

BOYZIE CEKWANA:
THE SOUTH AFRICAN DANCING BODY IN TRANSITION

THESIS

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by

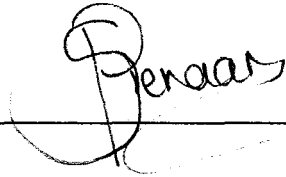
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UNDERTAKING

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and has not been submitted previously as a dissertation for any degree in any other university.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jendras', is written over a horizontal line. The signature is stylized and cursive.

ABSTRACT

Boyzie Cekwana is one of many black male dancers and choreographers that is currently receiving widespread support and recognition for his contribution to the field of contemporary dance in South Africa. Why certain images of the dancing body - as presented by this individual dance practitioner - are currently being promoted as artistically more viable than others by dance critics and the media is the central concern of this thesis. An analysis of the dancing body in contemporary South Africa must take into account the current post-apartheid condition, a condition of transformation and reconstruction that allows people greater freedom to select the country's leaders, popularize its heroes and heroines, market and capitalize on images and icons of a New South Africa. By opting to look specifically at a black male dancer, social appreciations of the body in terms of ethnicity *and* gender can be challenged. This latter area of research - the role of *gender* in the production, presentation and appreciation of the *dancing* body - is largely unchallenged in South Africa. Yet, if South African's want to truly rid themselves of the shackles of hegemonic rule, gender-construction is an area of social experience that needs intensive confrontation.

Chapter one will suggest some of the obstacles that might limit the South African dance researcher seeking an indepth analysis of the black dancing body, taking into consideration the country's history of elitist and autonomous rule. Attention will be drawn to multidisciplinary sites of information that might assist the researcher in such an excavation. The context of the research, however, is less interested in *historical descriptions* of the dancing body than with current *motivating factors* behind the preferential promotion of certain images over others in contemporary dance. Personal interviews and observations will therefore also provide crucial resource material. In chapter two, a case study of Boyzie Cekwana will be made looking at his personal background and the way in which it may have informed his contemporary experiences as a black male dancer and

choreographer. The underlying belief of such a case-study approach is that "it carries *implications* about the extents to which the resulting analysis is *applicable* to other *similar* cases"¹. This individual analysis includes information gathered from personal interviews with Cekwana; the author's own observations and experiences of Cekwana's work at the Vita FNB Dance Umbrella, the Grahamstown National Arts Festival, and the Durban Playhouse Theatre; and analyses of articles on Cekwana by journalists, and performance reviews by dance and theatre critics such as Adrienne Sichel (The Star Tonight!), Tommy Ballantyne (The Natal Sunday Tribune) and David Coleman (The Mercury).

Further examinations in chapter three and four will assess to what degree Cekwana re-presents culture-specific images of gender-modelling in his own performing body and the bodies of his multi-racial and multi-gendered *dancers* in selected *dances*. To prevent placing sole responsibility at Cekwana's feet for the representation of the dancing body to a society in transformation, the role of dance critics and mass mediators in this process of artistic communication will also be dealt with.

It is hoped that the ensuing discussion will suggest the possible effects that present frameworks of aesthetic appreciation may hold for choreographers and dancers in the country's future cultural development; this involves confronting a still controversial issue in South Africa - the relationship between dance and politics, choreographer and social responsibility. The thesis will round-off very briefly with suggestions to dance practitioners and educators in South Africa of alternative ways of perceiving and appreciating the dancing body based on gender, and not just racial, constructions; this is especially invaluable in the light of current efforts to include dance as a core-curriculum subject in all schools.

¹ Bromley 1986:xii.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page No.
Title-page	i
Abstract	ii
CONTENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1	
INTRODUCTION: DISPLAYS OF THE DANCING BODY	
i. "A dazzling star in the dance firmament"	1
ii. Remembering Apartheid: unmaking the monolith	5
iii. Re-searching the dancing body	8
iv. The Ethics in Aesthetics	12
CHAPTER 2	
CULTURAL CROSSOVERS: LIFE IN SOWETO	
i. "To come this far from obscurity"	20
ii. Dance and duty: performing the right role	23
iii. The Politics of Perception: The All-Seeing Eye	26
iv. Dancing for your dinner: visibility and viability in the city	30
CHAPTER 3	
BALLET SHOES AND GUMBOOTS	
i. "Boyzie glides to the top"	43
ii. "Liquid chocolate in motion" - the streamlined body	52
iii. The acrobatic slant, or manipulation of the dancing body	56
CHAPTER 4	
CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES	
i. Artistic difference and aesthetic deference	62
ii. "Still", after all these years	65
iii. Silence is golden: colluding with oppression	74
iv. Afterthoughts: Stating the rules of the game	86
APPENDICES	
I. Transcribed notes of interview with Boyzie Cekwana and members of the Playhouse Dance Company	89
II. Copies of selected critical reviews on Cekwana's <u>Still</u> and <u>Kude Nomfula</u>	102
BIBLIOGRAPHY	

DISPLAYS OF THE DANCING BODY

"A Dazzling Star In The Dance Firmament"³

The decision by Mark Hawkins, the artistic manager of the Playhouse Theatre, to devote a whole programme to Cekwana's works, clearly suggests that he perceives him to be an important choreographer whose achievement deserves wide attention and acclaim.⁴

In 1995, after only a few years of experience in the field of ballet, Boyzie Cekwana was awarded shared first prize for choreography at the International Ballet Competition held in Helsinki. This international achievement took place only two years after a local recognition, his appointment as resident choreographer to the Playhouse Dance Company - "the first such appointment in the history of South African dance"⁵. Both of these slip in right beside a whole list of "accolade[s] for the 25 year old dancer"⁶ including being twice nominated as the Most Promising Male Dancer by the FNB Vita Dance Umbrella, winning the Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance (1994) and receiving the FNB Vita Young Choreographer Grant (1994); the last two awards commissioned Boyzie Cekwana to create new works, both of which have been presented at venues around the country. Since taking up his residency, Cekwana has created several contemporary works, as well as performed in a number of classical ballets. At the 1995 Grahamstown National Arts Festival all of Cekwana's works were presented in a mainstream dance programme exclusively dedicated to showcasing his choreography. And soon after this, additional international recognition came his way in the form of an invitation from the Washington DC Ballet Company to re-choreograph and perform his

³ Playhouse Parade October/November 1995:10.

⁴ Peskin 1995.

⁵ Shevlin 1995a.

⁶ Ibid.

award-winning duet, Brother, Brother. Impressed by Cekwana's personality as much as by his work, artistic director Mary Day's invitation stated: "Everyone here is eager to meet you and learn from you *about dance in South Africa*"⁷.

Based on the variety and number of Boyzie Cekwana's supporters, as well as this researcher's own first-hand experience of Cēkwāna's on- and off-stage personality, there can be little doubt as to the creative talent and dynamic ability that this young adult possesses; nevertheless, there are agendas at play in the appreciation of his black male dancing body that involve much more than the inevitable revelation of a hidden artistic talent. Visibility does not immediately or necessarily imply viability. *How* one is made visible, or how one is *visualised* when visible, are processes of meaning-construction and value-association that require rigorous analysis.

Boyzie Cekwana, the performance artist, is especially revered and promoted because for many he stands as an affirmation of a black South African's ability to overcome obstacles of racial inequality and social hardship. "Helsinki is a long way, in every sense, from Soweto where this township urchin spent his spare time....", states journalist Ingrid Shevlin. Well-known and established dance critic Adrienne Sichel makes repeated references - when discussing Cekwana's choreographic and performance skills - to his township upbringing: she believes that Soweto is currently "at the cutting edge of South African dance"⁸. It is stated - and celebrated - that as an individual he was inhibited by the period of political turmoil and social transformation in which he lived. It is concluded - and lauded - that prior to his rise to fame as a dancer and choreographer, he faced extremely disempowering and challenging factors.

⁷ Ballantyne 1995a.

⁸ Sichel 1995a.

To be cast in the lead in A Midsummer Night's Dream and Les Nuits D'Ete in the same season, is a testimony to the talent of a dancer who's *risen against considerable odds*.⁹

The current affording of such widespread visibility to Boyzie Cekwana's black male body - "blacks" and "males" both traditionally associated with marginalisation in the classical as well as contemporary dance worlds - seems to reflect South Africa's "successful" transition from an elitist and exclusionary framework of appreciation, to an all-inclusive one. The placing of Cekwana's *performing* body on such widespread display is believed to remedy his own *social* obscurity and disempowerment¹⁰; this public promotion also promises the same granting of status to other previously unacknowledged bodies.

Inherent in the way that individuals are presenting and promoting Cekwana, is a recognition that the main tool of expression in dance, the human body, is of all possible artistic instruments the least removable from the associations of experience¹¹. Essentially, the experiences of the body are biological, social, personal, psychological, animal, mineral, vegetable, sexual¹², and are multiplicitous and shifting, rather than static and simple. In the context of performance, the dancing body becomes a potential site of value de- or re-construction of *any one*, or all, of the experiential layers available to the human being. Journalists, critics and sponsors, while acknowledging this potential, tend to promote Boyzie Cekwana as a nationally-applicable Image, a unitary Phenomenon, that best represents our new state-ideology of "democracy" because of *specific* social experiences attached to his ethnic body. Benefactors tend to *select* only certain aspects of his experiential body to mediate as "artistic" and "innovative". It appears

⁹ Television insert, "Dream a little dream with Boyzie Cekwana", Front Row, M-Net, November 1995.

¹⁰ Sanchez-Colberg 1993:151.

¹¹ New York dance critic John Martin, is quoted in Hanna [1988:151] as having made this observation of the dancing body as far back as 1936.

¹² Sanchez-Colberg [1993:157] refers to the body as this collection of multidimensional sites.

that the association of Cekwana's talented black body with enforced township living, and concomitant with this continual exposure to violence, injustice and repression, guarantees some degree of artistic acclaim in contemporary South Africa. Cekwana is being validated as an *epitome* of the "ability and resilience of township talent to rise to the challenge of overcoming apartheid-created hurdles"¹³ when his position in the contemporary dance world actually holds a very ambiguous position in respect to both his "black" and "male" body.

Since ambiguity was always the enemy of apartheid, to what extent does the public's current mode of appreciating the performing body truly reflect South Africa's changed way of perceiving the world? Despite the obvious rearranging of surface details of colour and gender, to what extent are the deep-seated ideological structures governing the imaging of these superficial presentations being challenged? In 1994, Gary Younge, a journalist for the Weekly Mail & Guardian, challenged South Africa's "new democracy" by asserting that: "Images from the dying era still adorn the institution."¹⁴ For Younge, these staid and prejudicial images were those of racism; democracy involved nothing more than the donning of a lavishly painted mask to cover up the cracks of institutionalised division and ethnic derision still being maintained. This has similar resonances for an analysis of the black *male* dancing body: the cosmetic introduction of male dancers into the dance world does not change perceptions about what it means to be masculine or feminine. As the kernel of this analysis is unravelled, it will be discovered that certain practices surrounding the production, presentation and appreciation of dance in this country still reflect the very patriarchal power relationships which govern South African societies - both black and white - and that still exert a prejudicial influence on these structures.

¹³ Anon., City Press, 12 March 1995.

¹⁴ Younge's article is forebodingly entitled "Democracy's here, but racism's alive and well", Weekly Mail & Guardian, May 6 -12 1994.

So as we embark on an excavation of Boyzie Cekwana's body from the particular social and performance firmament from which it has been nurtured, the more evident it will become that the decade of transformation leading up to South Africa's first 'free-and-fair' elections, would ultimately provide a doorway for Boyzie and his specifically *black male* dancing body to slip through into the realm of professional performance, without causing too many ideological ripples. The aim of the expedition is not to prove that Boyzie Cekwana's present visibility is solely a poor case of affirmative action: as already asserted, his talent as a performer and choreographer is unmistakable. Rather, it aims to uncover the multitude of factors exerting an influence over the dancing body; and more importantly, to suggest a multitude of potential frameworks for perceiving and appreciating the dancing body. It is the role of scholarly endeavours, states Steadman, to draw apart the veils of prejudice and elitism surrounding South African theatrical history¹⁵. Images of dance in South Africa are fraught with anomalies and idiosyncrasies¹⁶ which need to be excavated. Before we can plunge into a debate on the *contemporary* dancing body, and to what extent present perceptions are in fact a (re-)righting of the past, it is necessary for the researcher to turn back and perform her own (re-)writing of the past.

Remembering apartheid: unmaking the monolith

Contemporary studies on educational and epistemological frameworks reveal how apartheid was informed by a framework of knowledge that projected and disseminated the particular style and status of whites as being a "norm" divined by providence¹⁷. White colonizers of South Africa, brought with them a modernist social theory borne of the periods of enlightenment and progress experienced in Europe: amongst the various modes of experience integral to human existence, the capacity for *reason* came to be seen as the only means towards social development and cultural civilisation.

¹⁵ Steadman 1985:96.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Nkomo c1991:310.

Reason was established as an autonomous and sovereign activity functioning apart from, and capable of controlling, the impurities and flaws of the body and of nature¹⁸. The tunnel vision offered by this Cyclops of reason necessarily resulted in images existing on the periphery remaining unseen and therefore unvalidated. With time, the autonomy of this one-eyed giant was increasingly promoted as universally applicable and therefore superior: alternative voices accepted their muteness, different bodies believed their invisibility, and dissimilar feelings receded into numbness. What was essentially a *particular* mode of *selective* perception, was submerged into all social activities as inevitable and unchanging, including the "seeing" practices of theatre. In this way, says Gaylord, process gets entrenched as structure:

Many, if not most, rules are implicit, and, if part of a theatrical tradition, will be taken for granted and *remain largely out of awareness unless violated*.¹⁹

Violations of the traditional, deviations from the norm, contortions of the everyday are necessary to again make *particular*, *subjective* and *transient* those one-eyed experiences which have been granted *universal*, *objective* and *permanent* status. In a Foucault-ian sense, the scrutiny of localised practices of knowledge production may reveal the locus of power active within the surrounding macrocontext²⁰.

The "seeing place" of theatre in South Africa is one such local site of knowledge creation and dissemination that has had its perceptive autonomy interrogated. Research by Robert Kavanagh (1985), Martin Orkin (1991), David Coplan (1977), Temple Hauptfleisch (1988) and Ian Steadman (1985) analyses the symbols of action and images of physicality that began to prevail in local performances from the 1950's onwards. By recognising performance modes as repetitions of the cultural body²¹, practitioners during

¹⁸ Seidler 1995:19.

¹⁹ Gaylord c1982:137.

²⁰ Harvey 1989:43

²¹ Birringer 1991:162.

this time, Athol Fugard especially, excavated the implicit locus of power of an apartheid society and how it came to have an effect on the *racially* colonized body.

The central argument is that ethnic ideologies construe images of a natural, immutable, primordial *ideal*, thus conveying a sense of stability, security and self-esteem, but behind this essential 'facade' there is always room for multiple meanings and negotiation.²²

"Representing" the black body in performance did not mean "repeatedly showing" the black body as it was understood in the "facade" of dominant, "everyday" social practises; *re-presenting* it came to mean "*alternatively constructing*" it according to modes of perception peripheral or subversive to the established ideals²³. By challenging existing theatrical traditions governing the performing body, as a pre-conceived and -constructed reality, practitioners were symbolically challenging a social body that was defined within the narrow parameters of constructed myths entrenching racial inferiority, biological inevitability and ethnic division.

Athol Fugard is mentioned as notable amongst others²⁴ because he began to utilise workshopping and improvisation as a means to create plays that were grounded not just thematically (content) but physically (form) in the experiences of the majority of people. The "everyday" images that were exhumed through these alternate processes of body construction were very different to those communicated as "ordinary" and "normal" by dominant social perceptions. An autobiographical look at the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town suggests how South African audiences by the 1970's were being treated to new physicalities that required new perceptions:

²² Arkin 1994:57.

²³ Steadman 1985:500.

²⁴ *Ibid.*:88. Steadman draws attention to the fact that other practitioners were also involved in this process of theatrical experimentation, but that it is Fugard that was *selected* to "herald" this avante-garde.

The days of conversational acting and familiar plots were over. The middle-class deities of cleanliness and respectability were crumbling²⁵.

Instead of conforming to literal character representations, naturalistic sets and conclusive narratives, performers encouraged their own bodies to become sites of action, imagination and transformation. Flexing the individual's muscles and mind into multiple possible images became symbolic of negotiating the colonized body away from the facade of a stable and inevitable reality.

The research done on these theatre practices provides invaluable insight into the potential relationship existing between art and society, the individual and the ideal. In this case, revelation and recognition of the particular led to transparency and transformation of the general²⁶. The researcher seeking the same rigorous criticisms of the specifically dancing body in South Africa, however, will find that information is scarce; revealing arguments such as these are grounded in the general realm of theatre studies rather than in the separate discipline of dance.

Re-searching the dancing body

Historically, according to the "reasonable" constructs of civilisation and culture governing South African society, the black dancing body could not be aesthetically pleasing because of its proximity to, and visible presentation of, natural bodily functions. The black dancing body that colonialists perceived was traditionally used as a tool of physical expression in courtship rituals and life-cycle celebrations - birth, puberty, pregnancy, death - and to this end was often sensually explicit or physically intimate in its presentation. According to the separatist philosophies that nurtured

²⁵ Barrow and Williams-Short 1987:51.

²⁶ Adrienne Sichel in an article entitled "Victim art or cultural weapon?" (Star, 23 March, 1995) draws attention to the fact that President Mandela himself has publicly recognised protest theatre as bringing down Apartheid.

apartheid, the body is governed by the laws of nature, laws that threaten the rational path to civilisation; anything that had close associations with this realm of experience was "uncivilised, if not dirty"²⁷. Although certainly not invisible, the black dancing body was perceived as unviable and was continually silenced, discounted. It is armed with such an awareness that the contemporary researcher should approach an analysis of images of the *black dancing* body. Despite the country's current "democracy", data on the specifically dancing body is still submerged in modes of social theory that embody the selective and static perceptions of South Africa's historically dominant ideology. What resource material is accessed, as well as how it is subsequently utilised and interpreted, is an essential responsibility for the researcher.

The modes of dance appreciation that are available to the South African dance researcher - personal observation, critical analysis, photograph, video footage, sociological survey, anthropological study - must be recognised as particular forms of knowledge creation and dissemination with their own perceptual framework (and potential bias). While images of the white dancing body abound in books and journals dedicated to discussing aesthetic standards and performance criteria, images of the black dancing body are predominantly situated in anthropological and sociological studies, referring more often than not to its community-orientation and social containment. While acknowledging the relevance and importance of anthropological and sociological sites of information, our particular topic of inquiry is situated more specifically within the realm of professional performance, and as such alternative sources of information need also to be accessed. Local theatre journals and magazines provide essential visual coverage and aesthetic criticism of the dancing body in performance, spanning the last two or three decades. Scenaria periodicals especially cover the origins and development of South African Contemporary dance; however, this particular site of information has often been challenged by dance practitioners as having a Eurocentric bias and elitist appreciation.

²⁷ Seidler 1995:21.

Despite the potential prejudices inherent to various secondary modes of dance re-presentation, the researcher becomes dependent on them because of their permanence, especially when dealing with dance in an historical setting. The researcher must then temper this dependence with debate, continually moving in and between the various sources of knowledge dissemination available.

In South Africa, where the disciplines operate to a great extent as closed systems, not only is the essential dynamic and dialectical interaction undermined, in fact such division actually serves a positive function for apartheid.²⁸

For instance, essential for the researcher to recognise is that sounding out for data on black performers in the specific discipline of dance, works against the very historical nature of the black dancing body in South Africa; this research method has a potential leaning towards apartheid through its search for apart-ness. Dance, song and drama - treated as distinct and autonomous artistic disciplines in South Africa's dominant theatrical traditions - are considered inseparable forms of expression in traditional African rituals; this organically hybrid form has subsequently been absorbed into, and presented in, new urban performance contexts²⁹. Sifting through commentaries on theatre performances in general might offer some details of the black dancing body as a revelation of exploitation. In productions by the Serpent players, Workshop '71, and the Junction Avenue Theatre Company for instance, there was a marked increase in the use of black performers inexperienced in the professional field³⁰. Drawing from their actual lived experiences, these "everyday" people brought various socially-integral dance forms into rehearsals and performances. In the increasing promotion of their own ethnically viable cultural expressions, these performances tended towards a popular and accessible hybrid style where dance was only one

²⁸ Nkomo c1991:312.

²⁹ Glasser 1990; Coplan 1977; Larlham 1986.

³⁰ Holloway 1993.

element of physical expression, among many others, used to "symbolically enact different forms of exploitation"³¹.

The notion of choosing dramatic performance as a profession remained a novel idea for most blacks until the 1950's³², when actors like John Kani and Winston Ntshona entered the field of professional theatre and set themselves up as icons and role-models for a future generation of black actors. Unfortunately, the same can not be said for black dancers and choreographers, especially males in the field of ballet. Boyzie Cekwana's present visibility and viability is as a full-time professional artist, specialising in the realm of dance performance: the lack of material surrounding what is obviously at present considered an extremely viable career option for a black male in itself points to possible shifts in appreciation that have occurred. But of course, this scarcity of material still leaves us with very little answered as to *why* these shifts may have occurred. What context has made Boyzie Cekwana's particular "dance rite for the times"³³ now, that wasn't right before? What has caused, and allowed, the shifts surrounding current perceptions of the black male, as dancer and choreographer, to occur? Hauptfleisch challenges cultural development as such:

What one wants to look at of course are all the socio-economic, -political, -cultural and other factors which have created the *context* and have occasioned the shifts.³⁴

Ellen Hellman, in her descriptions of a Johannesburg slum-yard, perceives certain transitions in African cultural life to be an inevitable response to urban *economic* necessity: "The African is straining onward in an attempt to satisfy his ever-increasing needs in the way of food, clothing and furniture"³⁵. Dominant cultural expressions too are shown to be

³¹ Holloway 1993.

³² Erlmann 1991:402.

³³ Sichel 1995a.

³⁴ Hauptfleisch 1988:61.

³⁵ Hellman c1960:69.

continually evolving, through interactions with sub-cultures or alternate expressions³⁶. While artistic assimilation and integration are processes of organic development, especially in a multicultural environment such as South Africa, what Hauptfleisch also points to are those evolutionary interactions that are more conscious attempts at syncretism. It is the interplay between inevitable shifts, and those of a more determined nature, that are of interest in our current study on the production and appreciation of the black dancing body. As Hanna argues:

An individual learns dance on the bases of innate capabilities *plus* social interaction³⁷.

In the South African urban environment of capitalism and progress, specific ecological interactions may be encouraged, if not enforced, to ensure the survival of its inhabitants.

The Ethics in Aesthetics

Analyses of the non-artistic processes that may affect the production, presentation and appreciation of the dancing body in South Africa are few and far between. The interest that has been shown by certain practitioners concerning the social organisation of dance is accessible through short articles in journals and periodicals; but very little is actually written locally on the material processes that surround, for instance, a professional dance company such as the one that Cekwana belongs to. The local researcher must substantiate such an enquiry with insights gleaned from international readings. The phenomenological studies offered by Kamerman and Martorella (et al., c1982) provide interesting access points to understanding how internal (aesthetic) and external (cultural, political, economic, historical) organisational structures may affect the process of rationalisation surrounding professional performances. External influences may include the personal 'eccentricities' and traits of individual artists; and the choices of

³⁶ Hauptfleisch 1988:61.

³⁷ Hanna 1988:28.

audiences, benefactors, artistic organisations, critics, media and national bodies who "judge between alternative styles and decide - for the moment and in the long run - which will prevail in performance"³⁸. Intrinsically connected to suggestions of *how* certain physical traits and dance styles get chosen above and beyond others is the question of *why*.

Recently published biographies and autobiographies on dancers such as Rudolf Nureyev (Stuart 1995), Mikhail Baryshnikov (Aria 1989) and Gelsey Kirkland (Kirkland 1988) provide insight into the nature and function of artistic choices that occurred during their own participation in the specific discipline of ballet. What these books suggest is that audiences and the media see only what is offered in performance: they remain ignorant to the politics of manipulation and abuse that may happen behind-the-scenes in order to create the very images that they so readily accept under the guise of aesthetic integrity and viability.

What these books further suggest is that manipulation occurs as a result of socio-economic factors, but more seriously, because of the autocracy of narcissistic choreographers. Exerting an equally strong influence on the maintenance of artistic trends are external participants. Because images in the dance world tend to be fleeting, immediate and final, says Bensman, audiences tend to place "premiums upon the presence, projective ability or star quality of the performer"³⁹; individual or mass benefactors, audience members and company conglomerates, search for the one image that will fulfil their self-centred ideas about morality, financial viability, cultural hereditary or sexual fantasy. Contortionism, acrobatic effects, and distorted gender-identities are depicted as increasingly common demands in contemporary societies⁴⁰ by these personal accounts. These biographies focus specifically on balletic practices, but are pertinent to our study for two reasons. Firstly, classical ballet and contemporary dance in

³⁸ Kamerman c1983:32.

³⁹ Ibid.:8.

⁴⁰ Guerrier 1993.

South Africa tend often to share the same platforms of presentation and appreciation, despite their very different origins and motives⁴¹. Secondly, Boyzie Cekwana's body is as much acclaimed in the field of classical ballet as in more contemporary dance forms: it is essential for the researcher to understand the possible processes of manipulation behind both disciplines.

The notion of gender-construction and -contortion evidenced in these books brings us to another obstacle facing the South African dance researcher: the revelation and transformation of exploited bodies *locally* has tended to focus on ethnic particularity. Performance studies that discuss the processes governing the socialisation of the South African body, do so predominantly in terms of nationality, race and class, paying less attention to the specific socialisation processes aligned to *gender-production* in this country. South African theatre practitioners in the past, as dance practitioners do now⁴², celebrated the fact that "every conceivable aspect of township life could be dragged across the stage", that playwrights and actors could "bask in the footlights at night and probably man the factories by day"⁴³. Sylvia Vollenhoven recalls that during the first few years of the Baxter Theatre in Cape Town opening its multiracial doors, there were productions where the entire cast virtually came straight off a building site⁴⁴. Yet, as the discussions in chapter two will reveal, this "everyday" township life that was being presented in performance as democratic because ethnically-viable, had actually absorbed gender-specific and hierarchical practices encouraged by experiences in factories and building sites. Racial prejudice is one particular site of bodily repression in the modern society, but *is part of an ideological framework of perception and production that governs the body in all of its activities*. Feminist theories are insightful in this respect; their analyses lead to a revelation of the nature of prejudice

⁴¹ This topic will be discussed further in chapters three and four, making reference to the "autonomous" modes of perception used by contemporary audience members and critics alike.

⁴² This recalls earlier references to the way that newspapers appreciate Cekwana as "Soweto's Boyzie", a "township urchin" with "township talent".

⁴³ Barrow and Williams-Short 1987:95.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

which has repercussions for every single individual in South Africa. They highlight that the *processes* used to legitimise *gender inequality* on a universal scale, share the same rationalisation as those used in South Africa to legitimise *racial inequality*. William Doty sums it up as such:

Too frequently what are taken to be biological givens are charted, over-layered with recent social values, and the end product is then treated as having been "natural" or "god-given" from the start.⁴⁵

Just as the dominant modes of perception governing human experience in apartheid South Africa tended to apply universal truths, globally-applicable images, eternally definitive values to particular ethnic phenomena, so have they done to specific sexual phenomena. Foreign writers such as Hanna (1988) and Thomas (et al., 1993) offer paradigms that uncover the hidden agendas - the true motivations - behind the creation and promotion of apparently inevitable and 'naturally' fashionable images of the *social* body, by excavating images of the *dancing* body. They draw attention to how the dancing body at certain times in certain societies has been used to reinforce socially constructed beliefs and taboos about physicality and sexuality. The questions they pose include: who is it that gets to perform and present what type of movements on stage?⁴⁶; why is it that certain styles of dance movement have gained more support from practitioners, critics and sponsors?⁴⁷; how does this coincide with the way in which audiences perceive and appreciate - grant more status to - individual dancers and dance styles?⁴⁸ The most crucial argument that these researchers forward is the need for any study on the constructed visibility of the performing body to be situated within the specific ecological environment in which those performance images function⁴⁹.

⁴⁵ Doty 1993:17.

⁴⁶ Sanchez-Colberg c1993.

⁴⁷ Novack c1993.

⁴⁸ Copeland c1993; Hanna 1979.

⁴⁹ Hanna 1979:24.

So our preparatory excursion returns us to the local hero of our story: Boyzie Cekwana and his black male dancing body in a decade of democracy. Originally, apartheid allowed two ethnic teams of players - black and white - to dominate the game competing for acceptable images of the body. Political correctness tended to be the more simple selection of supporting either those playing left, or those playing right. Democracy, rather than simplifying the game, increases the number of participating teams, each of which have their own perceptions of the body that they wish to endorse, or to enforce, in order to satisfy their own specific, often hidden, agenda. The giant of apartheid discourse has been replaced by a goliath of multinational media. Investors internationally and locally need archetypal mascots that will cost-efficiently reflect the mass of new social, political, economic and cultural trends in existence, and so provide a drawing card for the largest crowd of consuming spectators.

The Playhouse Dance company, for which Boyzie Cekwana is presently resident choreographer, has equally been affected by South Africa's new social freedom. They have shifted their sources of financial support and aesthetic guidance from state-controlled institutions, to independent benefactors and audience response. The motivating factors behind the production, presentation and appreciation of images on-stage in the latter, are just as politically-bound as in the former. Boyzie Cekwana's present visibility is as much a product of selective perception and constructed promotion as was his invisibility under the Cyclops of apartheid, and it is on this selectivity that we will focus our attention.

This thesis hopes to excavate the implicit rules active in our post-apartheid South African society, by analysing one local element of physical rationalisation - gender - as presented in one specific context - contemporary dance - by one particular human body - award-winning young choreographer, Boyzie Cekwana, "an inspiration for dance in the new South Africa"⁵⁰. The methodological approach opted for attempts to situate itself

⁵⁰ Ballantyne commenting on Cekwana's Kude Nomfula, 1995b.

firmly within South Africa's current climate of discovery and debate. Dance is an essentially ephemeral mode of expression: although descriptions of it may be stored in the permanent vocabulary of words, or the frozen image of the camera, dance essentially communicates via fleeting symbols and flickering signs experienced first-hand; included, therefore, in the sites of dance appreciation to be accessed by the researcher, is the author's own subjective observations and interpretations of the black male dancing body, based on years of participation in, and reflection on, various dance practices and events, from classical ballet, modern and contemporary dance, to mime and physical theatre. Personal observations of the black male dancing body are experience-based and site-specific: individual interaction with, and appreciation of, the black dancer has mainly been through classes and performances offered in a predominantly European manner. To diminish the potential bias of a self-regulating and enclosed system of thought, to widen the channels of debate in which the black male dancer is understood and appreciated, a comparative analysis that utilise interacting resources from multiple disciplines is opted for.

Rather than attempt to present a life history of Boyzie Cekwana, specific events will be selected for their relevance to this area of analysis. Descriptions of these are taken predominantly from personal interviews held with Cekwana in Durban, August 1995; additional details are supplied by secondary sources, namely articles and reviews by journalists and critics written predominantly in the year of Cekwana's award. It has been noted that accumulating historical "facts" and childhood information through the personal remembrances of an adult individual, has its own perceptual slant and recreated selectivity. Nevertheless, Cekwana's recollections provide essential resource material to access the nature of the private human being, who may experience things differently to the social personality.

The following chapter will look at particular "everyday" events of Cekwana's life until 1986, when he first entered the realm of professional dance training; the focus will be on what a Soweto upbringing might have

involved for a black male child. This selected personal background will continually be situated within the surrounding macrocontext of the time, and used as an access point for general discussions on the black male dancing body. General information will be drawn from anthropological, historical and sociological readings, in an attempt to contextualise the "black male dancing body in transition"; this will also add substance to Cekwana's otherwise private recalls of township experiences. This analysis will provide a basis from which to assess to what degree Cekwana has chosen to utilise and/or question his own myriad of personal physical experiences, as influenced, if not constructed, by an actual and specific ecological context.

Chapter Three will resume the discussion on Cekwana, but predominantly from 1986 until the present; attention will be drawn to how the male dancing body (both black and white) during this time period was being perceived locally *and* internationally, taking into account, as Erlmann states, "the reality of global cultural evolution where culture contact and homogenisation are all pervasive rather than exceptions"⁵¹.

Having expounded on the nature of Boyzie Cekwana's dancing body as an ambiguous and complex mass of constructed and shifting realities in the following two chapters, the final chapter can then assess to what degree he chooses, or is able, to make transparent these selected processes of perception and re-presentation to the audience; Cekwana's two commissioned works, Still and Kude Nomfula, will be analysed paying specific attention to certain behind-the-scenes processes that took place, and whether these are acknowledged and validated by critical perceptions of the final products. This chapter will conclude by suggesting possible alternative relationships to be practised between the dancer/choreographer, a dance/performance, and the audience/critic as South Africa attempts to move towards an essentially hegemonic-free social experience.

⁵¹ Erlmann 1991:16.

Chapter 2 CULTURAL CROSSOVERS: LIFE IN SOWETO

"To Come This Far From Obscurity"¹

Boyzie Cekwana² and his twin sister were the last children to be born into a family of nine. He was born and raised in Soweto, so never experienced a traditional rural African lifestyle. He does remember being made aware of the routines and disciplines demanded by township communal living: as the youngest, Boyzie and his sister were required to "keep in their place"; this meant performing certain tasks and chores around the house, attracting as little attention to themselves as possible³. It is perhaps this childhood memory that reveals the origins of a personality that has been described by journalists as modest and soft-spoken. And it is this "low-key", "introvert" personality that would later impress international ballet choreographer Jean Paul Comelin⁴. Boyzie's mother brought the entire family up single-handedly, so it is her that he remembers as the dominant adult figure in his youth.

Townships, like the one that Cekwana stayed in for most of his childhood, are monuments to apartheid's nationally-enforced policy of separatist living. When Sophiatown was razed to the ground, the majority of inhabitants were dis-located to Soweto⁵ which has been described by some black writers as the epitome of "controlled, isolated, monotonous" black urban living⁶. Soweto, like other townships, aimed at entrenching ethnic division⁷, and isolated blacks from experiencing the technological

¹ Boyzie Cekwana, in interview with Ingrid Shevlin, discussing how he felt after receiving a standing ovation for his work in Helsinki.

² I will refer to Boyzie on a first-name basis to indicate when autobiographical information is being cited, and use his second name, Cekwana, to indicate my own interpretations and information provided by other sources.

³ Personal interview 1995.

⁴ Television insert, "Dream a little dream with Boyzie Cekwana", Front Row, M-Net, November 1995.

⁵ Steadman 1985:83.

⁶ Hart 1984:100.

⁷ Steadman 1985:83.

convenience and suburban luxury that was the norm in the surrounding rich white areas. Still, Soweto was close enough to the industrial heart of the country - Johannesburg and the Witwatersrand gold mines - to absorb the cultures attached to city living. As township children in the 1970's, Cekwana and his friends lived with an increasing knowledge of the fashions and fads of local and international urban environments via the various forms of media available to them. Boyzie recalls how the young boys would gather on street corners, talk about soccer and girls, or the latest music video that they had seen⁸. The earliest styles of dance experienced by Boyzie were spontaneous performances of township jive and gumboot dancing to popular music; according to Coplan, these forms of physical expression were extremely fashionable in the townships during the 1970's and 1980's⁹. Forms of black dance that originated from rural, tribal communities were present in urban areas, but for many newcomers to the city and inhabitants of the townships, these modes of physical expression were no longer related to the ecological dynamics in which they functioned. And this was important for people who perceived dance to be an integral part of their societal functioning. "Traditional" dances, preserved and reproduced by white benefactors, were seen as attempts to diminish the potential for cultural (re-)orientation and social (re-)development which a shifting physical expression could offer the black body. Boyzie experienced these "traditional" African dances in much the same way that any paying tourist audience might: as a movement 'display', something to watch, but certainly not to participate in. The "jiving" that Cekwana and his peers responded to were dance styles aligned to a *transitional* culture: their compositions were essentially heterogeneous, integrating the experiences of new labour and residential environments with traditional forms of physical expression. Coplan explains their origins of creation as the desire of urban black

⁸ Sociological journals, such as the African Studies 1990/1 series, have several relevant articles describing the interaction between urban and rural elements in the townships; sociologists point out that cinemas, discotheques and football fields, amongst other recreational facilities, were available to urban residents.

⁹ Coplan [1985] cited by Glasser 1990:9.

Africans "to *modernise* by absorbing new cultural elements within a *familiar* structure"¹⁰. It is to this familiar structure of traditional dance forms that we turn. What were these elements of the former that were retained and perceived as still suited to the ecological environment of the latter? Why were certain traditional steps and dynamics absorbed into politically and stylistically progressive forms of physical expression? This very telling aspect of studying the black dancing body in a state of transition, is an analysis *not* of what changed, but what *remained the same*.

The more traditional tribal forms of dance display, and the popular or recreational urban forms - despite their very different contexts of origin - shared a common denominator: they encouraged very rigid divisions between the sexes. The reasons for this will be discussed hereafter. Although Cekwana may not have been privy to the original processes of creation of traditional or even popular urban dance forms, a knowledge of the gender-roles implicit in their structures is relevant to our study for the following reasons. In chapter two Cekwana's introduction into the world of Contemporary dance will be discussed: this was a form of theatre dance that came to provide a site of heterogeneous composition for practitioners, drawing from all modes of "*everyday*" South African physical expression and consciously presenting them in theatre performances. Boyzie himself has stated that his inspiration for choreographic creation comes from "day-to-day happenings"¹¹. As we noted in the introduction, the everyday does not imply the inevitable. In the words of performance theorist Alan Read:

The everyday is at once the most habitual and demanding dimension of life which theatre has most responsibility to.¹²

This implies much more than just a responsibility to represent it. Both traditional and urban dance forms, as noted in the introduction, may

¹⁰ Coplan 1985:107.

¹¹ D'Arts interview, Dec 1994 - Jan 1995.

¹² Read 1994:103.

have been fused into "protest" performances that challenged cultural constructions of the everyday in terms of *ethnicity*; but did these theatrical performances also question, re-assess and re-present the gender-constructions implicit in the everyday? Aligned then to the absorption and utilisation of body images from ethnically-relevant arenas such as pantsula, township jive, isicatamiya, tribal dancing, gumboot dancing, jazz, and others into contemporary dance performances, is the question of acknowledgement: did practitioners in the field of contemporary dance, like tourist audiences, remain ignorant to the socially specific gender-constructions inherent in these particular dance forms? To what extent were these images of the body merely absorbed and re-presented (transposed rather than transformed), by Cekwana in his recreational dance practices and contemporary dance training? These questions can only be confronted once we look at what some of these images were and the different contexts in which they were appreciated. Although we move away from our particular focus on the *individual* Boyzie Cekwana, this brief socio-historical excursion will lead us back to the urban environment and to the specific modes of performance with which he did interact.

Dance and duty: performing the right role

The gender-distinct movement activities evident in both traditional and urban dance forms reflects the fact that both environments encourage, if not entrench, gender-specific labour and recreational practices¹³; males and females are affiliated to very different "occupational cultures" based both on biological givens and their associated sociological appreciation¹⁴.

¹³ Sithole [c1979] asserts this labour division according to sex as a basis for understanding the particular form that traditional Zulu Ngoma music/dance takes.

¹⁴ Hambly (1926) and Dupire (1973) suggest this in a historical and anthropological context; Beinhart (1991) and Argyle (1991) then provide further discussion on the maintenance of tribal masculine (and feminine) attachments in urban areas.

The method of dancing of the women differs greatly from that of the men. Their movements are sinuous and slow, with their arms moving in greater measure than their feet. The men, on the other hand, are full of action, and while they keep time to the music, their steps and motions are vigorous, consisting of jumps and jerks and twistings of the body, as if they were engaged with shield and sword in deadly combat.¹⁵

Anthropologist Hambly provides this description of a particular tribal dance that he experienced on his excursions into Africa during the 1920's. Aligned to their perceptions of the movements, anthropologists such as this attempted to reveal the specific social processes behind the presented creation of the dancing bodies. The different energy expenditure, spatial mobility, utilisation of body parts and attire, were shown to reveal very particular social identities aligned to both sexes. The female dancing body concentrated on qualities of spatial domesticity, physical decorum, energy reservedness and sensuality as a rehearsal for the "occupational" role that she had been appointed in society. The female possesses a biologically inevitable child-bearing capacity; as such, she is perceived as the caretaker of the human race. Hambly even provides a "scientific" description for the predominantly abdominal dancing that tribal women perform: the pelvis is enlarged, and the internal child-bearing organs massaged and stimulated, by a concentration on hip-gyrating dance movements¹⁶; the ritual performance acts as a biological assistant, and a physical rehearsal, for future maternal potential. The females "natural" occupation as childbearer - one that essentially results only in *temporary* physical restraints - often becomes associated with permanent and inevitable immobility and prudence; even if a particular woman at a specific stage is not limited by pregnancy, she is still socially affiliated to this biological inevitability and expected to conform to its (potential) restrictions. It is in conforming to the social attributes attached to the biological necessities of the body that the woman in this community is granted status: Tyrell suggests in her studies on Tribal Peoples of Southern Africa that the "*pride* of a woman is in her virginity, her marriage and her

¹⁵ Hambly 1926:105.

¹⁶ Ibid.:107.

fruitfulness"¹⁷. In another commentary on women in pastoral societies, anthropologist Dupire suggests an alternative to this view of virginity; her experience reveals that some tribes do *not* attach moral significance to virginity - in fact, the woman is expected to be an experienced lover at the time of marriage¹⁸. Nevertheless, even in this fairly sexually "independent" environment, the female is allocated a husband-to-be from a childhood age, she is expected to present herself *always* with modesty and decorum in his presence, and she is trained as a little girl - through games and dances that "are a direct imitation of the work done by women"¹⁹ - as to what household tasks she will be expected to perform when finally she does marry and give birth. Dupire argues that like the girls, boys in tribal communities learn from a very early age what type of task will be their duty to perform: their games usually entail some form of physical exercise, and they fast get used to enjoying spatial freedom and energetic release through chasing each other, playing leapfrog or building mud houses out in the open²⁰. Men, not hindered by the physical limitations of pregnancy, assume responsibility for the more physically dangerous, outwardly energetic but community-essential occupational activities; the power, force, speed, and endurance attached to these male social roles is developed and expressed through formalised mass movements that served as rehearsals for battle, for "inciting men to action, [sic] and summoning power"²¹. Also, it is through the rituals of energetic and endurance-testing dance, says Hambly, that the biological ability of the male to perform sexually is tested²². It is interesting to note that in the actual social environment in which these distinct roles functioned, variable identities were occasionally embodied. A Zulu male interviewed by Larlham tells how women used to dance the more aggressive war dances when men were away; he even goes on to describe a telling anecdote of how in an historical battle, it was the women - refusing to retreat in the face of defeat -

¹⁷ Tyrell 1968:introduction.

¹⁸ Dupire 1973:303.

¹⁹ Ibid.:299.

²⁰ Ibid.:300.

²¹ Larlham 1986:143.

²² Hambly 1926:107.

that danced their war dance with such force that the enemy ran off²³! If anything, this story points to how random the gender-distinctions in traditional black dancing (and society) potentially are²⁴. The anthropological example used is also but one example among many of different types of dance that are traditionally used to identify and reinforce particular social roles according to the specific functions being enacted - such as at initiations, weddings, hunting or courtship ceremonies. Nevertheless, contemporary South Africa has come to interact with, and understand, this black dancing body in a "performance" context very different to that in which it was originally perceived and appreciated. And it is the "one-eyed" performance spaces into which traditional rural or tribal dance forms were ultimately drawn, that concentrated on the body as a monolithic entity responding to codified rules of conduct, rather than as a multiplicitous mass responding to shifting contexts of experience.

The Politics of Perception²⁵: the All-Seeing Eye

South African society has been heavily influenced by the inherited ideals of long-standing religious traditions²⁶: "And God looked upon the earth, and, behold it was corrupt; for all flesh had corrupted his way upon the earth"²⁷. In order to satisfy the word of God, South African colonisers took it upon themselves to reject as sinful and base, any public sensual indulgence of the body. The modern world of progress and civilisation presented South Africans, as it had Europeans, with the (impossible) ideal of

²³ Larlham 1986:183.

²⁴ This related incident has interesting parallels with what happened in countries like America during the world wars: while men were away at war, women were moved into the areas of activity - industrial manufacturing of machines and weapons - usually associated with the masculine; as soon as their services were no longer needed - when men returned and resumed their productive roles - women were returned to domesticity.

²⁵ Roger Copeland [in Sayre 1989:109] uses this term to describe the mode of production and presentation used by American choreographer Merce Cunningham, who challenges the autonomy of all individuals involved in the artistic process. Further discussions in chapter four.

²⁶ Glasser 1990:9.

²⁷ Genesis 6:12.

acting on reason alone, rather on "natural" sexual feelings²⁸. It is for these "traditional" or "historically correct" reasons that the tribal dancing body was considered so threatening to colonial forces of cultural advancement. The qualities believed to exemplify the "civilised" body, such as acting rationally and with foresight, exercising reticence over the self, emotions, fear and immediate bodily satisfaction, and being able to follow one's own mind²⁹, were qualities that the black African did not reflect in its dancing styles. Rather, their dancing was perceived as irrational and spontaneous behaviour, it was seen to promote extreme emotionalism, sensuality, and being swept away by instinct. In the picture-perfect frame of European perceptual traditions the black dancing body disrupted predetermined harmonies: tones were too dark, textures unrefined, movements too diverse, and shapes indistinct. According to the rules of perception implicit in this "one-eyed" gaze, being perceived as *different* immediately relegated one to being seen as *inferior*; the statically framed, pre-determined, mode of understanding practised by the colonialist as social body, was concretised, validated and encouraged in the practices surrounding perceptions of the performing body. The proscenium arch theatres that now frame most of our contemporary dance performances stand as monuments to nationally enforced policies of segregation; like apartheid's ideological framework these essentially unyielding and monolithic structures consign various experiences of creation, presentation and interpretation to autonomous and isolated compartments. Functioning as an omnipotent eye, the proscenium arch stage is anything but a neutral architectural structure, or a value-free material space: *how* the on-stage individual is to be *looked at* is built into the spectacle itself³⁰. Implicit in this localised structure is a mode of perception that separates the viewer from the doer, and the performance from the process; and as soon as perceivers become "outsiders" to the context of dance creation, the more likely it is for very particular images to be interpreted within an abstract and general framework of appreciation. This

²⁸ Seidler 1994:20.

²⁹ Ibid.:17-18.

³⁰ Copeland 1993:146.

specific "seeing" place situates the performing body at a "gazing", "objectifying" removed distance, rather than in an "experiential", "sympathetic" intimate one; very often the process of perception becomes that of projecting meaning onto an object, rather than receiving meaningfulness from a subject. In such theatre productions choreographers create their works of art "behind-the-scenes"; dancers manipulate and mould their bodies in rehearsals; audience members watch from a passive and secluded spot in the dark auditorium, and all of these subjective, personal - but political - experiences are hidden behind the facade of a dispassionate, impartial aesthetic appreciation. "The voyeur's sense of power often depends upon invisibility and anonymity" says Copeland³¹; he discusses how feminist dance practitioners have drawn attention to this "male" gaze, as a mode of perception that objectifies, dominates, controls, separates. In the current argument, this voyeuristic gaze should not be misunderstood as applying to men looking at women only. Although "masculine"³² in nature, it is a trait that can be applied to any form of presentation that disguises the true motives behind the perception and appreciation of a particular dancing body. Any form of presentation that estranges the perceiver - as subject - from the context of creation - as subject-ive; that proposes communication through conformity and bonding through bondage, I take to mean a "male" gaze. This autonomous and objectifying mode of perception was used effectively by white colonizers to dominate the black dancing body; and this still prevalent "seeing" practice affects the way that individuals now also look at male and female dancers. The gender-specific dancing images that we have discussed so far in tribal modes of expression, although denoting *difference*, were not inherently or consistently *hierarchical*; yet, the values that South Africa's dominant social producers and critics have associated

³¹ Copeland 1993:144.

³² William Doty draws attention to this point: "masculinity" encapsulates ideas of confrontation, aggression, competition and individualism (1993:197) that are engendered *predominantly* in males, because rationalised as necessary traits for leadership in the modern world. At the same time these "masculine" traits are not only the property of males.

with, if not fixed to, the different movements, has resulted in black *male* and *female* dancing bodies being appreciated in very separatist ways.

The black *female* dancing body especially, because of women's biological associations with procreation (perceived as the close proximity to, and satisfaction of, the unreasonable sexual body) has been treated with obscurity and unease. In rural communities a large family is associated with future wealth, prosperity and security; sexual intercourse is seen as "life-generating" and so the women's affiliation to this natural function is proudly displayed in dance forms concentrating on the sinuous and sensual movements of the torso and pelvis. The openness and pride with which the black female dancer displayed her sexual centre, the way she remained grounded, shuffling, stamping and shimmying rather than leaping and running, her downcast eyes and earth-directed energy, were viewed with suspicion in the assertive, penetrating masculine world of reason and progress.

To have "substance" is to have something solid beneath one's stance, which enables one to be under-stood; and to have "standing" is to be known, well known, known to be well, to be as one is known, honest, upright. *To creep is not to stand, but to move, stealthily; not in a straight way, but with figure bent for conceit and camouflage, leaning toward the earth and its teeming obscurities, away from the lucid sky.*³³

It is perhaps for this reason, that the black female dancing body was treated with such distaste and denial by the dominant social system in South Africa: the closeness of the women's movements to the ground "contributes both to their obscurity and the unpredictability of their movements"³⁴; unpredictability breeds fear in the onlooker, and fear encourages repression and further obscurity - a whirlpool of sabotaging rationalisations in a self-regulating framework. It is only in relation to men, says the modern world of enlightenment, that women can supposedly escape the hold that

³³ Young 1993:230-231.

³⁴ Ibid.

their "human nature" may exert over them; it is men who are the gatekeepers of reason, the legitimate owners of the authority of reason³⁵. The classical ballerina - epitomising the good, white female - breaks this base association to the ground by her affinity for verticality and height, and her stretching towards the lucid sky; she is, however, deemed equally insubstantial, because it is only through the aid of a male partner that she is able to create the illusion of penetration and extension, it is only by not utilising the solid ground beneath her stance that she can exist as a rational mind might be expected to, disconnected from its natural, base body. The black male dancing body, because of its own processes of socialisation in rural communities towards assertive, emphatic or energetic movements, is similar to the ballerina in his propensity for verticality or power, but is seen as "naturally" strong, proud, tough and aggressive. Even those dances performed specifically by black males that may be more spatially static and less aerial in nature tend to be appreciated for their representation of muscularity and virility, qualities acclaimed in the masculine body. For instance, Andrew Tracey describes a dance performed by Shangané men in which the muscles are seen to "perform"; the body as a whole remains fairly stationary and grounded, the predominant movement being the shivering and shaking of the muscles, yet here too admiration is expressed for the physical control and power³⁶ shown. Although the black male was historically perceived to be a "naturally" skilled dancer, revealing an affinity to the body rather than the mind, it is an affinity that shares certain prestigious qualities of masculinity. The urban environment was to promote and encourage certain of these masculine traits evident in black dance, such as the ability to *overcome* the forces of nature, for predominantly economic reasons.

Dancing for your dinner: visibility and viability in the city

Popular urban dances encouraged the same demands for physical power, muscular force, energy expenditure and spatial mobility amongst

³⁵ Seidler 1994:3.

³⁶ Tracey 1952:57.

black males as in the rural environments; but the motivations behind, and methods of, achieving such success were very different. The powerful fighting body engendered in rural environments was perceived by apartheid's architects as a perfect - cost-efficient - tool for the back-breaking manual labour needed in the mines and industries of South Africa. The country's dominant economic producers and controllers utilised, and further entrenched, the rural-originated black masculine identity in regimented urban "occupational cultures". Migrant labourers retained their attachments to masculine self-formation³⁷ experienced in rural environments, but because of the extremely competitive and sex-segregated conditions³⁸ under which they were forced to live, work and play, these masculine attitudes were pushed to often distorted limits³⁹. Research done in the compounds and hostels of the mines in 1976 reveals how the personal insecurity and physical danger that the men faced encouraged rough and boisterous, exultant but fearful, attitudes⁴⁰. Such intense masculine identities could only eventually be absorbed into, and reflected by, the modes of production and presentation governing most urban forms of song and dance: "This side [we] have to be tough and assume manhood, not be soft like the women at home".⁴¹ Or as a young dancer from Zululand University proclaims:

If you are a good dancer you will be a good fighter because dancing involves fighting most of the time. If you are a dancer it means you are always in the limelight - open to everybody.⁴²

The "hard body" that had always been a prestigious possession in rural environments, was equally acknowledged as a status symbol amongst groups of working-class males, but had attached to it the notion of individual survival created by a capitalist society⁴³. Possessing and controlling the

³⁷ Moodie 1991:45.

³⁸ Hart 1984:96.

³⁹ Moodie 1991:46.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.:56. Sung by Lesotho migrants returning to the mines.

⁴² Larlham 1986:173. From transcripts of an interview with an aged dancer in the Durban area.

physical resources of the self was a sure ticket to abundant work opportunities; abundant work opportunities promised increased monetary wealth; increased monetary wealth promised physical status and social visibility; and this meant an avenue away from the obscurity that so many of these young men experienced on a daily basis in their new environment.

In a difficult economy, no one is embarrassed by ambition and control. And one of the cheapest, most convenient things to master is one's body... You can literally shape your own destiny, the rhetoric of physical culture promises. ⁴⁴

Banes's reflections on the use of dance by urban male youths in American working-class cultures has very interesting parallels with South Africa. The pursuit of social prestige through unique and spectacular physical expression that had always been a traditional practice in most rural African communities, was also used by young *urban* males to display their masculine prowess and skill. But for many of these working-class men, aggressive physical expression became a means of fighting the enemy of obscurity in their new environment, of making visible and powerful the very personal body that was considered socially peripheral⁴⁵. This desperate search for visibility in the urban community would ultimately mean, for an increasing number of black male youths, rejecting dance in pursuit of other activities considered more masculine⁴⁶ by those in control of these environments; this topic has direct bearings on understanding the repeated references by critics to Boyzie, the "soccer-ace turned dancer"⁴⁷, and will be discussed further on. Already, however, in trying to locate Cekwana firmly within the urban environment in which he was born and raised, we have discovered the seed of a distinctly black masculine identity, which was to be

⁴³ Seidler 1994:46. He mentions philosophies by Erich Fromm on the ambiguity and insecurity associated with the individual "freedom" experienced in a capitalistic society.

⁴⁴ Banes 1994:201.

⁴⁵ La Hausse 1991.

⁴⁶ Larlham 1986:140.

⁴⁷ Playhouse Parade June/July 1995.

further nurtured by the access which black male youths had to westernised images of the male body.

The cinema has been a potent force in the popularisation of the dance; first Fred Astaire and later Gene Kelly became household names and, more recently, John Travolta.⁴⁸

Although Glasstone's study refers mainly to the influence of cinema and television on images of the male dancing body in *America*, South Africans were equally exposed to these media messages; even the "man on the street" was to absorb certain westernised images of the male body, such as the athletic, dynamic and independent 'stars' that Cekwana and his friends came to idolise. Apart from absorbing gender-specific images of the body as encouraged by local labour situations, developing forms of urban dance therefore also absorbed the American entertainment industry's ideals of "star-quality" and individual recognition⁴⁹. Myburgh's study on the origins of Pantsula dance suggests that black American artists like Percy Sledge and James Brown had an important, although indirect, impact on the different competitive styles of this township dance that developed⁵⁰. And in 1982, says Boyzie, the music video of Michael Jackson's "Thriller" aroused the interest of most of the young boys. Vincent Mantsoe, another black male dancer and choreographer hailing from Soweto, confirms the widespread appeal that Michael Jackson had on the township youth: he and his friends used the flashy, quick and cheeky movements performed with so much gusto by the young black American performer as inspiration for the creation of their own street dance style, which they performed at local competitions⁵¹. Boyzie also remembers his peers mimicking, and improvising with, the American's steps but in their case specifically to impress the local girls; the

⁴⁸ Glasstone 1980:16.

⁴⁹ Glaser's study on the Tsotsi subculture on the Witwatersrand in the 1940's and 1950's reveals the interest that these aggressive youngsters had in American movie images of gangsters, cowboys and other heroic fighters [1991:48-49].

⁵⁰ Myburgh 1993:2.

⁵¹ Anon., Grocott's Mail, November 28, 1995.

young boys were using their own integrated styles of dance to fulfil a similar social function of sexual selection, and racial survival, that dance fulfilled in traditional black communities:

Women who choose the most energetic and enduring dancers are unwittingly assisting biological processes of a helpful kind.⁵²

For Boyzie, all the fuss made over getting the right Jackson-look and the right Jackson-moves at that stage in his life seemed worthless; the last thing he wanted was to get the attention of the opposite sex because at the age of twelve, he says, he was "too scared of girls", anyway! But as a young boy, Cekwana had his own role-model and trend-setter. The first image of dancing that Boyzie remembers having a significant impact on him was the spectacular antics and daring flexibility of another black male American dancer; this one - Leroy - was a youthful and vibrant character on the popular television series, Fame. "If that guy can do such amazing things with his body," remembers Boyzie, "then why can't I?"⁵³ Cekwana may not have been interested in achieving physical control, flexibility and stamina in order to impress the girls, but he was very aware of the *personal* repercussions such skills might hold.

Dance for me was a refuge, a place where I had the power and the self-control to extend myself. My earliest experience of dance wasn't to be the best, but rather just to be doing something physically exciting.⁵⁴

And despite this apparently modest start to dance, it wasn't long before Cekwana would himself be noticed for performing "the most amazing movements with his body" and hailed as "dancing his way to success"⁵⁵. Yet alongside Cekwana's quest for physical exhilaration through *dance*, other black males his age were turning to alternate forms of expression. "As boys", says Boyzie, "everybody was always talking about soccer, about

⁵² Hambly 1926:107.

⁵³ Personal interview 1995.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Mashile, Bona, April 1995.

some fantastic goal or move that a player had made"⁵⁶. In 1938, Lincoln Kirstein berated the situation of dance in America: he argued that the country's practical Puritan inheritance had "franchised the uses of the male body for professional sport, not for dancing"⁵⁷. South Africans too, governed for years by the iron-fist of a political regime that asserted calvinistic philosophies as guiding principles for behaviour, tend, *to this day*, to associate only *certain* activities with a signification of masculinity. Sport, alongside other forms of physical identity such as political leadership and business management, are believed to exemplify the qualities of a 'civilised' masculine body, whereas dancing is associated with the feminine, the emotional, the subjective, the sexual - qualities that are deemed inferior for the moral reasons mentioned earlier. Also, as the country has become increasingly urban in nature, these latter qualities are not only perceived as morally inferior but are also "practically" snubbed because they tend to be costly, in a society increasingly governed by capitalistic motives⁵⁸. Economist John Spira states that global trends such as the technological revolution have impacted on the domestic economic scene in many areas: in such an environment, "competition is the name of the game" and its a trend that "involves the replacement of man's sweat by machines"⁵⁹ - or overcoming the expressive body with the technical mind.

The potentially degrading and marginalising images attached to dancing in the urban environment diminished the chances of black males achieving the social advancement considered so essential to their new ecological survival. As young black males continued to vie for visibility and viability in the country's mainframe of social appreciation, many turned to more acceptable forms of masculine expression, other than their "traditionally" status-affording ones.

⁵⁶ Personal interview 1995.

⁵⁷ Kirstein 1983:99.

⁵⁸ Brian Priestman, Professor of Music at the University of Cape Town suggests the imbalance between sports and arts in South Africa is because the arts *do not win or lose* like rugby. Cited by Connell in Contact 1995:19.

⁵⁹ Spira, The Star, 22 December 1995.

Football [soccer] became an avenue through which black people could achieve status and prestige, and also recognition based on adeptness in sport, at a time when the imposed culture preferred to regard them as invisible.⁶⁰

Soccer, along with boxing and other sports, were extremely popular forms of recreational physical expression in the townships, because they enabled individuals to make themselves visible and viable in a society that otherwise reduced them to numbers and machines. Male competition and masculine identity in an increasingly capitalistic, apartheid society were aimed at achieving monetary wealth; if dancing in such a society was perceived as marginal, if it was seen at best as an enjoyable pastime but certainly not a paying career, then the young men turned to what *would* pay:

The young people prefer to play football....
They see there is *money* there in the football.
Ngoma [a traditionally respected dance form],
no money, just play for the people.⁶¹

This is not to say that male dancing disappeared completely in the urban areas; as a teenager, Boyzie was as interested in playing soccer, as in jiving on street corners. Sichel's proclamation in 1995 that "[t]ownship dance hasn't died, it has just moved on"⁶² confirms the present visibility of shifts in urban black dancing. What all of this information points to is that the contemporary black male that dances does so because he has chosen to⁶³ over and above the numerous other identity-forming options available in the urban environment. Boyzie remembers his decision to dance as one of the few obstacles that he initially faced: deciding to pursue dance, especially as a career-option in a country where this immediately implied the inevitability of job insecurity and financial hardship, seemed rather rash to Boyzie's mother⁶⁴. What it also points to, is what *kind* of male dancing was to be increasingly perceived as most viable under these social pressures. Certain

⁶⁰ Jeffrey 1991:70.

⁶¹ Larlham 1986: endnotes.

⁶² Sichel 1995a.

⁶³ Larlham 1986:140.

⁶⁴ Personal interview 1995.

gender-specific attributes that had been encouraged in the rural black dancing body, movements that asserted the height, speed and verticality of the body especially, were to be granted not only visibility but increasing viability in a society that perceived these to be movement metaphors for progress and civilisation. Black males that engaged in dance tended to create them according to the same rules of identity that applied in the boxing ring, or on the sports field, so as not to digress too much in form from socially acceptable masculine identities. Males were expected to fight, to assert themselves, draw attention to themselves, and to show as little fear or other emotional weakness as possible. The 'masculine' man keeps incapacitating fears at bay, overcomes the challenging forces of nature, asserts himself as master of his 'natural' physical self at all costs. Black males in the urban areas could pursue dance as a 'reasonable' activity, if its function was that of physical challenge rather than expressive subtlety; "In the moment of falling", says an urban male, "the dancer should give *no thought to fear or care*, and even if he lands badly or injures himself he should *never show it*"⁶⁵. And for many, there was an increasing emphasis on personality, and individuality, in what were otherwise essentially collective and socially prescribed performances⁶⁶. Bravado displays and exhibitions tended to become the realm of the individual⁶⁷, seeking satisfaction, recognition and visibility of the self above communal effort. It is interesting to note that in 1926, anthropologist Hambly considered the presence of "solo" dancing displays in tribal or rural rituals as a tendency towards cultural decadence and de-volution⁶⁸. He considered this exhibition dancing as a sign of the cultural assimilation by essentially socially functional dance styles, of western notions of public entertainment, and as such condemned the cultural adaptation. Since that time, research into black urban dance styles has further discussed this paradoxical balance between solo performances of individual idiosyncrasies, and overall group expression; many recognise it not so much as the absorption of a totally alien element of expression but

⁶⁵ Larlham 1986:148. Interview with an urban male Zulu dancer.

⁶⁶ Bensman c1982:8.

⁶⁷ Beinhart 1991:123.

⁶⁸ Hambly 1926:133.

rather as the cultural evolution of a stylistic element that was originally part of tribal dancing styles⁶⁹. What is interesting to note is Hambly's immediate association of individual attention and solo recognition through spectacular displays, as a product of the western entertainment world's trivialisation of the arts. And despite its ambivalent appreciation, the image of the black male solo dancer, performing completely apart from, or without, a communal group of dancers, has developed. These masculine and individualistic identities encouraged in urban labour and recreation environments may bear little *direct* reference to Cekwana and his personal body; what is significant to consider is how and why these gender-specific identities came to be absorbed into the modes of performance to which Cekwana would ultimately pledge himself.

The absorption of these dance forms into the mainstream world of performance was as much a result of cultural osmosis as social status and economic opportunity. As sociologists point out, the differential access which groups have to "power chances" in any environment contributes to the imbalance in the power equation⁷⁰. Although the entire black African group was disadvantaged in South Africa, its disadvantages were experienced differently according to the particular access that individuals had, not only to economic resources and modes of material production, but to modes of violence, orientation and expression. It was predominantly the black *males* in urban - migrant and mining - labour situations that enjoyed prestige and status because of their "position and function in the world of production"⁷¹, and because of their proximity to resources⁷². It was in the urban industrial areas - in mining compounds and hostels - that the most opportunities for, and investment into, "spontaneous" styles of urban dance as performing arts lay. For instance, investment into forms of competitive male dancing - such as the Ngoma or the isiShayameni - was considered important by white benefactors: they functioned primarily as socially sanctioned channels of

⁶⁹ Honore c1988; Myburgh 1993; Larlham 1986; Argyle 1991.

⁷⁰ Sharp 1994:73.

⁷¹ Kavanagh 1985:17.

⁷² Bank 1994:96.

physical expression whereby miners and labourers could vent their frustrations, pride and aggressions in controlled environments⁷³. In this way, the black male dancing body became a way for labourers to promote a sense of independence and individuality in their social body; at the same time it was used by mineowners to develop as necessary, but curtail as potentially threatening, the aggressive and competitive traits of the masculine working body. Although moderated by external forces, these channels certainly provided a time and space in which black males could orientate, address, and express themselves in their environment. It is the energy and determination engendered in black male dancers by such a competitive environment that now appeals to foreign investors and local sponsors. Jacques van Meel, Director of the Dance Academy of Brabant, Holland, admires (and is willing to financially assist) black male dancers such as Vincent Mantsoe and Moeketsi Kena⁷⁴ because of what their "struggle" has aroused in them; he believes that his own European students have it too easy, while these fellows possess what *he* calls "drive"⁷⁵, and what *otherwise* might be termed the golden apple of a cut-throat capitalistic world. This is a "virtue" that has tended not to be developed in female performers, both black and white. In a study on street performances in Europe Bim Mason allocates two pages out of about two hundred to an analysis of women performers in what is essentially an aggressive and competitive public environment; he attributes the lack of females in the business to socialisation processes:

Until very recently, women's education did not encourage them to acquire the assertiveness, self-confidence and independence necessary to dominate a street environment. These are more traditionally male attributes.⁷⁶

⁷³ Larlham 1986:131.

⁷⁴ Both of these Soweto-based black males have been taught by, and performed with, Sylvia Glasser's Moving Into Dance company; and both have received widespread local and international opportunities and acclaim.

⁷⁵ Marilyn Jenkins, Citizen 17 March 1995.

⁷⁶ Mason 1993:189.

Although research into gender-studies shows us that masculinity is a shifting concept, and that male prestige and status are expressed differently according to specific cultures and specific eras⁷⁷, we must recognise that:

Common to all versions of masculinity, however, is male assertiveness and fierce inter-male competition alongside relatively passive, domestically orientated females.⁷⁸

Cekwana was himself to glimpse this difference in spatial orientation and expression: around the time of prepubescent growth, he started to notice a difference in attitude towards himself and his twin sister. She had previously been allowed to do everything that he had, but they could no longer play the same games together, and he was told not to shove her around in case he hurt her. She was no longer allowed to stay out after 6pm, while he was free to play on the streets with his friends. Even going to the toilet had gender-specific associations; Boyzie was asked to escort his sister to the outbuilding in order to ensure her safety. He also remembers feeling significantly protective when she began to relate events about older men making sexual advances towards her. Urban life was making Cekwana more and more aware of the differences in activity between females and males based on their sexuality, a difference that has been widely acknowledged by sociologists.

We are shown how urban communities in Witwatersrand townships came to accept and define a place for male youths which was outside the confines of the household, in contrast to the place of young women, which was firmly within it.⁷⁹

Boyzie understood these increasingly visible gender differences as a necessary rule and responsibility of urban community life: women had to be protected by the men (often *from* the men).

⁷⁷ Glaser 1992:51.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ James 1992:6.

The "external", "urban", "white-controlled" environment in which individuals such as Cekwana and his sister functioned, must be acknowledged as exerting an influence over the way that males and females behaved socially and in performance, but should not be blamed for prescribing a *new* masculine identity and a *novel* hierarchical representation of gender-groups. Sociologists have increasingly pointed out that the prescribing of strict modes of conduct according to sex, age, lineage and home locality is a part of African traditional society; as suggested earlier, these group distinctions and constraints are reflected in traditional dance forms⁸⁰. So the gender-divisions experienced, and enforced, in the social activities and structures of urban environments in which Cekwana lived, rather than being unique and specific to their western or European origins, entrenched similar hierarchical constructions of gender that were the heritage of most traditional black South African communities. The absorption of these essentially "everyday" gender-specific physical expressions and identities into established performance spaces, (such as the ones that Cekwana would find himself in), for reasons of racial/ethnic *equality*, did not necessarily mean that they had been recognised for their gender *inequality*.

As a black child, living in one of the largest townships in South Africa and experiencing radical socio-political events as the 1976 Soweto uprisings, Boyzie could not help but be aware of the close connections existing between his personal everyday life and more encompassing social phenomena. Reading the newspaper, being involved in community life, experiencing social unrest and political violence on an almost daily basis demanded that Cekwana stay mentally, as well as physically, alert and strong. At the same time, surviving the hardships of an environment like Soweto for Boyzie meant accepting certain things as they happened: "You have to learn that what you cannot change, you cannot change"⁸¹.

⁸⁰ Larlham 1986:120.

⁸¹ Playhouse Parade, October/November 1995.

What I am...first and foremost is a man...or rather a male. Everything about me is influenced by what I am. I've never been a woman. I can't think like one⁸².

Boyzie's awareness of the socialisation of the human body, when coupled with this fatalistic philosophy, leads him to believe that his experiences in life have largely been determined for him according to preferred images of what it is to be black, and male; but-also that he is a victim of these social preferences, that "you just have to accept things as they come" and that "if something's not meant to happen, it won't"⁸³. As witness to a national perversion of justice and manipulation of identity, in a country where black South African's were told they were "naturally" inferior, that they should just accept their poverty and abuse as inevitable, and that their life was meant to be full of "somethings" that never happened, Boyzie Cekwana has certainly adopted a very moderate and accepting demeanour. At the same time, it must be recognised what the effects of such a brutal and choking environment⁸⁴ on a young individual must be; it seems that what the nationalist government regime set out to do, to "negate normal living" and bury black aspirations and ambitions underneath a pile of township dust, dirt and rubbish⁸⁵, they achieved to a large degree in Soweto. For Cekwana it seems, future prospects were not based solely on possessing talent or ability, or even on hard work; in Soweto, you just waited for your calling, hoping to "be in the right place at the right time". Such a philosophy represents a society that encourages, if not entrenches, the appreciation of a *particular, selected* phenomenon, as a *global, inevitable trend*, in order to maximise capitalisation on it. Perhaps its also easier for Cekwana now to promote this philosophy of "being in the right place at the right time" because the very racial and, especially, gender factors that might originally have promised him nothing but obscurity in his chosen career, have since 1986 brought him right into the limelight.

⁸² Personal interview 1995.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Hart 1984:98.

⁸⁵ Ibid.:96.

Chapter 3

BALLET SHOES AND GUMBOOTS

"Boyzie glides to the top"¹

...I knew I had come to a different and renewed place when I watched blacks, coloureds, whites, English speakers, Afrikaans speakers, and a cross-dressed Pieter Dirk-Uys dancing with one another while the audience applauded wildly at the spectacle of national unity before them.²

For some perceivers of the 1995 Grahamstown Festival, it was this years event that signalled the beginning of "a multicultural crossover explosion in popular arts"³; Ben Ngubane stated that the racially mixed festival experience had "become an institution of post-apartheid South Africa"⁴. It was at this "spectacular" 1995 Grahamstown festival that Cekwana's work, especially his most recently choreographed Kude Nomfula, was hailed as "an inspiration for dance in the new South Africa"⁵; dance critic Tommy Ballantyne promoted Cekwana's blending of a score by composer Sipho Gumede with a narration by poet Vusi Mchunu, and his fusing of a spiritual African ancestry with the Western influences into which he has been absorbed, as "a breath of fresh air blowing through a smoke-filled amphitheatre"⁶. Adrienne Sichel also commended Cekwana's use of a racially mixed cast, and the process of collaboration between choreographer, composers and dancers⁷. Yet, as studies by Hauptfleisch (1988), Erlmann (1991) and Kavanagh (1985) on South African theatre and cultural politics point out, considerable shifts towards artistic accessibility, hybridism and collaboration on the stage started occurring as far back as the 1950's. By the time of the 1976 Soweto riots, when Cekwana was only six

¹ Anon. Daily News, 26 June 1995.

² Prof Albert Wertheim commenting on the visible signs of a new society at the 1995 Grahamstown National Arts Festival, Cue, July 12.

³ Journalist Sudarsan Raghavan, Contact, 2(19) 1995.

⁴ Ben Ngubane cited by Brendan Boyle, Contact, 2(19) 1995.

⁵ Ballantyne 1995b.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Sichel 1995b.

years old, these artistic trends had established themselves as a direct challenge to a South African socio-political system that continued to deny spatial, temporal and experiential mobility based on race and class.

During the 1980's, several outreach programmes were put in place, attempting to provide underprivileged children with educational and experiential resources usually inaccessible to them: in the dance world, this meant increasing their contact with forms of physical expression such as ballet and jazz. The interaction was a dialectal one: as these attempts towards democratising society and the arts continued, forms of expression that had previously functioned at extreme ends of a continuum renegotiated their relative positions to each other. The ongoing interactions between "popular", "tribal" and "elitist" forms of expression opened up areas of debate within the discipline of dance. Criticisms that had previously been forwarded against ballet's tendency to promote technical clarity at the expense of expressive significance were increasingly appreciated. Ashley Killar in 1980 had argued that:

Some of the African dancers I've seen share so much joy with their audience, so many classical dancers seem to have had it knocked out of them⁸.

The very emotionalism and sensuality that had previously been looked down upon as aesthetically distracting, came to be seen by many as the heart and soul of the performing body. Formerly rigid and static divisions - situating African dance firmly in the realm of spontaneous and untidy ritual, and ballet in the realm of abstract and clean artistry - started to slide. Local audiences during this decade were increasingly exposed to "contemporary" dance performances that included not one, but many forms of physical expression from township jive, jazz and gumboot dancing, to classical ballet, acrobatics and mime as performed by non-racial casts⁹.

⁸ Allyn 1980:125.

⁹ Scenaria magazines provide relevant insight into the way that these multiracial collaborations came to be appreciated at events like the National

It was perhaps in the realm of what has now come to be known as Contemporary dance that practitioners were able to find an autonomous form that would accommodate all of the potentially opposing styles of performance that the country had to offer. It became the site of integration for a broad spectrum of physical experiences but functioned still as an aesthetic that applied standards of technical clarity and theatrical excellence. In its particular and *localised* realm of multicultural fusion and artistic integration, Contemporary dance stood as a challenge to the static and degrading ethnic images of a *state*-produced ideology. For many practitioners the physical integration that Contemporary dance achieved became equally symbolic of the integration of a variety of mental and emotional experiences. It came to mean, for many, "dance choreographed from ourselves, which takes the roots of situations of the country in which we live, at these times..."¹⁰; both the movement, and the *motivation* behind the movement, were being sought not only from within the performance space, but as fed by the individual body's experiences *as a human being* with its "own idiosyncrasies, hopes and fears"¹¹.

Cekwana was first introduced to contemporary styles of dance at a community-orientated dance school situated in Meadowlands, Soweto; when Boyzie first heard about the place, black performer and teacher, Carly Dibokoane, was "looking for boys" to train in Afro-jazz and contemporary dance¹². This was one particular time that Cekwana's biological sex would offer him first place to enter the doorway of life-time opportunities. Cekwana's interest at first reveals anything but the usual fairy-tale plot about an individual driven by a passion to dance, and he certainly did not think of "dancing as a vehicle to get somewhere"¹³ at that stage in his life. Rather, he

Arts Festival in Grahamstown.

¹⁰ Corinna Lowry of Johannesburg Dance Theatre at the premiere of *Ukuphaphama* in 1987; Johannesburg Dance Foundation Newsletter 9, February 1995.

¹¹ Albert du Toit, *Scenaria*, 1986.

¹² Shevlin 1995a.

¹³ Personal interview 1995.

admits, he was told that there were girls at the dance school, so he "went and saw the girls...and stayed"¹⁴.

In 1986, at about the same time that Boyzie was making a transition from the soccer-field to the dance-field, Ashley Killar - who the year before had become the Artistic Director of what was then NAPAC and is now the Playhouse Company - commented on a growing concern in the country:

As you know, we have a serious shortage of male dancers, and I believe that this stems from a lack of knowledge on the part of South African males as to what a career in dance entails.¹⁵

It was during the 1980's that, alongside attempts to make dance *racially* accessible, certain practitioners committed themselves to challenging stereotypical and prejudicial images of the *male* dancing body. Simply increasing educational and community dance programmes, and making existing dance aesthetics accessible, was recognised as an insufficient means of change. In order to entice males from the general social arena into their particular artistic one, practitioners had to change the way that these young boys *perceived* the male *dancing* body. A number of options were available in such a scenario: the prevailing dance aesthetic (classical ballet) and its gender-specific images could change; a new dance aesthetic (contemporary) with an alternative body image could be initiated; or the male social body could be encouraged to transform *its* framework of perception and appreciation surrounding these images of the dancing body. It was predominantly the first two that were to occur on a variety of (specific but interacting) levels. Images of the male *dancing* body underwent major transformations but, as the following discussion will show, without the essentially masculine (divisive and hierarchical) social evaluation of the gendered-body having to change.

¹⁴ Shevlin 1995a.

¹⁵ Killar 1986.

By the time of Cekwana's sixteenth birthday contemporary dance developments had already gone a long way towards changing the image of the dancing body. Jazzart's 'Dance Caravan', established in 1982, was one outreach operation that took its form of contemporary dance to schools, factories, community centres and shopping centres¹⁶. Especially significant was that its members were predominantly male and one of its main aims was "to establish that dancing was a physically demanding and 'self-respecting' job for males to do"¹⁷. Contemporary dance's manifesto of accessibility meant that the 'everyday' experiences of ordinary bodies were being absorbed into, and promoted by, an essentially new form of expression. These "everyday" experiences were not necessarily biological, natural or primitive impulses though; they included popular dance styles, social gestures, acrobatic routines, all of which were themselves culturally constructed modes of performance. Many of the forms of physicality that were integrated into, fused or incorporated by South African Contemporary dance performances, originated out of gender-divisive and masculine-dominant environments, both rural and urban. They carried, inherent to their motivating context of origin, particular rationalisations about the body especially the promotion of sporting, jiving, energetic, competitive, 'hard' male bodies. Many contemporary dance practitioners and choreographers tended to transpose these essentially autonomous forms from their 'natural' everyday environment, acknowledging their ethnic particularities, but not their localised gender-roles. Arguments that challenged the validity of preserving the core techniques of ethnic-specific dance forms in the urban environments of South Africa, drew attention to the fact that this not only maintained and promoted a form of shaped movement, but also a mode of constructed experience that no longer had relevance to its context of origin in the rural environment. However, many failed to acknowledge the equally essential fact that all dance forms also have, intrinsic to their composition, particular *gender*-constructions; although these might hold relevance for the individuals participating in it on a local social level, when transposed to the

¹⁶ Anon., Scenaria(69) October 1986:17

¹⁷ Ibid.

realm of performance a new context of appreciation is set up between audience and performer, and the constructed movements need to be re-assessed and re-utilized. It was in the realm of contemporary dance that males could ultimately draw from the physically-demanding and status-giving activities reflective of their socialised bodies of the urban '80's, and then express these within a framework of appreciation that accorded them the same validity on stage. In this way, the dominant social theories governing gender were represented - re-inforced - rather than *re*-presented - reconstructed - on the stage.

International developments were also to play an essential role in the way that local dance practitioners lured males into the field. It was during the 1980's that dance world-wide experienced a change of image as it attempted to deal with an increasingly violent and aggressive, technological, mechanistic and consumer-orientated society¹⁸. For some artists, their responsibility lay not in reflecting or glorifying these social developments, but in refracting and challenging them; these practitioners would herald a return to the natural, communal, process-orientated body. However, for others, dance became more a site of endurance, an act of perseverance, a means of survival and self-preservation¹⁹, and in line with social developments became more daring, acrobatic and breath-taking. Perhaps South African practitioners tended towards the latter because the country had for so long been involved in a national crisis: people were looking for martyrs, heroes and soldiers to liberate them from their shackles of insecurity. As Hagemann pointed out in 1990:

For the black student, the locus of protest against an unjust and incompetent education policy has been the body²⁰.

Although in the context of his discussion Hagemann was referring to the social body "performing" movements of protest through marches, sit-ins

¹⁸ Anon. ballett international (1), 1995.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Hagemann 1990.

and war dances, these "everyday" acts were transported into theatrical performances where the relentless, often deformed, performing body resembled a social body in agony and under attack²¹. Classical dance was not to be excluded from these developments. Jacqueline Ferguson in a 1986 interview, discussing changes made to the Royal Academy of Dancing Syllabus, stated that:

Much more is expected of the dancer today...
Unfortunately, ballet has perhaps become more
acrobatic.²²

Although adoring fans of the purely classical ballet form may have disliked the changes, for many they were dynamic, and essential, transitions that in South Africa could be used to encourage males into this particularly prejudiced dance realm. In 1987, Germaine Glueck interviewed Dudley Tomlinson, "a Ballet lecturer of distinction":

GG: Are attitudes to male dancers changing in South Africa?
DT: I think so, as my male classes this year are the biggest ever. I think films with the likes of Baryshnikov, who has a macho image, have made parents realise that male dancers are not necessarily sissies. Also, it is now well known that in England, athletes and soccer players have found dance classes improve their agility. Certainly there is no shortage of superb, virile male dancers overseas.²³

Only a year previous to this statement, Ashley Killar was to bemoan the isolation from, and lack of interaction with, international trends experienced by South African males because of the ongoing cultural boycott.

In a city like New York, youngsters have the example of dancers such as Nureyev or Baryshnikov and the example set by dancers of their calibre does a great deal to attract males into the dancing world.²⁴

²¹ Sichel [1990] draws attention to the inclusion of the "people's war dance" in Protest Theatre performances combining song, dance and drama.

²² Blumenthal 1986.

²³ Glueck 1987.

²⁴ Killar 1986.

Yet both of these internationally-acclaimed dancers it seems, judging from Tomlinson's remark, were eventually to exert an influence on South African dance trends. Despite the cultural boycott, certain local practitioners were still travelling globally, gleaning information and absorbing images from foreign dance platforms; and several overseas dance teachers and choreographers still accepted invitations to work temporarily in South Africa. The increasing accessibility of dance performances and dancers through the mass media also played a large role. American television shows marketed and communicated performers such as Fred Astaire and John Travolta to the world as "stars", and even ballet was subject to this increased coverage and widespread communication. Baryshnikov, more recently during the 1980's, has become a role-model for a number of aspiring male dancers; but it was Rudolf Nureyev, in the 1960's, who set the precedent for Baryshnikov and who would be remembered for changing the very unit of ballet - the ballet dancer's body.

The argument so far has continually shifted between Cekwana's microcosm of experience and the macrocosm of South African social life. Excursions into the local environment have led even further afield to the international macrocosm. This seems to confirm the argument forwarded by Larlham as to the holistic nature of dance and society, where the particular and the general, the personal and the social, and the local and the universal are in a process of continual interaction²⁵. At this stage, I wish to take what might at first appearances seem like a huge diversion from our study on the black dancing body in contemporary South Africa, but that will in fact reveal a very similar context of experience. The following few pages are dedicated to a brief look at Nureyev's influence in the ballet world; an individual of Russian descent, who worked and performed in America during the 1960's, and who concentrated his efforts purely in the realm of ballet appears to have little in common with our "township urchin", Boyzie Cekwana. However, scratching beneath the surface reveals a common truth. The biographical material on Nureyev offered by Stuart draws attention to the fact that he, like

²⁵ Larlham 1986:23.

Cekwana, despite visibly intense efforts and obviously extreme talent, partly reached the level of acclaim that he did because of 'being in the right place at the right time'. In America during the 1960's, the smell and taste of change was everywhere; and Nureyev came to represent - with the help of the media and its tendency to "spotlight" - a rebel hero to an uninhibited counterculture²⁶.

"When Nureyev arrived in the West", Arlene Croce has written, "it was at a moment of upheaval in public morals and popular culture. Nureyev's behaviour on and offstage appeared related to a new trend, and he may even have instigated it, in part."²⁷

The search for social liberation and government accountability amongst the American youth of the 1960's is not all that different to South Africa's current search for social redevelopment and political transparency. Through an analogy with the processes that were involved in making Nureyev into a megastar, I hope to enlighten the reader as to similar motives behind Cekwana's fame: how does a body warrant such attention, acclaim and heroism in a country that essentially perceives it to be "exotic", "foreign", "alien" and "primal"²⁸? There are several practical reasons also for this excursion: although Cekwana's initial experience of dance was in contemporary and Afro-fusion, at the age of seventeen he was awarded a three-year scholarship to the Johannesburg Dance Foundation; here he embarked on an intimate relationship with the world of ballet, which, he recalls, he "just loved". In the field of contemporary dance an early start at shaping the body is not considered a prerequisite, "though an athletic and supple body is an immediate advantage"²⁹. By the time he had reached sixteen, Cekwana's body had internalised the physical experiences affiliated to a modern socialised male body: he had led a life of outdoor adventure and action, been more at liberty to challenge the natural forces of space, time and gravity, and his long-term participation in soccer had laid the groundwork

²⁶ Stuart 1995:100.

²⁷ Ibid.:138.

²⁸ Ibid.:100.

²⁹ Clark and Crisp 1984:82.

for the risky dynamics, stamina and flexibility needed to satisfy the increasingly acrobatic trends of the classical and contemporary dance worlds. Yet despite classical ballet's increased incorporation of athletic and jazzy movement styles, the training process still exerts very specific demands on the body. By the time Cekwana experienced the possibilities available to the male ballet dancer, Nureyev's influence in this field of performance would have been felt. Autobiographical material on Nureyev provides some insight into certain modes of manipulation that exist behind the process of developing the viable male ballet body. The aim of this analogy is not to assume that Boyzie Cekwana demands the same levels of international recognition that Nureyev does, but to provide a viable framework in which to assess to what degree Cekwana's talent might be the result of forced promotion, rather than artistic encouragement³⁰.

"Liquid chocolate in motion"³¹ - the streamlined body

The ballet aesthetic, unlike the more body-accessible requirements of contemporary dance, requires streamlining of the legs, extreme outward rotation of the hip joints, and flexibility in the spine: early training is especially encouraged to develop the body before it calcifies into its natural adult shape. Nureyev only started his formal ballet training past the age of seventeen³², but made up for his late start by treating his body as a battleground: he pummelled and punished it to meet the formal requirements of an aesthetic that has been criticised for turning its back on nature³³. Paradoxically, by the 1960's the modern progressive world had brought the majority of human beings closer to a realisation of their vulnerability and imperfection; in an increasingly computer-efficient and mechanical-perfect society, the modern *man* launched into a quest for "zero defect"³⁴ within his

³⁰ Critic David Coleman expresses the same desire: "Being a modest young man, [Cekwana] is unlikely to be fazed by all the acclaim. It's to be hoped that his talent will be encouraged, not forced", The Mercury 3 August 1995.

³¹ Shevlin 1995a, describing Cekwana's on-stage image.

³² Greskavic 1993.

³³ Guerrier 1993:26.

own working tool - the body. Nureyev embodied this continual quest by constantly challenging his physical image on- and off-stage. This parallels the search for manipulation and perfection of the working body experienced by South African black males in their own "performance" environment, as discussed in chapter two.

The notion of manipulation in ballet is one that has become an increasingly contentious point of discussion. Choreographers in the classical ballet sphere often borrow from terminology associated with the plastic arts: they may refer to the material of their trade - ballet dancers - according to the principles of painting, sculpture or other inanimate art forms. Internationally recognised choreographer Jean Paul Comelin jetted in to Durban from Paris to stage Les Nuits D'Ete for the Playhouse Dance Company in October 1995. In a personal description given by him as to his process of creation, Comelin stated that he thinks of each dancer "the way painters think of specific colours"³⁵. Perhaps he shares the same perception of Cekwana that journalist Ingrid Shevlin does as "liquid chocolate in motion"³⁶. Choreographer George Balanchine, especially, has referred to his dancers as if they were malleable objects of manipulation, without idiosyncrasies and egos. However, if the block of wood that a sculptor is using to create a product is too large, or too bumpy, the sculptor has the option to hack and hew it into shape. If the colours that a painter has at his disposal are not the right shade and tone, again he has the option to mix and manipulate them to suit his demands. Ballet - referred to often as a "demanding mistress"³⁷ - requires individual human beings to do the same hacking and hewing, of their personality traits or physical limitations, to serve implicit rationalisations about aesthetic perfection and unity. In South Africa, these aesthetic rationalisations about conforming to the particular shape, line and motion particular to ballet became an excuse for excluding

³⁴ Term taken from the Panasonic advertisements currently being screened on television, promoting the technological "quest for zero defect".

³⁵ Playhouse Parade, Oct/Nov 1995.

³⁶ Shevlin 1995a.

³⁷ Ibid. Ironically, the feminine denotation of this term is man-made.

the majority of blacks from excelling in it, based on their 'naturally' - biologically - incorrect physique. The ideal male ballet dancer in the 1980's was still required to satisfy very specific shape and size attributes:

He must be tall, but not too tall; muscular but not overly so; strong and supple. Height affects line and ballerinas seeming to be getting taller nowadays. There is always a place in the company for the short male dancers, but obviously scope for varied roles is limited.³⁸

Nureyev, in his own time and space, was also the potential victim of such ethnic cleansing: "with the single exception of a generous turnout, the all-important capacity for a dancer's body to fan away from its center", he did not possess the inborn gifts that can promote a male ballet dancer's career³⁹. He simply - biologically - did not possess the proper proportions, natural alignment and steely instep that were considered so essential to fulfilling the 'noble', 'princely', and class-specific ideals out of which the dance originated and to which the greatest appreciation was still, even after decades of social transformation, attached.

Despite these 'biological' restrictions, Nureyev managed to gain visibility and viability in the ballet world because he was "willing to sweat blood" in his "battle to reshape and redefine his recalcitrant body"⁴⁰. While he was so stringently deconstructing his biological body, he was also reconstructing his socially-constructed/performing body. He challenged the ballerina's dominant *onstage* visibility - heightened by her extended, *en pointe*, verticality - by promoting the virtues that guaranteed his dominant visibility *offstage* in the modern world; these *socially* viable physical characteristics were being 'obscured' onstage by an aesthetic appreciation of the male as "unobtrusive" extension of, and invisible hydraulic lift to, the female. The invisible strength usually used to lift others, was used by Nureyev to launch his own body into the air; the understated power used to

³⁸ Glueck 1987.

³⁹ Stuart 1995:110

⁴⁰ Ibid.

hold the ballerina aloft was highlighted by sustaining leaps mid-air; the silent stamina associated with both was presented as a conscious endurance-test of increasingly athletic and vigorous steps.

Onstage, in the realm of performance, Nureyev challenged the *details* of a hierarchical framework of aesthetic appreciation by shifting the spotlight from the verticality of the female body, to that of the male dancer; but the spotlight, with its inherently exclusive nature, stayed intact. Although Nureyev even came to explore and express the more traditionally 'feminine' aspects of classical ballet - movements that were soft, lyrical, sustained, sinuous and restrained - and was even appreciated by some critics for his 'androgynous'⁴¹ quality, Nureyev's main contribution to ballet became his gender-specific identity. Nureyev re-produced the male *dancing* body by re-affirming the male *social* body.

The very exclusive nature of the framework by which individual bodies are assessed and appreciated, is evident in the tendency of critics and the media to create "crime-waves". Instead of appreciating individual bodies according to the interacting, multiplicitous and potentially shifting gender-specific identities that they may possess, they judge according to a framework that is shaped only to allow *either* conformance to, or *deviation* from, what are presumed to be ideal, immutable, universal truths about sexuality. In Nureyev's case, social mediators chose to concentrate on promoting his affiliations with the masculine identity lauded by the modern progressive world - the man as sportsman, risk-taker, acrobat, action hero, adventurer. Instead of challenging the 'everyday' (socially-constructed rather than natural or biological) environment of the 'progressive' modern society, and its increasingly blood-thirsty and spectacle-seeking demands, Nureyev became the "Joe Namath of dance"⁴², a youthful and muscular representation of classical Greek men in the service of Apollo⁴³, an

⁴¹ Stuart 1995:100.

⁴² Hanna 1988:20.

⁴³ Greskavic 1993:21.

adventurer of time and space, a colonizer of gravity⁴⁴, a hero with an impartiality to pain, risk or injury⁴⁵. It was these images, functioning within a still dominantly patriarchal ideology, that ultimately allowed Nureyev to reach the level of visibility and viability that he did.

The acrobatic slant, or manipulation of the dancing body⁴⁶

It is this framework of appreciating the male dancing body according to masculine-specific qualities that holds relevance today, and that has provided Cekwana with a platform for reaching the spotlight in South African dance. Local practitioners, both in the classical and contemporary dance fields - as Dudley Tomlinson's remark reveals - caught on fast to this image of masculine heroism in the dance world. They felt that if they promoted an appreciation of the male dancer as a sportsman, athlete or labourer - images attractive to the majority of working- and middle-class males - then more young men could be encouraged to participate in this form of expression without feeling that they were rejecting socially acceptable masculine identities. Ballet practitioner Lorna Haupt believed that:

If the average man in the street can recognise a famous gymnast, or a rugby player, or a boxer for what they are worth, he should recognise a dancer's ability, tremendous talent and achievement⁴⁷.

Boyzie, the young soccer-ace, could quite readily enter the world of dance at that stage of its evolution because of the increasing efforts by practitioners to show males that society would judge them on-stage, with the same status-giving and prestige-making values as when they were on the playing field.

⁴⁴ Greskavic 1993:22.

⁴⁵ Stuart 1994:110.

⁴⁶ Terms used by Guerrier 1993:25.

⁴⁷ Allyn 1980:24.

Aside also from the advantages Cekwana had through his social body, his body *biologically* fulfilled certain requirements about the ideal male dancer, especially in the classical field. According to Comelin, who cast Boyzie Cekwana in the lead role for his production of Les Nuites D'Ete, one of the features that makes Cekwana such a remarkable dancer is his physicality: Boyzie is "one of the most lean, and tall African black dancers" - and, he says, he "met a few in America" - that he has come across⁴⁸. For Comelin, it seems, Cekwana's black body (perhaps unlike other ethnic bodies that he has come into contact with) manages to satisfy the essential qualities of the classical male dancer "naturally"; appreciated in such a sense, Cekwana's body becomes a symbolic re-affirming of a value-system that rationalises about hierarchical and repressive assessments of the body according to the occurrence of biological attributes and birthrights. The utilisation of his black body is still ethnically prejudicial, because it in- or excludes individuals according to the extent to which their "natural" physical attributes conform to those publicly associated with their gender. After all, says Dudley Tomlinson, being at the right place at the right time counts, but athletic prowess - upon which becoming a 'star' seems also to depend - has a lot to do with one's genes⁴⁹.

Despite even these advantages, Cekwana has still experienced the paradoxical position inhabited by the dancer in a consumer society: the aim of survival and the aim of recognition. Although dance implies the intimate awareness of, and utilisation of the body, it is often used to challenge its own natural phenomenon, as Nureyev's tale reveals. The practice of "hacking and hewing" the biological body to meet the demands of an ideal body image, whether a performing or social one, is aligned to a patriarchal ideology that associates the body with the base, and the mind as the channel through which this hindering mass of muscle can be controlled, constructed and confined. Victor Seidler discusses the way that modern masculinity

⁴⁸ Interview with Comelin on television insert, "Dream a little Dream with Boyzie Cekwana", Front Row, M-Net, November 1995.

⁴⁹ Glueck 1987.

engenders a perception of the body as something to be constantly manipulated, controlled and challenged:

As men, we learn to treat our bodies as separate, as something that needs to be trained....It is as if we constantly have to prove our masculinity against a seemingly endless series of external tests.⁵⁰

And this notion of dominating the time-consuming and inefficient flaws associated with the natural body has been absorbed into the performance world under the guise of professionalism, and affects both male and female dancers. A question that faces every contemporary dancer, whose very matter is their message, is to what extent does s/he choose to be deaf to the utterances of her/his body⁵¹ in order to achieve the recognition of an increasingly demanding audience? Nureyev was willing to ignore the screams of his agonised body even to the extent that he continued to dance intensively while suffering from Aids⁵². As a late-comer to the demanding world of ballet, Cekwana has also chosen to mute many of his aches and pains: "I have amassed so many injuries because I have pushed my body hard"⁵³. Pushing his body, rising above himself, competing with both his self and his environment means for Cekwana a path away from obscurity: he looked forward to the "fierce, top-level competition" anticipated at Helsinki; for Cekwana, as a prodigy of the competitive, progressive modern environment, "to be good means you have to work all the time", and this includes working on the body to increase its effectivity as an obedient tool of communication. The traits that Cekwana reveals as important echo those traits referred to (in chapter two) as belonging to a hierarchy-seeking "masculinity": confrontation, aggression, competition and individualism⁵⁴ are symbols of the reasonable mind searching for progressive tactics; it is these essentially "masculine" images (as discussed further in chapter four) that are becoming increasingly popular and promoted in our contemporary society.

⁵⁰ Seidler 1994:17.

⁵¹ Guerrier 1993:28.

⁵² Stuart 1995.

⁵³ Shevlin 1995a.

⁵⁴ Doty 1993:197.

Cekwana's trained body seems to communicate what local and international governing bodies want it to, because it was in 1994 that his initially tentative steps into the realm of dance led him to be appointed as Resident Choreographer for the Playhouse Dance Company. This professional company, although originally a predominantly classically-orientated company, has under the guidance of Mark Hawkins - artistic manager, and Lyn Maree - artistic director, promoted movement versatility alongside artistic quality; presented echoes of the past and visions of the future; and drawn inspiration from both local, and international, events of relevance⁵⁵. On the one hand, Cekwana's athletic, muscular, jiving body suits the qualities that are considered charismatic and masculine in the contemporary dance world, and on the other, his height, posture and understated presence suits the qualities still associated with the principal male dancer in the ballet world. He has knowledge of, and experience in, ballet, as well as contemporary and Afro-fusion. He represents a biological affiliation to a "spiritual African ancestry" as well as a sociological connection to "the Western influences into which he has been absorbed"⁵⁶. His interest in socio-political commentary is tempered by an awareness of the demands of professionalism. All of these skills and attributes seem to make Cekwana the perfect candidate to fulfil the artistic philosophies of the Playhouse Dance Company. The fact that he has attached to his name the title of South Africa's prestigious arts awards might be regarded as an added bonus. Around the time of the 1995 FNB Vita Dance Umbrella awards, of which Cekwana had received two nominations, one for choreography and one for performance, the Business Day printed the following statement:

Any sponsor linking its name to South Africa's supreme arts awards gains tremendously in terms of community recognition, ongoing media coverage and prestige.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Lynn Maree, Playhouse Parade, June/July 1995:8.

⁵⁶ Ballantyne 1995b.

⁵⁷ Anon., Business Day 27 March, 1995.

Since that time period, the Playhouse Dance Company has received what Cekwana believes is unprecedented support and sponsorship for a dance company in South Africa⁵⁸. The sponsors have just about been lining up in attempts to show their "charitable" support of the arts; and of course, they will do their best to ensure that Cekwana maintains his status as superstar by providing untold opportunities and resources, until - perhaps - another "rising star" will be selected. Journalist Marilyn Jenkins points out the invaluable nature of the sponsorship that is currently being accorded to black male dancers such as Boyzie Cekwana: "Without it, their considerable talent might never have been given an opportunity to flower"⁵⁹. Certainly this is true, but it would be ignorant to assume that talent is an autonomous entity in the urban capitalistic world; tied in with the notion of talent or skill, is that of taste or fashionability. Already, Shion Unser who is the youngest member of the Playhouse Dance Company, is receiving attention that promises to make him the new "ascending" man of the moment. Journalist Ingrid Shevlin conducted an interview with Unser which she entitled "Keeping the right company"⁶⁰: the connotations are also financial at heart, considering the present exposure that the Playhouse Dance Company are receiving. Unser himself remarked that he was just waiting for the press to make him famous⁶¹. This is after all what the media tends to do - make or break superstars. The role of journalists and critics in mediating selective images of the dancing body through newspaper articles and reviews, will be discussed further in the following chapter.

Despite Boyzie's initial reservations about accepting an offer to guest dance in Durban - "I was used to life in Johannesburg and thought I'd die if I had to spend more than a few months in Durban"⁶² - he has developed a strong rapport with Hawkins and dancers of the Playhouse Dance Company.

⁵⁸ Personal interview 1995.

⁵⁹ Jenkins, The Citizen, 17 March 1995.

⁶⁰ Shevlin 1995b.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Anon., Daily News, June 26 1995.

"Mark Hawkins", says Boyzie, "is possibly the most dynamic person I've worked with"⁶³:

For Mark, dance can't just be for dance's sake.
It must say something, not in terms of a story but
it must have an emotional substance, a motivation⁶⁴.

As important as this prerequisite seems for Cekwana as performer and choreographer, how then does he find the motivation behind the movement, his own, as well as that of his dancers? And more importantly, how, and to what extent, does he then communicate these motivations - many of which might originate from contexts other than that of performance - to his audience? The following chapter will look in-depth at the events surrounding the creation and presentation of two of Cekwana's works, Still and Kude Nomfula, and then assess to what extent the messages being communicated to audience members and critics truly reflect the *artistic* motivations behind the movement; also to what extent both affirm/challenge his own body and that of his dancers as a multiply constructed reality; and finally, to what extent these messages are, and should be, appreciated by audiences and critics as new and ideal national truths.

⁶³ Playhouse Parade, Oct/Nov 1995.

⁶⁴ Personal interview 1995.

Chapter 4 CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES

The first chapter made suggestions as to some of the different and particular locales of experience to which Boyzie Cekwana was affiliated, in an attempt to remove misconceptions surrounding the artist as functioning within some abstract, non-material, transcendental realm¹. It was also suggested that the body is more than the site of a single or monolithic individuality, but is rather the building site for a number of interacting and continually transforming experiences. The black male dancing body in transition therefore refers to both the personal and the social: even if Cekwana puts his body on display with a knowledge of these multiplicitous and shifting realities, this personal revelation is often insufficient for social transformation *if attention is not consciously drawn to these, often submerged, sites of experience*. This final chapter will argue further around the notions of visibility and viability that were introduced earlier: here we confront the processes of knowledge production and dissemination associated with contemporary dance via the specific relationship that exists between Cekwana *as professional choreographer* and his presentations of the human body; we will also challenge the role of dance critics and journalists and *their* social mediation of these displayed bodies. As with our earlier selective analysis of Cekwana's personal history, several, rather than all, works choreographed by him will be discussed; and only certain critical reviews will be referenced for their particular stimulation of the ensuing argument, copies of which are present in the appendices. My personal first-hand observations - on more than one occasion - of the discussed works, as well as my past experience of contemporary dance and my present affiliation to physical theatre, will inform the argument.

In 1994, Cekwana received the FNB Vita Young Choreographer's Grant and was subsequently commissioned to choreograph a new work for the 1995 FNB Vita Dance Umbrella. Still was the end-result and premiered in Johannesburg this year. The Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance was received by Cekwana in the same year, and also commissioned a new work. This more recent dance, Kude Nomfula, was presented at the Grahamstown National Arts Festival in July 1995. It

¹ Doty 1993:66.

is these two works that have been chosen for detailed analyses: both have been offered as "contemporary" works in a dance programme presented to audiences in Grahamstown and Durban; yet both originate from very specific inspirational sources, both reflect very different stylistic features and both have been met with very different critical responses.

Interesting to note is the ambivalence with which critics and journalists discuss Cekwana's choreography: some of his works are referred to as ballets², others are admired under the title of dance theatre³, and some are even perceived to be on "the perimeters of physical theatre"⁴. Perhaps this is a redeeming quality of Cekwana's style: it appears not to be compatible with the traditional genres and conventional compartments into which artists are prone to be eternally boxed; perhaps this artistic ambiguity reflects a recognition and representation by Cekwana, as choreographer, of his own shifting and multiplicitous persona. There are, nevertheless, inherent process distinctions associated with all of these different titles, only some of which have been addressed by these reviewers. These production elements affect the way that individual dancers are required to perform, and whether their bodies, as equally malleable and multifarious as the choreographer's, will be explored and validated. In the ensuing discussion, the proscenium arch curtain is pulled aside to peer in at some of the processes of production and creation that took place surrounding Still, in comparison to those selected by Cekwana for his more widely acclaimed work, Kude Nomfula. Earlier attention was drawn to the fact that in South Africa democracy in performance has very often tended to concentrate on racial equality rather than gender equality. Both of these works are of interest here because while they (quite consciously) break some socially constructed images of the body, they ("still" quite unintentionally) engender others. It is crucial for any critical perceiver to understand the terms of creation and presentation under which the physical images in Still and Kude Nomfula were forged. Communicating an awareness of this potentially multivalent and subjective artistic reality to audience members is ultimately the role of both the

² For instance, Brother, Brother which received recognition at the International *Ballet* Competition in Helsinki.

³ Peskin 1995.

⁴ Jenkins 1995b, referring particularly to Still.

choreographer (in the specific space and time of the performance), and the critic (in the space and time *surrounding* the specific performance). This chapter therefore includes taking a glimpse at how critics choose to re-represent these images of the dancing body to South African audiences who, as Sichel remarks, are in desperate need of "a new criticism addressing the [new country's] evolving aesthetics"⁵.

Artistic difference and aesthetic deference

The critic, says Hanna, fulfils a role similar to other social agents of a culture who impart knowledge through teaching, preaching, discussing, informing⁶. The chapters dedicated to excavating the often hidden realms of experience governing Cekwana's performing and choreographing body, are analogous to the excavations that dance critics should undergo. Earlier, suggestions were made as to how an omnipotent and autonomous mode of perception tends to be created by the proscenium arch frame of presentation, and as such the selectivity practised by the choreographer should be revealed to an otherwise passively absorbing audience. It is for the same reason that broadcast media hold such sway over the way that people perceive and come to know the world: reality is perceived through the presentation of quicksilver images that, more often than not, have been uprooted from their original (ongoing) context of experience; the processes of production leading the subject of enquiry to the eye of evaluation are hidden behind-the-scenes, considered inanimate, material, technological, and therefore neutral. Cape Town educationist and writer Anthony Connell states that the tendency in South Africa has been towards the "blind worship" of the particular experiences of science and technology⁷; mass media images, affiliated to these modes of information dissemination, are often communicated as objective and universal truths. However, like the predominantly "one-eyed" theatre space, the communicative spaces of newspapers, television and radio have an inherent "selectivity" built into them: news journalists especially are governed by stringent constraints of time and space, so that

⁵ Sichel, Star Tonight!, 20 July 1995.

⁶ Hanna 1988:34.

⁷ Connell 1995:20.

only certain events and phenomena are chosen and presented as valid "headline" news. What is potentially an wholly physical experiential interaction is reduced to a privileged and particular one. In fact, selectivity and subjectivity affect all individuals in their daily functioning, even more so in the modern democratic world; the human senses are not able to absorb, transmit and utilise the multitude of images that continually bombard them, all vying for viability. There is an increasing desire in such a complex environment for an individual to be able to respond to a single chosen frequency without interference from others. This singular response is, however, a selective and political one; and the degree to which this bias is exposed and confronted varies. To assume that a critic can offer an objective, prejudice-free point of view of a performance is, akin to the reasoning behind much abstract classical ballet, to attempt to separate a human being from its very site of existence - its subjective experiential self. At the same time, subjectivity communicated through ignorance, or opinion through isolation, are avoidable falsities. When subjectivity is contextualised and communicated, and opinions informed and open to criticism, then the propensity for prejudice is undermined. Information without the revelation of the individual, and recognition of the mediator, will always give us the hierarchical discrimination associated with apartheid - *racial, sexual or otherwise*. So how informed are these people that have assumed the role of artistic shamen, of social seers, of cultural diviners in our own transforming society? And more importantly, how honest and open are they to locating themselves within their particular sites of experience, before communicating their knowledge to the nation as all-encompassing and universally-applicable? It seems that the conflicting views surrounding critics' impressions of Cekwana's works, more than signalling a positive movement towards critical debate and rigorous discussion on dance production and presentation, are a sign of our (still hegemonic and historically-correct) times.

"Still", after all of these years

When Cekwana created Still, he was dealing with the emotions that he felt at the apartheid "system", a socio-political system in which he, as a black, has experienced certain things differently, often painfully so, from his white colleagues⁸.

Although apartheid affected thousands of people as a nation, Cekwana's "inspiration" was of a very personal nature: the work is dedicated to two of his brothers, Lulanile and Shorty, and a "dear friend" Gert Fourie⁹, all three of which were killed without - says Cekwana - any act of justice being taken by the South African legal system. The title of the work refers to the fact that our country, scarred historically by a state of militarism, is "still" plagued by seething, senseless violence¹⁰. And apart from thematic associations, "still" refers also to the creative process and the final form/shape of the work: "In a very *quiet* way", explains Boyzie, "I'm trying to express *my* frustration and anger"¹¹. The performance style reflects Cekwana's essentially modest and soft-spoken nature, as it moves from moments of intense physical and aural activity, to the more telling and powerful moments of silence and stillness; after all, argues Boyzie, he is not Robyn Orlin who would express the same frustration and anger by throwing books and flour around the stage¹². It is in Still that Cekwana seems to come closest towards fulfilling the artistic beliefs sought by contemporary dance practice. Apart from the obviously "contemporary" subject matter, Cekwana's approach to the *process of choreography* was contemporary: he believes that while ballet provides mastery of the body, and the disciplined training regime that a professional dancer needs, other skills need to be developed and honed so that "the dancer (technician) becomes an artist (performer)"¹³. The dancer needs to be a thinking, feeling *human being* as well as a thinking dancer; to be in touch with their personal state of being, as well as aware of how this relates to the human condition in all its forms¹⁴. The choreographic process of Still reflects - more than any of Cekwana's other equally acclaimed works - his essentially democratic beliefs about the relationship between performer, choreographer, form and content.

⁸ Personal interview 1995.

⁹ This dedication is printed in all of the programmes accompanying performances of Still.

¹⁰ Jenkins 1995; Sichel 1995a.

¹¹ Sichel, "Soweto's Boyzie to compete in Finland", DIA Fields Advertising, 21 February 1995.

¹² *Ibid.* - Boyzie is here referring to the work that performance artist Robyn Orlin choreographed on the Playhouse Dance Company in 1994 entitled "...shooting of the stars not reserved for ticket holders only".

¹³ Personal interview 1995.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

Cekwana realised that the subject matter with which he was dealing referred to the physical force and psychological violence used by a system to get individuals to conform to a hierarchical structure of ethnic identities: in reaction to this "you will do/be what you are told" system of existence, the process of creation chosen by the choreographer involved more than just imparting steps to a group of dancers. Cekwana's representation of the subject matter included a defiance (*re*-presentation) of it; he kept the dance at a microstructural level of experience, rather than forcing his dancers to feel and think as he did, and portray the images of fear, suppression and antagonism in Still from his omnipotent and particular viewpoint. While Cekwana obviously wanted his individual performers to *understand* his personal context, to recognise the particular background of his anger in terms of the country's methods of colourcoding and typecasting¹⁵, he did not expect them to get inside his head, or more importantly his *body*, and *experience* these issues as he did. Discussions and debates were held amongst the group often leading to differences of opinion: for instance, Cekwana's perception of the police force was as an instrument of state suppression while most of the white female performers recognised it in the context of social security and protection¹⁶. Such is the nature of democratic freedom: instead of simplifying the creative process, it expands and enlarges it. Rather than attempt to integrate and universalise these potentially ambiguous and particular experiences into an externally cohesive movement style, Cekwana chose to work the emotive content of Still around the dancers discovering parallel, rather than pretending identical, contexts of association. In the variety of male and female characters represented in a variety of dance styles in Still, we recognise not only bodies on the stage - of muscle, bone and sinew - but individual people - with emotions, thoughts, desires and fears. The fact that such "political" material is being shown on the South African performance stage is not new; Boyzie himself believes that it is not his subject matter but his method of working - what he terms his "coaching"¹⁷ - that is new, especially within the traditional context of a classically-based dance company. In such an environment, personality and personal debate are not considered integral to the creative process; the degree to which

¹⁵ Personal interview 1995.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

performers are involved *subjectively* in the production of a work, is - I believe - an essential difference between classical and contemporary dance. Critic Adrienne Sichel is one individual that seems to have judged the viability of Still according to its particular history and personal creative process, in relation to the final product.

Sichel believes that Still is a true measure of Cekwana's artistic and theatrical power¹⁸:

This fragmentary mix of dance forms, silence and music, pulsates with sombre intensity as Cekwana and five dancers flight and fall, pirouette, goose-step, scream, mourn and grieve as they search for answers to a violent society and the human condition.¹⁹

Sichel recognises two important elements of the work: its use of a variety of physical expressions, from both the theatrical realm of performance and the everyday realm of gestures; and the socio-political significance attached to selecting such a diverse movement vocabulary. The dance reflects human anguish not by referring to it through the veiled shapes of classical abstraction or literal mimicry, but through the intimate and subjective body offering itself metaphorically as a variety of socialised images. In 1990 Sichel wrote an article on Protest in the Theatre in which she described how the predominant image of South African struggle - the toyi-toyi, or people's war dance - had filtered into theatrical presentations²⁰.

A series of running, marching, stomping steps accompanied by chants and songs, this militant street dance form strongly emerged in 1986 when unrest was at its height in the townships.²¹

It was during 1986 of course that the "township urchin" Boyzie Cekwana would walk from the dusty streets of Soweto into the world of dance. And it is perhaps the personal memory of the tense social atmosphere of that period of

¹⁸ Sichel 1995b.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sichel 1990b.

²¹ Ibid.

township life, of running and leaping, heavy breathing and stamping feet, that pervades Still. Other movements in this particular work are transposed from the realm of everyday gestures commenting on how we continually "perform" our identities in society. A sole male figure, smoking a cigarette, stands isolated by a harsh white spotlight; this simple act is transformed, assisted by the surrounding stillness and silence, into a metaphor of anxiety and inner turmoil. Another isolated - female - figure stands rooted to the spot, as if afraid to leave the minimal security and material comfort offered by a single chair. Images of the body include a continual running of fingers through hair, a repeated hanging of the head, almost imperceptible shifts in eyefocus, simple movements that individuals do habitually every day of their lives, but which relentlessly repeated suggest a whole world of emotional and psychological experiences. In an account by Birringer on the "endless repetition" used by German expressionist Pina Bausch²², he reveals how such a mode of presenting and then continually re-presenting one specific image of the *social* body on stage, forces the audience to shift their perceptual process from a comfortable acceptance of the everyday as 'inevitable', to a sharp recognition of the everyday as socially and culturally constructed. Still encourages a similar response: the endless repetition of subjective gestures excavates the implicit rules of fear and repression governing the experiences of a 'national' body.

Use is also made of images drawn from the constructed, but recognisable, world of dance: the female soloist that begins the piece tries constantly to maintain a poise and equilibrium, by balancing on her pointe-shoes, only to find that there she has no stability, no mobility, no escape from the spotlight that engulfs her; the spotlight itself, rather than comfortably reflecting its theatrical associations with social acclaim and visual status, offers only the relentless exposure and vulnerability associated with a prison watch or a state of emergency²³. A male pas de deux uses the traditional motif of lifting, supporting and physical unity only to distort the usual connotations and reflect the pair's inability to bond without battering, to touch without aggression, to lift without throwing. In between these more dislocated

²² Birringer 1991:162.

²³ Steadman stated: "In 1985 South Africa may be described as being ruled by a national security state ideology" [1985:476]. It is in this particular social context which Cekwana has situated Still.

duets, are moments where the elegance, clarity and framed beauty of balletic pirouettes and arabesques are promoted; yet these are juxtaposed alongside the chilling sound of human screams and the incessant rattling of chairs. After all, says Sichel about South Africa under apartheid, "everything was beautiful at the ballet while people died, were brutalised or went insane"²⁴. Cekwana has taken the images that dominated a particular personal and social context of experience, and offered them as a specific cultural context of experience.

In comparison to Sichel's positive remarks about Still, and my own recognition of its emotional power and structural intensity, dance critic for the Natal Mercury David Coleman derides the dance for being "tedious, lengthy and not a little self-indulgent":

Said to be dedicated to family and a dear friend, [Still] moves from frenzied jumps, kicks, whirls and rolls in dead silence, to more of the same accompanied by anguished yells and music that contributes little. A ladder also figures in the furore.²⁵

Like Sichel, Coleman recognises the type and quality of the movement being presented, he is aware of the repetition and the fragmentary mix of performance images. However, he seems to be assessing this *contemporary* work in a framework of appreciation that does not connect its particular form to its particular content, and ultimately, to its particular process of creation. Rather, he seems to be assessing it according to the same value-system by which he judged another, more classical, piece in the programme: Adagietto No 5, by British choreographer Royston Maldoom, is praised for its "sculptural serenity" and "sensitivity"²⁶. Radical woman performer Karen Finley might challenge Coleman with the following: "That's the "male" way of dealing with suffering: "thinking" about it instead of "feeling" it"²⁷. Perhaps Coleman might retaliate by observing that the content of the trio is not about intense suffering; that the emotional triangle of a girl and two boys in

²⁴ Sichel 1995a.

²⁵ Coleman 1995.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Acker c1991.

Adagietto No 5 does not consist of the violence, anguish and aggression, the time-stopping frustration and incessant inner-delving, that the content of Still does; but this is the very argument being forwarded against Coleman's mode of criticism. The content of the two works is *not* the same, so to expect their different structural presentations to conform to a single defined composition is to deny dance, as well as the dancer, the very experiential and explorative context that makes it a mode of cultural expression. McFee defines criticism according to artistic rather than aesthetic appreciation²⁸. The latter reflects more on the criticizers frame of reference, who observes through his/her own historically-correct and unadaptable context of rules. For instance, the repeated climbing and dismounting of a ladder at moments in Still - considering the relationship between thematic context and motional form that the work sets up - might be recognised as a symbol of emotional disturbance or social confinement: the motion is as *relentless* as the emotion it wishes to re-present. Coleman however perceives it as a meaningless "furor"; he fails to locate the subject(ive) matter in the particular context of experience of the *individual* choreographer, the *particular* work, or the *specific* style being utilised. What McFee terms "artistic" criticism, is a mode of understanding that searches for the *details of creation behind* the formal/final presentation, and an understanding of the artists intention; the degree to which the particular art work satisfies the *specific* criteria (context of rules) it has set itself provides the basis from which its artistic (and social) validity can be criticised²⁹. In Still Cekwana draws attention, quite intentionally, to various constructed modes of experience in which people are trapped, both on- and off-stage. The different overall movements of the men and women dancers in Still are not only an offering of technical integration and formal exploration: what a technique of dance symbolises for the body, what restrictions a form of physical expression imposes on the body on-stage, is a revelation of the systems and structures of a society that judge people according to their physicality, that enforce isolation through fear, that allow solidarity only through mute acceptance, and intimacy only through antagonism. The range of physical images comment on a society that is implicitly prejudicial and violent in all its practices from the particular/personal to the general/aesthetic. What Coleman trivialises with

²⁸ McFee 1992:130.

²⁹ Ibid.

a condescending wave of the hand - "Said to be dedicated to family and a dear friend" - is the very essence of the dance, the basic kernel for the work's thematic explorations. Yet he seems disinterested in discovering the personal motivation behind the dedication: the critics perceptive ignorance assists in the audience's receptive ignorance.

Coleman may perceive the context of rules associated with appreciations of classical ballet as impartial and universally-applicable because governed by an institutionalised (and therefore eternally authorised³⁰) aesthetic code of conduct. Classical ballet, through years of rationalisation, consists of a codified movement vocabulary but more importantly has a standardised linguistic vocabulary to match. Newly experienced forms of dance tend *not* to have an immediately accessible vocabulary relevant to descriptions of them. This happened with the earliest recordings of African tribal dancing that colonizers came into contact with. In attempting to capture the elusive essence of these new and active, but 'unknown' because previously 'unseen' expressions, individuals tended to interpret from within enclosed aesthetic and linguistic value-systems. Rather than attempt to appreciate these alternative physical actions in a framework of interaction specific to their own formal composition, researchers tended to assess them according to their own socially-specific structure of rationalisation. David Coleman, in our apparently ethnic-free society, seems to be doing the same thing: judging a particular and unique work according to a system of perception and evaluation that has been granted a universal and all-encompassing status. If Cekwana's black body conforms to the inflexible and predefined values of Coleman's mode of cultural perception, then his current visibility in the world of dance will also be perceived as viable. This type of impersonal and objective appreciation of Cekwana's choreography stands as a polar opposite to those modes of perception that attempt to judge Cekwana solely according to his personal, subjective life. Both of these assume a hegemonic appreciation of the human body, when in fact the personal and the political, the individual and the social, the artist and the aesthetic, need to be in continual interaction and communion, so that the one never supersedes the other. While differences of opinion do not necessarily set up hierarchical and exclusive

³⁰ Novack 1993.

appreciations, it is only when a deference for one's own, and someone else's, difference is shown, that egalitarian communication can occur. This deference includes making visible and viable, transparent and accountable, an individual's particularity within the information-giving process. Cekwana as choreographer has chosen particular working methods for particular contexts, but this selectivity has not always been acknowledged by him, or recognised by others. This lack of transparency has still, nevertheless, gained Cekwana public acclaim.

Silence is golden: colluding with oppression

Despite the artistic versatility and integration that Cekwana makes use of in Still, he has on other occasions conformed to conventional, traditional movement styles. One of Cekwana's first creations for the Playhouse Dance Company in 1993 was Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone: a duet between a male and female dancer, it was aimed at showing how people, even if not alone, are always lonely³¹. The essentially emotional and anguished content of the piece was presented, not through an individually and thematically relevant *movement* vocabulary as Still was, but predominantly through mimetic and dramatic gestures; although the spatial relationship of the two dancers on-stage, and the energy with which they approached the movements, suggested their emotional antagonism and isolation, the line and shape of their individual body-parts was ultimately in accordance with a pre-ordained movement lexicon and standardised form. While these might satisfy the aesthetic ideals favoured by Coleman, they certainly fail to represent the contemporary South African dancing or social body in ethnic or gender transition. The theme was explored with very little emotional or motional variation and nuance, because of very little interacting subject-ive input. Cekwana has admitted in interview, that the classical pas de deux, with its stress on the female and male as passive subject and dominant object respectively, is an outdated representation of the modern relationship³². Yet Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone ended up playing to all of these usual gender-stereotypes. The female dancer, assumed to be representing Aloneness, was allocated the almost determinate role of weak and

³¹ Peskin 1995.

³² Personal interview 1995.

wailing victim; she portrayed a stereotypical version of the emotional, irrational body with very little subtlety in presentation; she was manipulated both physically and mentally by the male dancer. He, in a clearly set up binary opposition, took on the role of tormentor and dominator; and he was equally staid in his presentation of a human body through predominantly aggressive, assertive, penetrating movements. In retrospect, Cekwana rationalises about the piece suggesting the inevitable influence of external factors:

I saw that I was working with very classical dancers within great time constraints. In three rehearsals, I could only really use what was available in terms of their *classical* skill. ³³

While Boyzie compliments most of the dancers of the Playhouse Company for their willingness to try new and daring motion and emotional styles, he makes it quite clear how difficult he has found it working as a black male contemporary choreographer in a predominantly white female classical company³⁴. In the ballet world the choreographer usually tells the dancers exactly what to do, and how to do it. No improvisation processes or workshopping of material takes place; individual interpretative input is kept to a minimum; machine-like perfection and technical precision in movement is preferred above and beyond personal idiosyncrasies, or other avoidable human flaws³⁵. It seems that the "considerable odds" which Cekwana had to confront and overcome to create this specific work were not personal or even artistic. Studies on the social organisation of performing arts companies (Martorella and Federico:c1982), suggest that the ambivalence of juggling aesthetic autonomy, with other non-artistic needs (such as time and money), is integral to the very nature of professionalism³⁶. In fact, argues Federico, because it is easier (quicker? cheaper?) to train a dancer in ballet technique rather than in artistic expressiveness, the socialisation system will emphasise the former³⁷. In 1994 Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone received a nomination for the FNB Vita Award for best *Contemporary* Choreography and

³³ Personal interview 1995.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Kirkland 1988.

³⁶ Martorella c1982:93.

³⁷ Bensman c1982:67.

Dance³⁸, when in fact not only the final presentation, but the process behind the creation, resorted to the usual classical ballet techniques of projecting established meaning onto the dancers as objects rather than receiving and exploring motions and e-motions from the dancers as subjects. The audience, unaware of the external limitations imposed on the artist, accept the final product as the only possible representation of the dancing body, and similarly the social body. They also tend to rely on the apparently informed opinions of critics and judges to assist them in validating the work. Despite Cekwana's own recognition of the limitations of the piece, the duet as it now stands on stage, becomes an affirmation/condonement *in the present*, of gender-specific divisions of the past. In comparison, the fact that Still was a commissioned work, that it had the sturdy financial backing of FNB Vita and the Creative Arts Foundation must surely have something to do with Cekwana being able to explore his performers' expressiveness to the degree that he did; knowing that the company had time, money and a guaranteed platform of presentation in their favour, Cekwana could viably afford to experiment with potentially taboo social, political and cultural elements. Nevertheless, despite the potential for social revelation forwarded by Still, the production process is not entirely free of anomalies.

With the particular and personal context of understanding gleaned by this critical perceiver so far - for instance, Cekwana's admitted recognition of racial and gender constructions; the thematic element of systematic exploitation being explored in Still; and the creative environment in which the work was produced - it seemed that there might also be an awareness of, and comment on, the *gender-roles* implicit in the various modes of physical expression presented in Still. A significant moment in the dance was near the end, when the four male dancers execute a long sequence of vigorous jumps, runs, leg-splits and floorwork in unison, at the front and centre of the stage; behind them the two female dancers remain stationary, bound by two chairs, repeatedly sitting, rising, doubling over and screaming in a slow, emphatic style.

³⁸ Anon., Cape Times, 8 February 1995.

The method of dancing of the women differs greatly from that of the men. Their movements are sinuous and slow, with their arms moving in greater measure than their feet. The men, on the other hand, are full of action, and while they keep time to the music, their steps and motions are vigorous, consisting of jumps and jerks and twistings of the body, as if they were engaged with shield and sword in deadly combat.³⁹

This quote was cited earlier as describing the different movement qualities associated with male and female dancers in a traditional African dance style⁴⁰. This description could quite easily fit the view that a modern day audience might get of *parts* of Still such as described above, where the two female performers function predominantly as a corps or chorus to the quartet of male dancers that very often dominate the front of the stage with athletic ensemble work. At other moments in Still the audience may see a female "support" a male dancer in a jump, but by remaining grounded and stationary rather than assisting him through the use of muscular force: Ebrahim Medell is seen "vaulting" off Desire Davids while Leanne Bates remains seated in the background. The females themselves might even be seen to execute breath-taking leaps and reach spectacular heights but not without the "invisible" aid of a male partner: Leanne Bates is fork-lifted, lunged and whirled around the stage as if representing the rigid spear of masculine penetration. The males, on the other hand, traverse the stage space vertically and horizontally; they climb ladders, run in unison, leap, fall, slide, connect.

Sichel earlier commented on the way that Still situated the superficial beauty and harmony of the ballet body firmly within an atmosphere of social turmoil and racial degradation. This juxtaposition of images aided in unmasking and understanding the aesthetic facades used to hide contortions of the human body according to ethnicity. The images associated with the performer's gender-identified bodies in Still - their different levels of energy expenditure, vertical and horizontal mobility, use of body parts, physical attire and emotive interpretation - seemed to draw attention to their specifically allocated role in a social system that entrenches people's identities according to biological

³⁹ Hambly 1926:110.

⁴⁰ See chapter two, p24.

physicalities, sex as well as skin-colour. Could an audience member apply Sichel's recognition of racial construction to an understanding of how sexuality is also manipulated and maimed to suit a performance ideal? As Kirkland's autobiography reveals, everything was beautiful at the ballet while the ballerina died (spiritually), was physically brutalised, or went insane⁴¹. A description of the movements seen in a classical ballet performance, more akin to Cekwana's Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone for example, might use a similar terminology as that used to appreciate moments of Still: the ballerina *en pointe*, in some positions, is unable to leap very high, travel very far, exert much energy and her arms wave and wander around an essentially still torso; she achieves the visibility that she needs by distorting her limbs to such a degree that her extremely lengthened, streamlined body penetrates the space; she manipulates her feet to fit the elevating toe-shoe, and she relies on the strength of the male dancer to lift her body like a projectile towards the socially-acclaimed heavens. The male dancer tends to travel along the floor with speed, away from it with height, using muscular force and power; but he too is in search of the pinnacle of visibility, so must often endure the manipulation and mastering of the natural body to achieve such ends. He contorts, confronts and challenges his body and others' to tests of endurance and strength. While these descriptions are in themselves abstracted from the particular realms of performance experience in which they might function, it must be acknowledged that these gender-specific images are often appreciated as epitomes of the ideal male and female dancer⁴².

It was also suggested earlier how gender-specific identities do not inherently possess hierarchical connotations but that it is via the social evaluation of these attached qualities that divisions of rank are entrenched. The differential values that are placed on perceptions and appreciations of gender-specific movements in the current "seeing" location of proscenium arch theatre are based primarily on the notion of visibility. It is since the development of the Russian perspective stage -

⁴¹ Compare the remark made by Sichel on p69.

⁴² Dupuy [1993] draws attention to how stereotypes of the female dancer associate her with the tutu, the toe-shoe and other images highlighting her femininity, while the ideal male dancer is young and beautiful, and "must bend his body, strain his joints, develop his musculature...".

frontal viewing, proscenium arch framing - that an emphasis on the human body's maximal legibility⁴³, through the conquest of vertical and horizontal space, has evolved. The tendency is for the human eye in such a framed architectural space to select, and concentrate on, certain images above and beyond others: so for instance, movements patterned along the floor, grounded, circular, subtle "bird's eye" view shapes, do not achieve the same effect of upright visibility that becomes so important to the seated audience. At moments in Still for instance, an audience member's eye is drawn to the group of male dancers who are asserting their height, speed and strength at the forefront of the stage, while perceiving as peripheral the two more static and sinuous female figures in the background. As suggested before this perceptual selectivity is intricately connected to an experiential selectivity: in other words, we tend to live what we choose to look at.

However, the proscenium arch tends to decide *for us* what to look at, and how to look at it. In this way, it functions much the same as a television or cinema screen does: the emphasis is on the immediately recognisable image, the framed picture, the spectacular shot. It is at the movies that:

The world's most desirable men and women will expose their hearts, minds and bodies to us for encounters that are emotionally and erotically intense, but which bear no guilt and *bring no consequences*⁴⁴.

Audiences in the essentially distant and passive positions of perception set up by the proscenium arch theatre, like audiences in a movie-theatre, can see what the performing bodies see and know what they know without having to surrender a fragment of themselves⁴⁵. In an increasingly complex, competitive and consumerist global environment, where the senses are inundated with multiple shifting and coalescing images, the visibility and viability of an experience tends not to be based on quality, but quantity - "concentrated" products that offer the most "punch" with

⁴³ Copeland 1990:9.

⁴⁴ Barry Ronge, "'Ribbon of dreams' is 100 years old", The Star, 28 December 1995. The article discusses how cinema, as "the only art form which is truly modern", has captivated audiences world-wide, as well as being an extremely viable money-earner.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

the least effort on the part of the consumer. The average contemporary theatre-goer wants something concrete, material, fixed that they can take home with them quickly and easily; because of the expediency of the dance performance experience, the ideal object of consumption becomes a static, frozen physical Image. Nureyev's fame was in part due to the fact that the man "sold" himself to the world of the 1960's, that he created his body to suit the needs of a society increasingly governed by "pop" art and mass media production: he exhibited the "boundless energy and appetite" that is the essential requirement of the Big Star, the adventurer⁴⁶; but at the same time he channelled this energy into the "caught" moment, "the flash of revelation felt as a held breath on both sides of the footlights":

The man knew the value of *the right pose* in creating the impression that becomes a memory: suspension even figured in his moments of maximum physical intensity, those first unprecedented jetes that seemed to hang in mid-air and in the mind of anyone who saw them⁴⁷.

In a world of global internets, mass media and universal communication, this search for The Image is especially important: newspapers tend to select *an* image of the artist/performer/choreographer that will immediately "catch the attention", "grab the eye", of the reader. For them, too, the spectacular pose, the awesome 'freeze', the action shot is the product that promises the most in return for its promotion. The ambiguities of human expressiveness and the subtleties of physical intimacy are at present, as much as during the years of apartheid's black and white policies, considered marginal; the demands of an increasingly technological world focus on "zero defect" and "picture perfect" images of action. Cekwana is aware of this perceptive dilemma. He believes that the choreographer wishing to express him/herself truthfully, through a movement vocabulary that although not thrilling or spectacular, is relevant to the thematic content of a particular work, will be up against some very tough opposition.

⁴⁶ Stuart 1994:13.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

At the moment, we are competing with TV, computers, and especially sport, which makes it very difficult to make people see dancing as an art form. They see violence and aggression and spectacular images on the TV all the time, so that's what they're looking for on the stage⁴⁸.

It is perhaps for this reason that the duet between Cekwana and Quinton Ribbonaar in Brother, Brother, which "brought gasps of admiration"⁴⁹ for its use of spectacular poses alongside the more "graceful lines"⁵⁰ traced by the two female dancers, is the section of Cekwana's work that received such local and international acclaim. It is possibly also for this reason that Cekwana foregrounded the athletic and aggressive movements of the male dancers in Still: this is, after all, what South Africa's "new" audiences seem to be looking for. Audience members searching for "innovative" images and "challenging" creations seem to be searching for these within dominant cultural trends that still encourage a "masculine" way of life. An individual only has to look around at the growing "yuppie" trend in South Africa which focuses on success at any cost; the wide range of popular music videos screened on our televisions, although promoting black singers and dancers, still depicts men and women as sexualised objects; the destruction, by apartheid, of the family unit and of community nurturance is now equally denigrated by a capitalist society demanding self-preservation and ruthless progress.

In light of Cekwana's recognition of the taste of mass appeal, did he consciously foreground the male dancers in large sections of Still in order to satisfy the audience's desire for images of the sporting, muscular, jiving, "hard" body? Or were the male and female dancers in Still consciously being presented as their gender-stereotypes - the active, muscular, competitive and public male, and the passive, emotional, solitary and domestic female - *in order to comment on them*? Was it Cekwana's choreographic intention to encourage, or to challenge, the different spatial and temporal relationships used by the male and female dancers? When questioned as to the choreographic intent of this particular presentation of the

⁴⁸ Personal interview 1995.

⁴⁹ Ballantyne 1995b.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

male and female dancing body, Cekwana confirmed that it was not a deliberate thematic motivation, that the issue of male - or female - identity is not one he particularly chooses to explore or re-present in his work⁵¹. He believes that as a choreographer he has to work with the dancers that he has, each of which bring their own *everyday* experiences and physical make-up to the process⁵²; it is for this reason that the male dancers are more often used for the work that requires the athleticism and strength that is Cekwana's trademark, because the females are largely limited by their classical training which relies on the male playing the role of invisible hydraulic lift to an ethereal *objet d' art*. In the ballet world, he says, he is often faced with "batty, dreamy" women, who are not strong physically, or in terms of their mental characters and opinions⁵³.

With my type of work, it's easier to work with men than with women. The pieces I choreograph are usually extremely athletic. Not aggressive, but physically demanding because there's a lot of running and throwing bodies. Although women do their best to cope with it, it's still easier on the men.⁵⁴

Although Cekwana's thematic content, and even form, in this particular work condemns and confronts "the system" according to *racial* inequality, any references to *gender* inequality are unintentional. Which brings us to a very important point: if unintentional in the performance, to what extent did Cekwana, as choreographer, actually confront this issue in process? Even though, in an essentially democratic manner, he drew from the personal understanding and everyday experiences of his cast of ethnically-specific dancers for *Still*, did they actually challenge their bodies at a very personal level to determine to what extent these "everyday" responses were also products of years of *gender*-socialisation? did performers question why certain of the movements were easier to perform by men than women? and to what extent were individual dancers offered opportunities and methods to transform their everyday responses? *Cekwana* himself seems to understand that the classical ballet heritage, which has been the moulding ground for

⁵¹ Personal interview 1995.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Playhouse Parade*, Oct/Nov 1995.

so many young white females in South Africa, has groomed them from the age of five to be "non-thinkers"⁵⁵. *He* recognises that this inability to think as a dancer or an artist, feeds into the social macrocontext so that individuals become socially unaware, and politically indifferent, to issues that effect more than their own personal "performing" kinospheres. But did Cekwana attempt to communicate this knowledge of gender-repression to his dancers, who function ultimately as tools for social revelation and transformation?

Alan Read, discussing the relationship that exists between the everyday and the constructed, the personal and the theatrical, argues the following:

The sober truism is that there is an element of passivity in experience: the acknowledgement must be made of the external situation which I do not create but which imposes itself on me.⁵⁶

This is often the dilemma that the choreographer faces: his/her working tools are human beings, with frailties, complexes, weaknesses and strengths. How much is it the choreographer's responsibility to challenge and extend the frameworks of perception and expression in which individual dancers "normally" function? Certainly every single human being is affected by everyday impositions on, and restrictions of, the body. At the same time, Read argues, theatre has the ability to *suspend, reinvent and revision* these limits of the body through imagination and creation⁵⁷. The problem of course is that these "everyday" limits have to be recognised as random constructions before they can be reinvented; consciousness of their particular fabrication, and their *multiple* variables, can lead to transformation. It is to this consciousness that the choreographer should address him/herself: not only that of the audience, but that of the very material substance on which he/she is dependent, his/her dancers. Cekwana is aware of the need for encouraging this personal consciousness in his performers, but his method of dealing with this dilemma satisfies his moderate and modest personality. Although Boyzie feels that as an artist in a prominent position he has social responsibilities to uphold, his own

⁵⁵ Personal interview 1995.

⁵⁶ Read 1995:208.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

awareness of not invading individual human rights demands a sensitivity, and often a compromise or reticence, from him so that he does not force an opinion on to others. After all, he says: "That's what rights are all about"⁵⁸. Sensitivity towards one's dancers is essential because as a performer he knows the difficulties of being pushed too far too soon⁵⁹. As far as Cekwana is concerned, regarding his *own* body on stage, he doesn't consciously try to break stereotypes; rather, he states: "I just do what I do because I love doing it"⁶⁰. As regards his performers, in *theory* Cekwana believes in gender-equality: "Both sexes can do what the other can - it's up to the individual to decide", he says⁶¹. At the same time, it must be said that Cekwana doesn't let his dancers off too lightly: "Unless I know for sure it's beyond a person's capability, I won't change it"⁶². In the creation of Kude Nomfula for instance, the set design required that the dancers get themselves on and off ropes hanging about six feet from the ground, and hang there for a considerable length of time while continually moving their bodies in classical leg extensions and lifts. From the start of the rehearsal process, three months before the first performance at the Grahamstown Arts Festival, the dancers only had one rope available on which to practise this sequence. Cekwana recalls the tension that this created amongst the females who he said were petrified to climb the ropes. In this case, however, Cekwana's decision to keep the ropes in the production, was more than just choreographic integrity; as in Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone, he understood his responsibility as a professional choreographer, in a professional organisation, to the constraints of time and money. The decision had been made about the ropes, the dancers had two months in which to prepare themselves, and most importantly, the company had, as he believes, an obligation to get past obstacles of a personal origin. Such a statement, however, fails to take into consideration the very same nature of implicit rules and regulations governing bodies according to gender, that has governed bodies according to race. Cekwana himself, in the crushing and choking environment of Soweto, recognised that individual choice is not necessarily a sure

⁵⁸ Personal interview 1995.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Television insert, "Dream a little dream with Boyzie Cekwana", Front Row, M-Net, November 1995.

⁶¹ Personal interview 1995.

⁶² Ibid.

ticket to social achievement. The limitations and difficulties that a body experiences, that are often referred to as of a "personal origin", are very often socially disseminated and entrenched. Apartheid rationalised about the abuse of the black social body for economic reasons; the arts in the past used the demands of professionalism to excuse artistic decisions that were essentially in collusion with forces of oppression. Over fifteen years ago ballet practitioner Elizabeth Triegaardt argued that the reason certain professional dance companies did not present sufficient contemporary work was because of the ever-present need to keep an eye on the box-office: "I think we have as much variety as we can within our financial limits"⁶³. David Poole justified the local conformity to tradition and lack of experimentation in dance by drawing attention to internationally acclaimed choreographer Glen Tetley. He believed Tetley to be an excellent choreographer but stated that even in Stuttgart the innovative Tetley lost the support of audience members because they were searching for something usual, comfortable, and leisurely⁶⁴, rather than challenging. In 1986 dance critic Germaine Glueck predicted that the inevitable osmotic development of contemporary dance in South Africa would lead towards more discerning, and less commercial, forms of expression⁶⁵. Yet, Cekwana's continual reference to the inevitable economic demands to be met by the contemporary commercially-dependent South African dance company reveals anything but a shift away from the hegemony and artistic censorship associated historically with a state-controlled environment. The Playhouse Company is sponsored by corporate contributors such as Cadbury's, Exclusive Books, Gallo Records, Jet Stores, Nederburg, Radio Metro, SA Breweries and a range of other companies associated with public entertainment and community services. The company is reliant on *mass* audience response especially if it wishes to retain the sponsorship offered by its corporate contributors, who are equally concerned with *widespread* appeal. The artist seeking the financial support of his benefactors, in such a scenario, is faced with a dilemma: he can either "[g]ive the people what they want and they'll turn up in droves"⁶⁶, or he can continue to offer a technique that is

⁶³ Allyn 1980:31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*:17.

⁶⁵ Glueck 1986:9.

⁶⁶ Star Tonight!, 20 July 1995. A critic referring to the mass attraction of the spectacular holiday-on-ice show, "Hot Ice"; the quantity of people present at this

shaped by the nuances of a delicate and vastly representative style and run the risk of not drawing the crowds.

Adrienne Sichel recently wrote a review on the Free Flight Dance Company's latest performance offering entitled 'Technical thrills and creative spills'⁶⁷. In it she criticised the artistic integrity of their works for doing what Cekwana is suggesting is a necessary choreographic ploy: rather than challenge the modern audience's overriding desire for spectacle, she suggested that Free Flight tended to score on technical virtuosity but *at the cost of* choreographic substance. In retrospect, Boyzie admits that this is one of the reasons why he eventually left Free Flight⁶⁸: "You know, it's O.K. to do ten pirouettes, eleven...and then what?"⁶⁹ In fact, says Boyzie, that's why he thinks some classical ballet can be so boring. Yet Cekwana does not disregard the use of pyrotechnics altogether. Cekwana attempts to balance the progressive with the staid, the innovative with the traditional, in an attempt to encourage patrons to the theatre without denying what is obviously a personal interest in politically- and emotionally-challenging subject matter. Although he thinks it important to approach an audience as a "thinking audience", he also believes that they need to be entertained⁷⁰ perhaps by offering them flashes of spectacular leaps, well-stretched limbs or suspended arabesques. :

Sometimes a choreographer needs to break the monotony of a moment, and maybe alter the course of a theme, by putting in a spectacular pose, but it must still be linked to the theme.⁷¹

Questions to consider here might include: will every theme necessarily demand at least one spectacular pose? Does a choreographer still put a spectacular pose into a content that is about "ordinary" un-spectacular people? Or is this in

extravaganza seemed indication enough for this individual that "theatre" in South Africa is certainly not dying.

⁶⁷ Sichel, *Star Tonight!*, 20 July 1995.

⁶⁸ In 1989, after graduating from JDF with a Three Year Proficiency Certificate, Cekwana went to work with the Free Flight Dance Company, under the choreographic guidance of Adele Blank.

⁶⁹ Personal interview 1995.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

itself a redundant question: is movement even definable as dance if not extra-ordinary or super-natural? And if not, then what happens to the validity of the movements executed by extremely expressive, but perhaps unsexuctive and unspectacular, individuals? Perhaps this is a question that will always plague the artist: how safe should he/she be, especially when the artist knows that the "safe" alternative will present, if not instigate, the acceptance of hierarchical, repressive, divisive images of the human body, and especially when the artist knows that the "unsafe" alternative will fail to draw the audiences, and so will fail to communicate anything at all?

Despite Cekwana's widespread local visibility and international acclaim, when Still was performed on homeground territory at the Playhouse Theatre in August, "less than 50 people looked on as the dancers moved about the stage"⁷²; I was at one of those performances, and I counted not more than 20 people in the auditorium. It seems that the reliable theatre-goers and long-term patrons of the arts aren't interested in "contemporary" *at all*, and this has nothing to do with lack of media exposure, advertising campaigns, or expensive tickets. Mark Hawkins argues that he has practically given tickets away to increase *dance theatre's* accessibility, but people still don't turn up because they still don't want change. When the company present Giselle or Swan Lake, tickets are sold out, says Mark; so they tend to do the classical works a few times a year because:

It keeps us going financially and enables us to explore the contemporary talent that burns at the heart of this company.⁷³

On the other hand, company member Leanne Bates believes that there is a contemporary audience out there that is younger and more open to new works than the "older" group of traditionalists in Durban⁷⁴; the positive response that the company received at the Grahamstown Festival, for the same programme of works premiered in Durban, seems to be an affirmation of this. Festival audiences seem to

⁷² Bauer 1995:60.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Personal interview 1995.

be more accepting of experimental and contemporary works; David Coleman criticises the Durban dance programme, in which Kude Nomfula and Still were presented, as "festival fare"; he believes that the Grahamstown Festival encourages an "attendant euphoria" in audiences, so the "high-ecstatic reception" received by the company at this event had nothing to do with artistic excellence or performance perfection, but rather mass-hysteria. After watching the contemporary programme of works offered by the Playhouse Dance Company, Coleman suggested to Durban audiences that they rather "pin their hopes" for dance excitement "on the Playhouse Dance Company's *Ballet Classics* next month"⁷⁵. So it seems that the contemporary choreographer functions in a society that on the one hand, like Coleman, is searching for classical positions and attitudes, and on the other is searching for modern spectacles and actions: in both cases the dominating framework of perception is that of the "male" gaze, where the performing body is displayed, distorted and desired behind a facade that pretends objective indifference.

Afterthoughts: Stating the Rules of the Game

In an article dedicated to addressing the imbalance between cultural expression and sports in South Africa, Connell cites the following inspirational words of writer Archibald MacLeish, spoken at the opening ceremony of the Lincoln Centre for the Performing Arts in New York:

"We live in an age which believes that information alone will change the world", he said. "It won't. Nuclear physics opened the sources of inexhaustible power to mankind, and that *power, without an understanding of the human meaning of that power*, gave us Hiroshima. Information without the intervention, the mediation of the arts, will always give us Hiroshima".⁷⁶

South Africans are at present trying to overcome their own history of mass human destruction. The previous chapters suggest how single channels of information at various times in local and international history have transmitted

⁷⁵ Coleman 1995.

⁷⁶ Connell 1995:21.

images of the ethnic and gendered body. They also suggest how the arts have already played a vital role in locating the atom of power generating information about the ethnic body in South Africa. Nevertheless, the country's new-found democracy should not excuse the arts from continuing to interrupt and intervene monotone channels still in existence, by mediating a variety of alternative frequencies. South African dance critics should continue to confront choreographers', as well as their own, contexts of appreciation to challenge what is potentially a hegemonic appreciation of the human body, and humanity.

Several of the questions raised in this last chapter especially, as to potential relationships between performer, process, performance and perceivers are questions that have been confronted by choreographers and performers seeking a democracy of dance production and perception in America during the 1960's. Choreographer/performer Yvonne Rainer denies any tendency towards what she terms disguised sexual exhibitionism or narcissism in her choreography, by concentrating on task-orientated movement, and by breaking the "spectacle of gaze" between performer and audience member⁷⁷. These explorations partly originated out of Rainer's response to the sexual boom of the 1960's and reveal an attempt to break away from the very exhibitionistic, spectacular, and sexually differentiated athleticism that was, for instance, making Nureyev famous. Rainer's process of production and presentation of the dancing body was an essentially egalitarian one, where any-body could perform the same movements and still be perceived as some-body. Another American choreographer and performer, Merce Cunningham, has dealt with the spectacle seeking age of technology not by searching for particularly unique subject matter, but through introducing new ways of looking at things: "The times we live in force us to rearrangements of all sorts"⁷⁸. In a world dominated by fast-changing television images, ideology-saturated media images, unpredictability, change, and instability, Cunningham recognises that democracy in dance production and appreciation is only possible if all the elements in the dance function according to their own context of experience. In effect, what Rainer and Cunningham attempt to do is take away the autonomous responsibility of the

⁷⁷ Copeland 1990:27.

⁷⁸ Lesschaeve 1985:131.

performer, or choreographer, to create a socially viable work. They react against the "star-quality" that tends to promote the particular worth and temporary value of an individual or system as universally, eternally, and immutably excellent. Not only does such a system of evaluation create vast chasms between people in a society ultimately seeking reintegration, but it sets up false ideals for people to aspire to. In a consumerist society, it also results in rapidly-changing body ideals and ongoing feelings of inadequacy when bodies become unfashionable and therefore unviable. What Cunningham encourages instead, is for dancers, musicians, artists, choreographer and audience members all to assume subjective and particular responsibility for what they *choose* to see, interpret and utilise. In this way, all individuals become "masters" of their own fate, they can acknowledge the process of creation taking place, and are essentially involved - quite consciously - in the very process of making meaning.

Cunningham provides us with a do-it-yourself survival kit for maintaining our sanity, or at least our perceptual clarity (which may be the same thing) in the modern city where everything seems to clamour for attention. This is the moral dimension of Cunningham's work; for there's a profound connection *between what we choose to look at and the way we live our lives*⁷⁹.

These final words of this thesis, rather than assuming to conclude the debate on the South African dancing body in transition, are placed here simply to suggest variable ways of presenting and perceiving bodies that are in search of dis-establishment from an authoritarian humanity. It is hoped that discussions and debates, transformation and transparency, will continue to be a priority of South African dance practitioners; and it is hoped that every individual involved in the production and promotion of South African contemporary dance - from the choreographer to the critic to the audience member - will begin to take responsibility for their own "politics of perception". Only then can we perhaps begin to unshackle the racially *and* the sexually colonized body from its bonds of hegemony.

⁷⁹ Copeland 1979:322.

APPENDIX I

TRANSCRIBED NOTES OF INTERVIEWS HELD WITH BOYZIE CEKWANA, AND LEANNE BATES AND EBRAHIM MEDELL - TWO MEMBERS OF THE PLAYHOUSE DANCE COMPANY - IN DURBAN, AUGUST 1995.

SP: What do you remember as your earliest experiences of dance?

LEANNE BATES: I was about five years old when I first started ballet and I've been dancing ever since...

SP: And do you think this was your choice? What was it that made you take *ballet*?

LB: Well, I think that it's every mother's dream to want her daughter to be a ballerina. I was very young, so I don't remember actually making a conscious choice to dance.

SP: Why did your mother feel it important for you to do ballet? What was it that she thought it would teach you?

LB: I suppose it was the discipline.

SP: And you, Ebrahim? When did you first start dancing?

EBRAHIM MEDELL : Well, its a very long story, but basically what happened is that when I was at school, I had to take woodwork as an extra subject and I hated it. It was only when I got to matric that I saw that ballet was an option. And I really didn't want to do woodwork so I chose to do ballet.

SP: Did you think you were going to make a career out of ballet at that stage?

EM : No, it was just that all of a sudden in high school I actually had a *choice* of subjects. I really just thought that ballet would be quite easy to do.

I soon realised that it was more difficult than I'd thought but I'd never really expected to go far with it.

SP: Leanne, what goals do you think you have achieved as a dancer?

LB: I think that your goals as a dancer change with time. The more dance forms I was introduced to as I grew older, the more open my mind became to different experiences. Dance should be continually changing, a dancer should always be going further than just the technical aspect, and that's where "training" becomes important.

SP: Ebrahim, Leanne spoke about her mother fulfilling a dream to see her little girl dancing. As a male *choosing* to dance, did you experience a lot of opposition? Were your parents as supportive of your dancing?

EM : There was a bit of tension from my father. You know, he was a soccer-fan so he wasn't that sure about it, but he never stopped me from doing it.

SP: Boyzie, I find it very interesting that the newspapers often mention the fact that you played soccer before you became a dancer, as if to justify your dancing as athletic ability, which doesn't then undermine your masculinity. Iby spoke about his father not being very keen on his dancing. Do you think that it was the same with you? You mentioned that your mother was worried about your decision to be a dancer. Do you think that people thought you were going into something you shouldn't as a male?

BC: No, I don't think she was worried about that aspect of it. She was more concerned about what the future would hold for me. There was no one else in the country that had done what I wanted to do...

SP: ...there were no role models?

BC: Yes. There was no one who I could point to that had already been successful at what I wanted to do. So there was more concern over the

question of financial security. People in my community didn't regard dance as a *career*.

SP: They rather consider it an integral part of life?

BC: Yes.

SP: In classical ballet, the male and female roles are very specific, and this is particularly obvious in traditional pas de deux's. Traditional African dances also have very specific gender roles, don't they?

BC: I don't know. I can't really speak about that because I have never done traditional dance. I've seen it, mostly in townships when displays were being put on, but I have very little experience of it really.

SP: So what were your influences in the dance world? I know that Carly Dibokoane encouraged you to join the Soweto Dance Project when you were sixteen, but what is it that attracted you to dancing?

BC: I lived in a township my whole life, so as a child we were more used to township jive and other popular trends. I was easily influenced, as most children are, by the latest styles. We were very influenced by American TV and movies. When I was about 12 years old, Michael Jackson's Thriller came out, and all the boys were learning the right moves, dressing the same as him. It was all used to get the attention of the girls. But I was too scared of girls at that stage, so the last thing I wanted to do was get their attention. So the Michael Jackson trend didn't really appeal to me. I remember watching the programme *Fame*, and there was a black guy that was doing the most amazing things with his body, and I thought, if he can do that, why can't I?

SP: It seems that initially it was the idea of doing spectacular feats with your body, of physically challenging yourself, that attracted you to dance? Do you think that it was also a political act, in the sense that your body was yours, and yours alone, to control?

BC: Yes, I think that...and Ibbey [Ebrahim] and I have spoken about this before...dance for me was a refuge, a place where I had the power and the self-control to extend myself. My earliest experience of dance wasn't to be the best, but rather just to be doing something physically exciting. As boys, everybody was always talking about soccer, about some fantastic goal or move that a player had made.

SP: ...and for you, dance was the place where you could find that physical excitement. This idea of pushing one's body, of extending one's physical range, interests me. In a newspaper article I read recently, the headline is "Boyzie glides to the top". Obviously it hasn't been as easy as that: you have said you had to push your body hard, often to the point of injury, because you started dancing so late. And in anticipation of the Helsinki Festival you commented that you were looking forward to fierce top-level competition. How important are these goals of success, wealth and fame to you as a dancer and choreographer?

BC: I never saw dance as a vehicle to get somewhere. I think that success for a dancer or an artist is difficult to measure because the body is always changing. Unlike movie stars, who can measure their success by the amount of money they have made, dancers feel differently about their bodies and the way that they are doing a movement, every day. You have to just see how you feel in relation to your self.

SP: What is it about your work, do you think, that people think is different or new in South Africa? I mean, fusing different dance styles has been happening for a long time in this country.

BC: I've often thought about that. I'm not really sure. I don't think that my work is particularly new in terms of theme or content, but my approach, the way that I coach, is new.

SP: Do you think that in South Africa at the moment, we are still fighting images of the male dancer as weak, effeminate or homosexual?

BC: Yes. It particularly shows when we go to schools, for our Reachout programmes. Recently, we were at quite a conservative Afrikaans school, and when one of the boys stated that he wanted to be an actor he got laughed at by the whole school. Young boys are still looking for pain, blood, physical agony because these are a sign of their masculinity. At the moment, we are competing with TV, computers, and especially sport, which makes it very difficult to make people see dancing as an art form. They see violence and aggression and spectacular images on the TV all the time, so that's what they're looking for on the stage.

SP: I noticed in Still especially, that there is often a quartet of males dancing in unison, or foregrounded on the stage. Is this a conscious attempt on your part to present a specifically male image? Do you feel it necessary to present male dancers in a certain way to try and change people's stereotyped notions of them?

BC: I usually don't attempt in any one dance to deliberately have a main theme. I think that like everyone else, I am a victim of my society. What I am, before a choreographer or a dancer, first and foremost is a man...or rather a male. Everything about me is influenced by what I am. I've never been a woman so I can't think like one. You see things differently.

SP: Do you find it easier then to choreograph on the males rather than the females?

BC: A lot of people ask me about the gender-thing in my work. For me, what it is, is just the way that I am. I try to work with the individuals that I have in the company, and the females at the moment are weaker than the men.

SP: Why do you think this is? When I think about my own experiences as a woman in society, I remember doors being opened for me, heavy things being carried for me, people telling you that you're not supposed to exert too much energy or to play as "rough" as the boys do. And I

believe that these are some of the reasons that females - and female dancers - "naturally" haven't *developed* the strength needed to do some of the things male dancers do.

BC: I think that there are certain differences between men and women and that it's the responsibility of the community to maintain these differences. I remember when I was younger that my twin sister and I used to do everything together. And then one day my mother told me to accompany her to the outside toilet, to keep watch for her. And then she had to be home by six o' clock before it was dark, I was told not to push her too hard in case I hurt her, and she started telling me about the way that older men looked at her. I think that women in our society need to be protected by the men.

SP: Leanne, doesn't this worry you as a dancer? That you are seen in a certain way because you are a *female* dancer?

LB: No, not really. I was quite a tomboy when I was young. As a girl I was always quite physically active. And I think that things are changing. Audiences don't apply such rigid gender roles anymore.

SP: As we've discussed already, the classical pas de deux presents very specific roles for men and women dancers. Do you think that these gender roles still apply in our modern society?

BC: No, I think that these images are very outdated. I try rather to work off individual qualities, to use what each person gives me.

SP: That's why I think Still works for me, because it explores the range of human emotion and physicality by allowing each individual dancer to make the expressive content their own. Leanne mentioned to me earlier that she felt she had been challenged both emotionally and technically by working with you. We were discussing how exhausting your dances are because they seem to demand an emotional input as well as a physical performance from the dancers.

BC: Yes. Still really deals with my anger and frustration at the system in this country. I realised that my dancers all came from different backgrounds and I wanted them to understand my own context, the way that my experiences have had to be different because of the country's position towards skin colour. We had a lot of discussions about the subject matter, for instance my relationship to the police is to see them as an instrument of suppression by the government...

SP: ...whereas the white dancers might see the police in the context of security?

BC: ...that's right. So the dancers were asked to draw from their own feelings about the subject. I can't tell them how to feel. It really makes a big difference for me when the people I am working with are committed, and open to new ideas. It's a question of trust between you and your dancers.

SP: I recently read an article about you in the Weekly Mail & Guardian, in which it says that your greatest desire is to be the best choreographer in South Africa.

BC: Actually, I was very upset about that article. When I went to JDF to dance there, I was asked to fill in a form about myself, and there were questions like what hobbies do you have, what do you want to be when you grow up, those sorts of things. And I was just playing around when I filled it in, and I said that I wanted to be the top choreographer in South Africa. Then this guy from the newspaper needed extra information for an article and went to the JDF files and wrote down all that stuff.

SP: Nevertheless, you have received a lot of recognition, and are obviously an artist in the public eye. To what extent, Boyzie, do you think it's your responsibility as an artist, a choreographer, to challenge or comment on social issues?

BC: I think that it's important to highlight social issues. But I don't think that I have the right to use my position to dictate, to force my opinions on

others. That's what rights are all about. You need to be very sensitive to people and issues. Also it's very difficult, as a black, and a choreographer in a predominantly white company, to stand up to certain issues.

SP: The idea of aggression and physical violence in dances is becoming quite a trend at the moment, I think. And we chatted about dance having to compete with spectacular sports, television violence, computers and videos to get the audience's attention. How do you feel about using spectacular moves and striking poses in your choreography to get the audience's attention?

BC: I think that the use of pyrotechnics depends on what and why you are doing something. Sometimes a choreographer needs to break the monotony of a moment, and maybe alter the course of a theme, by putting in a spectacular pose, but it must still be linked to the theme.

SP: I read a crit that Adrienne Sichel wrote on the Free Flight Dance Company's latest performance. The title of the review is "Technical thrills and creative spills" and in it she says that Free Flight often tends to score on technical virtuosity at the cost of choreographic substance.

BC: That's actually one of the reasons I chose to leave Free Flight. You know, it's O.K. to do ten pirouettes, eleven...and then what? That's why I think classical ballet can be so boring. For Mark [Hawkins, artistic director of Playhouse Dance company], dance can't just be for dance's sake. It must say something, not in terms of a story but it must have an emotional substance, a motivation. Dance must educate as well as entertain the audience, so that they become a "thinking audience", although it is still important to provide entertainment.

SP: We've said that Leanne has managed to develop her strength and assertiveness as a dancer. I know that in efforts to extend the range and ability of male dancers in ballet away from being the muscular but invisible partners, trainers started to concentrate on developing their

flexibility and extension, traits usually associated with the female dancers. But is the reverse being done? Is "masculine" strength and stamina something that is taught in classes for the females?

BC: No, strength is not taught in classes. The girls would have to develop it on their own.

SP: Do you think it is your responsibility as choreographer to challenge the level of dancers' strengths and abilities? Do you think it important to make them aware of possible limiting and conventional gender-stereotypes?

BC: You know, in the ballet world I feel that I am faced with really batty, dreamy women. They are not strong - physically or in terms of their minds, their opinions. The tradition in the ballet world is that you are told what to do. My background with other - more contemporary - dance companies is that they have been directed by strong women, and the female dancers are also strong and opinionated. Whereas ballet dancers have been disciplined from the age of 5 to be a nonthinker: they are indifferent to politics, and unaware of issues even in local news. Recently there was a lot of exposure in the headlines about child abuse, but so many of the girls were unaware of this. As a black, I feel that these *are* issues. Dancers, especially female dancers, tend to be removed from these issues about human rights, or women's rights. They are so ballet-orientated that they aren't aware of any issues outside of the personal. And many of them don't want enlightening.

SP: Let's look at Kude Nomfula for example. The audience sees the male dancers having to help the female dancers onto the ropes, as if to affirm their weakness, their inability to move without the assistance and support of a male partner?

BC: That's a very interesting example. For the male dancers, it was much easier to get onto the ropes than the females. There was a lot of tension, and tantrums about the ropes, because some of the girls were just petrified to get onto these six foot high ropes. This was three months before the first

performance in Grahamstown, and we only had one rope to practise on. A lot of the girls had to be lifted up by the men because they felt they couldn't do it themselves. The first night we performed was the first time that everybody got to use the ropes, so they had never experienced having to hang and move on the ropes for such a long time. Leanne just put her mind to it and climbed up. I think that it has to do with physical and mental strength. You see, the decision about the ropes had been made. A choreographer always has other commitments, time and money constraints, especially in a professional company so it was too late to turn back and change the ropes. At this stage, the final product, the performance, was most important. I have a responsibility as a professional choreographer, an obligation to get past certain obstacles, because of dictations of time and money. So in a way this made the girls have to get up onto the ropes. At the same time, I do believe that both sexes can do what the other can, but it's up to the individual to decide. Unless I know for sure what I am asking is beyond a person's capability, I won't change it.

SP: We were talking about young boys seeking the physical agony, aggression and pain that they see as part of the modern world. To what extent do you think this is also the dancer's desire? I mean, to what extent would you push your body to get a movement right?

BC: Well, my body is my tool. And I want to preserve it for as long as I can. I think that experimenting and challenging oneself is good, but never to the point of pain.

SP: Kude Nomfula has been described as a contemporary ballet, that uses a lot of jazz movements. I noticed that you still used a very classical pas de deux structure for one section with two couples, with the men lifting and supporting - partnering - the women. Did you consciously choose to use this style in amongst the more vigorous and contemporary group unison sequence?

BC: With the type of music that was being used, I think that this was the only - or rather the safest - avenue I could go with these classical dancers. The section you are talking about was the last section to be choreographed, and I felt that I couldn't ask any more of my dancers than they had already given.

SP: Do you think that an artist should opt for the "safest" path?

BC: I think that sometimes it is needed. It really depends on the piece; not everything will be wildly exciting. As an artist you need to be secure enough to know how to balance the safe with the wild, as long as it isn't boring. For example, in this case, the safe alternative was needed to break the other rhythm - something familiar, more calm than the other rhythm I had explored. As a choreographer, I believe strongly in practising a sensitivity towards my dancers. As a choreographer you have to be aware of using human beings who can only go so far. I know from my own experience the difficulty of being pushed too far as a dancer.

SP: This brings us back to what we were saying earlier about to what extent it is the choreographer's responsibility to extend the limits of the dancers, and also the audience.

BC: Yes. I feel quite good about the transformations that dancers like Leanne have undergone through Still. Leanne has become much more mature, she is not hiding behind her technique, which a lot of dancers do. Because I am working in a classical company, there is no workshopping or improvisation that occurs. The choreographer is supposed to do everything; classical dancers expect to be given all of the steps and to develop precise movement. But I try to develop my dancers into understanding artists, by trusting and understanding them as individuals. Lonely Won't Leave You Alone for example, was one of my first pieces for the Playhouse Company in 1991; I saw that I was working with very classical dancers within great time constraints. In three rehearsals, I could only really use what was available in terms of their classical skill. By the time I choreographed Still, Mark and the company had developed enough trust in me to give me more time to

work the piece. So rather than telling the dancers what to feel, we had time to discuss, and to allow them to draw from their own feelings.

SP: This idea of an emotive or expressive content is what contemporary dance has developed. Contemporary ballet is more about people, the human condition in all forms. So it requires individual interpretation rather than stereotypes and clichés. I think that Still achieves this more than your other works, because the *process* of individual interpretation is visible in the final *performance* as well. But then your audiences - and this includes many critics - respond to the traditional works more than to Still. They find the silence, the screaming, the repetition and the emotional content disturbing; they fail to understand it. Also, I was surprised at the turn-out this evening when I watched the programme. In Grahamstown at the Festival you had full houses. And Lynn Maree said that many local supporters had phoned to find out if you were going to offer them a programme, and yet when you do so, so few people actually arrive!

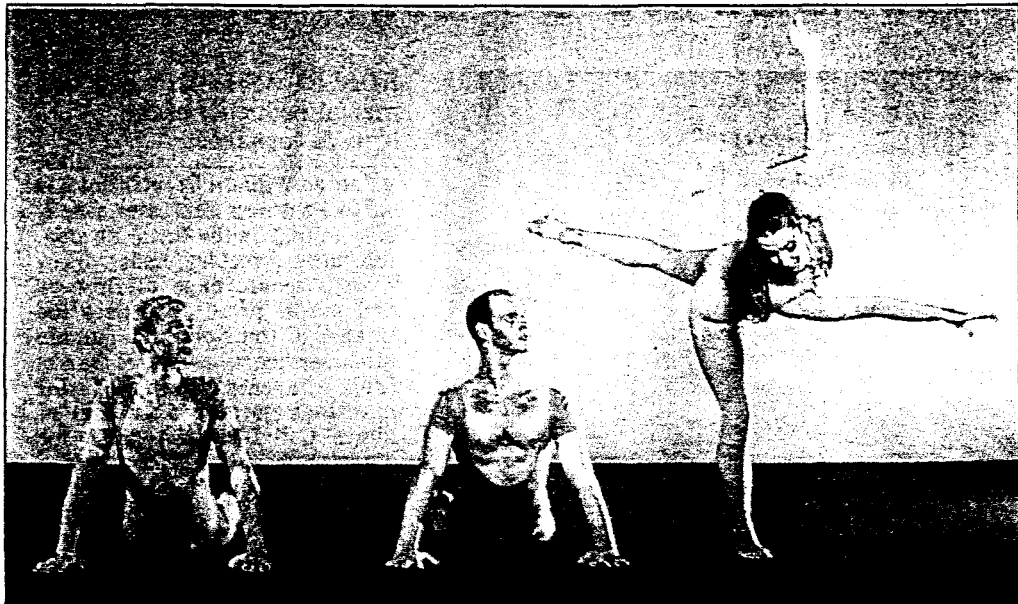
LB: I think that the audiences in Durban are mainly older people who want to see the classical works. It's something they can relate to. Unlike the younger generation, the crowds at the Grahamstown Festival and the youth festival, that can enjoy and relate to new works.

BC: The decision to do the programme at the Grahamstown Festival was the Foundation's request.

SP: Do you think that the media, and the amount of coverage you receive, has a role in drawing audience attention? I mean, I've been following Boyzie and the company in the newspapers just over the past few weeks, and the coverage you have received seems unprecedented for a dance company in South Africa.

BC: I agree that the media coverage and sponsorship of the Playhouse company since April is very rare, for any artist and especially a dance

company. But I think that audiences in Durban don't come to the theatre regardless of media coverage. I think that there is a lot of competition amongst newspapers in the city, the urban areas, but actually most of the people in the outer areas of Durban don't really get to see or hear much about us.



Helen Thomas, Andrew Gilder and Shion Unser in *Adagieth* # 5.

An inspiration for dance

The Playhouse Dance Company, particularly its resident choreographer Boyzie Cekwana, took the Standard Bank National Arts Festival by storm last week.

On the opening night of a programme exclusively featuring his works, Cekwana and his colleagues received a tumultuous standing ovation.

The response to the classical programme next day was no less enthusiastic from audiences starved of dance for dance's sake.

Winner of last year's Standard Bank Young Artist Award for Dance, and more recently of the choreographic section of the Helsinki International Ballet Competition, Cekwana's programme of five works choreographed over three years culminated with the premiere of *Kude Nomfula* (Far from the River) which was specially commissioned for this year's arts festival.

The result is an inspiration for dance in the new South Africa as it blends a brilliant score by composer Spho Gumede and a breathtaking narration by poet Vusi Mchunu to his own classically based choreography. In this spell-binding half-hour-long new work, Cekwana successfully fuses



DANCE

Tommy Ballantyne

his own spiritual African ancestry with the Western influences into which he has been absorbed.

As the curtain rises, the ghostly spirits of past history are eerily suspended in the half light near the river, dancers dangling languidly from long ropes as the medium recites his ritual to the faint throb of drums and the smell of smouldering incense, his poetic chant forging links between the past, present and future.

Taking the river as his theme, Cekwana avows it is "the centre of life, and life never strays far from it". The spirits descend to earth to dance and the audience is swept along on Cekwana's magic carpet.

Kude Nomfula is another triumph for the young choreographer/dancer in a brief, meteoric career. His other major work, *Still*, commissioned by FNB Vita for last year's Dance Umbrella, brings with it a full spectrum of

emotion and dance forms, challenging the dancers' every move and superbly executed by them.

Brother, Brother, as danced by himself and Quinton Ribbonaar, brought gasps of admiration from the packed house before they were joined for the last scene by Helen Thomas, Desiree Davids and Shion Unser. Unser looked strong and partnered with confidence, while Davids and Thomas traced graceful lines.

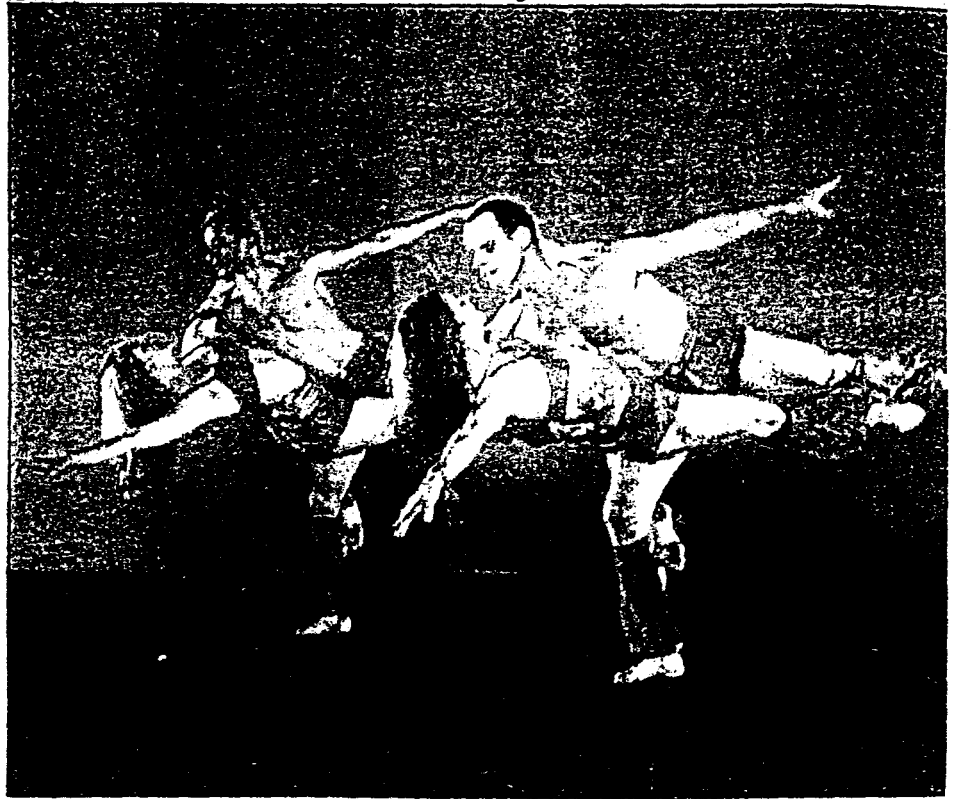
Guest star Vincent Hantam maintains his own high standards, animated and making the role his own in *Spectre de la Rose* with Mary Ann de Wet who has never danced better.

Others worth mentioning are Leanne Bate, Ebrahim Medell and Andrew Gilder for their versatility and flair while Rene Olivier in *Recollections* and in *Kude Nomfula* was in eye-catching form.

Still and *Kude Nomfula* will receive their Durban premieres in a new season of dance at the Drama Theatre from Thursday, July 27, to August 13. Also on the programme are a new work *Excerpts* by Mark Hawkins and Royston Maldo's exquisite pas de trois *Adagietto* #5 featuring Thomas, Gilder and Unser.

Wide acclaim for Boyzie's new work

Shion Unser and Leanne Bate and Andrew Gilder and Mary-Ann de Wet are prominent in Boyzie Cekwana's **Kude Nomfula** for the Playhouse Dance Company in their new season, **Premieres**, at the Drama Theatre. The work breaks new ground and the premiere was received with wide acclaim at the arts festival in Grahamstown.



DANCE

Tommy
Ballantyne

Playhouse Dancers back home with four new works

Fresh from their recent successes in Grahamstown at the Standard Bank National Arts Festival earlier this month and from a flying visit to Italy where six of their members staged a one-off performance at a cross-cultural festival near Rome only last week, the full Playhouse Dance Company is eager to capture the attention of audiences nearer home with its latest season of four new works.

Premieres, which opened on Thursday in the Drama Theatre at the Natal Playhouse, features two great works by resident choreographer Boyzie Cekwana, a new work by artistic manager Mark Hawkins and one by British choreographer Royston Maldoom, all four being seen for the first time in Durban.

The 12 performances of *Premieres* are carefully spread over three weekends with performances at 6.30pm on Sundays, 8pm on Thursdays and Fridays and 3pm on Saturdays with the final performance on August 13.

This evening's audience will see Helen Thomas, Andrew Gilder and Shion Unser in Maldoom's pas de trois *Adagietto #5*, a work first performed in South Africa in 1992 by the Dance Theatre of Harlem in Johannesburg, and then by the Playhouse Company in Grahamstown this month.

Desiree Davids and Leanne Bate are partnered by Unser, Cekwana, Ebrahim Medell and Quinton Ribbonaar in Cekwana's *Still* which was commissioned by FNB/Vita for this year's Dance Umbrella in March in Johannesburg.

It is an intensely theatrical work drawing on a variety of dance techniques but keenly showcasing Cekwana's choreographic versatility.

Hawkins's long-awaited *Excerpts* was premiered on Thursday with music by Joyce Grenfell and original compositions by Durban musos.

Using the full company, Hawkins has drawn from the creativity and peculiarities of the individual dancers to make up a collage of differing images experienced in real life situations.

In typical Hawkins fashion he covers a wide range of emotions, some sad and some humorous, but all human and true to life.

Rivalling Hawkins's *Excerpts* is Cekwana's powerfully theatrical and inspirational *Kude Nomfula* which premiered to wide acclaim in Grahamstown.

Choreographed to an original score by Sipho Gumede and with narration by Vusi Mchunu, it broke new ground at a time when dance has been seeking alternative outlets.

At the Grahamstown festival it was like a breath of fresh air blowing through a smoke-filled amphitheatre, sweeping away all that was pretentious and false and standing for all that is good in this most gracious of art forms.

People have stopped me in the street and asked: "Is it really that good, really worth seeing?"

My response to one and all has been: "See it for yourself; make up your own mind. You won't be sorry you did."

Ticket prices are R20 throughout on Thursdays and R28 (R18 for pensioners, scholars, students and Friends) on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

Booking at Computicket.



DANCE

Tommy Ballantyne

Boyzie takes up US invitation to show South African style dance

The Playhouse Dance Company's choreographer in residence Boyzie Cekwana, 25, is on a month's visit to the United States capital as a guest of the Washington DC Ballet Company.

What prompted the invitation was the performance at the recent international ballet competition in Helsinki of his work for two male dancers *Brother, Brother* with colleague Quinton Ribbonaar which shared the first prize. So impressed was artistic director and founder of the Washington company, Mary Day, by Cekwana's work and his personality that she arranged for him to have a month's leave of absence from his own company and spend the time with the Washington company.

"Everyone here is eager to meet you and learn from you about dance in South Africa," she said in her invitation to Cekwana. "More specifically we are interested in your choreography as winner of the Helsinki award which you must be very proud of."

In Washington Cekwana will observe classes and performances at both the professional company and the School of Ballet which has trained several world-renowned dancers. Arrangements will also be made for him to visit other dance companies in Washington, and also in New York.

His visit will culminate with a guest debut appearance during the Washington Ballet Company's Fall Series in the Terrace Theatre in the prestigious Kennedy Centre from

September 27 to October 1 when he will perform his *Brother, Brother* with a Washington dancer he has yet to teach.

After the September 30 performance he is due to take part in a post-performance discussion, *The Choreographers Speak*, before members of the audience. Other works on the programme include Choo-San-Goh's award-winning *Momentum*, Graham Lustig's *Transit* and Lynn Cote's *I Care*.

The final two performances of the Playhouse Dance Company's *Ballet Classics* with the NPO are at the Playhouse Opera today at 2.30pm and 6pm.

The programme features *Cygnets* from *Swan Lake*, the Shostakovich *Pas de Deux*, *Le Spectre de la Rose pas de deux*, Jack Carter's *Summer Day*, the third act of *Coppelia* and the Natal Junior Dance Theatre in Ashley Killar's *Holberg Suite*.

Dance lovers in Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands get a unique opportunity to see the Playhouse Dance Company in performance at the Memorial Hall at Hilton College during the coming weekend's Natal Witness Drama Festival.

The company will give two performances on Saturday, September 16, at 2.30pm and 7pm. Included on the programme are Cekwana's *Brother, Brother* and *Lonely Won't Leave Me Alone*, Jack Carter's *Summer Day*, Royston Maldoom's *Adagio #2*, Janet Smith's *Muddy* and Shion Unser's *Interlude*. Booking is at Computicket, if there are any tickets left.

12 THE MERCURY
Thursday, August 3, 1995

Dance programme offers little to excite

DANCE: Premieres: A Season of Dance
- Playhouse Drama

IN SPITE of the seemingly nigh-ecstatic reception accorded the Playhouse Dance Company at Grahamstown last month, much of *Premieres* puts one in mind of workshop theatre.

The type of offering - here seen in the guise of dance - that often has one wishing they'd got it right before summoning an audience.

The exception is British choreographer Royston Maldoom's multi-award-winning *Adagietto No 5*, brought to this country by the Dance Theatre of Harlem a year or so ago.

Set to the slow movement of Mahler's *Fifth Symphony*, this emotional triangle of a girl and two boys has a sculptural serenity, here sensitively conveyed by Helen Thomas, Andrew Gilder and Shion Unser.

Reminiscent of his *Flitterblotter* days, Mark Hawkins's *Excerpts* features assorted dance vignettes interspersed among snippets from recordings by Joyce Grenfell reciting her humorous monologues.

Once past the seemingly interminable *Excerpt 1* there are moments to raise a smile, particularly Elaine Fletcher's *Flavia wants to dance*, with live accompaniment, not the bizarre recorded soundtrack.

Excerpts was rather blunted by having the audience seemingly unaware that the opening tracks of Grenfell were meant to serve as a verbal overture.

This being Durban, they chattered even louder to drown her voice, the dipping of the house lights being to no avail!

Of the two commissioned works by Standard Bank Young Artist Award-winner Boyzie Cekwana, *Kiule Nomfula* comes closest to possibly meriting Johannesburg critics' "Best of the Fest" rating.

Eschewing the customary jargon it can be recorded that Cekwana's dipping into African superstitions and folklore has a visually stunning impact, confusing though the theme often is.

This seemingly hinges on the age-old belief that the river is the centre of life that one should never forsake. This much is gathered from the narration in Zulu and English by Vusi Mchunu.

Sipho Gumede's recorded score ranges from strident township-like jazz to primitive drum beats, as does the choreography from the balletic to the athletic, if a shade repetitive at times.

Much as *Kiule Nomfula* gives evidence of Cekwana's sense of theatre as well as dance, *Still* is by comparison tedious, lengthy and not a little self-indulgent.

Said to be dedicated to family and a dear friend, it moves from frenzied jumps, kicks, whirls and rolls in dead silence, to more of the same accompanied by anguished yells and music that contributes little.

A ladder also figures in the furor.

Neither work measures up to Cekwana's *Brother, Brother* that has triumphed overseas. Being a modest young man, he is unlikely to be fazed by all the acclaim. It's to be hoped that his talent will be encouraged, not forced.

The Maldoom work apart, *Premieres* could perhaps best be termed "festival fare" which, stripped of the attendant euphoria, has but little to excite local dance-lovers.

After giving Capab's recent *Swan Lake* a truly rapturous reception, they can but pin their hopes on the Playhouse Dance Company's *Ballet Classics* next month.

DAVID COLEMAN



STRIKE A POSE: Helen Thomas and Andrew Gilder in a scene from *Adagietto #5*, choreographed by Royston Maldoom. A scene from *Premieres: A Season of Dance*, being staged at The Playhouse every Thursday to Sunday until August 13.

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