which had turned into exaggerated theatricality) that was the prevailing style in Russian and European ballet when he had begun to dance. As a choreographer, Balanchine generally de-emphasized plot in his ballets and preferred to let dance be the star of the show. At the hands of Balanchine, classical ballet incorporated the past and the present; most apparent in his ballet *Agon*, with music by Stravinsky (1957), this ballet reconciled the French dance forms of the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the anxiety of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Its nervous intensity and nakedness of execution was unlike any ballet ever made before. Balanchine successfully fused modern concepts with older ideas of classical ballet. Like Stravinsky, he had a deep sense of responsibility to the past—the classical tradition made possible in the exchange of ideas across centuries. Balanchine, in a sense, reinvented the past in his ballets by appropriating the majesty of the Imperial Russian Ballet, the mood of l'Opéra de Paris in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the setting of *La Sylphide*, a ballet by Danish choreographer August Bournonville, in his *Scotch Symphony* with music by Mendelssohn (1952). The free-flowing U.S. dance forms

stimulated him to develop new techniques in dance design and presentation, which significantly altered the thinking of the world of dance. For Balanchine, music made us aware of time and should not be disturbed by movement. He believed that movement, or dance, should add to music not distract from what it was expressing. Often working with modern music, and the simplest of themes, he created ballets that are celebrated for their imagination and originality. Dance like music, for Balanchine, was under no obligation to tell a story or to imitate life. He had the strong conviction that music expressed itself eloquently and that it created forms. Many people at the time believed the Balanchine style of ballet to be formless because it was 'storyless'; today we call it abstract. Having choreographed over 400 ballets, he is without a doubt the greatest choreographer of our time.

In her biography, *Dancing On My Grave* (1986), Gelsey Kirkland, who we discussed in chapter one as one of the first ballerinas to expose the inner workings of the ballet world, makes some very interesting statements on Balanchine's style and choreography. As one of his muses and principal dancers, her intimate words on her life as a Balanchine dancer depict the profound impact and contribution of Balanchine's work to the art of ballet. She writes:

There are those who maintain that Balanchine's ballets set the standard of beauty for all time. To those who still deify him, he rescued the classic ballet and extended its expressive range. But what place did feeling and wit, love and reason, have in Mr. B's theatre? In his obsession with the mechanical execution of dance, what other qualities did his ballets possess or lack? What was the effect on his dancers when form overshadowed content?

The men were still cavaliers; the women were slender "pinheads", either ethereal or sensual. Mr. B was famous for describing ballet as "Woman." She, the ballerina, was apparently his inspiration, the love of his life...

It was as if ballet were born with Balanchine. His official version of what was supposed to be the orthodox style of ballet made him the living repository of all practical knowledge pertinent to the art...

Without a script, the style of a ballet provides the only instrument with which to penetrate its reality and reconstruct its inner meaning. The past acts as a constant provocation and guide to those principles of creative discovery that seem to speak to each age. The enduring subject of ballet was never to be found in the literal symbols of fairy tale or myth, nor was significance stored in the steps by themselves. Classical dance in the deepest sense, like classical

drama and music, sought to inspire judgement, to enlighten and ennoble the human spirit. By its very nature, the method of classical ballet held the promise of a revelation that opposed escapism.

By removing the classical vocabulary—the academic steps and positions of ballet—from the traditional repertory, Balanchine divorced the steps from the historical environment and dramatic context in which they had once acquired meaning. He adapted a version of the Russian lexicon that had been established by choreographer Merius Petipa during the last century. Over the years, Mr. B derived a formula to fit what he saw as the essential speed of American life...

What had come to life in former times as a revelation of divine harmony—a composition of movement, music, and dramatic action, as geometrically sublime as the secret coiled in the spiral of a seashell—was interpreted by Mr. B. in a new way. He performed an autopsy on what he saw as the corpse of classical ballet. Exacting a code of movement, he thought he had isolated its soul (Kirkland, 1986: 48-9).

His company, the New York City Ballet, was the leading dance group of the United States and one of the greatest companies in the world. An essential part of the success of Balanchine's group had been the training of his dancers, which he had supervised since the founding of his School of American Ballet in 1934. His choreography had its origins in the classroom where he experimented with new combinations of steps and cultivated a style. The studio was his laboratory and ballet training was his science. The School of American Ballet supplied him with dancers that were trained in the Russian technique that he was brought up with. With these dancers, he took this technique and deliberately exaggerated certain aspects of it. Balanchine chose to shape talent locally, and stated that the basic structure of the American dancer and the speed of New York City was responsible for inspiring some of the striking lines of his composition. The speed, the clarity, the sharp attack that Balanchine demanded, came to be the New York City Ballet's trademark. Fascinated by the workings of the human body, and curious about its limits, Balanchine had his dancers dancing bigger and faster than anyone had before. He worked with the dancer's individual strengths and pushed them to try new steps that they had never believed possible. He was continuously inventing new moves with increased technical difficulty and was constantly testing his dancer's limits. Balanchine was not only gifted in creating entirely new productions—his choreography for

classical works was equally fresh and inventive. He had made American dance the most advanced and richest in choreographic development in the world today. Always preferring to call himself a craftsman rather than a creator, Balanchine often compared himself to a cook or a cabinetmaker (both hobbies of his) and had a reputation throughout the dance world for the calm and collected way in which he worked with his dancers and colleagues. Kirkland explains:

Even when he described ballet as an “omelette” and we dancers as the ingredients he would use to “cook something up,” we thought his choice of culinary metaphor combined eccentric charm and metaphysical profundity. It seemed the height of modesty for him to refer to himself variously as chef, gardener, tailor, carpenter, and cabinetmaker...

Balanchine assembled steps that were supposed to have been predetermined by God and humbly described himself as an instrument of divine will. His word was holy (Kirkland, 1986: 49-50).

Balanchine’s position that dancing is an absolutely independent art and not merely a secondary accompanying one was unwavering. He believed it to be one of the greatest art forms of our time, and like the music of great musicians, it can be enjoyed and understood without any verbal introduction or explanation. He often referred to ballet as movement itself and compared it to how sound is important in a symphony. For Balanchine, ballet belonged to the dancer and choreography did not exist except for what audiences saw before their eyes. Ballet was in the moment and lived in the dancer and only for that moment when the dancer danced. He acknowledged that ballet could tell a story but it was the visual spectacle of this art form that was the most essential element of ballet. His philosophy of ballet was based on the idea that audiences are moved and touched through their eyes and that they must be trained to see what is being performed on the stage. He insisted that it is the illusion created which convinces the audience, much as it is with the work of a magician. If the illusion fails, the ballet fails, no matter how well a program note tells the audience that it has succeeded.

Balanchine’s ability to honor the technical sophistication and sweeping elegance of the nineteenth century Russian Classicism while stripping it of its artifice, plot, and theatricality

led to the development of neo-classicism, a form which married the essence of Russian ballet to the modernist and dynamic sensibilities of an American audience. Some of the greatest ballets ever produced were Balanchine's: *The Four Temperaments*, *Themes and Variations*, *Symphony in C*, *Agon*, *Symphony in Three Movements* and many more. In his work he gave equal weight to the ensemble and soloist alike, and he rejected (for the most part) the star system he had been brought up with. At the heart of every Balanchine ballet is the belief that dance is music brought to physical life.

### 3.3 The ballet class

As we have seen, Balanchine's aesthetic vision has had an enormous impact on the ballet form; specifically, his love of the female form, has had an exceptional transformative effect on choreography and on the 'ballerina' image. The female body was his muse and his inspiration, and as we saw in the introduction of this chapter, his aesthetic ideal has been both contested and celebrated. He loved tall dancers because the audience could see them better. He loved women because they were more flexible and they had the ideal body for the ballet technique, for speed and the refinement of the technique. Men, for Balanchine, were made to jump and to lift or support the women in choreography. He believed that men's bodies were not built for the speedy footwork he required of his female dancers. He loved teaching women and choreographed for them.

In the previous section we described how the classical ballet form has evolved throughout history and how advances in its technique and evolution in its artistic form—especially with the development of the pointe shoe and point technique for the ballerina—has left 'the dance' standing by itself, and stripped of its heavy theatrical setting. What we focused on was the evolution of this form and the theoretical foundation upon which our present day ballet form has been built. Today we bear witness to how Balanchine and his counterparts have pushed the limits of the ballet dancer's body to the point where the technical sophistication of both the female and male dancer has been unprecedented throughout the entire history of ballet. The ballet dancer of today is lighter, stronger, faster and more agile than ever seen before, and the ballet form has so far reached its highest level of excellence. Balanchine, with his

great love of the art and his unrelenting desire to bring ballet to life through the human body and to highlight its aesthetic beauty, set the standard that we saw fervently criticized in the Keefer case. By transforming ballet from the large, fluffy Romantic story to a highly visual and aesthetic experience where the lines and curves of the dancer's body as well as the elegance, lightness and grace they embody is celebrated, and where it becomes synonymous with ballet, the human body that is trained to dance ballet becomes the primary focal point of this art form. The formula for creating this aesthetic experience is dependent on the ballet dancer's formation; it begins primarily in the mind of the young aspiring dancer and is realized throughout his/her physical transformation. Through the international ballet institution's internal network, the Balanchine standard is managed and maintained through the rigorous demands placed on the training of professional ballet dancers. The entrance requirements for ballet schools such as the San Francisco Ballet School, are the norm these days and only in rare cases do professional ballet schools make exceptions. Schools look for raw talent and exceptional physical potential; without the primary physical elements as described on the San Francisco Ballet School web site, the young aspiring dancer will, as we will see in the next three chapters, feel less than adequate. These types of schools (e.g. National Ballet School of Canada; Les Grandes Ballets Canadian; The School of American Ballet; The Houston Ballet School; Winnipeg and Alberta Ballet schools; L'Opéra de Paris, and all the other professional schools) search for the best of the best and make their choices based on what they conceive to be the future of this art form. It is within these schools that young aspiring dancers learn the language and vocabulary of ballet; they learn to understand and feel the music; they develop their movement skills and as they become more advanced, they learn to integrate their technical abilities with their unique artistry. Through their participation in the daily rituals and practices, they learn the rules and codes of ethics, and the norms and values that are imbedded in their social environment. The physical training takes place in the ballet class and here, where dancers begin their formation, the entire history and evolution of ballet is brought to life through the human body. This is where the cumulative knowledge of generations of choreographic talent, and the mastering of the human body, is transmitted to new generations of dancers and where that knowledge will eventually be transported to the next generation. The ballet class is the place where the young aspiring dancer will learn the secrets of the law of gravity and where, through his/her formation, will



embody the grace and elegance inherent in this art form. This is the place where the dancer learns who they are as dancers.

Anywhere in the world the ballet dancer's daily ritual begins with the infamous ballet class, and here they will learn that the ballet terminology, which began in the royal courts of France, is French. In all studios around the globe and regardless of ballet style, the ballet vocabulary is always spoken in French. So, every morning the ballet dancer begins with their daily class where they learn the basic exercises that keep their bodies fit, limber and in top performance shape. Whether they are just beginning their formation, or have already attained a professional status, all ballet dancers begin the day in the very same way. Men and women, boys and girls, all begin class standing with one hand on the barre<sup>10</sup>, stomachs pulled in, necks tall, back straight and thighs and feet turned-out<sup>11</sup> and every exercise begins with one of the five basic positions of the feet<sup>12</sup>. The barre work generally lasts approximately thirty to forty minutes and always begins with the *pliés*<sup>13</sup>; depending on the ballet teacher, she or he could ask that they be executed from one or all of the five basic positions. After the *pliés* the exercises at the barre proceed with the: *tendus*, *dégagés*, *rond de jambe*, *frappés*, *petit battements*, *arabesque*, *attitude* and *grand battement*<sup>14</sup>. Once the barre work is over the ballet

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<sup>10</sup> The **barre** is a horizontal rail fixed to the wall of a dance or freestanding on two parallel bars and is used as a balance-check.

<sup>11</sup> The **turnout** is a fundamental requirement of all classical ballet, which involves rotating the legs and feet outwards from the hips so that the feet point outwards while the hips remain facing forward. The idea of the turnout is to give the body greater freedom of movement in every direction. It depends on flexibility in the hip socket and which is enhanced and developed with many years of ballet training.

<sup>12</sup> **First position:** feet are in what we call a turned-out position, forming a line perpendicular to the rest of the body with the heels touching. The feet should ideally be as close as possible to 180 degrees keeping the knees aligned with, or over, the toes. **Second position:** feet form the same line as they do in first position except now the heels are approximately a foot apart depending on the width of the dancer's hips. **Third position:** one foot is placed directly in front of the other, turned out, with the heel touching the middle of the other. **Fourth position:** the feet are turned out, one in front of the other, and separated by about a foot, with the heel of one foot opposite the toe of the other. **Fifth position:** is the position from which most dancers begin and end variations and dances. It is a clean, tidy and secure position and gives the body its greatest possible height when taking off for jumps. In fifth position both legs are turned out, with the heel of one foot touching the toe of the other.

<sup>13</sup> **Pliés:** These are essentially knee bends that warm up the legs and ankles and provides elasticity; their aim is to assist the dancer in turns, pointe work and in landing from jumps.

<sup>14</sup> **Tendus** are leg and foot stretches that help to elongate and strengthen the muscles of the legs and torso. Tendus, as all extended leg exercises, are executed to the front, side and back with the foot brushing along the floor through half-pointe to a full extension. While executing numerous variations of tendu exercises, the dancer is also continually working on the proper turn-out of the leg and feet.

dancer stretches and prepares their tendons and ligaments for the centre work, which lasts about forty-five minutes to an hour. Most of the exercises that were executed at the barre are performed during the centre work without the support of the barre. New exercises are also introduced including pirouettes, adage exercises and allegro exercises<sup>15</sup>. Each and every exercise is designed to change the young dancer's physical shape and to transform it as close as possible to ballet's aesthetic ideals. And, each and every day ballet dancers train their body to master the language of ballet. They practice the same steps over and over again, every day of their entire training and throughout their careers. Physical and artistic perfection is the goal.

We opened this chapter with the Keefer story, which not only emphasized the exclusionary practices of the ballet world, but also highlighted the impact, which Balanchine

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**Dégagés** are essentially the same brushing movement as tendus but in dégagés the working leg leaves the floor slightly when extended. **Rond de jambe** is an exercise designed to increase the turn-out of the legs. The dancer traces a semi-circle on the floor around his or her body. The working leg moves steadily with the toe on the ground from the front to side, side to back and then past the stationary heel. **Frappés** are designed to prepare the legs for jumping. The raised foot touches the other ankle and from the knee down, the leg is thrown strongly out to the side. **Petit battements** is an exercise designed to prepare the legs for more complicated and intricate steps. The heel of one foot touches the other ankle. The lower part of the leg moves out and in very quickly. This is made more difficult when the dancer rises on the supporting leg. **Arabesque**: at the end of the exercise dancers test their balance by letting go of the barre and rising on their toes. There are many positions that dancers can take to test their balance and one of the most common body positions is the arabesque. In an arabesque position one leg is stretched behind the body. The leg on the floor is turn-out and the leg behind the body is lifted in the air at a minimum of 90 degree angle from the supporting leg. The **Attitude** is a variation of the arabesque except that the leg, which is extended behind the body, is bent at the knee and forms a 90-degree angle. **Grand battement** are free high kicks of the leg where the leg is thrown in the air with great control and then brought down to a tendu position. This exercise must be executed with as little movement as possible in the upper body. These exercises loosen the hips and assist in keeping the legs flexible.

<sup>15</sup> **Pirouette** is the term that refers to many kinds of turning steps. To execute proper turns, a dancer must begin with a strong preparation—a plié and a pulled-up body—and must quickly snap to the front while spotting (focusing on a spot in front of the body all the time) in order to prevent dizziness. The dancer must then spring up to half-pointe or full pointe on the supporting leg, while the second leg springs to a turned-out relevé position under the knee. The arms are also solidly positioned in front of the body at waist level to keep the body balanced and assist with the turn. **Adage** means slow, soft, lyrical and sustained movements. A series of steps are combined in adage exercise to develop these special qualities in the dancer's body. Adage creates the illusion that the positions flow one into one another. **Allegro** in ballet involves brisk and lively movements, usually jumping steps and sequences. What is essential in both small and large jumps is that the legs are fully stretched and the feet are pointed, creating a sharpness and length to the jumps. Jumps begin and end in a plié; the plié serves a

has had on the physical standards and requirements in the ballet world today. Balanchine's method of training was very quick and speedy—he basically stripped down the training process by removing any unnecessary elements—the same way his abstract ballets sought to eliminate what he saw as superfluous elements of plot and character. He focused on lightness and speed and was completely obsessed with the female form and the ballerina. Kirkland explains:

The physical line of the ballerina seemed to have been ordained. A thin body carried the most definition. A slender figure was supposed to be the prerequisite for movement. We were not taught how movement can generate the illusion of both line and shape, how a ballerina's facility can create the impression of weight. Only on my own and years later would I learn that by moving in a clever way, a dancer can appear heavy or light, adding or losing pounds by changing placement dynamic.

Mr. B's ideal proportions called for an almost skeletal frame, accentuating the collarbones and length of the neck. Defeminization was the overall result, with the frequent cessation of the menstrual cycle due to malnutrition and physical abuse. A fulsome pair of breasts seemed the only attribute with which a ballerina could assert her sexuality.

Over the years, Mr. B's methods and tastes have been adopted by virtually every ballet company and school in America—through faithful imitation, and by encouragement of those ballet masters trained by Balanchine, and those teachers who champion "thin-is-in" as a requirement for admission into the schools. For those who refuse to go along with the crowd, professional employment is unlikely.

A "concentration camp" aesthetic leads to abuse of diet pills, quack weight-reducing formulas, and, ultimately, anorexia. The health problems have become epidemic. Without proper nourishment, the chances for recovery from dance-related injuries drop to nil, with a corresponding increase in susceptibility to disease and chronic disabilities.

Many of the excesses of American ballet seem to be a result of the slimness trend, turning ideal of beauty into mere fashion. Mr. B pushed us in that direction, but also popularized ballet (Kirkland, 1986: 56).

The ideal ballet body, especially for women, as we saw in the San Francisco Chronicle articles and as Gelsey describes in her book, is tall, lean, good arches in the feet, straight

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multitude of purposes; most importantly, it serves to prevent injuries and it allows the dancer to jump

spine, long neck, and perfect turnout. These are just the basic physical requirements, however, much emphasis is placed on musicality, grace, poise, quality of movement and the intangible artistry. Men generally need to be solid artists—they need to be able to jump and turn, partner the woman and to develop great power and strength. The women need to have, what they call, ‘the full package’—beautiful body, great technical ability and exceptional artistry. The fact that there are fewer men than women who decide to pursue a career in ballet, and because they are in greater demand than women, the ballet world tends to be more forgiving. It is not unheard of to have men in prominent ballet companies who do not have the perfect body or the perfect technique. Nevertheless, both women and men receive the same daily technique class as described above. Women have a separate class to train them to dance on pointe shoes—this is called pointe work. Since jumps and turns are one of the main features of male ballet dancers, they receive separate men’s classes where they learn to suspend their jumps in the air as long as possible and also learn to master the art of multiple pirouettes. The men and women also have *pas de deux* classes together where they learn to dance as partners. In many of the classical repertoire like *The Sleeping Beauty* ballet, the principal couples usually perform a *grand pas de deux* in the final act. The *grand pas de deux* begins with the couple dancing together, then the male dancer will perform a solo of large jumps and turns followed by the female dancer who will perform a solo and the couple will finish by dancing together again. The *pas de deux* in any ballet requires great precision and exceptionally strong technique and beautiful artistry. In most of the professional schools dancers also have what is called a *variations class* where they learn the classical repertoire and also, where they have the chance to develop their artistry. Every exercise in the class prepares the body for the ultimate virtuoso requirements—the basis for formation in general, however, is the mastery of the codified positions, shapes and steps and the integration of technical ability with artistic talent. With the great influence of Balanchine, the refinement the lines of the dancer’s body and the careful attention paid to the whole aesthetic quality of the dancer’s shape and movements, ballet has been transformed into an art form that now celebrates sophisticated lines and a sleek modern aesthetic. The visual beauty of ballet has been pushed so far that it has in effect created even more demands of the human body. Although, the basis of the classical ballet training has always been the five positions of the

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higher.

feet that developed from the *école d'action*, today dancers jump higher than ever before; lift their legs higher than before; spin faster and with more revolutions than ever before; and most importantly, are completely focused on the highly sophisticated aesthetic of the ballet form. Although ballet has always taken the form of a spectacle, it has nevertheless evolved into an art form that is very much about the visual experience. Never before in the history of ballet has the body become one with the form as it has today. The fully trained body of both the female and male dancer is the most important aspect of this art form—without the training, or formation of dancers' bodies there can be no ballet. Furthermore, without the prime focus being the visual aesthetic of the body, there is no art. The female body is no longer covered with layers of material and her womanly curves are a hindrance to the aesthetic that was held as the standard for perfection by Balanchine. No longer is ballet about the story but it is about the human form and its potential to attain stunning lines on stage. Throughout this chapter we have shown how the history of ballet is the story of organization, movements, and traditions, of companies, theatres and trends, as well as individuals. Modern dance began in America in the early twentieth century when the precursors of the artist we know today began their own rebellions against both formality and artifice of ballet. Modern dance pioneers eschewed the rigid hierarchy of ballet and favored a freer movement style. They also favored bare feet over pointe shoes and stripped dance of its literary and narrative context altogether, as well as isolating it from its musical accompaniment. As we saw in the introduction of this chapter, the ballet form has been and still is today a controversial art form. Ballet, unlike modern dance, requires a very specific body type and as a reaction to the ballet institution's exclusionary practices, modern dance pioneers rebelled by developing a new dance form that did not rely on an idealized body type. Modern dance, in general, celebrates heterogeneity and is highly critical of the elitism of ballet.

The royal courts of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the elitism that is symbolic of that time and place is still imbedded in the art of ballet; its proud spirit is still very much rooted in its modern form. The ballet form, as we have seen, has evolved in direct relationship with the evolution of the role of the body and its level of importance. As more and more demands to excel have been placed on the human body in ballet, the more we reveal its incredible potential. Also, the more we push the body to create magnificence on stage—to create

illusions and magic, the further we transform the creative potential of the form itself. Hence, the ballet form and its high aesthetic standards have emerged from the body's ability to attain the ultimate level of excellence. The dancer bows to the physical needs and requirements of the ballet form of today. The ballet form and its idealized standards of excellence is not always a perfectly tangible thing, however, for dancers who train their entire lives to inhabit it, its ideal shape is nevertheless engraved in their minds. This is their main target and this is the force that drives them. Everything that is this form the ballet dancer will embody by the time they take their first professional steps on stage. The very first experience that the young aspiring dancer will encounter is the aesthetic experience. They will on the very first day of their audition at the professional ballet school learn about what is valued and what the standards of excellence require. They will come out of this event with their first impressions of what is expected of them and in many cases what weaknesses they hold in their unformed body. Rarely do all the young dancers have the absolute perfect body but they must have strong potential. The young dancers' bodies will change throughout their training and as they learn the elements needed to acquire the ideal image they will continually assess themselves vis a vis this image. The first level of their embodied experience of ballet, as we will illustrate in the coming chapter is the aesthetic experience. We have so far explained what the ballet form of today looks like and have also described its roots and the theoretical foundation upon which it was built. In the next chapter we will explain the dynamics of the dancers' aesthetic experience throughout their formation and transformation. We end this chapter with a solid knowledge of what the ballet form looks like and begin the next chapter with an idea of what the ballet dancer will strive to inhabit.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **THE AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In the previous chapter we began with an illustration of the high standards upheld by professional ballet institutions and discussed the aesthetic ideals of this art form. We described the high level of physical requirements that a young aspiring dancer must meet in order to be accepted into a professional training program. Furthermore, in order to understand the depth and long cultural history of the ballet form, we traced its evolution and discussed at some length the vision of those who influenced the form throughout its history. Now that we have knowledge about where this art form emerged from and what has been invested in its growth and development, we are now ready to proceed to the next level of inquiry. In what will follow, we will explore the dynamics involved in the ballet dancers' formation and transformation, and will describe their relationship with their bodies, with the ballet form and with the social context through which they emerge as dancers.

As we highlighted in chapter 2, our research chapter, the main focus of this dissertation is to delve into the ballet dancers' actual experience of their formation and transformation in order to shed some light on the phenomenon of embodiment. The interviews that were conducted for this study have generated a great deal of insightful information. These very detailed conversations, which describe the dancers' fully active and highly creative engagement in this process, will be central to the second half of this dissertation (chapters 4-6). Let us first begin, however, by recapitulating from chapter 2, the following proposition: If you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience and therefore self-expression. If we assume this to be true, then what we are actually suggesting is that the

formation of the ballet dancer, which is the *inhabiting* (or embodying) of the ballet form, is the actual transformation from one bodily form to another bodily form, and is also the transformation of bodily experience and therefore, bodily expression. We also raised the following questions: How does a dancer inhabit this ballet form? And how is it expressed? How does the process of transformation happen? What does it entail? How is the process of formation related to the learning of the language of ballet? And how might this language relate to the way the dancer experiences their body newly? How does the transformation into this new experience change the way the dancer expresses? How does the dancer experience the idealized image and how does that relate to their formation? How is the process of formation integrated into the story the dancers' recount to themselves? In other words, how do they come to understand the 'experiencing' of the idealized form in ballet? And how do they negotiate this? Our proposition and questions collectively question the very nature of the ballet dancers' embodied experience. What exactly does it mean to embody? In order to make sense of the remainder of this dissertation and of the discussions that will follow, it is important that we understand the term '*embodiment*' as meaning to sense the object at a bodily or sensorial level. For the ballet dancers, it would mean the sensing of the ballet form—the visual object of their desire—at a bodily level, or from within themselves. The actual sensation is the embodiment of that object and expression from a place of sensation, that is, from a place where the object of desire is embodied, is the actual expression of that object. As we will describe in the next three chapters, the ballet dancers' embodiment of the ballet form is determined by their emotional attachment, their understanding, appreciation and love for the ballet form. Their deep connection with the visual image of this form, their sensation of it at a bodily level, and their expression through it, will be the main focus of our discussion.

The ballet form, as we have come to know it today, exists by virtue of the ballet dancer's carefully trained and sculpted body. It should be noted, however, that the ballet dancer's formation is not exclusively a bodily experience, rather, it is a highly complex and layered process that requires more than a simple game of monkey-see-monkey-do; ballet dancers are not produced nor formed by imitation. As we will describe at length in this chapter and the final two, the ballet dancer is formed through the 'inhabitation', or embodiment, of the ballet



form. The form, being the nucleus, the central power source and the main focus and obsession of the ballet dancer, is also the standard by which the dancer's progress and transformation is continuously measured. As we will explore further, the ballet dancer lives within the ballet form and experiences it at the aesthetic level, at a symbolic level and at a sensorial level. At every level of their experience the ballet form is situated at the very core of it all; its power is released the very moment the young aspiring dancer desires it and thus takes a leap of faith to be transformed into a ballet dancer. The dancers' growth and development requires their active participation. Every exercise, every correction and every moment for the rest of their lives as dancers, and far beyond that, will be consumed by the inhabitation of the form. They will, as they train and become immersed in the ballet culture, release their old ways of seeing the body and will also change the way they act or behave. They will in a sense wear, or 'put on' a new character, or the new self that will be created in the likeness of the ideal image—or as close to it as possible. The entire process, as we will describe at length, is a kind of wholly experience connecting the mind, the body and the spirit and becoming completely conscious of their unity. All the exercises and training demand a complete investment of the dancer's physical, mental and emotional energy. There must be no reluctance to let go of the old form. The reward produced by their entire devotion to the embodiment of the form and to expressing through it, is the feeling of freedom that occurs when the transformation of the dancers' outward appearance coincides with their inner sensation. This is the ultimate accomplishment—when every part of them is perfectly aligned and they can experience freedom through the form and through the discipline required to attain it.

In order to understand this phenomenon, and for the purpose of making the intangible tangible, we will breakdown the formation of the ballet dancer and the *experiencing* of it into three parts: the first (chapter 4) will be the aesthetic experience where the dancers will develop an 'eye' for the form and will actively integrate it into their transformation. The second part (chapter 5) is the institutional experience—the place where the self will emerge as a dancer. Through the dancers' daily interactions with the social context through which their self will emerge, they will learn the codes, the ethics and the symbols, and will attain the necessary mindset required for success. And the third and final part (chapter 6) is the ultimate

experience, the union of the bodily experience, the lived experience and the experience of expressing through the form. This is the level of the embodied experience where the dancers now 'live' the body as a dancer, where they live the experience of the dancer, and where they live the 'self' of a dancer. This is where the body is no longer an object but a subject.

To begin then, we will devote this chapter to the aesthetic experience and to the development of the 'eye' needed to reach the ultimate quest of aesthetic perfection. The life of a dancer is filled with hard work and discipline, however, this work is driven by an unrelenting passion for their vision. The making of a dancer is certainly not a natural process but rather, it is a carefully calculated and highly creative invention that begins with a vision that is thrust forward and realized through the imagination. This imagined image of oneself as a dancer and the inner sensations that are provoked, and which develop with the building of each layer, one step at a time, is the basis for this dynamic act of creation. The formation of the ballet dancer is at numerous levels like a work of art. It is inspired, created with much attention, carefully cultivated and never entirely finalized. Every moment throughout the process of transformation is subject to much contemplation where the self-image of the dancer is in constant flux and where attempts to create aesthetic perfection renders it in a state of continual unfinalizability. To end this introduction and before we proceed to the theorization of this phenomenon, I turn once again to a very powerful quote by Gelsey Kirkland exposing the vulnerability she encountered with her self-image, her external appearance, and how the experience of her own reflection in the mirror caused her much anguish because it somehow did not always coincide with her imagined self-image nor with her inner sensation. She explains:

Throughout the early phases of my career, the mirror was my nemesis, seductive to the point of addiction. Stepping through the looking glass meant confronting a double who exposed all my flaws and pointed out all of my physical imperfections. Over a period of time, the image in my mind clashed with the image in the glass. Until the opposition between the images was resolved, I saw myself as a walking apology, unable to attain or maintain my constantly refined ideal of physical beauty.

With all of my insecurities intensified, I became my own worst critic, embarking on an aesthetic quest for perfection that in the end would heal the

wounds I had inflicted upon myself. Trying to perfect both my appearance and the quality of my movement, I was unaware of a contradiction. As I continued to educate myself, my love and anger wed within my personality. I remained a child. I worked and lived in isolation, an almost absolute solitude that I now see was unnecessary. I was misled, sometimes deliberately. And I was not alone.

The endless repetition of barre exercises in front of a mirror reflects a distorted image many people have of ballet, an image shared by many dancers. The physical side of the discipline does involve a certain degree of tedium, to say nothing of the pain. But the hours of practice are minor compared to the emotional terror that can sometimes haunt a ballerina when she studies her reflection in the mirror. This anxiety is not due to simple vanity or fear of professional rejection.

As in the myth of Narcissus, the beautiful youth who falls in love with his own reflection, the relationship between the dancer and her mirror image is intimacy of extraordinary power and potentially perilous consequence. Most dancers ultimately seem to drown themselves in their own images, pushed by forces unseen. The dimensions of the tragedy are revealed only when lives and personalities are destroyed. Until then the damage remains invisible.

I suspect that every dancer experiences the mirror in a uniquely personal way, although many are perhaps oblivious to the power it exerts over their lives and how that state of artistic servitude has come into being. Certainly few dancers have taken the relationship to the extremes of my early career, and fewer still have managed to reverse the hold of the mirror.

As a primary teaching tool for dance, the mirror fosters the delusion that beauty is only skin-deep, that truth is found only in the plasticity of movement. It seems preferable to imitate rather than create. Imitation can be varied to create the impression of originality. There are endless possibilities for breaking the human mold into novel patterns. To be daring in dance no longer involves risk, virtuosity, and strength of conviction. The dancer can win approval for steps that require no real decision in creative or conditional terms.

The dancer is trained to watch, to enter the world of the mirror until it is no longer necessary to even look. To the extent that a dancer becomes a complacent reflection, he or she does not learn how to test beauty, how to discover its inner life. In this way, the mirror can trap a dancer's soul, ultimately breaking creative spirit. Such a dancer is created, but does not know how to create. With success and popularity, the situation becomes more precarious. At any moment, with the capricious changes of fashion, a glance to check the mirror may reveal tragedy—that he or she has been created for nothing (Kirkland 1986: 72-3).

#### 4.2 The author and hero in aesthetic activity

Like a work of art, ballet dancers are always in the process of perfecting themselves. The process is highly interactive and is not a one-sided act. That is, their formation is dependent on an intersubjective relationship. In order to understand this phenomenon, we will begin this chapter by referring to Bakhtin's essay, "*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*" where he explores the aesthetic problem involved in the relationship between an author and the characters he creates. His exploration and description of the various aspects of the author/hero relationship is developed through a typology of human events in terms of the number of participating consciousness and their interrelationships. For the purpose of understanding ballet dancers' aesthetic experience, Bakhtin offers us an interesting and insightful theory into this phenomenon through his examination of the author's spatial relationship to the hero.

Three parts of "*Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*", are devoted to the hero's spatial form, temporal wholeness, and the possibility of wholeness of meaning around his person. The hero is placed within a physical space against a given horizon where Bakhtin focuses on the hero's *external appearance*, *external boundaries*, and *acts*. The fact that the external appearance of ballet dancers is crucial to their success, and that throughout their formation and transformation, as described above by Gelsey Kirkland, they are constantly questioning and struggling with their own reflection, Bakhtin's theorization of how we experience from within, or inwardly, the *externalization* of our own image is important in order to understand the dancers experiences. Although Bakhtin discusses *external* appearances and *external* boundaries and actions, his main interest is on the internalization, or self-sensation, of how *I* imagine myself and experience from within myself, my own external appearance. This *inner* and *outer* dynamic is central to self-formation; the inner struggle to have our particular imagined, or fantasized, self-image recognized by *others*, is the ultimate goal in self-creation. The fact is that "we can never create ourselves as others see us" and "the unspecific potential other that we try to be for ourselves renders us unfocused, transparent, empty and alone" (Bakhtin 1990:23). This suggests that without a witness or an alibi, *I* can never know myself

completely. “Only a genuine other consciousness can draw convincing boundaries for us, complete us, and fill us in” (ibid.). Self-actualization and self-realization, then, are impossible without a relational experience with the *other*; an attempt to create our own self within a single-consciousness situation results in failure. The dancer’s *formation*, then, is dependent on the *seeing* of the other, or on aesthetic activity. Through the process of *formation*, ‘*inhabiting*’ the ballet *form* becomes dependent on the image that the *other* might possess. Bakhtin writes:

When I contemplate a whole human being who is situated outside and over against me, our concrete, actually experienced horizon do not coincide. For at each given moment, regardless of the position and proximity to me of this other human being whom I am contemplating, I shall always see and know something that he, from his place outside and over against me, cannot see himself: parts of his body that are inaccessible to his own gaze (his head, his face and its expression), the world behind his back, and whole series of objects and relations, which in any of our mutual relations are accessible to me but not him (Bakhtin 1990:22-3).

Implicate in this highly complex act of creation, or aesthetic event, in the self and other interrelationship, the project of selfhood takes on the added dimension of the ethical event. Bakhtin explains, “when the hero and the author coincide or when they find themselves standing either next to one another in the face of a value they share or against one another as antagonists, the aesthetic event ends and an ethical event begins” (Bakhtin 1990: 22). The dependency between the self and other raises questions of responsibility, or answerability; the absolute need for a response from the other (most of the responsibility is placed on the other) stresses the need for ethical action within the aesthetic event. Bakhtin’s primary concern is not so much individual responsibility and the ways we answer for ourselves in an act, as it is with the ways in which we come to create images of others, and images of ourselves for others. He contends that these finalized images are the very essence of aesthetic activity.

The categories of: how my self looks and feels to my own consciousness—the I-for-myself—the how my self appears to those outside it—the I-for-others—and the how outsiders appear to my self—the other-for-me, are indicative of how the ‘I’ strives to *know* and *see* how others see ‘me’. Bakhtin poses a number of questions about *selfhood* and *self-*

*creation*. He asks how a self establishes a relationship to the world and proceeds to refute the traditional subject-object oppositions as fundamentally flawed because there exists neither a stable self nor a stable 'given' world to which it might be opposed. The outside world *becomes* determinate and concrete for us only through our willed relationship to it; in this sense, "our relationship determines an object and its structure, and not the other way around" (Bakhtin 1990:8).

The self is always on the lookout for reflections of the parts of its self in the other. It is only through aesthetic activity that the self can come to know its whole self, which in reality is never completely finalized. Every image of myself constructed by another is necessarily partial for several reasons not the least of which is that the very act of finalization required by all images is false to the project of my unfinalizable life, because my life is always noncoincident with itself. I seek the consummating power of each finalizing image for certain limited purposes, but these images "do not disrupt the unity of my life as lived, which is always directed toward a yet-to-come event" (Bakhtin 1990:17). "Wholes" are always transcended by our inner selves, and a recognition of such endless forward momentum is, in fact, constitutive of a healthy inner perspective..."(ibid). Here, in *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*, Bakhtin's primary concern is with the aesthetic escape from responsibility. If it is well understood, aesthetics can play an important role in ethical daily life. In the process of creation my self, my 'I' in the *I-for-myself* category, is in a never-ending challenge to see how others see me. This activity in-and-of-itself opens itself up to numerous ethical concerns in self-formation.

In understanding the self to be situated in time and space in a unique and unrepeatable manner, Bakhtin raises the idea of the *excess of seeing*. By this he means that our uniqueness in time and in space constitutes a unique way of looking at the world and relating to it. He writes:

This ever-present *excess* of my seeing, knowing, and possessing in relation to any other human being is founded in the uniqueness and irreplaceability of my place in the world. For only I—the one-and-only I—occupy in a given set of circumstances this particular place at this particular time; all other human beings are situated outside me (Bakhtin 1990:23).

This *excess of seeing* depends on our incarnation in time and space and is always in relation to the other. The physical reality is that we, each of us, sees the world in a particular way and our unique 'field of vision' is unique to our singular place in the world. We see everything that is in our specific 'field of vision' and all those things like the backs of our heads and the background that surrounds our bodies are only partially accessible to our vision. We imagine in our mind's eye what we look like but without the other's validation, or rather, contemplation, we can never completely know for sure. Bakhtin explains:

The excess of my seeing in relation to another human being provides the foundation for a certain sphere of my own exclusive self-activity... Our concern is only with actions of *contemplation*—actions of contemplation, because contemplation is active and productive... And it is these actions of contemplation, issuing from the excess of my outer and inner seeing of the other human being, that constitute the purely *aesthetic* actions (Bakhtin 1990:24).

If we fail to use our "excess" relationally, all that would remain would be our own limited perspective on the world. The responsible thing to do is to use this "excess" ethically.

...the excess of my seeing must "fill in" the horizon of the other human being contemplated, must render his horizon complete, without at the same time forfeiting his distinctiveness. I must empathize or project myself into this other human being, see his world axiologically from within him as *he* sees this world; I must put myself in his place and then, after returning to my own place, "fill in" his horizon through that excess of seeing which opens out from this, my own, place outside him. I must enframe him, create a consummating environment for him, out of this excess of my own seeing, knowing, desiring, and feeling (Bakhtin 1990: 25).

Bakhtin takes the example of the suffering human being in order to explain steps of aesthetic activity and thus, ethical action. The suffering person's emotional volitional tones are tones of suffering and our responsibility to this person is to experience and consummate him aesthetically. "The first step in aesthetic activity", Bakhtin explains, "is my projecting myself into him and experiencing his life from within him, as it were" (Bakhtin 1990:25). The

experience must be one of a knowing and seeing person. I must experience it as he does and since many parts of his external appearance are inaccessible to him, I must from within his life horizon appropriate his life experience, which here is the experience of a suffering person. The fact that he is not able to completely experience his outwardly expressed emotional volitional tone, I must after projecting myself into his intimate existence come back to myself and reflect back to him as accurately as possible, and with much empathy his outward expressedness. Bakhtin explains:

When I project myself into another's suffering, I experience it precisely as his suffering—in the category of the other, and my reaction to it is not a cry of pain, but a word of consolation or an act of assistance...Aesthetic activity proper actually begins at the point when we return into ourselves, when we return to our place outside the suffering person, and start to form and consummate the material we derived from projecting ourselves into the other and experiencing him from within himself. And these acts of forming and consummating are effected by our completing that material (that is, the suffering of the given human being) with features *transgredient* to the entire object-world of the other's suffering consciousness. These transgredient features no longer have the function of informing but have a new function, the function of consummating. The position of his body which had first informed us about his suffering and which led us to his inward suffering now takes on a purely plastic value, becomes an expression which embodies and consummates the suffering expressed, and the emotional and volitional tones of this expressedness are no longer the tones of suffering. The clear blue sky that enframes him becomes a pictorial feature which consummates and resolves his suffering (Bakhtin 1990: 27).

This empathetic and ethical action allows the potential to heal another from his pain and suffering. The very act of projection and contemplation, the very moment this aesthetic activity begins, the potential for a moment of empathetic completion is made possible.

The *excess of seeing* allows one to finalize and complete the image of another and to locate him/her in a particular time and place. Like an author who relates to the hero, *I* provide form and create an image of *you*. In order to provide artistic form there must be two distinct centers of consciousness. What is of particular interest to us in this essay is the aesthetic activity between two distinctly separate and physically bounded entities that rely on each other's consummating power to finalize each other's image. The formation of the ballet



dancer, as we will discuss in more detail further on, begins with the visual comprehension of the aesthetically perfect ballet body/form. The dancer ‘meets’ that perfect form for first time when they begin ballet training. Throughout their transformation process they are actively seeking to inhabit, or embody that form and their success is contingent upon their outward appearance, physical beauty, and their ability to produce aesthetically beautiful ballet movements with their trained body. The outward expression of both the body’s aesthetic beauty and the emotional and artistic expressiveness of the dancer determine whether a dancer makes it or not. In what will follow, Bakhtin describes the complexities and dynamics of the inter-connection between *outward appearance* and *internal* bodily sensation and self-consciousness. He describes the necessity of a second bounded entity, or second consciousness, in the I-Other relationship, which is important in understanding the dancer’s aesthetic experience. His theorization of *outward appearance* will shed some light into the ballet dancers’ perceptual world. After all, from the actual moment young dancers begin their training they are almost immediately bombarded with the images of aesthetic perfection. Their daily confrontation with the image of the ideal ballet form that becomes engrained in their minds and at no time absent from their thoughts, lures them into an almost obsessive space where they are in constant need of having their outward appearance reflected back to them. Their internal sensation of their dancing body and their self-perception is very much part of the dancer’s actual aesthetic experience. Before we proceed to the interviews, it is important that we first understand Bakhtin’s theorization on outward appearance; outward boundaries of the body; and the inner and outer body dynamic.

#### 4.2.1 Outward appearance:

In this section of the essay, Bakhtin questions how we experience our own exterior, or outward appearance and how we experience our outward appearance of the other. By virtue of this idea of the ‘external’, the self is at one level separated by an ‘inner’ and ‘outer’ experience, yet on another level is reunited by the inter-relationship between outward appearance, external expression, the other’s *seeing* of my ‘exterior’, and internal self-sensation. Bakhtin places an emphasis on the inner sensations of the human being as the primary experience of the external physical body. “My own exterior is experienced by me from within myself” and “it is only in bits and pieces (parts) that my own exterior enters the

field of my outer senses” (Bakhtin 1990: 28). At no time is it possible for human beings to see all the parts of their own body through their own eyes, nor their outward appearance and expression, and it is only through their inner sensing of these body parts that some unity of the entire body is possible. Bakhtin explains:

While my thoughts can place my body wholly into the outside world as an object among other objects, my actual seeing cannot do the same thing; my seeing, that is, cannot come to the aid of thinking by providing it with an adequate outward image (Bakhtin 1990: 28).

I can never clearly see how I appear to others; I can only imagine the whole expression of myself in my own mind. The image I have of myself in my mind’s eye is only an imaginary picture; it is an image that is continuously changing and being re-negotiated and remains incomplete, or unfinalized. Although I sense my body and outward appearance internally, I can never know with absolute certainty what I look like outwardly. Bakhtin explains:

One can, of course, make the attempt to visualize one’s own outward image in imagination, to “feel” oneself from outside, to translate oneself from the language of inner self-sensation into that of outward expressedness in being (Bakhtin 1990: 29).

To see one’s self—that is, one’s exterior expression and appearance—one would have to break the unbreakable connection between my outward expressedness in being and my inner experience of myself. Bakhtin contends that if one were to “succeed in doing this, we shall be struck by the peculiar emptiness, ghostliness, and an eerie frightening solitariness of this outward image of ourselves” (Bakhtin 1990:30).

In order to vivify my own outward image...the entire architectonic of the world of my imagining must be radically restructured by introducing a totally new factor into it. This new factor that restructures the architectonic consists in my outward image being affirmed and founded in emotional and volitional terms out of the other and for the other human being (ibid.).

My inability to detach from my inner self-sensation requires another consciousness outside of myself to affirm my outward image. It is through the other's reaction and seeing of my outward appearance that I can come to know my own outward expression. One of the issues at hand in this essay is very important to our understanding of the dancer's aesthetic experience and formation. It is the question of how we can successfully express to the other our imagined self-image. The problem we face here is the need and desire to have our inner self-sensation affirmed by the other through our outward expression.

The point at issue here is precisely how to accomplish the task of translating myself from inner language into the language of outward expressedness and of weaving all of myself totally into the unitary plastic and pictorial fabric of life as a human being among other human beings...

Indeed, when we contemplate our own exterior—as a living exterior participating in a living outward whole...what is engendered is a hollow, fictitious product that clouds the optical purity of being.

What occurs here is something in the nature of an optical forgery: a soul without a place of its own is created, a participant without a name and without a role—something absolutely extrahistorical. It should be clear that through the eyes of this fictitious other one cannot see one's true face, but only one's mask-face (Bakhtin 1990: 31-2).

To be seen as one senses oneself from within is challenged by a kind of visual language barrier. This obstacle necessitates the visual affirmation from another human being. Without this other's affirmation of my outward appearance and expression, I will only see myself as an imagined fictitious being never completely whole at any given moment. Even in the rare case where I look at my own reflection in the mirror I am not totally and completely seeing myself. I am actually seeing myself from within my own self and therefore, I am only seeing a reflection of my exterior and not my whole being.

The mirror can do no more than provide the material for self-objectification...our position before a mirror is always somewhat spurious...we project ourselves into a peculiarly indeterminate possible other, with whose help we then find an axiological position in relation to ourselves: in this case, too, we try to vivify ourselves and give form to ourselves—out of the other (Bakhtin 1990: 32-33).

In any case, what is expressed here is not a unitary and unique soul—a second participant is implicated in the event of self-contemplation, a fictitious other, a nonauthoritative and unfounded author. I am not alone when I look at myself in the mirror: I am possessed by someone else's soul...At times this other soul may gain body to the point where it attains a certain self-sufficiency. Vexation and a certain resentment, with which our dissatisfaction about our own exterior may combine, give body to this other—the possible author of our own exterior (Bakhtin 1990: 33).

It is important that we understand this phenomenon of the mirror reflection because ballet dancers spend most of their day facing a mirror and training in front of one. Their aesthetic experience of the ballet form is largely determined by their reflection in the mirror and unfortunately, as the interviews will reveal further on in this chapter, this reflection sometimes becomes their biggest nemesis. Bakhtin explains that “outward appearance must encompass, must contain within itself, and must consummate the whole of my soul—my unitary emotional and volitional cognitive—ethical stance in the world” (Bakhtin 1990:34). The other can only fulfill this wholeness because I am incapable of “feeling myself in my own exterior”(ibid) and because I am incapable of creating a whole and complete image of myself.

...a human being experiencing life in the category of his own I is incapable of gathering himself by himself into an outward whole that would be even relatively finished. ...rather, is the absence in principle of any unitary axiological approach from within a human being himself to his own outward expressedness in being (Bakhtin 1990: 35).

A second important feature of the outward appearance and seeing of the human being's exterior is the *outward boundaries* of the body that encompass him/her. “This outward boundary is experienced in self-consciousness i.e. in relation to myself, in an essentially different way from the way it is experienced in relation to another human being” (Bakhtin 1990: 36). It is only through this other human being that my entire body and being can be aesthetically experienced. As bounded entities, I-and-the-Other are separated by the lines that delimit his/her body in the outside world and those that delimit my body. I see his/her entire physical body and he/she is part of my perceptual experience as I am part of his/hers. It is

only through aesthetic contemplation that each can complete the other for each other. We experience each other from outside and reflect back to one another a complete image of each other. That image is internalized and lived through by me and for myself and by him/her for himself/herself.

The correlation of the image-categories of I and Other is the form in which an actual human being is concretely experienced; this form of I (the form in which I experience myself as the one-and-only me) is radically different from the form of the other (in which I experience all other human beings without exception). What is essential for the aesthetic standpoint is the following: I am-for-myself- the subiectum of any self-activity whatsoever...; in my lived experiences, I start out from within myself and I am directed forward, ahead of myself, upon the world, upon an object. The object stands over against me myself as subiectum. ...the point is the living correlation of me-the one-and-only subiectum, and the rest of the world as an object... The other human being exists for me entirely in the object and his I an object for me. But in this act of self-objectification I shall never coincide with myself-I-for-myself shall continue to be in the act of this self-objectification...(Bakhtin 1990: 38).

The Other and I positioned outside of each other rely on each other's aesthetic contemplation for finalization. By consummating each other's outward image and internalizing this image of each other, it takes on a new form—one that is shaped and lived within us—and which acquires new meaning. This image of our outward appearance is reflected back to each other and each can experience a moment of finalization—a moment when all the fragments of our external features are unified and made whole by the other and become part of our being through our inner experience. In this moment of completeness of my outward expressedness my exterior is translated into the language of my internal sensation of myself. My internal sensations and my imagination of my exterior are continually verified by these aesthetic experiences. The experiencing of the body, then, is an internal one, which brings us to our third feature—the *outward action* of human beings that occur within a spatial world. Bakhtin asks the following questions: How is an action and its space experienced in the action-performer's self-consciousness? And, how is the action of the other experienced by me? We have already explained that my outer body is experienced from within me and is part of my once-occurrent unity. Bakhtin explains that:

This purely internal experiencing of the body and its limbs is especially important at the moment of performing an action which, after all, invariably establishes a connection between myself and another external object, invariably expands the sphere of my physical influence. ...What is seen merely complements what is internally experienced and is of secondary significance in the actualization of an action (Bakhtin 1990: 43).

The goal of an action, and the established course the body will take in this action, is consciously determined, and as is the body experienced from within, so is the action it takes. The eye travels with the action of the body and the movement is experienced through inner self-sensation. That is, the seeing of an action as Bakhtin explains, is a one-sided act and what is actually seen during the action is experienced in the language of inner self-sensation. Bakhtin explains:

Thus, inner sensation of self remains the foundation—the proper world of action—during intense external action: it dissolves within itself or subordinates to itself everything that is externally expressed, and it does not allow anything external to complete itself in a stable intuitable given either within or without myself (Bakhtin 1990:44).

The outward expressed action is captured by the other externally and is actualized only by the consciousness that is situated outside the action performer and who does not partake in the action.

We have so far described the experiencing of outward appearance, the outward boundaries of the body and outward action, in relation to one's self-consciousness and in relation to another human being. In his discussion of the inner and the outer body, Bakhtin "synthesizes these three abstractly isolated moments in the single axiological whole of the human body" (Bakhtin 1990: 47) and questions the problem of the body as constituting a value. He places importance on the fact that the body as value is uniquely connected to the subjective experience, or inner experience, of the human being.

My own body is, at its very foundation an inner body, while the other's body is, at its very foundation, an outward body (Bakhtin 1990:47).

The inner body—my body as a moment in my self-consciousness—represents the sum total of inner organic sensations, needs, and desires that are unified around an inner center. The outward aspect, as we saw, is fragmentary and fails to attain independence and completeness. ...I cannot react to my own outward body in an unmediated way: all of the immediate emotional-volitional tones that are associated for me with my body relate to its inner states and possibilities, such as suffering, pleasure, passion, gratification, and so forth (ibid.).

The problem is that I cannot experience the value of the external body—or my personality as a whole—without mediation; the value, then, of my external body as a whole is shaped by someone else's perception. The love and acceptance of my external body—of my being as a whole—which I experience, when recognized by the other is like a gift, Bakhtin explains. It is an act of lovingness when my inner self-love and affection is affirmed in the eyes of another. This kind of “love that shapes a human being from outside throughout his life...gives body to his inner body” (Bakhtin 1990:51).

The outer body is unified and shaped by cognitive, ethical, and aesthetic categories, and by the sum total of external, visual, and tangible features that make-up the plastic and pictorial values in it. My emotional volitional reactions to the other's outer body are unmediated, and it is only in relation to the other that I experience the *beauty* of the human body in an immediate way—that is, the human body begins to live for me on an entirely different axiological plane, on an axiological plane inaccessible to my inner self-sensation and fragmentary outer seeing. Only the other is *embodied* for me axiologically and aesthetically. In this respect the body is not something self-sufficient: it needs the *other*, needs his recognition and his form-giving activity. Only the inner body (the body experienced as heavy) is *given* to a human being himself; the other's outer body is not given but *set as a task*: I must actively produce it (ibid.).

The dynamics of my inner and outer body, and the outer body of the other within the I-Other relationship, illustrates the active engagement of the self in self-formation. In what will follow we will delve into the dancer's mind and into their imaginary world—a world where their inner self-sensation is actively seeking a way to be recognized and be affirmed

outwardly by the other. So far in this chapter we have understood through Bakhtin's theorization of the I-Other relationship and outward appearance that there exists in every human being a place in the mind where our expressed image is alive only in thought and perception, and in a world where only I sense this imagined image. The imagination is a highly active phenomenon; it is a place in the mind where the self is always present and where its self-image is constantly being negotiated as it seeks out that finalizing moment where the inner self-sensation meets its outwardly expressed image. For ballet dancers, this begins at the level of an aesthetic experience where they imagine the transformation of their body to that of the aesthetic ideal. This self-project requires firstly, the visual understanding of this ideal form, and secondly, the process of transformation where the self inhabits, or embodies the ballet form. One step at a time the dancer will transform into a beautiful work of art and will embody that form. This goal requires a highly active aesthetic experiencing of the ballet form.

The idea that there is an inner and outer body implies that the subjective internal experience of a human being is very much engaged in self-formation. It also suggests that embodiment will be experienced both inwardly and outwardly. That is, in the case of the ballet dancer, the embodiment of the ballet form is something that will be sensed internally, expressed outwardly and recognized externally by the other. As we explained earlier, forming a ballet dancer requires more than simply training the physical body. This idea would mean that at no time are the dancers connected at any level to their outward appearance. As we will continue to describe throughout this dissertation, as the dancers train and change their outer appearance, their inner self-sensation will also change in unison and so will their self-perception.

In the next section of this chapter, we will describe the ballet dancer's aesthetic experiences as they train to become dancing bodies. Through the interview data, we will learn about how the dancer engages in aesthetic activity in search of the finalizing moment. This is the first level of the experiencing of the ballet form before the actual inhabiting of it. As we will see, it is a process that is never completely finalized and in many ways almost an impossible task. Let us now turn to the stories that ballet dancers themselves reveal to us.



#### 4.3 Experiencing the aesthetic ideal of the ballet form

The Imagination of the ballet dancer is a fascinating thing especially when it reveals the intricate workings of their inner self-sensations as they create an external image that corresponds and reflects their inner being. As we discussed earlier, the ballet dancer's outward appearance is always in constant development and is never completely finalized. Although this is true, ballet dancers will train, learn, improve their artistic skills and physical abilities and maintain the best outward appearance that they can achieve. It takes many years to transform a young child who dreams of dancing, into a work of art. And like a work of art they will never be complete and they will never fully and completely inhabit the ballet form. That image is an ideal set to push the limits of the human body to aesthetic perfection. As standards become more demanding, the ideal form has, as we explained in chapter three, become increasingly more unattainable and remains an elusive dream to many that attempt to conquer it. Nevertheless, the project of forming a ballet dancer is certainly not impossible and although this act of creation is one of the most challenging of all art forms, it is without question a fascinating process.

In chapter 3 we discussed at length the ballet form and described the *ideal* ballet form. Here in this chapter, where we are dealing with the *aesthetic experiencing* of the ballet dancer's formation, the ideal ballet form is actively engaged and alive in the imagination of all that partake in the ballet world. It is firmly imbedded in ballet's visual language and it is the single most important 'character' in the dancer's transformation. It is there to set a standard, and is the very thing that young dancers are striving to attain. For each and every dancer that I interviewed, and out of the 500 plus pages of interview data that I have amassed, the one element that is present throughout—whether implicitly or explicitly—is the ballet form. All of the dancers I interviewed, both male and female, had an interesting story to tell; each believed theirs to be special and unique and as I conducted the interviews I was somewhat amused by this fact. Their stories were filled with much emotion and their descriptions of their experiences were heartfelt. Nevertheless, their stories had more in common than the dancers might think. Throughout the 500 pages we see a range of differing successes and failures, as well as a range of talents and weaknesses. Although each dancer

had their version of their own personal formation story to tell, the basic process by which the transformation occurred was the same for all of them. They may have trained in different schools, in different parts of the world, and they may have started off in a variety of ways, and for various reasons, but their main goal and desire was the same. As I read and reread the interviews both the simplicity and complexity of their goal struck me. The most intriguing aspect of the entire process of formation was the way in which the dancers described their life-story in the ballet world without realizing that they were actually telling a story about how they developed their *eye* to grasp and understand the visual nature of this art form. The ballet dancers spoke about technique and the strengths and weaknesses of their body. They were not fully conscious of the fact that, not only did they learn the visual vocabulary and language of ballet, but they were also taught how to *see* themselves with a kind of *newness*. It was as though they were given a brand-new set of eyes, which they sort of took for granted. I myself while learning to dance did not realize what was actually happening to the way I looked at myself. The thing that we remember the most are the emotional struggles and outcomes, not the manner in which we came to understand ballet. In fact, the visual literacy that the dancers had attained was internalized subtly and easily from the moment they first entered the ballet school, and as a result, their critical understanding and judgement of what makes a good ballet dancer was developed. This one common language that contains everything that this culture is and represents, is located at the very center of the ballet dancer's aesthetic experiencing of the ballet form. Furthermore, the learning of this language and vocabulary is not only a visual experience but it is very much a bodily experience as well. The learning and understanding occurs primarily at the physical level of experience and simultaneously engages the visual senses. As the dancers figure out how the body should feel in certain positions, they are also learning how the lines formed with the body, is supposed to look. Furthermore, their awareness that they are in fact—what dancers refer to—as “hitting those lines”, is affirmed by those watching them. The inhabiting, or embodying of the ballet form, then, begins with this aesthetic activity where the dancer is fully active in their own self-creation. As they change their bodily experience they change their lived experience. Let us now turn to one of the dancers I interviewed in order to illustrate how the dancer's visual knowledge is developed throughout their training and thus internalized.

Betsy Ann Baron is a retired professional ballet dancer and soloist who spent most of her career dancing in Montreal for Les Grandes Ballet Canadiens and today is a massage therapist specializing in dancer's injuries. I have chosen to begin this section with her interview because her story is fairly common and a good representation of ballet dancers in general. Like many young girls, Betsy Ann Baron began her dance training at age seven in a small local ballet school. She did not immediately enter a large professional training program; most dancers tend to start their training in their local ballet school because the desire to train professionally has not quite developed yet. At this stage, ballet class is generally thought to be all fun and games. Although these schools are not generally oriented towards training young children for professional careers, they nevertheless may become for some, the impetus behind the dream and desire to dance. It is usually at this age in the local school where children receive love and attention for just being children who love to dance, and often this is the very thing that pushes them to pursue a career. This is what Betsy Ann had to say:

At seven years old my mother took me to ballet school so that I can learn a little poise and grace. And I fell in love with it, much to my parent's dismay! So I continued ballet, and then music, and they wanted me to go into music, and I knew that I had to go into dance. Nothing was going to stop me! I had a wonderful teacher. My ballet teacher was from Latvia and she taught just beautifully. The love of movement. She would say "Dance! Dance! the technique will come!" And then there were those classes that she'd say, okay today it's going to be an easy class and we knew that would be only technique and it would be the hardest class we would ever have. So she gave me a good base of loving of movement and knowing that you had to have a technique to be able to express that love and joy of movement. So I got that at age seven and then I moved on and I went to a wonderful summer music camp- The National Music Camp, in Michigan and I could dance, and I could sing in the choir, and I could play music and I could hear concerts and so I was really enriched from age eleven on up. And I went to my last two years of school, of high-school at the boarding school there and I became a dance major where we had equal ballet and equal modern. We had classical ballet and we had people from the Graham company come in ...we really had a wonderful dance education. From there I went to Julliard, I hated it!

At the age of seven Betsy Ann was given positive affirmation from her first ballet teacher and this helped to motivate her love of dance. This joyful experience would change as she

realized that ballet was much more than simply fluttering around without technique or form. The moment that she realized that her body was now being evaluated and that serious work was required to maintain the positive affirmation, Betsy Ann understood that her quest to dance would take a lot of serious work. She was learning that to become a professional ballet dancer it would require that she now be *seen* as a dancer. As her dance education shaped her understanding of what was really required to dance professionally, Betsy Ann would begin her aesthetic experiencing of the ballet form and her battle to make it. Almost all of the dancers I interviewed experienced that same transition—the moment the fun in dance became serious work, they expressed that their intentions had changed. Their relationship with their training was now more focused, more exciting and yet more painful. Jennifer Franklin, a former soloist with Le Ballet de Montréal Eddy Toussaint explained her transition from playing the ballerina to actually learning real technique.

Dance was always around me. My parents owned their own ballet school and they were both professional dancers once too. I loved hanging out at the studio and pretending to be a prima ballerina. I would try on the costumes and spin around until I would get so dizzy and fall on the floor. Oh those were the good old days! Eventually my parents figured out that I wanted to dance and that's when my training began. Of course we all start with creative dance classes and eventually real ballet class. I remember standing at the barre for the first time and listening very carefully to my ballet teacher's instructions. It was soooo hard! God! I remember having absolutely no idea what she was saying and I wanted to scream. Of course I didn't have the perfect body and of course a very hard turnout to work with so even standing in first position was hard work for me. So I very quickly learned that ballet was going to be hard work and that it wasn't always fun and games! But I really wanted to look like Miss Leigh my ballet teacher and wanted to be able to dance like the big girls so I stuck to the training. It was torture but I loved it because it was going to make me a dancer and that's all I wanted to do. And so I guess I had to get disciplined! Ha ha ha...

Young students of ballet quickly learn that if they want to become ballet dancers they are going to have to suffer through the training. This is where the young student begins to understand that there is in fact a new way of moving and in order to move this way you need to learn the secret behind it. Dominique Walker, another ex-dancer who trained in various small schools and danced in small companies in both Canada and the United States, explains:

I fell in love with the ballet at about 4 years old when my parents took me to see the Nutcracker. I grew up in a house that played a lot of classical music and I remember dancing around the living room and just feeling the music. When I saw the Nutcracker I was awestruck. I couldn't understand how the ballerinas danced on their toes and why I couldn't do that. It was like a secret and I had to know what it was. To me it was like magic! They were like angels flying around on stage and I wanted to be like them. I remember asking my mother. "Mom how come they could fly and I can't?" I don't remember what her answer was but shortly after that I remember starting ballet lessons and wanting so much to know the secret. Of course eventually I learned that to learn the secret you had to work hard and learn the language. It was so great when I started to understand but before that I remember being frustrated and wanting to fly ha ha! Of course that didn't last long! Like everyone else I had to stick through the pain and training. It was fun sometimes especially when I got a move but it was really mostly hard work. I had a hard time concentration at first because I just wanted to move but I knew I had to listen to the teacher if I was going to figure out the secret! And I guess I did eventually!

The young ballet students, as we have read above, soon realize that there is a secret language that needs to be acquired in order to dance like a ballerina. The blissful state of child's play and dance without form, begins to change when the young child understands that there is a new way of using their body and that to learn this you must listen carefully and work very hard. The freedom of play is transformed into a desire to attain freedom of flight—of lightness and grace. The young dancer now understands that there is a standard to attain and begins to absorb into their visual experience what is taught to them about their bodies and about the ballet form. They learn to compare and contrast themselves to the ballet form that they are now beginning to understand. They learn to compare their bodies to the other student's bodies, the other's to the form. As they develop a visual literacy of the form they begin to compare their internal self-sensation to their reflection in the mirror. Hence, begins their aesthetic experience.

Now that the young dancer begins to understand that becoming a ballet dancer and looking like a one requires serious training, they enter the next phase of the aesthetic experience. They begin to see physical changes in their bodies and begin to feel the

movement of their bodies in a different way. Let us turn to Betsy Ann again as she describes the growth spurt she went through after training everyday. She would learn that her body would soon begin looking more like a dancer as compared to the children in the little local school where she began her training. She explains:

When I was serious? Hum, there are little stages there, hum, when I was four I saw my teacher doing Dying Swan and I still have an image of her back and her arms. Then when my mother took me to ballet school at age seven there was that other flash, of yes! And at age eleven I went to International Music Camp and I could take ballet class everyday I was really, wow, my body changed, I came home to Toledo, Ohio to my ballet class and all of a sudden I knew I was better than the rest of the class and I knew something had changed.

She had noticed an aesthetic change in her body and realized that the other girls did not have what she had gained in summer school. These visible changes provoked a new awareness of herself as a young dancer. Her visual vocabulary was developing and she was now engaged in a major act of creation—in the transformation process. Her summer away from her local ballet school helped to further develop her visual understanding of the ballet form. The more she understood ballet's aesthetic complexity the more easily she was able to integrate it into her body and thus into her transformation. Her realization that she was now more advanced than her classmates helped to shape her self-image. The comparison game has begun and in that moment of recognition, Betsy Ann's self-image will now, and forever, be compared to the ideal ballet form. There is no going back once that connection is made. It begins in the imagination and becomes the driving force behind the training. One of the first things that young dancers, especially girls, learn is that slimmer is better and that a womanly body is not acceptable.

I remember really getting into it! I lost a lot of weight that summer, for probably lots of reasons, camp food. Walking all over, it was a huge campus, I got to dance everyday, there was a lot of exercise going on. But my body slimmed down of course, I was already changing. I think I got my period that fall, those changes were happening too, the puberty change was happening. And then my weight for a dancer, I always had a difficult time with that. For a ballet dancer. So, it was always a fight.

Well, my boobs, were only just starting to develop but it didn't, I didn't realize that it was something odd for a ballerina to have breasts until I was probably, when I went to NY at seventeen. When I had a teacher, you know who would say things like, "stretchem Betsy". We would be doing *cambré en arriere* and you know, and I had a doctor tell me I should get surgery and, you know I wasn't huge but I was larger than normal. So I have to say that of the whole image thing, wardrobe people had a hard time making costumes for me. At Les Grandes Ballet, I had one woman that decided she would figure out how to make my bodices

I did queen of the lilies and on the video I look like a Viking woman, you know, the way the top bodices, and like, it was really horrible. So talking about having a bad self-image, you're put in a costume that you don't look beautiful in and you have to go out there and make the public forget that your costume is hideous.

Every part of her body is judged through her conscious awareness of what is aesthetically accepted or not. From her teen years when she developed breasts and throughout her professional career, Betsy Ann understood that the full-figured female form was not the best body in ballet. This active integration of this information becomes part of the transformation process and part of the daily life of the dancer. This aesthetic experience is deeply entrenched in Betsy Ann's inner self-sensation, and this provokes a negative self-image that is further confirmed by her teachers as well:

No actually when I left Juliard after the first semester I went to the Joeffery School and I had a teacher finally say to me, you know you are a wonderful dancer if you want to get married and have babies you're fine, your body is fine but if you want to dance professionally you have to loose weight. And she said that on a Friday and on the weekend I didn't splurge and I was good and lost ten pounds quite quickly. And that also, if I don't loose the weight I am not going to get a job.

A comment like this one from her teacher will create such uncertainty that she will be completely focused on her weight and on her breast size until the problem is rectified. Her external appearance will affect her internal self-sensation and in that one finalizing moment, Betsy Ann was driven to loose ten pounds in a matter of days. All the comments that she will receive over the span of her training and even her career will be noted in her internal dialogue and will forever be present in her self-assessment. Dominique Walker had a similar experience and explains:

I was a teenager when I to the Winnipeg ballet school to study at their summer school. I think I was 14 or 15 the first time. I trained everyday, took pointe class, did variation class, pas de deux classes, modern class, and character class. That was a lot compared to what I was doing at the Academy in Chicoutimi. I lost so much weight and my lines got so long and lean. My legs looked great and my technique was so much better! When I got back home everyone freak out on how much I had improved. I was starting to see myself as a dancer now. I had been around all kinds of teens from all over the country and the competition was stiff! I had to work so hard just to get noticed. But since I have always been musical I had an advantage because I was really feeling the music and the teachers loved that. I got lots of recognition in Winnipeg the first time but the second time I went, the following year, it didn't go as smoothly. I was about 16 then and I had over the year developed hips and a butt. It was round, still is ha ha, and the teachers constantly told me that I had to loose weight if I wanted to dance in a professional ballet company. So of course for the rest of my life after that I struggled with this big butt. It was never fat just round and they hate that! Don't you remember how we used to starve ourselves just to loose those last 5 pounds ha ha! And then came the laxatives! That was stupid. But those comments followed me forever and still do today.

Many of the young women, who train to become professionals, will eventually go through some kind of weight crisis, and in many cases it might even lead to eating disorders. Over the many years that I have spent around ballet dancers and researched their experiences, I found that the days when they are told that they are too fat, or too short, or their body is just not right, their ability to perform will be greatly affected by their internalization of these comments, especially on those particular days. Even years after they have stopped dancing and moved on to new professions, or maybe even started a family, these dancers will never forget the day they were told that their body had some sort of flaw. That painful experience becomes etched in their memories and in their inner self. Each time that they face the mirror they will see that flaw in their outward appearance. The mirror is there to be used to help the dancers learn how to see and how to pose but as Gelsey Kirkland explained earlier in the chapter, the mirror could devastate a dancer. Jennifer explains it as follows:

When Eddy invited me to come take the summer stage I was just 14 and I was really proud. I knew at that point that I was better off doing Eddy's work



because it was more suited to my body. I worked so hard and had very strong technique but still my lack of perfect turnout and round butt would make it hard for me to get into a company like Houston Ballet or San Francisco Ballet. I loved Eddy's stuff any ways but of course the fact that I did not have the perfect body pretty much scarred me. I used to hate looking at myself in the mirror especially when my best friend Barbara was in the same class. She was perfect and still is! There were moments when I just wanted to break the mirror. All I could see were my flaws. It's crazy! I wore a tutu and the back would pop up because my butt was too round! It's very hard to think about those moments because you work so hard and dream about seeing yourself one day as this perfect ballerina and that day never comes. I was a good dancer and did solo work but at the back of my mind I knew I didn't look the way I had always dreamed of looking. I mean ballet is all about the aesthetic. If you don't attain some level of semblance to the ideal you'll never get into a ballet company. Maybe modern or Jazz but not ballet. So the days I thought about my big butt in a unitard or tutu I would have a really hard time turning or lifting my legs. It was like a mental block or something! I just wish once I could have seen myself in the mirror or even in my mind as the perfect ideal ballerina. Now I teach school and try to forget about it but you never really do. The butt is still there ha ha ha!!!

Betsy Ann describes it as follows:

I tried often not to work in front of the mirror because then you get used to focusing on that mirror image and when you get on stage there is no mirror image there.

oh boy, that's really tough. I think that when I felt good inside I looked good. And if I was uncomfortable I couldn't radiate. If you are uncomfortable, and I'm not talking about when you're working hard on something technically and there is a beauty in that hard work, I'm not talking about that, I'm talking about, you know, you're not quite on your leg, and you're garbing a muscle instead of having everything working properly. But the mirror is very tricky. You need to use the mirror, you need to know it's a friend but not a drug.

All three dancer—Dominique, Jennifer and Betsy Ann—explain the unity, or connection, between feeling good on the inside and looking good on the outside. As we discussed earlier, the idea of an inner and outer experience implies that the dancer is always actively engaged in their own formation and they are influenced by what they are taught to see and value. As they refine their aesthetic sense, they will begin to understand that changes in the bodily appearance—even the subtlest detail—will give them an inner feeling of pride and

accomplishment. Betsy Ann describes, for example, what happens when you gain or loose weight:

When I first came to LGB I was in a good ballet shape. I was thin and I was long and I was new in the company so I was understudying somebody who did not loose enough weight so I got roles because of that. And then my weight fluctuated, I would go up and down a few pounds and things would be taken away from me. Roles would be taken away from me here and there. And then I lost a bunch of weight and Brian McDonald was doing a new work, I wasn't supposed to be in the work because I was too heavy for him and then he came in and saw me and I was thin and all of a sudden I was in the work and I had a solo. And so, when I walked into the room he said, "We welcome you Betsy. Look how beautiful you look." So I don't know if he was trying to give me a compliment for having lost weight but at the same time, oh hum, what do you use for hum hum! Ha ha so I knew that when I was thin that I had the look that the direction wanted!

The visual appearance of the body is only one obvious and apparent element required to become a ballet dancer. The aesthetic lines of the ballet body are important but so is the technical proficiency of the ballet dancer. It is through the technique that the language of ballet is made visible by the dancer's body. Embodying the ballet form, then, means not only looking like a dancer but also being able to dance and move through space with elegance and grace. The physical training of the body develops the right lines and strengthens the body to become technically precise. The ballet dancer's formation demands not only beautiful bodies but requires strong technique and natural artistic ability. Betsy Ann told me numerous times throughout the interview, that she always tried to keep her weight down and that she wanted to dance so badly that she took every measures possible to ensure that her body was thin enough to dance. Once she realized that she could get the roles, she proceeded to work even harder on perfecting her technique in order to insure that she would be given technically interesting and challenging roles. She explains how much she loved the roles that required many jumps and quick footwork:

No, no that was the fun part. At certain times, you know, difficult technical movement, you know, there are certain things that are natural to you and certain things that are not. Jumping was natural to me. Doing adagio standing on one leg with the other leg at your ear, it was not natural and probably felt I

hated it! I did not love it at all! I was not an adagio dancer. I loved jumping and doing batterie and eating up space.

She talked about the artistry in dance and explains that in order to be able to express what you feel and engage the audience, you must have a strong technique. Although she was fixated on her body and its shape and size, she also discovered that the ideal body shape was only part of the training and transformation. She explains:

You have to be able to, if you want to write a letter you have to know the alphabet and how to read and write the alphabet before you can write a letter. That's the simplest way that I can describe it. If you want to play the piano you have to know how to put your fingers on the keys and what sound sounds like to build the sound of music you want to make. So it's the same thing in dance. Even if you are doing an improvisational kind of work you have to understand how your body works so that you can do the movement and in effect, you are creating a vocabulary. In a more classical sense in a more ballet sense, or even classical/modern you have to know the technique, the language, the vocabulary.

Betsy Ann received positive affirmation from most of her teachers and told me that because she was a hard worker the teachers were always good to her. She explained that she did not have the most amazing body:

I had a moderate amount of turnout, I was not completely turned-out. My feet were okay, I didn't have flat feet nor did I have big archy feet. I have just a normal body. My body proportions were pretty okay. I didn't have a very flexible back and arabesque was my nemesis.

She was always aware of her shortcomings and throughout her career she would work with different teachers in order to correct her problems. The dancer's work is never over. She was already a professional dancer and when she had time off she explained that she would fly to New York City to train:

I had a few teachers that I met up with that changed my way of working drastically. That helped me become a more intelligent dancer. And also it changed the look of my body; my muscles became a petite muscle definition, which I was very proud of when I looked like that. And then of course you dance with more self-confidence. And these teachers were not in MTL except (the name she mentions on tape was not clear)...I really liked working with him. I had a wonderful teacher in NY and every time we would get laid off, I would run to NY and study with (again the name is not clear) ...and I would come back and the direction would say, "Wow you look gorgeous who did you study with".

Although Betsy Ann was in a ballet company and was dancing regularly, she knew inside that she was not the 'classical' ballerina nor did she have that kind of body.

I think that, no I know that I never saw myself as a sugar plume fairy. I loved dancing on pointe but I loved roles that had more emotion to them—emotional content. So I was not a tutus and tiara dancer.

Growing and developing into a ballet dancer who rarely danced the 'classic' roles, Betsy Ann came to an understanding of her body's aesthetic deficiencies. She knew that although she was not the picture perfect aesthetic ideal, she was nevertheless an artist who was able to execute ballet moves and technique, and who could express emotion, but who would never dance the kinds of roles that only few ballerinas could perform. These are the ballerinas who come the closest to the ideal form—these are the ballerinas who are selected to be part of elite ballet schools and companies like San Francisco Ballet School/company or The National Ballet School of Canada/company.

Jennifer and Dominique as they described earlier, also learnt that they too did not have the perfect body to enter these types of companies. After years of training and learning to know what a 'real' ballerina looks like and how they compare to that ideal, the two dancers understood that they could never attain that type of physical aesthetic. In Dominique's case, she was a wonderfully lyrical dancer but because she could not lift her legs as high as the other girls and because of her round butt, she knew she could never be part of the elite ballet world. She explains:

After years of trying to become the perfect ballerina I knew that I had to get real. My butt was in the way! My arabesque was low because the rounded part of my butt would get in the way. My extension was barely above 90 degrees and my turnout was all from the knee. But I could dance. I loved the music and I loved to move to it. It would sometimes move me to tears that's how sensitive I am. It's important to be a strong technician and to be able to lift your leg high but if you don't feel the music then all the technique in the world won't help you.

...the ballet world is strict that way. You have to have the whole package. You have to look like the perfect ballerina, feel the music and of course be an artist. You need to be able to see the lines in your mind and feel them in your body. You have to be able to express the music through those lines. I had the musicality but never had the perfect lines. Maybe in my next life ha ha...

Jennifer had the opposite problem. For her, technique and lifting her legs was the easy part but expressing was the hard part. She explains:

I had really good solid training. Miss Leigh was amazing. She really taught me all the tricks well and although I would have liked to have more rotation in my hips and a smaller butt, I did have nice lines. My extension was very high and I had strong technique. I think I was really good at the technical part of ballet but I had a hard time expressing. Many people told me that I was a cold dancer and needed to work on that. As I got older it got better but it was something I struggled with. I'm musical and a clean dancer but I think I lacked charisma. Ballet is an art and as an artist you have to be able to use your body to express emotion. It's not good enough to just do the tricks. Your body has to say something. I had to work HARD at that! I think I did okay in the end.

The quest to inhabit the aesthetic ideal is not uniquely a female problem in ballet. The male dancer faces the same kinds of issues and challenges. David Bushman, another former soloist who danced with Les Grandes Ballets Canadiens, talked openly about the aesthetic ideals of ballet when I interviewed him. If we compare men and women at this first level of inhabiting the ballet form, that is, at the level of aesthetic experiencing of the ballet form, we would see that although the standards are not as rigid for the male dancer, because there are so few of them, we would nevertheless see that male dancers are as concerned with the problem of

inhabiting the ideal form as the women are. The process of transformation occurs the same way for both men and women; the only difference is in the shape of the male and female body. The inner and outer inter-relationship is the same and so is the desire to transform the body from the average looking body into a dancing body.

David started taking ballet class in a local ballet school when he was in high-school. He started his dance training rather late but was nevertheless guided into a career in dance by several interested teachers. Because of the shortage of male ballet dancers it is much easier for men to find employment in dance than it is for women. David was encouraged to dance by many people; he was told he had the perfect body for ballet and that he had the potential to go far. Although he started his training late, he managed to make it in the professional world of dance. David explains:

I was following my teacher, who was going to become my teacher—Duncan Noble—wonderful man who just passed away. He came up to me during the audition and he said, “young man how long have you been studying.” And I said ten weeks. Ten weeks, okay, and he went back to the table. Obviously he liked what, I think what they saw was potential of course, they said, don’t worry about it you’re going to be fine. I couldn’t do petite allegro I couldn’t do anything in that class and even, you know I didn’t know, not even barely the essentials to get into this company! If you want my opinion. Even though in the school productions of Nutcracker I had made it to Cavalier, I had made it to the Grande Pas. I was doing my best and I felt like I was just, what ended up happening in my career was that I relied heavily on my natural ability. I never really developed the kind of things I felt I needed to become, I mean, luckily I had this dream to be a soloist or a principal dancer in ABT. And Duncan kept saying to me, what do you want to do with your life? Three years later when I come to him and say, I want to join North Carolina Dance Theatre. He says you’re not ready. But I say, Duncan I’m 21. If I don’t do it now, you know, some one is knocking at the door and I better answer the door. And he says, well it’s your choice. You don’t have entre-chat six, you don’t have pirouette a la seconde, you don’t, you know, you don’t have, you don’t have...

Right from the start David did have a body that has a lot potential, however, without the proper training he would always struggle with the difficult ‘tricks’ that most men have by the

time they are twenty-one. If David had trained in a professional ballet school at an early age he might have reached a very high level of proficiency. This was probably the most frustrating problem for David; he realized after many years of dancing in a professional company what he might have accomplished had he trained at a good school when he was a child. David's interview was one of the most interesting and informative; I happened to catch him less than a year after he retired and his emotions were still very sensitive. He was right in the middle of his transition—that is his transition from the world of professional dance to a new profession that was not yet established. I have included below several pages from the interview because David was probably the only dancer I interviewed who struggled to separate the body from the dancer. He would absolutely redirect the discussion to his dance career or to himself as an artist. I finally confront him about this and I think his response is worth including in this chapter.

DB-Oh, ya, my feet were good, they were not fantastic. Suffice it to say I hadn't developed the strength and the, sort of, um, you know, and my jump was never good, I was not a natural turner. I didn't develop these basic things that I really would have, I could have used. I think, I mean I went and auditioned with Misha at ABT while I was in NCDT. I spent five years there. Misha loves me but he said, I need you to leave NCDT and study for one year and solidify everything you have because you're exactly what we like. I mean I was going across the floor doing double tours to arabesque in his class and I was doing them. I can't tell you what they looked like but he could see, that obviously there was something there but. Suffice it to say, when I first joined NCDT Sal, Salvatory who is the director there, I think he came and worked with Eddy Toussaint at one point. He sent me off to New York right away after my first few months with the company. He said I want you to go study with ...Thomas in NY. You need petite allegro! You need to learn fast. So I did it, came back and he said that's exactly what you needed. Suddenly I was doing a lead Alegra ..., I was doing the lead in Square Dance, I was doing his work. I spent five years there. Even Dickey was saying leave NCDT. You can do better. I loved my work with Sal and I was doing great work so I thought you know my expectation, I knew what my weaknesses were. Like I don't have, Misha told me himself, I don't have the strength that the young kids starting at 12 and 14 have. I'm not going to become a lead classical dancer. But I was determined to find my place but I wasn't, I think, I started to accept the fact that I wasn't going to, even though I had this classical body,

Yap, everyone said it, that's why everyone was a little bit, actually even Larry when I came to Les Grands Ballets, he was frustrated because he saw someone who had everything that could have been, uh, I could have been completely versatile. And at one point he decided that, well I love his work, I love him as a contemporary dancer but he's just not going to become my classical lead. And I think it really frustrated him. So I think, so I'll just give you my history: I spent five and a half years with Sal. At one point I decided I was not going to go any further here and I'm going to NY. And out of the blue I decided to audition for Eliot Felds. He took me. I had done an audition for him a year before, a cattle call, and he didn't think that I was interesting enough so I came back the following year and I had a private audition and he really pushed me and he loved me so he signed me right away that day. And I left. And I had had bad knees in NC, I had bad tendonitis in my patella tendons. Until my...a good friend there told me that I would never last. My knees were fine! Just the fact that I left NC changed the way I was working, but it was contemporary, again it was, he needed my classical understanding but he really wanted somebody who could move. So I ended up doing some really great work for Eliot. Tough guy, uh, very demanding in many ways but I loved his vision. I was very inspired by, you know I was always the kind of person who liked to be pushed. In fact I needed that, somebody in front of me who would say, "you've got to go much further!" And, uh I did! Again the ballet class, we only got ballet class once in a while. We actually had to go out and get it. We weren't like, we were unionized but we had certain things that we excepted. We were a smaller company so again the focus wasn't on, you know he certainly loved classical work, you know he felt it was definitely necessary but he was pushing for the stuff that's raw, he wanted both. So I got to the level to which I had arrived in my classical work, you know of course he was still pushing for, you know certain things that I still didn't have.

CK-Did you have a flat turn-out?

DB- I did but the way in which I was using my turnout, there was some things that were really, really challenging. There were a couple of things for the men in one of his ballets that he was like, use da da da (he gestures the moves). Tough stuff. But I think, you know, to him he was very happy with what I was doing in the company and when I decided to leave, He said, I am so happy for what you are doing in the company and I want you to choreograph for me! I want you to stay, I want you to choreograph. I said, well right now that's not my whim. I love what you're doing and I'd love you to retire here, I'd love you to stick around. I said, Well, no I can't I got to go. So, I was going to retire, this was in 1993.

CK- I'd like to ask you, can you go back to when you first started and give me a snap shot, or picture of what your early body looked like, several years



into the training, and when you finally left North Caroline Dance Theatre. I'm interested in the transformation of your body and how you felt physically in your body as a dancer?

DB- I am going to say that from the moment I stepped foot into my first ballet class until I left NC (North Caroline Dance Theatre) that's a long time, you have eight years there, and this is of course in hindsight, I'm going to say this, but I felt like something was happening to me. I was literally just being pulled in a direction, that, you know, and I didn't feel like I was literally, actively making choices. I felt like choices were being made for me and I was going towards those choices. And I was, for me, doing the best with the challenge that was being put in front of me that I could. Even though I did have the desire to actually go out and audition for ABT and audition for something else, here and there I did the auditions. I was letting life happen to me. And that was kind of what was happening. I wasn't aware of what I could actually do to actively build myself as a dancer. I was taking the challenge and I was doing what ever I had to do to meet the challenge. The role, the, whatever the director would tell me, you're missing this, okay, I will do myself to find that.

CK- are you talking about the physical?

DB- Building a dancer. Building myself as a dancer.

CK- what does that mean to you?

DB- to me then, it was always about, I was always running after whatever I was told I was missing. Instead of saying, this is me as a dancer, this is what I have to do to get there.

CK- did you have a picture in your mind of what the perfect male dancer was?

DB- yes! But I wasn't someone who was always looking at photographs.

CK- could you describe that image? Who was that image of, especially at that time.

DB- Well ya there was Misha, but already even Misha, I was looking at him in *When Push Comes to Shove* from Twyla, and things like that. I was still quite taken by the sort of the theatrical and movement ability in people, and not just...you know

CK- Not just the body you mean?

DB- To be honest, I'd look at someone in a classical work and I would say, "that's unreachable"! I had a chip on my shoulders from the very beginning!! Because of my age, and also because the way my career started and I carried that chip all the way into Les Grands Ballets.

CK- Did it frustrate you?

DB- It pushed me. But I, I think I always carried with me this frustration that I never lived up to the classical potential that I could have as a dancer.

CK- Before going to Les Grands, were you proud of what you had achieved? Did you feel good?

DB- I definitely felt good. I think every dancer has a problem with self-confidence. We all have insecurities of about our work in the mirror. You know when you look at, ultimately I was very happy with, I felt lucky to be where I was.

Ck- did you think you were beautiful?

DB- Ya

CK- Did you battle with that image in the mirror every morning? Were you okay with it?

DB- No, uh I liked what I projected, I, I, had actually moments of lack of self- confidence on stage in certain things. But generally as a dancer, I enjoyed, in the studio I enjoyed looking, seeing myself, I enjoyed the rapport, I liked the work.

CK- Did the teachers always like you in class?

DB- Ya, I felt like I always had people giving me corrections. I was never ignored.

CK- So they always felt you had potential?

DB- Ya (he pauses to think) I'm not sure that they all, I mean I would think that the majority of teachers, now I'm talking in class, the majority of teachers would probably say, he didn't live up to his potential. As a dancer, as an overall dancer. BUT the majority of my directors, my ballet masters, and the people from companies that have come in to work with me would say, "he's an artist".

CK- You said you felt good in your body, were the best times always connected to the way your body was working?

DB- Yes, and it wasn't just about the way I was working but the way everyone was working...everyone was going towards the work the same way, there was a work ethic that was there, um, people really cared, and people really, we were all, I don't know, we had developed somehow and even when I first came into the company, I felt like my work ethic was appreciated. Because, I came into something that was already happening and somehow fit in. I felt very lucky to...they were already doing some really great work at that time.

CK- During your time in the company was your technique improving?

DB- Always, I think that's always happening. I definitely improved as an artist in a way, yes I was pushing myself, trying to push myself classically in class, but even Larry's class was about finding a way to do the technique and just move! Definitely he wanted, you know, he wanted strong "tricks" from the men but you know where I gained the most was in the Balanchine work and that kind of thing. Because it was really about finding the very natural, the very interesting way to move, even from Eliot. Eliot would always say great, you have great technique but make it say something. So for me that followed me always. And Sal the same way—I don't care how strong you are technically, and ya we could all sit and marvel at how many pirouettes, and ya boom, boom, boom (he gestures with his hands) finish on releve. So, ya, make it say something and make it interesting. So that was always my goal. Always, to find a way to make whatever I was doing.

Ck- So in your mind, when did you become a dancer?

DB- When did I become a dancer, hum (long pause)

CK- At what point in your career did you say to yourself, I made it, I'm a dancer?

DB- Here in Les Grands Ballets

CK- Not before?

DB- Because Eliot had a way of getting amazing things out of us, the kind of feed-back that I got from Eliot was when he didn't come back and yell! Or when he, there were time when he would even say, you just did a fantastic show! Fucken fantastic show! He love that, he love to come in and say, God it was just fantastic! But, it was, once in a blue moon I would get that from him singularly, to me, directed at me, but generally it was like to the men he would come in and say that. I lived for the feeling like I just pushed myself to the maximum for him. And for me, but I somehow, for me dancing was proving something to myself. And I don't want to say that I didn't feel like a dancer, but I was still in this thing about proving something to him, proving

something to me, but I felt that I've arrived, I feel like I'm complete when I came to Les Grands.

CK- What determined that? What gave you that feeling?

DB- When Larry hired me, first of all I was already in such a strange place that I was ready to retire then. Like I said, I was going to go to Broadway and do something else. I auditioned for Les Grands Ballets, that morning I auditioned for them, I didn't know the company. That night I went to see the show! They did *Desire* by James Kudelka and I was like uhhhhh! I can't stop! *Desire* was great and I will say this for the record, I love this because I auditioned Friday morning, I saw the show Friday night, Saturday morning I went in and left Felds, I gave him my official notice. I didn't have a contract. Saturday afternoon I went to see the show again and he offered me the contract back stage after the show. I was just decided, I said, first of all if I don't get the contract I'm done dancing, I could stop now, if I don't get, I'd love to do this work but if I don't get it I'll see, but I can't continue where I am now. I want something else. And that gave me the desire to do it!

CK- Was it the choreography or the artistic works being presented by Les Grands that made you feel like a dancer or was it the physical accomplishment?

DB- It was my place in that work, it was my place in the work, it was the place that was accorded to me. Larry saw me, he liked me I felt good about my audition. I liked just the way it all felt, um, and then Larry said, I'd like to hire you as soloist but I can't right now, but if I like your work I'll promote you right away. So he promoted me right away as a soloist. I was like, "I'm being recognized for who I am! Suddenly!"

CK- There are many people who will be reading my dissertation and they don't really know about dance. Could you in your own words describe what the ideal male dancer looks like and in your perception what makes him an artist?

DB- Okay, you could talk about form, you could talk about shape and form and I don't think the ideal is fair! But if you want to look at maybe every dancer's ideal of the male dancer: it's a tall, well shaped, but not thin, but certainly everything is longggggg, you know, flexible of course, well proportioned, good feet, we all need good feet and often male dancers have a problem with that. If you don't have them, everyone is like...(he demonstrates how men push on their arches to make them more flexible) I know people who have broken their feet to get better feet! So that would be the sort of 'classic ideal'. I don't think that that ideal really exists and I think that often we would look at dancers today and I think that that kind of, I mean look at Nijinsky, he was short, he was kind of beefy, and. You know

when you look at Nueryev, you know because Misha was too short, fantastic dancer but if you were looking for ideal he's too short but Nuereyev was probably your ideal. He had good feet, fantasticcccc animal quality, could do it all, and who cares what he was doing you were like oh my god taken in! So perfect body but he also knew how to use it!

CK- When you were doing ballet class how did you connect to your mirror image? Were you happy with it?

DB- I'm glad you came back to this point, that's good because I don't know if I've been misleading the question. The word comes to mind, searching. If I think about my career and my self as a person in society, where do I fit? Religion, what do I believe, what are my, you know, my political ideas, all of this, since I've been little I feel like I've been searching for my place. And the same is as when I see myself as a dancer. I feel like since the beginning, and I'm starting to open all that up again because I am in my transition, but I feel as a dancer I had moments, especially in roles that I did, especially because, then you have something to focus on. You put those questions away, this searching and you say, "NOW I focus everything into this role." Or this challenge, one of my teachers said to me, you don't have your petite allegro! And so you focus on it. But I felt sooo often in my life, I was, I had my feelers out, I was, like I've been, not a sponge necessarily, but cause I haven't always taken everything in. Hum, what talks to me? What speaks to me? What touches me like when I go see a good film, or if I read a good book. I also was practicing Buddhism here for about a year, for longer than a year actually. But I didn't say, suddenly I'm Buddhist. I grew up Catholic. My family has all gone off into different sects, you know, and it's all, it's interesting because you find that there is a whole that there is a battle in my family on who's right or who's wrong. And my parents are still Catholic and everyone had left the church. And so I think its been hard for me to just say, I'm going to commit to this idea now. I don't want to say I've been floating but in a sense I think that was part of the reason why I had trouble defining myself as a dancer. I was in the now, even in NCDT, I was in the now but in terms of saying, that's my goal, I want to be Nueryev, couldn't say I ever said that. I was enjoying the moment. I was enjoying you know, when somebody came to work the company, that's what I focused on. When it was over, then it was the next thing. So in a sense I was amassing this knowledge and I was touched by it. And I was, putting it into the work.

CK- Are you separate from your body? And I'll tell you why I'm asking this. You are the first dancer, I promise you, who has diverted the attention completely away from the body. Where most of the dancers I interviewed were completely obsessed with talking about their body. Now what I'm trying to get at here was, were you humbled by the ballet form? Did you

embrace it? Did you hate it? I want to hear about your relationship with the ballet form.

DB-Hummm I don't know? What do you mean?

CK- I mean you're completely avoiding it! I want to understand why is it that your body is not there in the conversation?

DB- Because, well you kind of had the answer to this question. It's my ongoing frustration that I never assumed the ballet form the way I wished I could have. I went towards this kind of natural sort of ability that I have, this instinctual thing that I have and I've always relied on it. I do have a certain understanding of ballet technique. If I didn't have it I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing. And ultimately, even out of shape as I am, if you ask me to get up and do something, I'll do it, you know what I'm saying? And I, I'll, I even have this dream of going back to dancing one day, believe it or not. Yes it is an awe-inspiring thing and I know plenty of people who are intimidated by it. My frustration is not about intimidation, it's about saying, you know it's the same thing when somebody from Limon comes in and teaches Limon class. You know you're saying that I'm avoiding talking about my body, I've never been obsessed about my body. I'm a bit now just because I'm feeling out of shape. It's funny because now when people hear me saying oh I have to loose weight la la la, and people are like, get over it! You look fantastic. Because I'm not in the same shape. I'm not doing six hours in the studio any more. I was never obsessed about my body before. I just said, this is what I have and I'm going to totally, you know, ya I was always working on certain things, you know, oh ya I'm loosing strength in this foot, or you could point your foot better there. You know when I look at Kylian's work, its about focus in the body, so all of that, this ability that's a given, for me that's a given. If you're going to work, if you're going to dance, that kind of awareness of your body is a given, you can't dance without it. So, that understanding of my body I feel like I've always had. And I've always been cultivating it. Um, but don't ask me to go out and do all second turns pulled into 4 pirouettes finish perfectly. That's my... no forget it!

The perception of the imagined other is always present in David's mind; he has spent his entire career developing himself as an artist and he has tried to avoid thinking about his external physical body as the body that could have been. He was and still is, in his mind, a dancer and an artist yet he also knows that his body did not look like the body that he held in his imagination for so many years. He has never had the opportunity to have that image of the classical male virtuoso ballet dancer, which he felt lived inside of him, finalized in an aesthetic event. For David, his inner self-sensation of expressing his inner artistry outwardly

through a perfectly sculpted body never happened. He was an artist but his outward appearance did not meet the artist in him in his outward expression. David had the opportunity to dance many wonderful pieces at Les Grands Ballet Canadiens, however, in his imagination, and despite the fact that he was a soloist, he has never been recognized for his technical skills and he will forever in his memory be frustrated with that moment of contemplation and finalization that he missed out on. For Betsy Ann, she knew what she was capable of dancing and was happy when her weight loss was affirmed and validated by the assignment of good roles. As she explained, she loves ballet but she preferred the expressive roles where she could shine. Her imagined self-image was recognized and she does not seem to have any lingering resentment. For Jennifer, she worked hard to develop her artistry and to merge her technical ability with her feelings and emotions and although she danced as a soloist and was recognized for her strong technique she nevertheless always struggled to become the passionate and eloquent dancer that she felt she was inside. She explains:

I think back today and wish that I had had one of those performances where the audience is moved to tears. I saw it happen so many times in my head but for some reason my emotions were blocked. It's weird how that happens: you think that you are projecting and you feel it inside but somehow those watching you don't see it. They see your lines and your extension and stuff but they don't feel the energy you are emitting through your body. Odd! I always thought that was ODD! It's awful when you feel it and no one else does. Maybe that's just who I am.

For Dominique her body would not meet her lyrical ability and that was something she would not get over. She explains:

There is nothing worse than feeling it so deeply and your body won't do what it's supposed to do. I have never felt in my body what it would feel like to hold my leg up to my ears while I evoked a deep sentiment. I kind of felt it in my emotions, I mean what it would have felt like, but never actually physically felt it. I yearned for it and it never happened. It's like this little dancer in me was trapped in my body and wouldn't let me experience perfection in the ballet sense. You reach and reach and when it doesn't come at one point you just have to let go. Maybe I have and maybe I haven't—I don't really know?

In this chapter, we have come to understand the aesthetic experience of the ballet dancer and have also learnt how the ideal ballet form plays an important role in the transformation process. Through the dancers words we gained insight into the process by which they learn to *see* the body differently. That is, through the dancers' description of their aesthetic experience of the ballet form, we have come to understand how their visual literacy of the art of ballet is shaped. As we have seen, the dancers develop an understanding of the language and vocabulary of ballet through their daily training. They learn the aesthetic standards of ballet and as they integrate its language and vocabulary into their bodies, their physical experience—that is, their sensorial experience—changes. Their tendons and muscles begin to understand what it feels like to stand in certain positions and move in a new way. As their bodies begin to change shape and they begin to develop a ballet body, their visual understanding begins to take form as well. The deeper their understanding of the aesthetic ideal becomes the deeper their understanding of the bodies potential. In their imaginations they see themselves as the vision of perfection and as they develop a deeper understanding of their abilities and limits, the innocence of their desire is gone. The ideal is always there—in their minds, in their vision, in the eyes and sight of the other, and within the very spirit of ballet itself. Their aesthetic experience lives within the complexity of their inner and outer dialogue and within their active engagement with the ideal form. Every little step towards embodying the ballet form is based on an intricate inter-relationship between multiple levels of experience. It is the union of the inner self-sensation, the outer appearance and expression, and the perceptual interplay between the 'I' and 'Other'. As we have heard, the dancers' inner desire to attain the epitome of aesthetic perfection begins with the internalization of their visual understanding of the ideal ballet form and also the integration of this visual literacy into actual physical movement. The young students of ballet are like sponges; they suck-up every ounce of the very thing that is ballet. The dynamics between the ideal ballet image, which is always present in their minds, the inner self-sensation of their self-image, the image that the Other has of them and the possible future image of themselves dancing in the aesthetically perfect form, are all integrated into their entire aesthetic experience. Through the interviews we have seen that there is a powerful subjective internal experience at work here and that the inner self-sensation of the ballet dancer is highly engaged in aesthetic activity. Through the development of their visual vocabulary and the learning of the ballet language,



the ballet dancer begins their transformation process. Their inner and outer body is simultaneously transformed and they are one step closer to embodying the ballet form.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **THE INSTITUTIONAL EXPERIENCE**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

In the last chapter (chapter 4) we discussed at length the idea of, and the inter-relationship between, the 'inner' and 'outer' human being. In so doing, we placed an emphasis on the internalization of the outward experience—that is, the internalization of that moment of finalization in an aesthetic event. We discovered through Bakhtin's theorization of the inner self-sensation that the self is actively engaged in its own unique self-creation. The notion that there exists an inner world within a human being—a world where feelings and emotions, and desires and needs, are experienced—and that this inner world is actively engaged in aesthetic activity, signals that active communication between the inner and outer self exists, and that it operates at the level of human beings self-consciousness.

So far in the second half of this dissertation we have come to understand how the ballet dancer experiences the ballet form at an aesthetic level. Chapter 4 was primarily devoted to the aesthetic experience and the body, as well as to the dancer's imagination and desire. We have understood through Bakhtin's theorization of outward appearance and expressedness that the transformation of the outward appearance is forever connected to inner self-sensation and is therefore transformed simultaneously. It is important that we now take this transformation process and contextualize it. Although Bakhtin gives us a good description of aesthetic activity, we still need to understand how the mind is actively engaged in the process of self-creation and how the self as a whole is developed. In the previous chapter we have come to understand the basic dynamics of the inner and outer experience of the body in

aesthetic activity, however, it is vital to this dissertation that we understand the social context through which the self of a dancer emerges.

Ballet, as we have already explained, has been institutionalized and has a unique structure and symbolic order. If one is to become a dancer one must not only change their body but they must also embody everything that is ballet. That is, as the dancers *step into* the ballet form, they are in essence transforming their body and being into all that is symbolic of the ballet institution. From its rituals and practices, codes and symbols and aesthetic ideals, embodying the ballet form means much more than simply changing the body. It is the transformation of the body, the mind and the whole entire self into a work of art. It is a process that engages all of the human beings senses as well as their thoughts and behaviors. It would not be logical to think that the formation of a dancer would simply require physical training; after all, the ballet dancer's formation does not occur within a cultural vacuum. The formation of a dancer is a magnificent act of creation in that it requires an incredible amount of internal discipline and concentration. The dancers must be fully present and fully engaged in their formation, which means that they must be fully attentive to their social surrounding. A large part of their formation is dependent on learning the ballet language and vocabulary, codes of ethics and conduct, rituals and practices, and learning how to behave under the basic institutional standards. Although their work is highly physical and their body requires years of training, we must not exclude the mind and the entire self from this work. What is essential to further our understanding of the dancer's formation, is a theoretical understanding of the process by which the mind and self emerge from within a particular social structure. Since ballet has developed into an institution with a very long history, and that this institution is responsible for managing and maintaining the art of ballet—which means the managing and maintaining of the ballet form—we know that the formation of the ballet dancer occurs within a highly organized social context where there develops many intricate layers of social relations. In order to understand how a self emerges from within such a context, this chapter will begin by turning to the work of George Herbert Mead in *Mind, Self, & Society* (1934).

## 5.2 The emergence of the mind and self

In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead describes the social process through which the mind and self emerge. His analysis of human experience extends beyond the general study of individual psychology to that of social order and communication. For Mead the formation of the self is part of a social process that develops through social interaction and where the mind emerges through a social process of communication. Within a social context where there are at least two individuals interacting, there are two phases in the process of communication: the first is the *conversation of gestures* and the second is language, or *the conversation of significant gestures*. In the conversation of gestures the individual is unconscious of his/her communicative gestures and is equally unaware of the response it may provoke in the other. Since the individual is unaware of the reactions of others to his/her gestures, he/she is unable to respond to his/her own gestures from the standpoint of others. The individual is a participant in the conversation of gestures and is in fact communicating unbeknownst. The conversation of gestures is therefore considered unconscious communication. Mead uses the example of the dog-fight to introduce this idea:

Dogs approaching each other in hostile attitude carry on such a language of gestures. They walk around each other, growling and snapping, and waiting for the opportunity to attack . . . (Mead 1934:14)

The act of each dog becomes the stimulus to the other dog for his response. There is then a relationship between these two; and as the act is responded to by the other dog, it, in turn, undergoes change. The very fact that the dog is ready to attack another becomes a stimulus to the other dog to change his own position or his own attitude. He has no sooner done this than the change of attitude in the second dog in turn causes the first dog to change his attitude. We have here a conversation of gestures. *They are not, however, gestures in the sense that they are significant.* We do not assume that the dog says to himself, "If the animal comes from this direction he is going to spring at my throat and I will turn in such a way." What does take place is an actual change in his own position due to the direction of the approach of the other dog. (Mead 1934:42-43, emphasis added).

Although the conversation of gestures is unconscious communication it is nevertheless here where language, or rather, conscious communication emerges. Communication for Mead is evolutionary in that it develops from the more or less primitive forms towards the more or

less advanced forms of social interaction. In the human world, language supersedes, however, does not abolish, the conversation of gestures and marks the transition from non-significant to significant interaction. For Mead, language is communication through significant symbols—a gesture, usually a vocal one, that calls out in the individual making the gesture the same functionally identical response that is called out in others to whom the gesture is directed (Mead 1934: 47). In significant communication, the individual understands the meaning of his/her gestures.

For Mead the process of communication is a social act because it involves the interaction of at least two individuals. This social act—this act of communication—occurs in three parts: it begins with a gesture imparted by one individual, the response of the second individual, and the result of the action initiated by the first individual's gesture and develops into meaning (Mead 1934: 76-81). There is no meaning independent of the interactive participation of two or more individuals in the act of communication. Certainly the individual can anticipate the responses of others and can, therefore, consciously and intentionally make gestures that will bring out appropriate responses in others. This form of communication is quite different from that which takes place in the conversation of gestures, for in the latter there is no possibility of the conscious structuring and control of the communicational act.

Consciousness of meaning is that which permits the individual to respond to his/her own gestures as the other responds. A gesture, then, is an action that implies a reaction. The reaction is the meaning of the gesture and points toward the result—the 'intentionality'—of the action initiated by the gesture. Gestures "become significant symbols when they implicitly arouse in an individual making them the same responses which they explicitly arouse, or are supposed [intended] to arouse, in other individuals, the individuals to whom they are addressed" (Mead 1934: 47). For example:

You ask somebody to bring a visitor a chair. You arouse the tendency to get the chair in the other, but if he is slow to act, you get the chair yourself. The response to the gesture is the doing of a certain thing, and you arouse that same tendency in yourself (Mead 1934:67).

At this stage, the conversation of gestures is transformed into a conversation of significant symbols, which is the very foundation of Mead's theory of mind. "Only in terms of gestures as significant symbols is the existence of mind or intelligence possible; for only in terms of gestures which are significant symbols can thinking — which is simply an internalized or implicit conversation of the individual with himself by means of such gestures — take place" (Mead 1934: 47). Mind, then, is a form of participation in an interpersonal or social process; it is the result of taking the attitudes of others toward one's own gestures—or conduct in general. Mind, in brief, is the use of significant symbols.

What is at the core of Mead's 'social behaviorism' is his view that mind is emergent out of the interaction of organic individuals in a social matrix. Mind is not a substance located in some transcendent realm, nor is it merely a series of events that takes place within the human physiological structure. Mead actually rejects both the traditional view of the mind as an object separate from the body as well as the behaviouristic treatment of the mind solely in terms of physiology or neurology. Mead agrees with the behaviorists that we can explain mind behaviorally if we deny its existence as a substantial entity and view it instead as a natural function of human organisms. It is, however, neither possible nor desirable to deny the existence of mind altogether. The physiological organism is a necessary but not sufficient condition of mental behavior (Mead 1934: 139). Without the specific character of the human central nervous system, it would not be possible for the individual to internalize the process of significant communication and furthermore, without the social process of conversational behavior, there would be no significant symbols for the individual to internalize.

The emergence of mind is contingent, then, upon interaction between the human organism and its social environment; it is through participation in the social act of communication that the individual realizes his/her potential for significantly symbolic behavior such as thought. Mind, in Mead's terms, is the individualized focus of the communicational process — it is linguistic behavior on the part of the individual. There is, then, no "mind or thought without language;" and language—the content of mind—"is only a development and product of social interaction" (Mead 1934: 191- 192).

I know of no way in which intelligence or mind could arise or could have arisen, other than through the internalization by the individual of social processes of experience and behavior, that is, through this internalization of the conversation of significant gestures, as made possible by the individual's taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself and toward what is being thought about. And if mind or thought has arisen in this way, then there neither can be nor could have been any mind or thought without language; and the early stages of the development of language must have been prior to the development of mind or thought (Mead 1934: 191-92).

Therefore, mind is not reducible to the neurophysiology of the organic individual, rather, is an emergent in "the dynamic, ongoing social process" that constitutes human experience (Mead 1934: 7).

Like the mind, Mead argues that the self is also a social emergent and that this social conception of the self suggests that individual selves are the products of social interaction and not the preconditions of that interaction. Mead explains that "the self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (Mead 1934: 135). Mead's model of society is an organic model in which individuals are related to the social process as bodily parts are related to bodies. For Mead, the self is a reflective process and it is this reflexivity of the self that 'distinguishes it from other objects and from the body'. Unlike the body, the self is 'an object to itself' and the body, for Mead is not.

It is perfectly true that the eye can see the foot, but it does not see the body as a whole. We cannot see our backs; we can feel certain portions of them, if we are agile, but we cannot get an experience of our whole body. There are, of course, experiences which are somewhat vague and difficult of location, but the bodily experiences are for us organized about a self. The foot and hand belong to the self. We can see our feet, especially if we look at them from the wrong end of an opera glass, as strange things which we have difficulty in recognizing as our own. The parts of the body are quite distinguishable from the self. We can lose parts of the body without any serious invasion of the self. The mere ability to experience different parts of the body is not different from the experience of a table. The table presents a different feel from what the hand does when one hand feels another, but it is an experience of something with which we come definitely into contact. The body does not

experience itself as a whole, in the sense in which the self in some way enters into the experience of the self (Mead 1934: 136).

The self in all of its wholeness and its reflexive character, distinguishes human beings consciousness from that of animals (Mead 1934: 137). Firstly, consciousness, Mead explains, may denote a certain feeling consciousness, which is the outcome of an organism's sensitivity to its environment. And secondly, it may refer to a form of awareness, which always implicitly has the reference to an 'I' in it and is, therefore, appropriate to the discussion of human consciousness (Mead 1934: 165). While there is a form of pre-reflective consciousness that refers to the 'bare thereness of the world,' it is reflectivity, or self-consciousness, that characterizes human awareness. The pre-reflective world is a world in which the self is absent (Mead 1934: 135-136).

Self-consciousness, then, involves the objectification of the self. In the mode of self-consciousness, the "individual enters as such into his own experience . . . as an object" (Mead 1934: 225). How is this objectification of the self possible? The individual, according to Mead, "can enter as an object [to himself] only on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organized social environment" (Mead 1934: 225). Self-consciousness is the result of a process in which the individual takes the attitudes of others toward himself/herself, in which he/she attempts to view himself/herself from the standpoint of others. The self-as-object arises out of the individual's experience of other selves outside of himself/herself. The objectified self is an emergent within the social structures and processes of human intersubjectivity.

Mead's account of the social emergence of the self is developed further through an elucidation of three forms of inter-subjective activity: language, play, and the game. These forms of "symbolic interaction", that is, social interactions that take place via shared symbols such as words, definitions, roles, gestures, rituals, etc., are central in Mead's theory of socialization and are the basic social processes that render the reflexive objectification of the self possible.



As we have seen, language is communication via “significant symbols”, and it is through significant communication that the individual is able to take the attitudes of others toward himself/herself. Language is not only a “necessary mechanism” of mind, however, it is also the primary social foundation of the self:

I know of no other form of behavior than the linguistic in which the individual is an object to himself . . . (Mead 1934: 142). When a self does appear it always involves an experience of another; there could not be an experience of a self simply by itself. The plant or the lower animal reacts to its environment, but there is no experience of a self . . . When the response of the other becomes an essential part in the experience or conduct of the individual; when taking the attitude of the other becomes an essential part in his behavior — then the individual appears in his own experience as a self; and until this happens he does not appear as a self (Mead 1934: 195).

Within the linguistic act, the individual takes the role of the other and responds to his/her own gestures in terms of the symbolized attitudes of others. This “process of taking the role of the other” within the process of symbolic interaction is the primal form of self-objectification and is essential to self- realization (Mead 1934: 160-161).

The self-as-object is a basic structure of human experience that arises in response to other persons in an organic social-symbolic world of internal and inter-subjective relations. This becomes even clearer in Mead’s interpretation of playing and gaming. In playing and gaming, as in linguistic activity, the key to the generation of self-consciousness is the process of role-playing. The game involves a more complex form of role-playing than is involved in play. In the game, the individual is required to internalize not merely the character of a single and specific other, but the roles of all others that are involved with him/her in the game. He/she must, moreover, comprehend the rules of the game which condition the various roles (Mead 1934: 151). This configuration of roles-organized-according-to- rules brings the attitudes of all participants together to form a symbolized unity: this unity is the “generalized other” (Mead 1934: 154). The generalized other is “an organized and generalized attitude” (Mead 1934: 195) with reference to which the individual defines his/her own conduct. When the

individual can view himself/herself from the standpoint of the generalized other, "self-consciousness in the full sense of the term", is attained.

The game, then, is the stage of the social process at which the individual attains selfhood. One of Mead's most outstanding contributions to the development of critical social theory is his analysis of games. Mead elucidates the full social and psychological significance of game-playing and the extent to which the game functions as an instrument of social control. The following passage contains a remarkable piece of analysis:

What goes on in the game goes on in the life of the child all the time. He is continually taking the attitudes of those about him, especially the roles of those who in some sense control him and on whom he depends. He gets the function of the process in an abstract way at first. It goes over from the play into the game in a real sense. *He has to play the game.* The morale of the game takes hold of the child more than the larger morale of the whole community. The child passes into the game and the game expresses a social situation in which he can completely enter; *its morale may have a greater hold on him than that of the family to which he belongs or the community in which he lives.* There are all sorts of social organizations, some of which are fairly lasting, some temporary, into which the child is entering, *and he is playing a sort of social game in them.* It is a period in which he likes "to belong," and he gets into organizations which come into existence and pass out of existence. *He becomes a something which can function in the organized whole,* and thus tends to determine himself in his relationship with the group to which he belongs. That process is one which is a striking stage in the development of the child's morale. It constitutes him a self-conscious member of the community to which he belongs (Mead 1934: 160).

Although the self is a product of socio-symbolic interaction, it is not merely a passive reflection of the generalized other. The individual's response to the social world is active; he/she decides what he/she will do in the light of the attitudes of others—her conduct is not mechanically determined by such attitudinal structures. The self has two phases: one that *reflects* the attitude of the generalized other and one that *responds* to the attitude of the generalized other. Here, Mead distinguishes between the 'me' and the 'I'. The 'me' is the social self, and the 'I' is a response to the 'me' (Mead 1934: 178). "The 'I' is the response of the organism to the attitudes of the others; the 'me' is the organized set of attitudes of others

which one himself assumes”(Mead 1934: 175). Mead defines the ‘me’ as “a conventional, habitual individual”, and the ‘I’ as the “novel reply” of the individual to the generalized other (Mead 1934: 197). There is a dialectical relationship between society and the individual; and this dialectic is enacted on the intra-psychic level in terms of the polarity of the ‘me’ and the ‘I’. The ‘me’ is the internalization of roles which derive from such symbolic processes as linguistic interaction, playing, and gaming; whereas the ‘I’ is a ‘creative response’ to the symbolized structures of the ‘me’—to the generalized other.

Although the ‘I’ is not an object of immediate experience, it is, in a sense, knowable, or objectifiable. We can understand the structural and functional significance of the ‘I’, however, we cannot directly observe it— it appears only *ex post facto*. We remember the responses of the ‘I’ to the ‘me’—and this is as close as we can get to a concrete knowledge of the ‘I’. The objectification of the ‘I’ is possible only through an awareness of the past; however, the objectified ‘I’ is never the subject of present experience. “If you ask, then, where directly in your own experience the ‘I’ comes in, the answer is that it comes in as a historical figure” (Mead 1934: 174).

The ‘I’ does not get into the limelight; we talk to ourselves, but do not see ourselves. The ‘I’ reacts to the self which arises through the taking of the attitudes of the others. Through taking those attitudes we have introduced the ‘me’ and we react to it as an ‘I’. The simplest way of handling the problem would be in terms of memory. I talk to myself, and I remember what I said and perhaps the emotional content that went with it. The ‘I’ of this moment is present in the ‘me’ of the next moment. There again I cannot turn around quick enough to catch myself. I become a ‘me’ in so far as I remember what I said. The ‘I’ can be given, however, this functional relationship. It is because of the ‘I’ that we say that we are never fully aware of what we are, that we surprise ourselves by our own action. It is as we act that we are aware of ourselves. It is in memory that the ‘I’ is constantly present in experience (ibid.).

The ‘I’, then, appears as a symbolized object in our consciousness of our past actions and thus it becomes part of the ‘me’. The ‘me’ is, in a sense, that phase of the self that represents the past—the already-established generalized other. The ‘I’, which is a response to the ‘me’

represents action in a present—"that which is actually going on, taking place", and which implies the restructuring of the "me" in a future. After the 'I' has acted, "we can catch it in our memory and place it in terms of that which we have done", but it is now (in the newly emerged present) an aspect of the restructured "me"(Mead 1934: 204-203). Because of the temporal-historical dimension of the self, the character of the 'I' is determinable only after it has occurred; the 'I' is not, therefore, subject to predetermination. Particular acts of the 'I' become aspects of the 'me' in the sense that they are objectified through memory—the 'I' as such is not contained in the 'me'.

The human individual exists in a social situation and responds to that situation. The situation has a particular character, however, this character does not completely determine the response of the individual; there seems to be alternative courses of action. The individual must select a course of action and act accordingly, however, the course of action she/he selects is not dictated by the situation. It is this indeterminacy of response that "gives the sense of freedom, of initiative" (Mead 1934: 177). The action of the 'I' is revealed only in the action itself; specific prediction of the action of the 'I' is not possible. The individual is determined to respond, but the specific character of his/her response is not fully determined. The individual's responses are *conditioned*, but not determined by the situation in which he/she acts (Mead 1934: 210-211). Human freedom is conditioned freedom. Thus, the 'I' and the 'me' exist in dynamic relation to one another. The human personality—or self—arises in a social situation. This situation structures the 'me' by means of inter-subjective symbolic processes such as: language, gestures, play, games, etc., and the active organism, as it continues to develop, must respond to its situation and to its 'me'. This response of the active organism is the 'I'.

The individual takes the attitude of the 'me' or the attitude of the 'I' according to situations in which he/she finds himself/herself. For Mead, "both aspects of the 'I' and the 'me' are essential to the self in its full expression" (Mead 1934: 199). Both community and individual autonomy are necessary to identity. The 'I' is process breaking through structure. The 'me' is a necessary symbolic structure which renders the action of the 'I' possible, and

“without this structure of things, the life of the self would become impossible” (Mead 1934: 214).

The self, we can conclude, arises when the individual takes the attitude of the generalized other toward himself/herself. This “internalization” of the generalized other occurs through the individual’s participation in the conversation of significant symbols, or language, and in other socialization processes like play and games. The self, then, is of great value to organized society: the internalization of the conversation of significant symbols and of other interactional symbolic structures allows for “the superior co-ordination” of “society as a whole”, and for the “increased efficiency of the individual as a member of the group” (Mead 1934: 179). The generalized other—internalized in the ‘me’ is a major instrument of social control; it is the mechanism by which the community gains control “over the conduct of its individual members” (Mead 1934: 155). “Social control” in Mead’s words, “is the expression of the ‘me’ over against the expression of the ‘I’” (Mead 1934: 210). The genesis of the self in social process is thus a condition of social control. The self is a social emergent that supports the cohesion of the group and individual will is harmonized by means of a socially defined and symbolized ‘reality’, with social goals and values. Thus, there are two dimensions of Mead’s theory of internalization: the first is the internalization of the attitudes of others toward oneself and toward one another—the internalization of the interpersonal process—and the second is the internalization of the attitudes of others “toward the various phases or aspects of the common social activity or set of social undertakings in which, as members of an organized society or social group, they are all engaged” (Mead 1934: 154-155). The self, then, refers not only to others, but to social projects and goals, and it is by means of the socialization process—the internalization of the generalized other through language, play, and the game—that the individual is brought to assume the attitudes of those in the group who are involved with him in his social activities. By learning to speak, gesture, and play in “appropriate” ways, the individual is brought into line with the accepted symbolized roles and rules of the social process. The self is therefore one of the most subtle and effective instruments of social control. The self emerges out of “a special set of social relations with all the other individuals” involved in a given set of social projects (Mead 1934:

156-157). The self is always a reflection of specific social relations that are themselves founded on the specific mode of activity of the group in question.

### 5.3 The dancers self-formation

The ballet dancers' playground, like all social settings, is a place where the dancer's self is shaped and formed. The ballet world is an institutionalized setting and as we explained earlier in this dissertation, is a highly organized and structured environment. The ballet dancer's self emerges from within the symbolic order of the ballet institution. In the previous section we learnt through Mead that our selves are formed in interaction with others and that both our minds and selves are formed within the social and communicative activities of a social group or community. We have understood that the project of selfhood is a highly complex and dynamic act of creation that involves a fully active self, engaged in an ongoing social process. Through active communication and the interactive dynamics between our selves and others within a given group, we learn to adapt to the group's activities and through symbolic interaction, we emerge through our continual process of adjustment to our social world. Since this chapter is about the institutional experience of ballet dancers, it is important to understand the development of the dancer's self, which we have understood develops from within the process of social experience and activity. That is, the ballet dancer's formation is a result of his/her relations to that process as a whole, and to the others who they interact with within that process. It is the ongoing dynamics of this process that constitutes the ballet dancer's experience and is therefore important to this study.

Through Mead we have come to understand that the ballet dancer becomes self-conscious as they interact with others and learn to read their gestures, or behaviours. Within this communicative dynamic, they learn to assume the roles of others and monitor their actions accordingly. As we have explained earlier, Mead contends that self-consciousness and individuality develop in tandem with social organization and co-operation. He conceives of the mind as a form of conversation, that is a conversation that is held internally within a person's self. The ballet dancer as they train and develop themselves as dancers, and thus as members of the ballet institution, are in a continual dialogue with themselves. Their internal

dialogue—that is, their response to the attitudes of others within their group and the incorporation of certain aspects of the other's attitudes towards themselves—is a kind of negotiation process with their inner desires and their response to their external environment. All young students enrolled in a professional school aspire to become ballet dancers and therefore must engage themselves fully and completely in the process. Since the self is a social emergent, the creation of a dancer's self would require the internalization of the ballet institutions symbolic order and active participation in inter-communicative dynamics through which the self emerges. That is, it would require the internalization of the attitudes of the ballet world and it would also involve active participation in its rituals and practices. The ballet dancer is transformed from within a setting where certain organized attitudes, such as aesthetic standards and ballet class rules, are accepted as the norm. The dancer incorporates these attitudes, norms and values into their sense of self and is actively responsive to their group. Like all human beings, the dancer is a self-contained unitary individual who carries their uniqueness deep inside themselves. Since the individual is socially based, they can, however, only come to know themselves from within an organized group, or community. Their self is constantly negotiated and renegotiated vis a vis the groups attitude and it is through their reactions and response to, for example, the standardized norms of behaviour that a dancer will come to know who exactly they are. Ballet dancers' lives are characterized by the ongoing conversations and dialogues they carry out in the course of their everyday activities. Their dedication to their daily rituals and practices (the daily ballet class, their rehearsals, their interactions, etc...) is something that they identify with and which gives them a sense of certainty in their lives. Their identity as ballet dancers and as a member of the ballet institution is thus formed by their constantly unfolding desire to dance as it is progressively being realized.

In chapter 4 we saw how the ballet dancer internalizes the ballet world's visual vocabulary and aesthetic ideal. Through their studies and their involvement in the ballet institution, the ballet dancer learns what the aesthetic standards are and understands that to become a ballet dancer, this standard must be upheld. As we have already explained, the transformation of a dancer begins with the training of their bodies and the incorporation of a visual literacy into their minds and bodies. The physical training and visual understanding are

part-and-partial and are thus inseparable. That being said, the self-formation of the ballet dancer then is inseparable from their bodies as well. Their formation is completely based on the development of the aesthetically ideal physicality, the development of a certain attitude and mind-set, and the internal development of their artistry and uniqueness. It is important to note that in what will follow, the dancer at no time separate from their bodily experience and as a result, from their institutional experience. Since the body is the main vehicle of self-expression for the dancer, it is therefore the central character in the entire transformation process. The emergence of the dancers' self is, as we explained, contingent upon interaction between them selves and other dancers, and their environment; it is through participation in the social act of communication that they realize their potential as dancers. Through this dynamic process they are called upon to react and respond. Each dancer has their individual story to tell, however, it must not be forgotten that the impetus behind their active participation and acceptance of their community, is their love and desire to dance. Each may react and respond in their own unique and creative way, however, the norms and values of the ballet institution are firmly maintained and managed, thus, allowing for very little deviation. To be accepted into this community the dancer must accept to live this life style. The dancer will only come to know who they are and what role they play within the ballet institution through active participation in their formation. That being said, in what will follow, we will begin by looking at one particular dancer's journey through the transformation process. Through this first interview, we are invited into the dancer's internal dialogue of her institutional experience.

Rosemary Neville's institutional experience is very interesting because she was one of the very few women who actually started serious dance training at eighteen years old and who actually made it into a company after only four years. Prior to her serious training, Rosemary had only taken ballet class for fun. What is interesting about her development, or transformation, is that she spent much of her teen years being formed into a young person 'outside' the dance world. Her everyday life was very different and her general attitude was already taking form on the 'outside'. The fact that she came back to ballet at such a late age and actually became a professional ballet dancer despite a long interruption in her training makes her case unusual as well as very interesting. At the age of five Rosemary did take a



few ballet classes up till the age of eleven, however, her training was interrupted by her parent's relocation to Brazil.

CK- That's quite an accomplishment only 4 years of training!

RB- As I said I'm very stubborn. And I had even a series of injuries starting right off the bat. Because I was pushing my body and it didn't want to do what it didn't want to do! It was doing it in those formative years and its not something I would suggest to any one to do, although I did feel that when I got into the company that I got there because I really earned it, because I really wanted it, so you don't take any of it for granted, where some other people might, and I was able to have lived other things in my life and it helped me as an artist.

CK- Did you ever struggle physically to become a ballet dancer?

RN-Oh, ya, I don't have super high extensions, I don't have amazing feet, I have a much smaller upper body than my lower body so I had to diet all the time. Like horribly, like 600 calories a day. Its not very much fun, that aspect of it and I'm sort of glad to put that behind me ha ha. And which is why I am really careful about my daughters' approach to dance and her image about her body. It can unfortunately color everything in your existence as a woman.

CK- Ya absolutely, I agree. When you were between that age of five and eleven did you feel that you were a dancer?

RN-Yes, ya ya

CK- At that age did you struggle with the image?

RN- No, no I wasn't aware of my body's short-comings when I was that young. But that's also because I was in a school where there was not a lot of emphasis placed on that. It wasn't like getting into the National Ballet School and everybody had to have feet like hooks and an amazing turnout. The teachers worked with what strengths you had. And helped you with what weaknesses you had. And it was a very positive approach to everything.

CK- Before you went into the professional school, did you like your body?

RN- No problems with it, no self-consciousness nothing like that.

CK- Tell me about your training at L'Ecole Superieure.

RN- First I joined L'Academie and I was very fortunate to have some very good teachers. And I would go twice a week and eventually three and four and five and all day Saturday. That's when you start to become more aware of your what's missing in your body.

CK- What was that for you?

RN- Feet, extension, I was missing everything ha ha, flexibility

CK- So who did you see as an ideal dancer?

RN- I can't really say I looked up to anybody. I had to be really sure of myself. I had to develop a certain competitiveness that wasn't naturally in me. I have always competed with myself but then all of a sudden I had to compete with other people. So it starts with an eighteen year old competing with fourteen year olds, intellectually, I mean forget it! But as I got a little bit older and they got a little bit older, there was not that big a gap between lets say a sixteen year old and a 20 year old, then there is between a 14 year old and an 18 year old. I didn't necessarily look up to any of the dancers in the company, I had a pretty tough time when I got into the company. Because I was older I wasn't like your little green 16 year old as an apprentice. Here I was 22. I was the same age as a lot of the company members. I didn't necessarily know the etiquette of company class where the apprentice stands in the back and never gets in the way of principal dancers and you get all those looks from the principal dancer like to die for. And it was tough in the beginning because the apprentices don't dance. We would go on Columbia Artist tours at the time, eight week tour, ten week tour of the southern United States on a bus and I would dance maybe once a week. And I was responsible for a lot of different roles. Like a...but you never learn the roles. You're standing in the wings trying to learn the roles and then you get thrown on into a part for a five foot one dancer and you're five foot six. Like you don't stand out already because you don't know the steps ha ha

Like all the other dancers in training, Rosemary quickly learned how to assess her body fairly quickly. She negotiated its strengths and weaknesses based on the idealized standards. She understood that to gain acceptance by this institution you would have to not only learn the language and vocabulary but also learn the codes of ethics as well. The ballet class is where much of the rules are taught; there is a very strict hierarchical structure in ballet class—the best dancers are usually asked to stand in the front of the class and the worst are asked to stand at the back. In a company ballet class this practice still applies: the principal dancers stand in the front row, followed by the soloists, then the demi-soloists, the core and finally,

the apprentices in the back row. These are simple basic rules that must be followed and are generally re-enforced. Whether they are professionals or students, know their place in class and never forget their place. The dancer knows their potential and knows what needs to be accomplished if they are to move up in rank. Dancer's, unless they are stars or principals are generally obedient and rarely rock the boat. They are not supposed to deviate from any set codes of ethics, and daily ballet class is an absolute must. Rosemary was re-learning all of these rules and as she developed and transformed herself into a dancer, the re-integration process became easier. She also began to take on the attitude that in ballet you do everything you can to transform your body including starve yourself. This is acceptable behavior and until recently, it was almost encouraged.

CK- When you were training again and getting into shape, and you're looking in the mirror, how did you feel? Did you start feeling good about yourself eventually?

RN- Your body starts to change. The shape of your muscles start to change and I started to see, what in my head was a dancers body emerging. Its very encouraging. I have a pre-disposition to build a lot of muscle. And in the 80's muscular dancers were not the thing to be! Now they are but the aesthetic then was to have a soft thin body. Like no thigh muscles bulging beneath your tutu and no biceps. And what happened when, as my, um, my training started to become a little more varied, um, all those other muscles start awakening and developing too. And that's when you start realizing, okay I have to somehow compliment this training so I don't bulk up. I can't walk as much as I like to. Or I can't run. I had to modify what I was doing in terms of other types of exercise.

CK- And what about the eating?

RN- The eating, well I was just careful. I was still living at home at 22 so I had somebody vigilating but then when I got into the company and I was pretty thin at the time, I was told it was contingent on me loosing weight. So then the scale comes out and you start weighing yourself every single day and then the laxatives. I didn't get as far as bulimia but I got pretty close to anorexia. And I remember my mother saying to me you're starving your body, do you want your body to eat muscles? What do you think the response was? YES! I don't want the thigh muscle.

CK- So your mom was aware then?

RN- My mom was very aware then, she's a smart woman. Then eventually when I got into the company I had to avoid eating at home. I would walk home from Les Grands and stop somewhere and just have a salad. I deprived my body of protein a good number of weeks in order to loose. Like I would loose ten pounds in a week, there is no other way to do it, its really sad.

CK- Was there ever a point that you liked your body?

RN- Pretty rare. Because the thinner you get you still see flaws in your body. That's what the whole anorexia is about. They can be like a stick and still think that they have a big butt.

Most people outside of the ballet world would assume this starvation practice to be an unhealthy mindset. Dancers spend many hours discussing how to loose weight and share drastic measures as well. They tend to believe that this is part of the discipline and people on the 'outside' would not understand. It is a rather tricky practice to negotiate and rationalize because on the 'inside' it is commonly practiced and encouraged, however, on the 'outside' when the dancer goes home to his/her families, he/she is confronted with a whole other set of values and attitudes. As we read, Rosemary would avoid going home for dinner at all cost, because she had been admitted into the company and had become a professional dancer and now she was prepared to assume all that this privilege entailed. So, the dancer begins his/her training and they start to develop the body, the lines and the artistry and they are prepared to sacrifice everything for the art. In their minds they are following all the protocol and are transforming them selves into ballet dancers. Some days you feel like you are a member of the group and some days when you have been overlooked and a teacher has told you that you would be better suited for modern dancer, your whole self is rattled. Everything you had hoped for and you had thought about yourself is challenged. Rosemary explains:

RN- Ya I had Sellier when I was in the company, that was not necessarily the best experience for me because he helped me bulk up again. And I'm a good jumper too but the more you jump the bulkier you get. And all of a sudden you start seeing your roles shifting, less ballet to more modern. It's a very vicious circle because the more modern you do the more into the ground you dance and the more bulk you get, and then forget it you're never going to get to put a tutu on in Nutcracker, which is what my aspiration was. When I

started, just when I finished my schooling I could remember teachers saying to me, you really should consider modern dance. And that just kills you!! If you have aspirations to be a ballet dancer. But I had been a little more flexible in my thinking I would have been a much happier young adult and I would have had a much healthier perception of my body and eating habits and everything that goes along with it right.

She had been so focused on the project of transforming herself into a ballet dancer that the thought of changing paths would be devastating. It is as though you are being cast out of your home.

CK- So tell me inside yourself, while you were dancing and having this conflict with the mirror, did you still feel like a dancer?

RN- Oh absolutely. I felt that I had found my vocation. My voice, how to express myself but it wasn't necessarily the right place to be doing it. Like I said, if I had listened to those people when I was 18, why don't you explore modern dance, I probably would have been happier. But look I ended up almost doing all the modern rep in the company. I ended up doing a lot of principal roles in the modern rep.

I think that dancers are very fortunate at Les Grands because they get to touch on such a variety of styles. It brought a lot to my career that I would have had, otherwise, because if I were in a ballet company, where you do things like Nutcracker, well anyone who interrupted their training for 7 years, well forget it, you would be in the corps de ballet forever. I was very lucky that way.

Ck- Did you feel like a classical ballet dancer?

RN- Never, no

CK- Have you done the tutu ballets?

RN- Oh ya.

CK- What was your favorite role? What role expressed best who you are?

RN- In the tutu ballets there were no favorite roles ha, ha. I never felt comfortable in them. I had to do dew drops in the Nutcracker. Do you remember Diane Patington, she felt comfortable doing ballet. She went to sleep with her pointe shoes on. She was the ballerina. She was like so up on her hips and she starved herself, sure! But she felt most at home with pointe

shoes on. I always felt like a fish out of water with pointe shoes on. I ended up, towards the end of my career, doing the barre in bare feet. And it would drive the teachers nuts especially the guest teachers, what is this a ballet class and she doesn't even have soft shoes on her feet. But we did so much modern I had to feel the floor to get grounded to start my day. And then it would progress, we had three studios at Les Grands and I would go into another studio, that was my alternate birthing room! You would come into the world in a kinder way ha ha! Because if you are working in such a small group, I mean 34 is pretty big compared to a lot of companies now a days, but its still very incestuous. And there is a lot of power struggle going on everyday all day and different artistic directors, I lived through about four changes in personnel, they play there little mind games saying hello to some people and not saying hello to others. Only correcting so and so for the whole class, it's like, what are the rest of us invisible? And sometime you just can't deal with it! So I would just need like a mental health day and I would go and warm up somewhere else. I still had to come into rehearsal right? But how do you cope? You at least eliminate that one and a half hour at the beginning of the day that is so jarring to your system that it makes you crazy for the rest of your day.

One of the most commonly practiced games in the ballet world is the game of, who is 'in' or who is 'out'—that is, who is going to make it into the company, or who is going to get the role. If dancers are is not working hard enough, if they are not pushing their bodies, if their extensions are too low, if their jumps are not quick enough, or big enough, if they have gained weight, and if they are not improving, or for any other reason, it is a common practice to ignore that dancer until they do something to improve their status. The ballet teacher will normally not correct the dancer who is on the 'out' and will simply ignore his/her presence. This is a symbolic act to let you know, as well as everyone else in the studio, that you are unworthy of attention. For the most part, this is a humiliating position to be in and generally pushes the dancer to push them selves. The dancers who receive corrections and who the teacher yells and screams at is generally the one with the most potential and the one most likely to get the roles. This kind of humiliation practice is known by everyone in the dance world; whether they are dancing in New York, London, Montreal or anywhere in the world, the practice is well understood. Any dancer who has been fully socialized knows that they do not want to be ignored because you will not suffer in silence but rather, suffer from the silence and with an audience too. Rosemary told me she hated when she was on the 'out'. She also hated the fact that everyone always wanted the teacher's attention and she did not want

to have to do what they did to get that attention. She began to rebel and would take classes elsewhere. Part of Rosemary's self would not conform to the social pressures of the ballet institution. She had a very stubborn attitude and although she was given roles to dance, part of her self would simply not resign herself completely.

RN- Well I didn't hate my body, but you are always acutely aware of your body's flaws because they are always being drawn to your attention. But the less I took class the better I felt about my body because it become a more organic experience warming up. You just concentrate on just being centered and okay, look try and get rid of this tension that I'm feeling over here in my left hip. As opposed to, okay lets see how high I can get this leg, how turned out it could be, you know, it almost like everybody is vying for the teacher's attention. That's not what you should be doing when you're warming up.

CK- So what kept you motivated to stay in ballet?

RN- I loved it! It sounds a little unhealthy but I loved it! Especially towards the end of my career. I just, um, as in any type of job the employer has to have a certain amount of control over their employees. And as you grow older I would assume, most people would want to take on some of that responsibility. At least that's the way I am. I love to work alone and I probably always have so I resented having somebody always looking over me. Because I have so much vested interest in what I am doing, I don't like being second guessed: Are you taking class, are you doing this, are you doing that. Trust me! I will go out on stage my hair will be perfect, my costume will be impeccable, I'll remember the steps I'll be in the right place at the right time, I will interact with my fellow dancers but in ballet you don't have that kind of trust. Not in ballet, ballet. It's such an old fashion world and it almost prides itself on not having evolved. And one of the main ways I think, that it maintains the control over the individual dancers, is through their relationship with their body. It's like the manipulative sort of thing.

CK- You always did things that was frowned upon, how much do you think the pause in your training contributed to this?

RN- One hundred percent! Oh ya if I hadn't interrupted my training I wouldn't have had such a fight with my body but I might have ended up going the route that a lot of other dancers do, you get sick of it, you burn out earlier. I had such a challenge ahead of me at 18 it was like a burning desire to be a ballet dancer. I finished my CEGEP, I went to university, I did a year at McGill I got really, really high marks in linguistics, but you are burning the candle at both ends you can't go to class every night and all day Saturday and still get through McGill with really high marks. So it's like, what am I going to do here? Well I could go to school later when my body gives up. I

said to myself, I could go to school when I'm 30. I can't dance like resume dancing when I'm 30, it's now or never. So there was an urgency. And of course I didn't retire when I was 30 I waited until I was 36 but I knew that it was finite. Where as maybe when you don't interrupt your training, I don't know but I was spared that feeling of being like a horse with blinders on. I knew I had other venues, I didn't feel as trapped as a lot of dancers, my transition wasn't easy because emotionally I was very invested in what I was doing but it might have been easier then some other dancers because I knew that I had other options. I went back to university 5 years before I retired.

CK-What did you study?

RN- I studied accounting. But I knew, look I'm getting a lot of injuries here, the writing was on the wall! I have to somehow get my feet wet and I didn't want to go through that shock of finishing my career and like you got nothing. So I started taking night classes. It was very tough. I used to have to study in the wings. Doing calculus in the wings, it was totally crazy. During rehearsals I would be sitting in a corner hiding doing my homework, but you got to do what you got to do. So when I finished dancing, or what I thought was finished, I didn't have to start a degree from scratch. I didn't even have to go back to CEGEP which is what most of them have to do. It's really, really hard. Dancers don't know where they fit in, what they want to do. You have so many transferable skills but who's to know what you have an aptitude for to make it a goal.

Because Rosemary entered the ballet world at eighteen, her sense of self was not completely formed from within the rigid confines of the ballet world. She never completely lost her old self, rather, she basically did what she had to do to make it into the company but always had one foot outside. She did eventually become a ballet dancer but as she delved further into what that entailed she never fully allowed herself to conform. She played the role of the student, and then of the company member, but would take the chance and escaped every chance she could.

CK-Was there ever a moment from age 18 on that you did not feel like a dancer?

RN-Anytime I had a really, really bad injury. I tore my ankle at 30 really bad tare, and the longer you stay away from the studio and you don't take class and you're not involved in that day to day power struggle and all that stuff, with roles and other dancers, you start to feel like you're on another planet. Because your life is so enmeshed with that regime, and you start to think



well maybe I'll never get back to dancing. A lot of dancers who have severe injuries get extremely depressed and they are in such a rush to get back to it because they're so worried that otherwise they won't, that too much time will lapse and it won't happen either because of circumstances, or because somebody else has been hired. Now a days there are better working conditions and you can't necessarily be summarily fired for having too many injuries but it can contribute to not having your contract renewed. So every injury you get, and I did have a lot of injuries, probably because of that interruption in my training, you start to feel a little bit less like maybe this is where I belong. I got a certain amount of negative reinforcement too early on, like when I was eighteen I injured my hip I had to stop for nine months and my mother said, you know this is your body sending you a message, you shouldn't do this. I didn't need that type of sabotage and all that I could think of was that she's just trying to hurt me. Again she was probably right but that's not what I wanted to hear. I wanted to dance professionally and I was darn well going to do it even if my hip didn't want me to. You really have to have a lot of drive to do it. Unless, like you, you have a lot of natural facility ha ha.

Although Rosemary would try and escape every now and again, she still loved to dance and did not want to loose her place there. Throughout this interview I realized that she was constantly running away and then being pulled back in. When she was injured she was afraid of loosing her place. She was a dancer and her self had been transformed into a dancing body—it would never be easy for her to leave. Everything that she had become was about ballet. She wanted to perform and she did.

CK- Where you in the 'click' at Les Grands, or were you the outsider?

RN- In the company was there a click? Hum, well there was a nucleus of us that got to do most of the contemporary work and in the 80's that is where you wanted to be so I was fortunate. My heart wanted to be in the tutu and the tiara but the directors and the choreographers and my body said, do the contemporary so I was lucky. I got to perform three out of four ballets a night.

Rosemary was fully engaged in her formation; she focused on her training and tried at all cost to avoid injury. She made some bad choices like taking class outside of the company class and then her position in the company was further threatened by her pregnancy.

CK- So you said you became pregnant?

RN- I was pregnant while I was in the company—that probably wasn't the wisest choice. Because what should be a truly wonderful moment in your life I only got to experience it once because I waited until I was 35 and you should embrace the changes that you're going to bla bla bla, and you start feeling like I'm a little round fat teddy bear. I was taking class and you're weight doesn't necessarily go only on your stomach, people don't get that, and not everybody that looks at you knows that you're pregnant. I danced until I was five months pregnant and the company went to NYC and I had a role created for me by James Kudelka, which involved no dancing it was all gesture. It was in *Plaisir Solitaire*. And he wanted me to do it in NY in City Centre and the artistic director said no. I can't go out there with a sign that says this woman is pregnant. I can't take the chance of a critic looking at you on stage and saying, oh my god what a fat dancer. I was crushed. Because the ballet, my role was just about feminine beauty and simplicity and I felt so good doing it pregnant. And everybody knew I was pregnant and everybody watching me knew. And they were like, you're just exuding feminine beauty. I was so happy that I was pregnant. But you know, you go out there on stage in NYC nobody knows and you know, well put a note in the program, I don't care. I thought that was a little short sighted. So I stopped dancing a little earlier. And I came back too soon. I got back in shape when she was 2 months old and I was supposed to do the lead in *In Paradisium*. I couldn't get it together physically because I was still breast feeding, and your ligaments are too loose, I already had a lot of problems with my ankle ligaments. It was much too early and so there again I went through that whole process of feeling crappy about my body. You can't lose the weight faster than your body wants it to come off. Maybe some people's metabolism kicks right back in, mine had slowed down so much it was like at a stand still. It's like, I'm so unhappy what the heck am I doing this for, but you have to do what you have to do. Financially you don't want to lose your place in the company.

Rosemary had developed many layers to her life and thus, to her self as well. Most of her days were spent dancing and focusing on her dance career. She eventually got married, had a child and became an accountant. Although I do not want to write about the ballet dancer's transition in this chapter because it will be discussed in the next one, I would like to make the comparison between David Bushman and Rosemary. Unlike David, who I happen to interview as he was in the process of the dancer's transition program, Rosemary seemed to detach from dance with more ease than David. Although she had many issues with her body

changing and missing the artful aspect of ballet, she easily integrated herself into a new life. David's self seemed to be more invested and as a result, he had a very difficult time leaving Les Grands Ballets.

It is important to note that when we speak of institutional experience, what we are actually talking about is the embodiment of the ballet institution. That is, as we mentioned earlier, we are actually talking about ballet dancers *stepping into* the ballet form and in so doing, they are in essence transforming all that they are into everything that is symbolic of the ballet institution. Since the transformation occurs through both the mind and body and thus, through the entire self, then we can suggest that the formation of the dancer is dependent on the embodiment of certain institutional behaviours, thoughts, perceptions, judgments, norms and values as well as the physical form. That is, everything that is contained in the art of ballet is located in the ballet dancers' mindset, in their beliefs and values, in their standardized norms of behaviour, in their thoughts and in their perceptions of the human body. Certainly, we are not contending that to become a dancer you do not retain some sense of uniqueness; in fact, each dancer's response to the rigid constructs of the ballet institution will differ depending on their own subjective experience. After all, each young aspiring ballet dancer comes into the ballet world with a unique body and a unique set of talents. The difference, however, begins firstly with those outside the ballet world. We introduced Jennifer Franklin in the last chapter and we return to her interview in order to clarify what we are suggesting. She explains:

CK- Did you have a lot of friends outside of ballet?

JF- No, not really. I basically lived at the studio—not literally of course ha ha—and I really didn't have that much in common with girls outside of ballet. At school I stood out because I would walk differently—you know with my feet turned out—and I wasn't really that interested in boys. I pretty much dreamed ballet, thought about ballet, slept with ballet in my mind, ate ballet ha ha ha, and most of the girls at my school couldn't relate! All they could think about were boys and dating. I didn't have time for that. If I was going to become a great dancer I, well, you know, I couldn't get involved with stupid stuff the others were into.

CK- Did you get along at all?

JF- I don't really know how to answer that. I just thought that they were really undisciplined and I learnt through ballet that if you want to get anywhere you had to work hard and keep focused. The girls at school were always talking back to the teachers and you know in ballet class you NEVER do that. They also were really not careful with what they ate. It seemed like they were always running off to McDonald's and I remember thinking that that was TERRIBLE!

CK- So how did this make you feel?

JF- Well, I knew I was different and I also felt special. Ya, special is the right word. Everyone knew I was a dancer and I remember that the girls would always look at me like, I don't know, like I was different but not in a bad way. You know, I'd always arrive at school with a large bag with all my pointe shoes and leotards and tights and stuff. My hair would be pulled back in a chignon ready for ballet class after school. And, I don't know I felt like I was better than them. In gym class, the girls would stare at me while I stretched and stuff. I knew they were looking at me and I liked it. That was a long time ago ha ha ha! Looking back now I think I was a snob. Dancer's have that reputation! I guess it has to do with the fact that we are part of an elite society.

CK- Ya right ha ha!

JF- I mean ballet comes out of the Royal Courts and of course when you train in ballet you just get that sense—like you're part of some Royal, I don't know, kingdom I guess ha ha! That sounds terrible again! But it's true. I think that's why the modern dancers hate us so much! I actually liked that they were threatened by us.

CK- Us?

JF- Ya the ballet world. It's because we had the body and the training to do amazingly hard things with our body and that gives us a strong confidence compared to them. I mean you are taught from a young age that only the best could be a ballet dancer and the ones who did not have the body or the talent would have to do modern. So, ya I felt really special and different.

In this excerpt from Jennifer's interview we can see how by contrast to the lay person, the dancer comes to see themselves as special. The rituals and practices and all that this entails, becomes embodied by the dancers through their training. Jennifer's thinking about discipline

and hard work as well as eating habits, are very much part of the institutional environment through which her self is defined. Dominique Walker explains:

CK- So what was it that defined you as a dancer?

DW- Wow, let me think. You know we are trained in an environment that really doesn't just let any one in. Of course you can take ballet classes for fun but when you are accepted into a professional training program you know that you are special. That's only the beginning. Then your body is trained to do things that most people couldn't even imagine doing. For God sakes we jump higher and better than basketball players, have better conditioning than most athletes and we dance on our toes! Ha ha! Now that's special! So I think what defines me as a dancer is the whole thing—the whole ballet world that's inside of me. It's like it's in my blood, in my heart beat, or even in my head. All the time! Even now that I no longer dance I still judge people based on how I was raised. I was raised in a ballet studio and I learnt to stand up tall and to turn my feet outward and to walk proud. I hate it still today when people slouch! Well you know I'm a chiropractor now so ha ha!

CK-Can you explain further why you felt special?

DW- Well you know, it's like we talked about before—there is this secret society where you can go and learn the teachings that come from a long line of artists. It's like the monks who have their own ways of thinking and doing things. They have their own belief system and it's very intriguing because it seems from the outside looking in that they know something we don't. I don't know but I think being raised in the ballet world teaches you secrets about the body and about gravity and all that stuff. Most people who are looking into this world would probably want to know the secret. My husband always asks me, "I don't get how you stand on your toes" and I just laugh and tell him that it's my secret. So I guess it's all about discovering how to put the technique with the artistry, with your emotions, with the energy in your soul—it's all that and more! This is the secret that only we share and if you want to know it to you have to show that you have the potential to attain that.

CK- So, what does that mean exactly?

DW-It means that to be allowed to learn the secret you have to show that you have potential. That your body will learn the language and be able to dance for the art.

CK- Dance for the art?

DW-Ya, dance for the art. I mean it's a gift to be allowed into the secret society. It's not for everyone you know. I think that dance finds you and chooses you. I know for myself, it's like it invaded me and that was it! I was gone! GONE! It's like a drug once you start you can't ever go back. It's like being told a BIG SECRET that will change your way of looking at the world forever. Once you know you can never go back! NEVER! It lives in you and I think even when you die it'll still be there!

Dominique throughout her interview had extremely insightful ideas about the ballet world. She was one of the most articulate of all the dancers and I was totally fascinated by what she had to say. Her description of the "secret society" is a good one because it is indicative of a well-structured institution with clearly defined ways of being. She expresses quite clearly that dance lives inside her and that it always will. The embodiment of the ballet institution is clarified even further in this next passage:

DW- You know once you learn the secrets—once your body follows the rules and does daily ballet class you never forget what that feels like. How could you? You did it everyday from maybe the age of 5 until about 30 or even longer. You just never forget! It's like being born Japanese and living in Japan most of your life and well, just because you moved to Canada at 30 it doesn't mean that you have forgotten your roots or even your mother tongue. You know? The ballet world is like it's own little country with it's own special language and well, you just don't forget where you came from. That's all!

CK- What is the ballet world?

DW- I'm glad you asked! I think the ballet world is the body. I mean it's the way our body ends up looking. All the exercises, all the very structured training, well, it's been organized to sculpt the body to look a certain way. You aren't just born looking like a ballet dancer, or even being able to do the technique. Although, some people get it faster than others! So, ya, the ballet world is the body because the ballet body is the center of its universe but without that universe you wouldn't get a body like that. So I think you can't separate the two.

CK- So, is your body today the ballet world? Now that you are retired?

DW- Ya sure! Of course it is because I still define myself as a dancer even though I don't dance. That Japanese immigrant is still Japanese except now

he lives in Canada. He learned new things but never forgot his roots. Right? So I still know the rules in the ballet world. I still know the language, I still know how to move even though I don't practice any more. I can still hear my teachers comments and their corrections. I can still remember the many pieces that I danced and of course I will never forget what the music felt like in my body. That's what it is the ballet world. THAT's WHAT IT IS!!!

CK- So it lives in your body?

DW- Not just in my body! It lives in my mind and in my memory. I think it's still my identity. Look, every day I still wake up and stretch the way I did when I got up and I was in pain from the last performance or class. I still live my life with discipline and structure—just like it was organized for me before I organize it for myself. I don't think that the teachings ever disappear from you mind. So I think the whole ballet thing lives in my entire self.

Here Dominique clarifies that the embodiment of the ballet world, or institution, is an experience that lives in her entire being. What is clarified here is that no matter how structured or organized the rules of the ballet institution are, the fact that its entire structure centers around the formation of ballet dancers, we cannot separate the institutional experience from the aesthetic experience and, as we will take up in the next chapter, the lived experience as well.

The institution of ballet, as we explained earlier, has a regal history and its roots are alive within the ballet dancers' self and is thus imbedded within their act of self-creation. We have so far through the interviews come to understand that the dancer's transformation and formation is a highly creative act that engages all of the dancer's senses, all of their physical abilities and all of their artistic talent as well. From within this creative and highly dynamic intercommunication between a dancer, a teacher, a choreographer, the ideal form, the rituals and practices, the mirror image, the image in his/her mind, the inner self-sensation, all the dancer's emotions and thoughts, and so on, emerges a dancing work of art whose sense of self is tied up with his/her role as professional ballet dancers and with his/her personal experiencing of the institution. Within this interaction, where all of these elements merge in a wholly union, the dancer's self emerges as dancer who has in his/her unique way, responded

creatively to the entire process formation. Jennifer gives a good example of her creative response to particular moments in her transformation.

CK- What was the hardest thing to accept?

JF- Well I hated the fact that it was always the skinniest girls who were treated like they were the 'smartest'! You know what I mean? The better you looked physically the better you were treated. I hated that because I was stronger technically than those girls and just because my turnout was not as flat or because I had a round butt, I was treated like, I guess a second class citizen.

CK- So how did you deal with that?

JF- Well ha ha! I very quietly would work really hard at my technique. For example, I knew no one in the class could do 32 fouetté tours so I would find a studio after classes and would practice and practice until I was able to do them. Then when the opportunity would arise in class I would show it off! The teachers would be so excited and I was the one getting the attention then! I guess that's why I ended up with the best technique. I had no choice! If I wanted to be seen I had to go to desperate measures ha ha ha! I also hated the fact that men got a lot more breaks than we girls. They are so in need of male dancers all the time that guys with bad feet or short legs would often get into companies easier than girls with a bad body. It's not fair but that's just the way it is and you have to shut up and accept it!

CK- What else did you have a hard time accepting?

JF- Well I hate when artistic directors don't hire anyone better than their star dancers because they worked hard to get them their name and status and they don't really want anyone to come in and screw that up. I think it's crazy but that's how it is in the ballet world. There is a lot of unfairness but if you want to survive you just keep your mouth shut!

CK- So you never rebelled?

JF- Ya RIGHT! Well actually, once and it turned out not to be a very good idea. I was about 14 and I was going through my hormonal phase and I was in a bad mood and well, ballet class started and my hair wasn't up yet and I was chewing gum, which is a no, no! My ballet teacher was pretty surprised by my behaviour because I was the one who always followed the rules. At first she just told me to hurry up and get my hair up and my gum out of my mouth. I pinned my hair up but refused to throw out my gum. She asked me again to throw it out and the third time she threw me out of class and for the



rest of the week ignored me and didn't give me one correction! Ha ha! That was the last time I ever rebelled!

Ballet dancers generally dream of having careers as ballet dancers most of their lives and although they have the right to quit at any time, their desire is too powerful to simply let go of their dreams. As we have heard in Rosemary's interview and Jennifer's, rebelling is not always a good idea; the institutional standards and practices hold such power over the dancers that it is very difficult to break any of the rules without being reprimanded. Furthermore, the standards of perfection are incredibly high that in order to stand out the dancer has to go to creative measures, as did Jennifer by developing her technique to compensate for the lack of a perfect body. Dominique has her version of this act of creativity:

CK- What was the most difficult part of becoming a dancer?

DW- Well I think it was the fact that I wasn't born with the perfect body and I had to work with what I had. Like I said before, I had a big butt, low extensions, ordinary feet, I was turned out from the knees and had a bit of a curve in my spine and this was very hard to overcome. I always had positive feedback because I had the right attitude and because I worked really hard with what I did have. I do have long legs and arms and a short torso—I look a lot like the Balanchine dancers so I think teachers liked this. But when I actually had to do adage for example and I had to hold my extension I wasn't able to because I, well I just didn't have that kind of strength. But I loved the music so much and worked at becoming an artist rather than a technician. I felt the movement right to my core and I just focused all my energy into that just so I would be noticed. I also worked really hard at the roles I was given. Of course I was never offered the roles that required the high extensions and stuff. I would do the occasional pas de deux that of course required a lot of emotion. I guess you just have to find your place in this world. It's a very hard place to be but when your soul calls you to dance no matter how painful it is you just do with what you have. I cried so many times because I felt like I had been cheated of a perfect body and that my soul was a dancer's soul. It's really hard when you see yourself as a prima ballerina but no one else does. Now that's hard.

CK- So how did you survive it all?

DW- The music! It was the music that gave me pleasure and even though I knew I would never dance the roles that I wanted I always knew I had the music and that I was one of the most musical dancers around! I guess when the music sings to your soul and you're able to express that through your

body, well you just keep going because it's so amazing. I think to survive in the ballet world you need to be realistic and know your place and accept it otherwise you just die! I saw so many talented dancers just leave the world because for whatever reason they were being overlooked. I just never understood that.

CK- Why do you think they were overlooked?

DW- Well, I think that the standards of perfection are so tough in ballet that at some point when you realize you just don't meet those standards you can't give up. You have to be creative and somehow find a way of compensating. You know every dancer has their deficiency and you just have to be smart and do what you can. You also have to pray that people inside the world will overlook your flaws too and give you a chance. I mean most of us are not born with the perfect ballet body and for some it's easier to work with what they have than others. I mean if you have bold legs and flat feet no turn out and no musical talent, well, I think you're crazy for even trying to do ballet. But any ways, I think it's the smart dancers who figure out a way to fit in. I know for me it was obvious from the start that I was not going to be a National Ballet of Canada dancer but I wasn't going to let that stop me because somewhere in this world there was a place for me.

Interestingly, in the interviews we see how the dancers' formation and institutional experiences are very much intertwined in the ideals of this world. Whether we are discussing the aesthetic experience or the institutional experience, what the dancers are being lured by into this world is the very thing that they are having to creatively responding to. That is, young students of ballet are drawn into the ballet world initially by their innocent belief that they have the gift to decode the secrets of lightness and grace. Their desire overrides the fact that although the image of themselves in that perfect body lives only in their imaginations and in their aspirations, the reality is that they will spend many years trying to step into this illusive dream. For some the dream to master the laws of gravity and to live within its magic, will be realized through creative negotiation with the ideal image. The manner by which they respond to the institutionalized ideals, to their self-image vis a vis this ideal image, the way they respond to other's images and other's images of them, and the way they negotiate all this information is all part of the creative process by which they will become dancers, or not. Through Mead and through the dancer's interviews we have come to understand that to be transformed into a ballet dancer requires an active involvement in a highly dynamic and

layered process of interactive communication where the response to the institutional norms, values and attitude of the ballet world will determine the successful self-formation of the ballet dancer.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

#### 6.1 Introduction

We have arrived at the final chapter of our inquiry into the transformation and formation of the ballet dancer. This final chapter will focus on the ballet dancer's lived experience and thus, the final layer of the dancer's creative and active participation in the process of formation. So far in this dissertation we have gained insight into who the ballet dancer is and how he/she is transformed into a dancing body. We have heard first hand descriptions of the aesthetic experience and institutional experience of the ballet dancer and have also come to understand that this transformation is one that requires multiple levels of change. We now know that the formation of the ballet dancer extends far beyond the training of the physical body and requires a full physical, mental and emotional transformation as well as the full integration of everything that is ballet. In essence the dancer's formation is dependent on the inhabiting, or embodiment, of the ideal ballet form; that is, it is contingent on the full integration of the language and vocabulary of ballet. At the most basic level, the transformation actually begins with a dream and a passionate desire to master the art of ballet. It starts with the imagining of the self living within this exquisitely trained body—a body that not only moves through space with grace, tremendous power and with great ease but which has attained unnatural skills. The need or passionate desire to inhabit this existence is for the most part an inexplicable yearning that goes far beyond reason. At this point in our inquiry we can suggest that this yearning is driven by a visceral need to transform the lay person's bodily experience into the experience of the dancing body. The whole and complete transformation of the human body into a body that dances is the ultimate experience.

As we have discussed in the previous chapters, the changes in the body, in the mind and within the entire human being that occur through many years of training, is a highly creative act that notably begins with a powerful dream to become the embodiment of everything that a ballet dancer is. Whether it is the enchanted beauty of the dancing body or the power of this magnificent work of art, something of its visual presence on stage inspires many young children to embark on a journey that may or may not lead them to that magical place where there is lightness and where the body lives a very different experience. To reach that new experience and state of elevation one has no choice but to totally and completely submit to the high aesthetic ideals of this art form. Regardless of the rigorous training that it entails and the unnatural aesthetic demands of this art form, the young dreamer is forever motivated by the ballet dancer's state of grace and willingly abandons his/her old aesthetic standards for a new one. As we have already discussed, the young dancer must develop a deep understanding of this aesthetic and learn to see and feel the body newly. After many years of aesthetic contemplation of this ideal ballet form, and measuring themselves up and against it, and after modifying and adjusting the aesthetic flaws in the lines of their body, the young ballet students gradually gain access to a new bodily experience and thus, a new lived experience. After many years of actively pursuing what was once only a dream, and after imagining themselves as this magnificent work of art who has mastered the art of grace and lightness, and who now knows the secret to defying the earth's gravitational pull, the young students of ballet will have abandoned their old ways of conceptualizing and seeing the body and will have become the living and breathing embodiment of ballet. They will have integrated the ballet culture's daily rituals and practices into their everyday lives and will have now understood what it is to live within the body of a ballet dancer. They will move differently than the lay person and their old ways of standing, walking, moving and behaving will be transformed into everything that is symbolic of ballet dancers. Certainly they will retain the uniqueness of their inner selves, however, their outward appearance will express to the world that they are now dancers. The idea of becoming a ballet dancer is no longer the object of desire but rather it is now a subjective experience. The object of their desire is now a sensorial experience; they are living, breathing and existing in time and space within a body that has been trained to dance. Every movement from stretching the leg, to pointing a foot,

from lifting an arm to bending the back, is executed from within a dancer's body. There is no separation between themselves and the object that they now embody; what they see in the mirror and through the eyes of the other is sensed internally. As we described in previous chapters, the inner sensorial experience is transformed simultaneously with the outer physical experience. At no time is the body's experience separated from the inner self-sensation. The young students of ballet have been transformed into ballet dancers; they have become the embodiment of this art form. They now experience the form aesthetically, symbolically and at a sensorial level and ultimately live the body of a ballet dancer. The question to ask then would be: When exactly did they become dancers? Did it happen at specific moment in time—an exact moment in their training that will forever be etched in their minds? What was it that indicated to them that they were in fact dancers?

We have described in the previous chapters how the ballet dancer's transformation proceeded and in effect, highlighted two specific levels of change and experience. Our description has mainly focused on the process of transformation and has led us to the above question: When exactly did these young students of ballet become a work of art, a dancing body and an expression of everything that constitutes the institution of ballet? In other words, how did they know they were dancers? When did their perception of themselves as students of ballet shift to the actual embodiment of a full-fledged ballet dancer? When did they step into the form? When did the completion of embodiment occur? Was it ever really finalized? When did they start living the experience of a ballet dancer? When did the object of their desire become integrated into their subjective experience? When did they sense the change in themselves and also in their bodies? And when did they become inseparable from this object?

In this concluding chapter we will turn our attention to the actual embodiment of the ballet form and the actual formation of the ballet dancer. We have heard the dancer's descriptions of the ideal form and through their interviews we have understood the challenges they have faced while training their body to attain perfection. We have heard about their obsessions with the ideal form and have also understood that their training is never over and that attaining aesthetic perfection is a never ending task that will for most remain an illusive dream. Here in this chapter, we will describe through the dancer's own words the moment

when they first felt like a ballet dancer and we will also, in effect, entertain the idea that at one moment in this long process of transformation the young aspiring dancer will become one with the form. There will be no separation between their bodies and who they are. We remind our readers of our initial proposition: *As you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience and thus self-expression*. It is in this chapter where we will see how this proposition is lived out in the ballet dancer's transformation. This chapter is ultimately about the internalization of an artistic form that is expressed through its embodiment and thus through the dancers themselves. In order to further understand how this proposition might be true, we will answer the question of when the dancer became a dancer and proceed to asking the following: what happens when the dancer retires, stops training and no longer performs? Are they still dancers once they have lost their physical conditioning and their dancer's shape? There is yet another change that occurs here; the bodily experience changes and so does the lived experience and therefore self-expression. What happens to the dancer? Are they nevertheless still dancers? Or, not? The interviews were designed to draw out the answer to these two sets of questions, however, before we can begin to discuss the interviews, we need to discuss the body and the idea of the lived experience at a theoretical level. Previously we turned to Bakhtin for guidance on the very nature of aesthetic experience and we then turned to Mead for guidance on the institutional experience. In this chapter, and in order to understand the dancer's embodied experience, we turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's work in order to better understand embodiment and to also gain an understanding of the interconnection, or intertwining of mind and body, the inner and outer, and of the lived experience. As we will see in the next section of this chapter, Merleau-Ponty challenges the separation of the mind/body duality that has dominated much of traditional philosophy thought. His work will shed some light on the dancer's embodied experience. Therefore, this chapter will begin with Merleau-Ponty's theory of the body in his book, *The Phenomenology of Perception*, and will then proceed to a description of the lived experience of the professional ballet dancer and all that this entails.

## 6.2 Merleau-Ponty and *The Phenomenology of Perception*

At the beginning of this dissertation we explained that one of the reasons for this research project was to extend the idea of a socially constructed body to that of the physiological and physical experience of the body. It was our contention that no matter the cultural conception of the body defined within a given culture, this conception will ultimately be experienced within the body, through the body, by the body and at every sensorial level that is part of a human being's physiological and physical makeup. In the case of the ballet dancer, the cultural conception of the body in the ballet world, it was determined, is that of a vehicle of self-expression. Furthermore, we determined that in order to become this vehicle of self-expression one would have to step into, or rather, embody the ballet form. This conception of the body is not simply an idea but rather it is an idea that is lived out from within the body and through the body. We are, therefore, contending that the dancer's body is not an object, in the traditional philosophical sense, but is the dancer himself/herself and is, therefore, a subject. In effect, what we are proposing is that it is not simply the dancer's body that is being transformed through the training but rather, it is the entire human being—his/her internal and external being—that is transformed into a dancing body. This study, therefore, negates the idea of the mind-body duality and suggests that the body is not separated from thought, from self-awareness, from self-expression and from any sense of self whatsoever. That being said, and in order to end this dissertation with a theoretical grounding for our contention, we turn to Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory on the body in *Phenomenology of Perception*.

In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty's sets out to expose the problematic nature of the traditional philosophical dichotomies and in particular the dualism between the mind and body. In much of his work, Merleau-Ponty sought to rearticulate the relationship between subject and object, and the self and world through his account of the lived and existential body. In fact, most of his career was spent exploring our embodied experience and he paid a tremendous amount of attention to the body in relation to the self, to the world and to others. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, his theorization of the *body* and *the world as*



*perceived* is the main topic of discussion in the first two sections. Here he argues that the body, or the *body-subject* as he often refers to it, has not been given proper significance within the philosophical tradition which generally has a tendency to consider the body as an object that a transcendent mind orders to perform varying functions. He develops the concept of the body-subject as an alternative to the Cartesian “cogito”. Consciousness, the world, and the human body as a perceiving thing are intricately intertwined and mutually ‘engaged’. Much of his work is based on accounts of perception and tends to emphasize an embodied inherence in the world that is more fundamental than our reflective capacities. He also claims that perception itself is intrinsically cognitive. In fact, his work is often associated with the ‘primacy of perception’, though rather than rejecting scientific and analytic ways of knowing the world, Merleau-Ponty basically wanted to argue that such knowledge is always derivative in relation to the more practical exigencies of the body’s exposure to the world. The body is very much implicated in most of his work and his description allows us to reformulate the problem of embodiment in terms of the body’s practical capacity to act, rather than in terms of any essential trait.

In problematising the mind and body dualism in traditional philosophy and the conception of the body as an object, Merleau-Ponty develops his critiques around the idea of an objective world which exists ‘out there’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 72) which is entirely separated from the thinking subject. He criticises the tendency of philosophy to fall within two main categories (subject/object), neither of which is capable of shedding much light on the problems that it seeks to address. He is equally critical of the Cartesian account of humanity, as well as the more empirical and behaviouristic attempts to designate the human condition. Rationalism is problematic because it ignores our situation, and consequently the contingent nature of thought, when it makes the world, or at least meaning, the immanent property of the reflecting mind. Merleau-Ponty strongly rejects Descartes prioritizing of the mind over the body because it is unjust and also because it ignores the problem of meaningful judgement. Furthermore, it does not explain how perception could be meaningful. For Merleau-Ponty, perception is not merely the result of the functioning of individual organs, but is also a vital and performative human act in which “I” perceive through the relevant organs. Each of the senses informs the others in virtue of their common behavioural project,

or concern with a certain human endeavor, and perception is inconceivable without this complementary functioning. According to Merleau-Ponty, empiricism generally ignores this and also makes our cultural world an illusion by ignoring the internal connection between the object and the act. He contends that no matter how efficient their explanation of certain phenomena, these type of scientific and analytic causalities cannot actually appraise meaning and human action. For Merleau-Ponty, both empiricism and intellectualism are eminently flawed positions:

In the first case consciousness is too poor, in the second too rich for any phenomenon to appeal compellingly to it. Empiricism cannot see that we need to know what we are looking for, otherwise we would not be looking for it, and intellectualism fails to see that we need to be ignorant of what we are looking for, or equally again we should not be searching (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 28).

Merleau-Ponty's attempt to reorient philosophy emerges from his preoccupation with undermining such dichotomous tendencies. Essentially it ensures that one exists as a constituting thing (subject) or as a thing (object). While he does not want to simplistically deny the possibility of cognitive relations between subject and object he does want to reject the suggestion that these are phenomenologically primitive. It may be useful, in a particular situation, to conceive of a seer and a seen, a subject and object. Science, however, tends to rely on the methodological ideal of a detached consciousness observing facts about the world. Merleau-Ponty accommodates this, provided that the terms of such dualities are recognized to be relationally constituted. In other words, for him the seer and the seen condition one another. Our capacity for seeing does depend on our capacity for being seen—that is, being physically embodied in what Merleau-Ponty describes as an 'interindividual' world. In rejecting the traditional metaphysical philosophy and its governing subject-object relationship and when he speaks of his phenomenological method, he suggests that "the demand for a pure description excludes equally the procedure of analytical reflection on the one hand, and that of scientific explanation on the other" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: ix). Only by avoiding these tendencies, according to him, can we "rediscover, as anterior to the ideas of subject and object, the fact of my subjectivity and the nascent object, that primordial layer at which both

things and ideas come into being” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 219). The *Phenomenology of Perception* is hence united by the claim that we are bodies, and that our lived experience of this body denies the detachment of subject from object, mind from body, etc...( Merleau-Ponty 1962: xii). In this embodied state of being where the ideational and the material are intimately linked, human existence cannot be fused together in any particular paradigm. Although Merleau-Ponty criticizes the mind-body duality and contends that ‘I am my body’ he does not advocate ignoring the aspects of our life that are ‘mental’. What he does suggest, however, is that the use of the ‘mind’ is inseparable from our bodily, situated, and physical nature. This means simply that the perceiving mind is an incarnated body and by suggesting this he is actually enhancing the concept of the body to allow it to both think and perceive. Therefore, by virtue of the reformulation of the body as being simply an object to a body that now thinks and perceives, the individual is no longer just a body but rather, a body-subject.

Although *Phenomenology of Perception* is a rather lengthy book and quite repetitive, it is primarily devoted to illustrating that the body cannot and should not be viewed as an object, or material entity of the world. Merleau-Ponty develops his argument primarily through the main theme of the book, which is perception. The practical modes of action of the body-subject are inseparable from the perceiving body-subject, and it is through the body that we have access to the world. Perception, therefore, involves the perceiving subject in a situation, rather than positioning them as a spectator who has somehow abstracted themselves from the situation. Action and perception, then, are inherently interconnected, or as Merleau-Ponty says, “every perceptual habit is still a motor habit” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 153). This then ensures that there is no lived distinction between the act of perceiving and the thing perceived. It is important to also add that for Merleau-Ponty, “in the natural attitude, I do not have perceptions” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 281). He suggests that:

We started off from a world in itself which acted upon our eyes so as to cause us to see it, and now we have consciousness of, or thought about the world, but the nature of the world remains unchanged; it is still defined by the absolute mutual exteriority of its parts, and is merely duplicated throughout its extents by a thought which sustains it (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 39).

For Merleau-Ponty, then, the common perceptual paradigm that involves passively seeing something and then interpreting that biological perception, is a false one. The presumption is still that one exists either as a thing, or as a consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 198), but the perceiving body-subject conforms to neither of these positions; its mode of existence is more complicated and ambiguous. Perception cannot be characterized as a type of thought in a classical, reflective sense; it is not passive before sensory stimulation, but as Merleau-Ponty suggests, is a 'creative receptivity'. Basically, the point that he is making is that we are not simply passive before sensorial stimulation, since the visual experience seems to change and yet nothing changes optically with respect to color, shape or distance. What we actually see is not simply the objective world, rather, what we do see is conditioned by a myriad of factors that ensure that the relationship between perceiving subject and object perceived is not one of exclusion. That is, each term exists only through its dialectical relation to the other. From this analysis of the perceiving body-subject, Merleau-Ponty concludes, "Inside and outside are inseparable. The world is wholly inside and I am wholly outside myself" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 407). This inseparability of inner and outer ensures that a study of the perceived, ends up revealing the subject perceiving. As he contends, "the body will draw to itself the intentional threads which bind it to its surroundings and finally will reveal to us the perceiving subject as the perceived world" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 408). It is this intertwining of the inner and outer, as is revealed in a phenomenological analysis of the body, which the intellectualism of philosophy cannot appreciate. According to Merleau-Ponty, philosophers of reflection ignore the paradoxical condition of all human subjectivity: that is, the fact that we are both part of the world and coextensive with it, constituting but also constituted (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 453). Perception is unstable because it is neither grounded in an objective or subjective component but by a reciprocal openness which resides between the two categories. Merleau-Ponty suggest that:

We must discover the origin of the object of the very center of our experience; we must describe the emergence of being and we must understand how, paradoxically, there is for us an it-self (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 71).

In short, we must discover how things and meanings emerge from our general perceptual involvement in the world and take their place around us. That is, we must turn our attention to the source of the meaning. Merleau-Ponty contends that his philosophy has the means to cater to this instability. His analysis of the body's tendency to seek an equilibrium through skillful coping, or what he terms 'habituality', affirms how perception is learnt, primarily through imitation, in an embodied and communal environment. While perception is subject to change, just as communities can change over periods of time, this possibility certainly does not allow for wild fluctuations in perceptive experience from one moment to the next. Habit, and the production of schemes in regards to the body's mobilisation, "gives our life the form of generality and prolongs our personal acts into stable dispositions" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146).

Another idea of central importance for Merleau-Ponty is the fact that the body is always there, and that its absence is inconceivable (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 91).

If I do not take off my clothes I could never see the inside of them, and it will in fact be seen that my clothes may become appendages of my body. As for the latter, it is my basic habit, the one which conditions all the others, and by means of which they are mutually comprehensible. Its permanence near to me, its unvarying perspective are not a *de facto* necessity, since such necessity presupposes them...I am accessible to factual situations only if my nature is such that there are factual situations for me. In other words, I observe external objects with my body, I handle them, examine them, walk round them, but my body itself is a thing which I do not observe: in order to be able to do so, I should need the use of a second body which itself would be unobservable. When I say that my body is always perceived by me, these words are not to be taken in a purely statistical sense, for there must be, in the way my own body presents itself, something which makes its absence or its variation inconceivable (ibid.).

In other words, we cannot treat the body as an object available for perusal, which can or cannot be part of our world, since it is not something that we can possibly do without. Classical psychology makes an error in treating the body as an object, when in fact, for Merleau-Ponty, an object "is an object only insofar as it can be moved away from me...Its

presence is such that it entails a possible absence. Now the permanence of my body is entirely different in kind” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 90).

Another factor against conceiving of the body as being completely constituted, and an object in-itself, is the fact that it is that by which there are objects. Our motility testifies that the body cannot be the mere servant of consciousness, since “in order that we may be able to move our body towards an object, the object must first exist for it, our body must not belong to the realm of the in-itself” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 139). Merleau-Ponty makes explicit that the aspects of an object revealed to an individual are dependent upon their bodily position. For him, and as we saw in Bakhtin’s theory in chapter four, we are not accorded quite the same privilege in viewing our own bodies, as we have in viewing other ‘objects’ and other people’s bodies. He explains that this is so because “the presentation of objects in perspective cannot be understood except through the resistance of my body to all variation of perspective” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 92). We cannot see our bodies as the other does and we need the other to attain to true awareness of ourselves as a body-subject. Even our vision of ourselves in the mirror is always mediated by our body image, and hence by the other, and it would seem that we cannot look at our own mirror image quite the same way that we can appreciate the appearance of others. We also saw this in chapter four as well. This being said, Merleau-Ponty suggests that our body should be conceived of as our means of communication with the world, rather than merely as an object of the world that our transcendent mind orders to perform varying functions. He offers one very good example of the body as a means of communication, which also makes it clear that a subject-object model of exchange tends to deprive the existential phenomena of their true complexity. He suggests that

If I touch with my left hand my right hand while it touches an object, the right hand object is not the right hand touching: the first is an intertwining of bones, muscles and flesh bearing down on a point in space, the second traverses space as a rocket in order to discover the exterior object in its place (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 92).

More significantly, the hand touching itself represents the body's capacity to occupy the position of both perceiving object and subject of perception, if not simultaneously, then in a constant oscillation. However, "when I press my two hands together, it is not a matter of two sensations felt together as one perceives two objects placed side by side, but an ambiguous set-up in which both hands can alternate the role of 'touching' and being 'touched'" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 93). Hence, Merleau-Ponty argues for 'reversibility' of the body, its capacity to be both sentient and sensible, and reaffirms his basic contention that incarnate consciousness is central phenomena of which mind and body are abstract moments (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 193).

The tendency of our body to seek its own equilibrium and to form habits is another important component of Merleau-Ponty's body-subject and it is worth discussing here. Another related point to make about the status of our bodies, which precludes them from being categorized simply as objects, according to Merleau-Ponty, is that we move directly in union with our bodies. "I do not need to lead it towards a movement's completion, it is in contact with it from the start and propels itself towards that end" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 94). In other words, we do not have to check to see if our legs are there before we stand up because we are with our bodies. I and my body are one. The wave of a hand or any other gesture that responds to a given circumstance without intervention of traditional philosophical conceptions of thought and/or intention, testifies to this idea of I am with my body. The perception/actions of any sportsperson reveals a form of intelligence that informs much of our everyday interaction, and that refutes many dichotomous positions (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 142) most obvious among these being the insistence that a separate act of interpretation (to determine a goal or intention), is necessary to give action a meaningful form. According to Merleau-Ponty, the point is that "Whether a system of motor or perceptual powers, our body is not an object for an 'I think', it is a grouping of lived-through meanings which move towards its equilibrium" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 153). The emphasis on rationalistic thought, and its tendency to dissect human behaviour through 'I think' can conspire to turn us away from the body's acclimatisation to its own environment. Hence, he tends to explore a more basic motivation for human action than is usually taken to be the case. Rather than focusing on our desire to attain certain pleasures or achieve certain goals,

his analysis reveals intentional arcs, and to try and achieve an equilibrium with the world. Through reference to embodied activity, Merleau-Ponty makes it clear that our actions, and the perceptions involved in those actions, are largely habitual, learnt through imitation and responsiveness within an environment and to a community. Without such a pre-reflective base, language-games would be unlearnable and hence, he emphasises the philosophical importance of the act of learning, and by implication, training. He maintains that philosophy has generally been unable to adequately address these phenomena (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 142). Through the very act of learning, Merleau-Ponty contends, consciousness is irremediably embodied. Dance, for example, or other language-games for that matter, is learnt through repeated embodied efforts that are modified until the ‘right’ movements are achieved. This intelligence of the body—that is, its capacity to innovate and retain new meaning—again denies the heavy emphasis that much of the philosophical tradition has placed on interpretation, and certainly any conception of interpretation that contrasts itself with a purely passive perception. In reacting to their own different, but nevertheless distinct set of influences, they still chose modes of action in relation to past success. Even in the most apparently ‘thoughtful’ of activities, the body inclines itself towards an equilibrium. It is worth making explicit that this habituality to which we are referring, is far from being merely a mechanistic or behaviouristic propensity to pursue a certain line of action. Our habitual mode of being is constantly being altered even in very small ways. Merleau-Ponty asks, “If habit is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action, what is it then?” According to him, “it is knowledge in the hands, which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from the effort” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 144). He suggests that this type of “knowledge in the hands” is primordial, and he implies that if we completely detach ourselves from this habitual base, we risk embarking on philosophic and scientific endeavours that are of no practical benefit, and that might also artificially serve to legitimise the mind-body dualism. The following quotation from the *Phenomenology of Perception* captures the issue at hand:

We said earlier that it is the body which ‘understands’ in the acquisition of habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense datum under an idea, and if the body is an object. But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of



‘understand’ and our notion of the body. To understand is to experience harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between the intention and the performance—and the body is our anchorage in the world (Merleau-Ponty 1962:144).

Understanding is defined in this paragraph as harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between intention and performance, and this also sheds light on his suggestion that consciousness is primarily not a matter of “I think that” but of “I can” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 137). Action in this paradigm is spontaneous and practical, and it is clear that we move phenomenally in a manner somewhat antithetical to the mind-body distinction (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 145). While habit and the tendency to seek an equilibrium might help us adjust to the circumstances of our world, they do not simply make this easy. For Merleau-Ponty, “What enables us to center our existence is also what prevents us from centering it completely, and the anonymity of our body is inseparably both freedom and servitude” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 85). That is, though the body searches for equilibrium, as a mortal and temporal body it is also precluded from perpetual equilibrium (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 346). He explains that we move spontaneously and pre-reflectively, in accord with our bodies. According to his version of the pre-reflective cogito, when one motions towards a friend to come nearer, there is no preceding or ancillary thought prepared within me which motivates my action (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 111). I do not perceive a certain signal in my mind and then decide to act on it, or if I do, it is a rare and derivative occurrence. Hence, according to Merleau-Ponty, the immense difference posited by the philosophical tradition between thinking and perceiving, and of course the mind and body, is revealed as a mistake. Insisting that we cannot discern an interior state that preceded the expression of that state, he suggests that “I am not in front of my body, I am in it, or rather I am it...If we can still speak of interpretation in relation to the perception of one’s own body, we shall have to say that it interprets itself” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 150). Human subjectivity is no longer conceived of as residing in an inaccessible, private domain of the ‘mental’. Rather, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the body-subject entails an affirmation of public and surface interaction, and the external features and expressions of our bodies. This does not preclude deep feelings, but merely suggests that they must necessarily be manifested in our public lives.

Merleau-Ponty does not intend to suggest that the complicity of body and mind that we see in habit and the mastery of a certain technique, implies an absolute awareness of one's own 'subjectivity'. According to him, "there is the absolute certitude of the world in general, but not of anything in particular" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 344). He also contends that lived relations can never be grasped perfectly by consciousness, since the body-subject is never entirely present-to-itself. He explains that here there is ambiguity because we are not capable of disembodied reflection upon our activities, but are involved in an intentional arc that absorbs both our body and our mind (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 136).

Let us say...that the life of consciousness—cognitive life, the life of desire or perceptual life—is subtended by an 'intentional arc' which projects round about us our past, our future, our human setting, our physical, ideological and moral situation, or rather which results in our being situated in all these respects. It is this intentional arc which brings about the unity of the senses, of intelligence, of sensibility and motility (ibid).

For Merleau-Ponty the presupposition of "a universe perfectly explicit in itself" (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 41) but residing between these two positions, his body-subject actually requires ambiguity. He explains that ambiguity resides in my perception of things, and in the knowledge I have of myself, primarily because of our temporal situation which he insists cannot but be ambiguous. He suggests that

My hold on the past and the future is precarious and my possession of my own time is always postponed until a stage when I may fully understand it, yet this stage can never be reached, since it would be one more moment bounded by the horizon of its future, and requiring in its turn, further developments in order to be understood (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 426).

That is, to Merleau-Ponty we are never self-present; there can be no self-enclosed 'now' moment because time also always has this reflexive aspect that is aware of itself, and that opens us to experience beyond our particular horizons of significance. Indeed, it is because of this temporal ambiguity, that Merleau-Ponty asserts that we can never truly say 'I' absolutely (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 208). Instead he suggests that "I know myself only insofar as I am

inherent in time and in the world, that is, I know myself only in ambiguity” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 345). In the concluding words of the *Phenomenology of Perception*, he insists that “man is a network of relationships” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 456), and that these relationships are not something that we can, or even should want to unravel. The interdependence of the knot is what gives humanity its very qualities, and by dissecting it, we risk losing the very thing that establishes us as human.

### 6.3 The ballet dancer’s lived experience

Let us begin this section by briefly recapitulating what we have learnt about the body in the previous section. From Merleau-Ponty we have understood that we are bodies and that our lived experience of this body denies the separation of the mind from body. Our existence occurs in an embodied state and our consciousness of the world around us is not simply something that happens in our minds but rather, our intentional consciousness is experienced from within our bodies and through it.

Through his concept of the body-subject, or lived body, Merleau-Ponty negates, and overcomes Descartes contention that the body is a machine powered by the mind. The body is a living organism by which we experience the world around us. This body should not be understood as having separate parts that work together like a machine. Rather, for Merleau-Ponty, the body must be understood as whole, as it is lived. That is, we must understand the body as it is lived in our experience. We have come to understand that the body is both transcendent and immanent. I know that transcendent things exist because I can touch them, see them and hear them. I know things from an embodied perspective rather than in its totality. Because I am a body I can only see things from a certain perspective, and yet, because I am a body, I can also experience the thing as being more than that partial perspective. The thing exists “in itself” because it resists my knowing it with total certainty. Although, the thing does exist “for me” because I always experience it in relation to my own body. For example, a chair is something to sit on and a desk is something to sit at and write on. Things allow for certain bodily engagements while closing off others. In this sense, things are both transcendent and immanent; things as given to experience are each an “in-itself-for-

me”. If we can understand this idea of the “in-itself-for-me”, we can see how experience as it is given to us is always a subject-object dialogue. I can never experience things independent of my experience as a bodily engaged being in the world: the meaning I bring to my perception is ‘a perceiving’ which is embodied. It is by virtue of my embodiment that I can experience things as being up or down, as having insides or outsides, or as being close or far away. Space is always in relation to my body as situated within the world. The same is true of time because I can never be two places at once as a living breathing body. I am always situated in the present, on the horizon and the past fades away as more ambiguous. Thus, when I experience a thing within a context, this spatial-temporal context is temporary and unfolding over time, and thus subject to change. The body then is primarily a way of being in the world. It is a form of lived experience which is fluid and ever-shifting. And it is also a way of interacting with one’s environment—of shaping it and being shaped by it.

Now that we have understood the concept of embodiment through the work of Merleau-Ponty we can see why it is important to this dissertation. We have been leading up to the actual embodied experience of ballet dancers and to the inhabiting of the ballet form. So far we have discussed the ways in which they experience the ballet form at an aesthetic level and at the institutional level. It is important to note that although we divided the transformation and formation of the ballet dancer into three levels of experience (aesthetic, institutional and lived) as a way to make some sense of the complex dynamics at work in the ballet dancer’s formation. It is, however, necessary now to acknowledge that this transformation process is wholly constituted in the lived body and all three levels of experiencing occur simultaneously. If it is true that the mind and body are inseparable, and that we experience our body as a unified potential, then it would mean that we can take our original proposition—*If we change the bodily experience we change the lived experience and thus self-expression*—and state that the bodily experience is the lived experience, and this experience is thus expressed from within the body, through the body and outside the body. Since we acknowledge that embodying the ballet form is the actual stepping into everything that constitutes the art of ballet, then we can say that the spirit of ballet is given form through the ballet dancer’s embodied state. Through the ballet dancer the form is made concrete and its principles, ideals and intentions are expressed through movement. Thus the embodiment

of the ballet form is ballet's physical form, realization and expression, or the incarnation of the ballet institution's conception of the body as a vehicle of self-expression.

So when does the actual embodiment take place? We have come to understand that the transformation of the lay person to that of a ballet dancer requires much training and a focused attention to the inhabiting of the ballet form. What exactly does this mean? It means that the young students of ballet must become fully aware and conscious of their body and understand the language and vocabulary of ballet until it has become a habitual mode of movement for them. What does it mean to fully understand the language and vocabulary? To understand and know the ballet form it must be experienced. The experiencing of the ballet form is one that is lived and one that unites all of the inner senses into that one experience. It is a wholly experience that encompasses each and every step of the transformation process. As the young students train they become fully conscious of the physical sensations of all the positions and movements in ballet. From within themselves they begin to feel it, understand it, know it and are, thus, experiencing it. As it becomes more familiar to them, they begin to live and breathe through it. Always striving the perfect the movement and always searching for a new experience in movement, the dancers are forever developing their experience and thus their expression. At no time are they ever separated from the experience; they learn what a solidly articulated movement should feel like and also understand when it has not been a successful articulation. After years and years of repetitious movements the language and vocabulary becomes part of the ballet dancers' entire being and their ability to translate music through their body becomes more refined. The better they understand the language and thus the form, the better they are able to articulate themselves through it. Their expression is forever being perfected. They are now ballet dancers. So when does this happen exactly? One of the first dancers that I interviewed—Jennifer Franklin who danced with Le Ballet de Montreal Eddy Toussaint explains:

JF- I don't know exactly when it happened. I think I always dreamt it and in my mind, or in my imagination, I was always a dancer. But of course I couldn't put one foot in front of the other without falling all over the place! But as I began to feel the technique in my body and I started to understand what it was supposed to feel like, I knew that I was leaning to dance. I'd try the moves over and over again and when the teacher told me that I was doing

good work then I knew I was closer to being a dancer. But I think it happened one day after a performance at my parents' ballet school when everyone started to notice that I was good. I knew that I was expressing what I was feeling inside. I guess to answer your question I would have to say, the moment I knew I was a ballet dancer was when people saw what I felt inside and they recognized that I was a ballerina! Yup! I could dance....and that happened when I understood the language in my body. I felt it all in my body and still do.

For Jennifer, and also the other dancers that were interviewed, the moment when they felt that they were dancers extended beyond the inner experience of the ballet form. Most of the dancers explained that the day that their inner experience was recognized outwardly by others, this was the moment when they knew they were dancers. Dominique Walker, another dancer who trained at various schools and danced in small companies in Canada and the United States explains her moment:

DW- I can't really say when I became a dancer except that I think I always wanted to dance and I knew I was a dancer from the age of 3. I loved the training and would get really excited when I understood the movement. I loved to jump so when I got the jumps and when they were synchronized with the music I loved that. To me I was dancing. The more I understood my body and how to do the moves the more I wanted to feel it and the more I wanted to feel it perfectly. You know you never can be perfect but you are always trying to make the movement more perfect. I think to be a dancer you have to love it. You can only become a dancer if you truly understand your body and the vocabulary of ballet. I think that to express as a ballet dancer you have to become one with it. I mean you have to know it so intimately that it's always part of you....

So to answer your question: I knew I was a ballet dancer when my teachers saw me as one. I knew it wasn't in my imagination any more and even though I struggled with my weight and thought I would never make it, I knew that I had understood what it meant to be a dancer and I was a dancer.

For both these dancer the moment when they actually become dancers is not clear, however, what is clarified in these two quotes is that being a dancer begins with a total understanding and thus experiencing of the ballet language and form. The actual realization of their dreams occurs at the level of expression. That is, once they are living the embodied state of the

dancer they are in effect expressing that outwardly and being recognized. But this experiencing is always being pushed even further. The ballet dancer is always striving to feel the body newly. Every time that they execute a movement they try and take that movement to a new level of experience—one that takes them closer to the ideal ballet form and to the ideal image of lightness and grace.

David Bushman, who we spoke about in the last two chapters, has this to say about pushing the experience to new dimensions:

DB- because, well you kind of had the answer to this question. It's my ongoing frustration that I never assumed the ballet form the way I wished I could have. I went towards this kind of natural sort of ability that I have, this instinctual thing that I have and I've always relied on it. I do have a certain understanding of ballet technique. If I didn't have it I wouldn't be able to do what I'm doing. And ultimately, even out of shape as I am, if you ask me to get up and do something, I'll do it, you know what I'm saying? And I, I'll, I even have this dream of going back to dancing one day, believe it or not. Yes it is an awe inspiring thing and I know plenty of people who are intimidated by it. My frustration is not about intimidation, it's about saying, you know it's the same thing when somebody from Limon comes in and teaches Limon class. You know you're saying that I'm avoiding talking about my body, I've never been obsessed about my body. I'm a bit now just because I'm feeling out of shape. It's funny because now when people hear me saying oh I have to loose weight la la la, and people are like, get over it! You look fantastic. Because I'm not in the same shape. I'm not doing six hours in the studio any more. I was never obsessed about my body before. I just said, this is what I have and I'm going to totally, you know, ya I was always working on certain things, you know, oh ya I'm loosing strength in this foot, or you could point your foot better there. You know when I look at Kylian's work, its about focus in the body, so all of that, this ability that's a given, for me that's a given. If you're going to work, if you're going to dance, that kind of awareness of your body is a given, you can't dance without it. So, that understanding of my body I feel like I've always had. And I've always been cultivating it. Um, but don't ask me to go out and do all second turns pulled into 4 pirouettes finish perfectly. That's my no forget it!

The process of formation, as we can see so far, is not one that is ever finalized. At some point in their training, the ballet dancers understand enough about what it means to dance and what the experience feels like to actually be dancers. The more of this dancing body that they have experienced the more they know how far they can push themselves and what their

limitations are. The important point we are making here is that to be a ballet dancer is to live and express the embodied experience of the dancer. Although the ballet dancer pushes the limits of their body, the experience also becomes part of a habitual feeling. It is so entangled in the dancer's being that they no longer have to act like a dancer because they are one. Furthermore, the daily rituals and practices become second nature and become fully intertwined in their sense of self. Betsy-Ann Baron explains:

CK- So your body always remembers?

BB- sure, sure it does.

CK- Do you think having gone through the dancers training and been a dancer, does it make you different?

BB- Anybody that has had any kind of specialized training will be more, will be different from someone who has not had any kind of specialized training. So what is the specialized training? It's a dance, it's a physical training, first of all, no not first of all, amongst it, it's a physical training, it's a musical training, it's a learning how to pick up moves, how to memorize, memory training, and spatial training, social training and how to be with a lot of people for a long time especially on a tour bus ha ha. So ya there is a lot of training that you get.

CK- There is a moment when you step into the dancer, a moment when it clicks and you realize you're a dancer—can you describe that moment for me?

BB- I think that I always tried to, um, in the theatre. I mean as a rehearsing dancer you are a dancer anyway, but that specialness that happens, I think its part everyday into the theatre and making up, putting on make-up, the habits that you build up in the theatre, the warming up, the rituals. Every dancer has their own little thing. Whether it's running around and getting full of energy or getting really quiet. In the last years I would get extremely quiet and sit back stage really quietly and get really focused and get centered and I would have people come up to me and say, are you okay? I would just keep my space and say, ya I'm fine. And then I remember one dancer, I danced a part for the first time and went...and the dancer came up to me and said you were so nervous you were hardly breathing. And I didn't want to deal with it, I didn't want to say anything cause I new I was really focused because it was very difficult what I had to dance and I really wanted to dance it well.



All the different rituals that dancers use in order to perform their very best become part of their lived experience. In their memory they retain moments of glory and moments of shame. No matter what the experience they never forget. There is a statement that dancers always say to each other: Once a dancer always a dancer. What happens when a dancer retires and no longer experiencing the performance? Are they still dancers? They are no longer training and their body starts to change and oftentimes they no longer look like dancers. So what does this statement mean? Again I turn to David Bushman who articulates the answer to this question quite well.

CK- So saying that, you know the statement: once a dancer always a dancer? If you were going to explain that to a non-dancer what would you say? Do you believe it?

DB- ABSOLUTELY!

CK- So what does it mean?

DB- there is a physical, emotional, intellectual, there is a full sort of perceptive experience in the body, in a person, in a dancer. You know if we're going to talk about perception, physiological emotional perception of who I am, it's a very defining experience to be in dance, in the element of dance. Producing it, preparing it, building, you know, when a dancer first starts at ballet, but when you're out of shape and you're starting to come back to work again, and it's this mountain you know where you're going. You feel terrible, you feel like, oh my god I'm never going to get there again, and sometimes you're in a rush and it's oh my god we're never going to get there. You know, and you're getting to the end of a rehearsal, you know, preparation for a show, it is such a rush, all of that, whatever it is, the pacing, and all of that, building this thing, you'll never lose that. You always know what it feels like. You're never going to lose that perception. What it feels like to be a part of that experience. I know many dancers who said, no more class! I just left dance, I've made my transition, I'm never going to step foot in a ballet class again. You still after all that know what it is ha ha ha

CK- Ya right ha ha!

DB- And I think that's why dancers sometimes go crazy. And that's why we go to shows now like, oh I could do better than that! We become a little bit you know, and it happens to every dancer! And it's because we don't have, I mean I know dancers who could get up and still dance, they could go through the steps of an entire ballet that they did ten years ago! I'm not that kind of dancer, I'm very much in the moment and when it's done I go. I know many

dancers who are very much like that, that's not true for all. It depends if you liked doing the ballet or not, and how long we did it and how often. But we never loose that! And uh, it's a kinetic experience. And kinetic experiences are not just physical.

CK- So that being said, are you still a dancer?

DB- I'll always be a dancer.

CK- Are you still experiencing it somewhere?

DB- Yes absolutely!

CK- Where?

DB- I'm experiencing it in the missing of it, you know what I'm saying? Any occasion I have to find to be physical, I started yoga, I started an acting course. Um, its something I'm singing, I started working with a classical coach right now, I'm building all sorts of things ha, ha, its all physical.

CK- For those people who have never danced, what does it mean that you're still experiencing it? Where do you experience it?

DB- Okay, I'll give you an example. People still tell me, people who don't know me, are you a dancer? It's not because of anything but my posture, the way I carry myself. I'm never going to loose that. That is built into me now. Um, its not just the way I walk or the way I hold myself, but it's the way I move. I'm never going to loose this thing that has influenced thing that has influenced the way I do everything.

CK- How important is it for people to know that you were a dancer? Is it still important to who you are?

DB- It's my identity.

CK- Still today?

DB- Absolutely, ya ya and that's why it's very hard to gain weight, to feel, I mean if really I was at a point, I know certain dancers, like I said they left ballet classes and said, no more. I'm still active, I'm still, I actually want to still keep dance as a part of my life for the moment. I did let my body go. I you know, I stopped taking ballet class. I haven't really taken ballet class. You know I go in and give myself a barre. I don't really take a ballet class. I actually went in and took some with Les Grands Ballets at one point. I took a break but I'm now getting back into actively doing shows. Doing work. But during that time, I, you know, I still have a bit, and I, I'm aware of it, I'm

aware of the fact that I'm not in the same shape as I was. This is part of it all, everyone goes through it. But I'm very interested in how I'm going to deal with it when I'm really done doing anything. And I have a funny feeling that I'm never going to give it up. This is kind of a decision I've made now. I felt too good being in shape. And not just being in shape, and this is kind of the thing I'm kind of realizing now, is that, ya next year I'm going to ride a bike, do I want to go swimming, I've done it all. I've tried biking, I've tried swimming It's NOT the same thing! It's not enough and its NOT THE SAME THING! It doesn't have the same payback. I like dancing too much. When I left, my last year in the company I took six months off, I had too, I really hurt my back this time. Same place but worse. I found out I had a degenerated disk in my lower back, it is very worn down. Of course it was a drama, I thought I'm done, I better stop now or I'm never going to walk again, kind of thing. The doctor was like, do your physical therapy, you're going to rehabilitate and we're going to get you better than ever. Well I got myself to the point where I could go back to work, finished my season, had to pay attention, you know, I did all sorts of strengthening exercises, got myself back, better then I was before I hurt myself, but I said, you know what, I think it's time to go. This is a sign. And things had started changing in the company, it was a different company then and as much as I wanted to continue giving to the company and continuing to nurture the new people came in, giving them what I had experienced in the company, I knew personally it was time to go. And it was a really hard decision to make. This was last June. It was really, really tough to make the decision. For my personal reasons and also for my place, I didn't want to give up my place. I didn't want to give up that whole thing, that I knew that I had to go through this. I had to disassociate myself and kind of go through this, I, well you know, I had to step out of it and figure out what I'm about now. And I'm not about Les Grands Ballets. And I really felt like that was my identity.

CK- Do you feel like you left yourself behind?

DB- Because I identified myself by it, that's my problem and that identity wasn't rooted in a sense of, it was me as part of something else. And it's for the first time I'm starting to become me apart from, I am me and whatever I choose to do which is I'd like to keep dance a part of my life. My identity comes from within it. I'm not identifying myself by something I am a part of or by the ballet I am doing at the moment. I left the part of me which is the dancer behind me and I guess still is.

In the absence of the experience, the retired dancer is still a dancer. Although the body does not engage any longer in the daily rituals and practices of the ballet world—the very rituals that transported them into their embodied state to begin with—in the absence of what

has become so familiar, the dancer is still experiencing that embodied state and is living the experience in memory. The body never forgets what it feels like to dance in a dancing body. It never forgets what it is like to live and breathe through that form. Once the language is learnt and the form embodied no matter how many years have passed, the feeling of the performance—to feel the lightness and grace—is still experienced through the understanding and knowledge of this embodied state. There is no separation from what the dancer knows and their experience. Dominique Walker explains:

CK- Now that you no longer dance, are you still a dancer?

DW- Ya, of course! Once a dancer always a dancer ha ha! You know that saying! Here is the thing: I identified myself as a dancer while I was still dancing and everything that I did in my life revolved around my dancing. Like I said before ballet is a language that you are brought up with and it is part of your being, part of your body, your mind and your soul. Just because your body is not practicing those moves anymore your body still remembers what dancing feels like. I was and am a dancer still because my memory still feels it too. I think that the experience itself never goes away. You know what I mean? It's like eating ice cream for the first time and you love the way it tastes and then you continue to eat it for the next twenty years and one day your doctor tells you that you are a diabetic and your cholesterol is through the roof and you can no longer eat ice cream, so what? You forget what it tastes like? No way! It's part of your experience and it's also part of your life then. I don't know if that explains it. But it's like it's inside you, or you're inside it and it will always be part of your identity. In fact there is no mistaken identity here!

CK- You say that your body has changed shape and that you now bike and swim to stay in shape but your body can no longer do the things it once did in ballet. Do people know that you were a dancer? And how important is it that they do know?

DW- Wow! That's a loaded question! Well, no I don't think I look like the dancer I once was but I think that because I have always walked with my toes turned out and I still sometimes wear a chignon in my hair, people will ask if I dance.

CK-Do you like that?

DW- Ya of course I do! I think somewhere inside I resent the fact that my body has given up and that I have all this pain in my back and hips—I think you know what I'm talking about ha ha!

CK-Yup! Big time!

DW- So I guess I wish I could still dance and when people notice that I look like a dancer—well actually an ex-dancer—it makes me feel good because it's such a big part of who I am and even though my body doesn't dance anymore my whole being does. When I hear music that I have danced to I remember the choreography in my mind and also in my body even though it isn't actually performing. It remembers what feelings and sensations I had. You know? Like I'll remember the breath and strength of a certain move and know exactly how it is supposed to feel. It's hard to explain but the best way I could explain it is that it's like when I fell last year and broke my wrist—I could still hear the crack and I could still feel the pain and even though my wrist is healed and I don't feel the pain today, in my memory it's still very real. You know when I was dancing I remember being asked to be present in my dancing and that usually meant that the director wanted us to be with the movement—to really be feeling it now in the present and to not just do the move because your body remembers how to do it, like a machine that repeats the move over and over again without emotion. I think when you dance such powerful pieces your body remembers the music, the emotions, the physical power of the body, it feels the flight and bounce, you know le ballon, and the energy that you put into it. Some people think that dance is just mechanical but it's not. It is really about bringing together the body and emotions and expressing them outwards to the audience. You are talking to them and they are feeling it. I don't know about you but I usually remember my conversations especially if they were filled with emotion.

CK- Absolutely!

DW- So my body doesn't work like it used to but I still dance ha ha ha, not literally though. I dance ballet in all my other senses. It's part of me and always will be. I mean you spend over 30 years living in the ballet world and learning to dance and perfecting yourself as an artist. How is that supposed to just disappear? It doesn't! You are still living the experience except it's in a different place (she starts to shed some tears).

CK- Dominique, do you want me to stop the tape?

DW-No it's fine. I'm crying because I miss it. I live it and miss it over and over again in my imagination. I guess it's better than nothing? At least in your imagination you can still live and relive the experience. It's just who I am. I am a dancer and I dance in my imagination. It lives in me and I in it. Does that make sense?

CK- It does! It really does. Thank-you!

Again here we hear how the lived experience, or embodied experience, is forever part of the dancer's self. The experience does not simply exist in the body but rather it exists somewhere at the core of all the elements that form dancers and which exist in their self-consciousness. Once dancers have embodied the ballet form—once they have become conscious of themselves as being ballet dancers, the experience that they will live and thus the knowledge that they will acquire will forever be part of their being. Although they are not dancing in the present they, nevertheless, are still dancing in their memory and in their imaginations. The embodied experience of the ballet dancer then, is not simply a physiological experience but rather is an entire history of their human experience as dancers. The process in forming a ballet dancer, as we have been discussing throughout this dissertation is one that requires an entire union of all that has made this dancer a pure expression of ballet. The ballet dancer has inhabited a new aesthetic experience and by virtue of the fact that this aesthetic experience is institutionalized, they have also embodied an institutional experience, and as a result their lived experience is thus an expression of the very art form that they now inhabit. As Dominique explains, ballet dancing is not simply a mechanical practice because it is the union of so many experiences that dancers will live and relive over and over again through their bodies, from their bodies and for their bodies, and sometimes even in their imaginations.

The young aspiring ballet dancer's desire to dance began within his/her imagination and developed into a creative negotiation between his/her inner self-sensation and his/her outward appearance, and thus expression. The fact that there exists an inner and outer world as well as an active communication between the two, it suggests that the body, throughout the process of transformation, is not the only part of the human being that is being transformed. The experience of the transformation occurs within the mind, within the body and within all of the human beings senses. Therefore, the lived experience of the ballet dancer is the entire experiencing of the transformation and formation process and the dancer's entire life expression. We will end this chapter with a quote from Jennifer who explains what the entire experience is about:

This is what I see: It all starts with a teacher who teaches you how to stand in the five positions. Then from there you learn to move always starting from

one of those positions and also ending in one. You learn to do your barre exercises from those positions and those five positions become second nature. But here's the thing: the teacher demonstrates a position and movement that is part of the ballet vocabulary and when she demonstrates it, especially for the first time, your eyes try to grasp what it's supposed to look like but of course that takes a while to figure out. So then, She simplifies it by breaking down the movement into smaller parts of that move so you'll see what it looks like through the transition. So now comes the tricky part: you somehow try over and over again to understand the move in your mind and then you have to get your body to understand it as well. So your mind and your eyes try and understand it and sends that message to your body until your body is finally feeling it. It's hard to explain in words except that your body does feel it and once it feels it, it always knows what it is supposed to feel like. Ha ha! I know that sounds funny but it's like that. So every time you learn a new move you go through that and soon your body has experienced the whole ballet vocabulary. It does sound a little mechanical but really it's not. It can't be mechanical because there is too much going on at the same time! The fact that you have to dance the movements means that they have to speak something and that can't just be mechanical. We're artists and the movements need to translate to an expression of emotion. I mean the movement has to be so many things: it has to be musical, artful, inspirational and the thing is when you are performing you really don't have time to think about every little movement. You basically feel it inside yourself and since your body has experienced it over and over again it just simply flows through you. It's like when you are learning a new language. First you search for your words as you learn them but once you know the words and have used them over and over again you don't have to think too much you just speak and it flows without searching for the words. You know what I mean? It's spontaneous and just becomes part of you. Ballet is a language and through it we express emotions and feelings. I think all language is about communication and expression. So I choose to express through ballet.

CK- So now that you aren't dancing, what happens to expressing through that language.

JF- God I don't really know? I guess I have the knowledge to teach others to dance now. I did teach for a while but now I'm a school teacher instead. But I think that once you have a language you can use it any time you want. It's not like you forget it. But I can tell you that even though I had trouble expressing emotions through ballet I think it was the only time that I could be that expressive emotionally I mean. Talking is easy but for me I find freedom through ballet.

CK- What do you mean by freedom? A lot of the dancer's talk about this, what does that mean really?

JF- Well I think it means that when I'm dancing on stage I'm almost naked because my whole self is exposed and because it's raw emotion. Sure you do the movements that are ballet but the unique part of you is dancing too. Most of the time in everyday life people pass you by and they have no idea who you are but when you're on stage I think that you can't hide that. The audience sees you at your most vulnerable state and they love you because you're not afraid to expose yourself completely. I learnt that the hard way! The more I let my emotions flow the more they loved me. So I think that's freedom. When you are free to show yourself completely without judgement, that's freedom. It's almost like making love openly and freely. It's liberating! I think that's why dancers are good lovers. They are free ha ha ha!

CK- Thank-you Jennifer!

At the beginning of this chapter we asked when exactly did they become dancers and what happened when they stopped dancing? The simple answer to this question is that they became ballet dancers when they learned the language, inhabited it and expressed through it. When they stopped dancing they retained the knowledge and the lived experience within themselves and within the multiple levels of memory, and in so doing, they never really stopped being a dancer. In its absence and in their yearning either to become dancers or in their desire to dance again, the experiencing of ballet within them is always present at one level or another. Like Jennifer explained: once you know a language you never forget it. And like Dominique explained earlier in this chapter: once you are born to a cultural experience you always identify with where you were born and it will always be who you are. So then, the dancers' inner desire to create themselves in the image of the ideal, is the initial impetus behind their transformation and development, however, once they inhabit the ballet form at one level or another, they are finally freed by the sense of recognition they attain. The dancer finally embodies the ballet form and through the eyes of the other, is liberated and his/her expression is set free. The ballet dancer's mind, body and entire human being is lived through his/her outward expression. They are now and forever living the experience of ballet in every part of their being.



## CONCLUSION

The overall aim of this dissertation is to make a significant contribution to the study of the body and society and to the growing interest in this field. Through this empirical research on the ballet dancer's formation, we have sought to give the dominance of social constructionist approaches to the body in contemporary social theory and cultural studies, further possibility to the ways in which it has previously viewed the body. For the most part, sociological scholarship on the body has sought to lift it out of the domain of the natural or biological and move it into the realm of the textual, symbolic or discursive by theorizing the body as an unfinished entity, which is shaped and constructed in, and invented by society. In effect, much of this scholarship has emerged from within this theoretical paradigm and has, thus, narrowed the possibility of the body being anything more than a receptor of social meaning. That is, in general, the social constructionist paradigm has developed an idea of the body as an entity upon which social forces, or power, is exerted and invested, as we saw in Foucault's work. We certainly do not negate the fact that at some level the body is socially constructed, however, we question the idea of reducing the body to an entity that is non-reactive. The problem of a socially constructed body is that it does not tell us anything about human embodiment. The fact is that the socially constructed body is at some level embodied and physically, emotionally and viscerally experienced by a human being. The social constructionist paradigm does not consider the material, biological or the physical dimensions of the body and in effect assumes that human beings' bodies are unresponsive to the social forces that they speak of. By avoiding the question of an embodied being, or a corporal being that experiences the world through the body, this theoretical space does not allow for the possibility of a responsive, creative and embodied human experience. Through this empirical study of the ballet dancer's formation, this dissertation aims to contribute to, and encourage, the development of a theoretical space that merges the physical and material body with the socially constructed body.

The human being's body that we speak of in this dissertation is one that lives an embodied experience—one that is socially, physiologically and mindfully engaged in the world. This body is self-conscious and reacts creatively and lives multiple levels of experience; it is a body that is alive and filled with unlimited potential and possibility. In fact, because the body is forever engaged in the process of completion, it remains in a perpetual state of transformation, and out of necessity to the moments of finalization that it seeks to attain, the body responds creatively to the social, biological and emotional factors that it experiences. The body that we described throughout this dissertation is a dynamic, communicative, intelligent, sensitive and social body, which renders the Cartesian mind/body dualism inadequate. The fact that this body is self-conscious of its self-image and its environment, is mindfully engaged in a dynamic inter-communicative process between the 'I' and the 'Other', and actively negotiates its transformation and formation, and thus, its self-formation, it does not seem logical to separate the mind from the body. By virtue of this study, which seeks to contribute to a new idea of the body outside the social constructionist thinking, we encounter a body that is expressive and actively implicated in the ballet training and dancing. Therefore, through our attempt to encourage an expansion of the social constructionist paradigm to include a living, breathing and feeling human being, we encounter an impossible escape from the dynamic, living presence of the body in the dancer's movement and therefore, the impossibility of a mind/body separation. In chapter 2 we proposed the following: If you change the bodily experience you change the lived experience and thus, self-expression. Implicit in this statement is the inextricable link between the mind, the body and the self as a whole.

Another aim of this dissertation is to make an empirical contribution to the newly developing field of sociology of dance. There is much unexplored territory in dance that sociologists might want to explore and which could bring valuable insight about our society. Some of these areas could include, for example, the study of the development and transformation of dance forms as a way to better understand cultural globalization; or the study of art and culture as an expression of a city's identity; or the study of popular dance forms and youth culture. There are numerous possibilities in dance that have just barely been explored by sociologists and we encourage the expansion of this field through our study of

dancers and their bodies. So what have we learnt from this study? Through the exploration of the ballet dancer's formation we gained insight into human being's embodied experiences. In chapter 3 we described the ballet culture's ideal form and traced its historical evolution and explained how this ideal is managed and maintained. Through this chapter we come to understand that cultural ideals of the body are socially constructed and that they are firmly rooted and implicated in the social. The dancer's body in ballet is trained to be strong, flexible and to reflect the ideal image that the culture upholds. Ballet dancers can do what most ordinary people cannot and thus the infinite possibilities of the body are revealed. As the ballet world pushes the limits of the ideal ballet form, so is the body's limit extended. Furthermore, through the transformation of the ballet world's ideal form overtime, and with such great influential charters like Balanchine at the helm, we come to understand that the ideal body within a culture can be constructed and reconstructed based on a vision. In the everyday world we see how artists, fashion designers, photographers, and media influences, and so on, construct ideal body images and we also see how these ideals influence personal lifestyle choices. These ideals, whether in the ballet world, or in the greater of society, are managed and maintained by a collective standard. They become imbedded in the culture's norms and values and have the power to influence the social body as a whole. In chapter 3, then, we learn that the ideal body has a history and its image has the power to influence the physical shape of the members of a culture, community or group.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 we concluded that through the ballet dancers' multiple levels of experience—their aesthetic, institutional and lived experience—that they are creatively and actively engaged in their own self-formation and they are at no time separated from their bodies. By breaking down the dancer's process of formation into these three levels of experiencing of the ballet form, we were able to see just how our initial proposition could be true. The inhabiting of the ballet form was the driving force behind their process of formation, and although this ideal is an invented one—one that suits the needs and requirements of the ballet world/culture—the experience of formation is embodied and is, therefore, alive within the dancer. Furthermore, by describing the ballet dancer's aesthetic experience, institutional experience and lived experience, we concluded that the dancer's self is actively engaged in a highly dynamic inter-communicative act of creation and that at no

time are they ever separated from their self-formation. What we learn from the ballet dancers' description of their formation, is that human beings experience the world around them through their bodies and that their subjective experiencing of that world is what makes them unique beings.

In choosing to make the ballet dancer embodied experience the main object of our inquiry, we gained valuable insight into the dynamics involved in self-formation. In describing the various levels of experiencing, the ideal ballet form and their relationship with their body and the social context through which they emerge as dancers, we actually cast a light on another possible area of research. Our main focus throughout this dissertation has been on the actual physical, mental and emotional experience—or rather, on the lived experience, or embodied experience—of the ballet dancer's formation. However, what we encounter in this story of formation, is a powerful and sophisticated emotional attachment to the art of ballet and to the form itself. The interviews took us into the dancer's lived experience where we heard how they were fully involved in the process, and we also heard how they negotiated their own transformation in a creative manner. No matter the situation, whether it was positive or negative, the ballet dancer's desire to inhabit the ballet form never changed. Each dancer had their own personal story to tell but the power and allure of the ballet form was central to all their stories. We explained how this form was constructed and how it was even transformed overtime, but the interesting thing that emerges here is the emotions that drive the dancers to embody that form—to live within it, to sense it at all levels of existence and to know it intimately at ever possible sensory level, and to become an expression of that form. What is fascinating, and certainly an interesting research possibility, is the deep and undeniable connection to that image—to a mythical character like the ethereal light and graceful ballet dancer—that the young aspiring dancers hold in their imagination. Where does the desire and fascination come from? Where does the need to inhabit this form—to create oneself in the likeness of that image—come from? The need and desire is so powerful that it generates in the dancer an incredible determination and will that despite the pain and struggles are nevertheless sustained. What is the nature of these emotions—that is, what is the nature of the desire, passion, love and need to become this ideal image? Are these emotions socially constructed or are they a pre-social phenomenon? Is this kind of desire a

natural impulse? Or, perhaps it has something to do with cultural benefit. Whatever it is that generates this kind of passion and need, the fact that these emotions emerge out of the need to embody a socially constructed image, which is very much part-and-parcel to the dancer's social experience, we can develop a new project that could make an interesting contribution to the newly expanding field of sociology of emotions. After all, desire, passion, need and certainly love, are the driving forces behind much of our social experiences and is definitely worth investigating. Furthermore, the fact that embodiment is a lived experience and very much part of the sensorial experience of the human being, it is logical to extend a study on embodiment to that of emotions.

## APPENDIX A

### INTERVIEW GUIDE

#### **The Beginning of the Journey:**

- When did you start your dance training? Where?
- What made you start?

**Probe:** direct the discussion towards what they envisioned for the future.

- What did you enjoy about dance?

**Probe:** lead discussion towards the body.

- How can you describe the ballet body?
- What did your body look like?
- Did you like your body?
- Did you feel you had potential? Why? Or, why not?
- What were your goals? (this is still about the body)

#### **Training:**

- When did you begin to train **seriously**?

**Probe:** allow the dancer to describe in detail how they felt when they first began the training.

The conversation should naturally go towards the attainment of the ideal ballet body.

- Why did you choose ballet?
- Did you train in another style? Did you enjoy it? Which do you prefer? Why?
- Talk to me about your training?

**Probe:** Here we must allow the dancer to speak freely yet always lead him/her towards their struggles (ie pains, injuries, failures, desires...) and their successes (ie there physical accomplishments, evolution, roles they were asked to dance...).

- Was the training difficult? Explain?
- What did you like about it? Hate?
- Did it get easier or harder? Explain?
- Where there moments when you loved your body? Hated your body? Why?
- Did you ever struggle with the training? How did that make you feel?
- Did you ever want to quit? Why?
- Did you ever stop for a period of time? If so, how did it feel? What happened when you came back? Did you come back?
- Where you a good student?
- Did the teachers like you?

**Probe:** here we must lead the dancer towards a discussion of how his peers and his teachers saw him?

- Did they think you had potential? Why? Or, why not?
- How did you compare with respect to the others?
- Was there anyone you admired? Why? Why not?
- Who would you consider to be an ideal ballet dancer?
- Can you describe them?

**Probe:** We are looking for a description of what the dancer sees as ideal.

- Did that person inspire you or discourage you?
- What is the perfect ballet dancer to you?
- Is it attainable?
- During you training, what were your goals? Did you attain them?
- When you looked in the mirror at various stages in your training, for the most part did you like what you saw? Why? Why not?
- What did the mirror represent for you?
- If you fast forward the varying images you saw in the mirror during your training, can you describe them to me?
- How did each make you feel?
- Where you always improving?
- Did you ever “fall back” in a matter of speaking?
- What changed when you either improved or fell back?

-Did you have weight problems? If so, how did that feel? What did you do about it? Were you able to conquer it?

-Was/is the struggles and pain that go along with the training worth it? Why? Why not?

-Why did you choose this life style?

-How do you feel being a dancer? What does it mean to you?

-In your training did you ever get to where you wanted to go?

-Do you consider yourself a ballet dancer? Why? Why not?

-Throughout your training did you for the most part like what you saw in the mirror?

-How did it feel to have live in your body?

-Was it a good body? A difficult body?

-Why become a ballet dancer?

**Probe:** here we must lead the conversation towards artistry.

-When exactly did you become a ballet dancer?

-How did you know you were a ballet dancer?

-Was there any time throughout your training that you did not feel like a dancer?

-Can you describe what it feels like to be a ballet dancer?

-Did you always feel like one?

-What is the role of the dancer?

**Probe:** here we must direct the conversation towards expression, the performance and the music.

-How did you relate to your body as a performer?

-What does the performance mean to you?

-What do you want to accomplish on stage?

-How does it feel like to perform?

-What is the role of the music?

-Can you describe the dance and the music?

-Does your body always do what it's told? If not how do you work around that?

-Have you ever had a bad performance, good performance, great performance? How did they feel? How did your body feel?

-What was your most memorable performance? Why?



-What is your favorite piece of music that you have performed to? Can you describe the performance?

-Did you ever have a disastrous performance? Describe it?

-Are you or were you a soloist?

-Do you perform with a dance partner?

**Probe:** question the relationship between their bodies and their partners.

-Do you prefer the pas de deux, solo, corp?

-Does it make a difference to you which role you dance?

-If you were to explain the feelings you get when you perform to a non-dancer, what would you say?

-Do you still dance?

#### **Retirement:**

-When and why did you stop dancing?

-How did you feel about your decision?

-How did that make you feel?

**Probe:** question the nature of the changes to their bodies after retirement and how they felt.

-They say "once a dancer always a dancer" what does that saying mean to you?

-What do you do now?

-Do you miss dancing? If so what do you miss the most about it?

-Do you still feel like a dancer?

**Probe:** question the effects of retirement on both the body and expression?

-Do people today know you were a dancer?

-How important is it to you that people know this about you?

-Do you think you still look like a dancer?

-How does that make you feel?

-Do you still wish you looked like a dancer?

**Probe:** for how that has changed the way they express themselves.

-What is your mother tongue?

-Are you still involved in the dance world?

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by **Clara Khudaverdian** as a requirement for her doctoral dissertation. The research is supervised by **Professor Jean-François Côté**, of the department of Sociology at the **University of Quebec in Montreal**.

#### A. PURPOSE:

I have been informed that the purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of ballet dancer's lives. The main purpose is to explore the lives of ballet dancers and the uniqueness of their experience as lived within the ballet world. The research aims to draw out a theory of how ballet dancer's bodily experiences are connected to their lived experiences.

#### B. PROCEDURES:

*I agree and am aware of the following procedures:*

- The time and place of the interview will be determined by mutual consent of all parties.
- The interview will be taped and will take approximately 90 minutes and may require a second interview.
- The questions in the interview will be of a personal nature and I am free to **NOT** respond to any question that makes me uncomfortable.
- At any time during the interview I am free to change my mind and end it without any ramifications or discomfort.

#### C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION:

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is voluntary.
- I understand my identity will **ONLY** be revealed in the study result and future publications if I agree to it.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ **agree** to have my identity revealed.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ **do not agree** to have my identity revealed.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.
- I understand the purpose of this study and know that there are no hidden motives of which I have not been informed.

**I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY AND WILLFULLY CONSENT AND AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.**

NAME (please print)

\_\_\_\_\_

SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

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