

Revisiting a dance history: traces of the 1960s in current contemporary dance.

This paper discusses the manner in which contemporary dance artists in the 21st century have been revisiting the concerns of the radical choreographers of the 1960s in their work, particularly in their use of everyday movement, their challenges to the fourth wall and their addressing of the audience. The writing draws on my live ensemble work *The Living Room* (2010)¹, alongside works by key contemporary makers, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker (Rosas), Siobhan Davies, Ohad Naharin and Nigel Charnock

In this paper I suggest that, in different ways, these artists break the fourth wall to reveal the artifice of performance-making in a way that knowingly references dance work of the 1960s. Choreographic devices such as the use of pedestrian, ‘everyday’ gesture and ‘matter of fact’ movement alongside scripted and at times virtuosic choreography, the use of direct textual address to the audience and the highlighting of the function and position of the choreographer within the dance work are reminiscent of the work of the Grand Union, Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown. What emerges from this enquiry is that current choreographic work continues to question and provoke notions of spectatorship and the location of meaning within dance work.

However, as will be seen, while the work of the 1960s and 1970s was ground breaking, in that it redefined what dance could be, current work is more contained, acknowledging its limitations and its dance-literate audience. The referencing of past aesthetics serves (as in visual art practice) to reaffirm and layer the reading of dance works whilst also subtly evoking the social and political concerns of a bygone era.

In examining the traces of the 1960s in current work I will first briefly review key choreographic devices developed in the 1960s and 1970s and their political and aesthetic implications. I will then discuss the use of a ‘matter of fact’ movement vocabulary as well as the use of gesture and facial expression alongside the scripted choreography in works by De Keersmaeker alongside my own. I will then discuss the use of text and more specifically prologues, that, as well as addressing the audience directly also highlights the choreographer position within the work. This last discussion will focus primarily on my own work as well as drawing on work by Naharin and Charnock.

‘Breaking the rules’, reinventing dance in the 1960s and 1970s

1. Pedestrian movement and ‘matter-of-fact’ bodies

Artists of the 1960s and 1970s were driven by the desire to blur the boundary between art and life, bringing art closer to life by rethinking the conventions of theatre, and considering the ‘*problem of performance*’ (Rainer cited in Lambert-Beatty, 2008, p8).

¹ Premiered and commissioned by Woking International Dance Festival in March 2010, *The Living Room* has toured widely throughout 2010 and 2011 with performances at Tmuna Theatre Israel in April 2010. The work was choreographed by myself in collaboration with composers Karni Postel and Nye Parry, lighting designer Michael Mannion and dramaturge and live artist Gary Stevens.

Postmodern makers thus chose to either bring ‘real’ life into the theatre using everyday movement, gesture, speech, and objects or non-dancers, or conversely to take the dance outside the theatre, performing in loft spaces, gymnasiums, galleries and public spaces (Banes 2003, Foster 1986).

Cunningham was the first to introduce pedestrian movement, a ‘matter-of-fact’ approach to the body that rejected Modern Dance’s expressivity. His approach was developed and expanded on in the work of The Judson Church group, and beyond, which offered a new paradigm for dance-making, ‘objectiving’ movement, in this way making movement the core of meaning making (Foster 1986). The ‘matter-of-factness’ of the body, the use of pedestrian movement and an objectivist approach to choreography was most notable in Rainer’s work. In her work *We Shall Run* (1963)², the vocabulary consisted only of running, and in *Trio A* (1966), the facticity of the body, in motion, was emphasised (Lambert-Beatty 2008). Her reductionist, stripping down of the conventional markers of performance such as narrative, character, costuming, technique and virtuosity further underlined the notion of movement as-object, substituting virtuosity with work-like action and forging a new minimalist and functional movement aesthetic (Banes 1987).

The functional and concrete postmodern vocabulary that emerged in the 1960s became more formalised in the 1970s and is particularly evident in Trisha’s Brown’s work from the 1970s onwards (in works such as the *Accumulation* (1971) *Water motor* (1978) and most notably *Set and Reset* (1983). Brown’s movement language centres on a functional ‘jointedness’, emphasizing the trace and trajectory of a movement (Briginshaw 2001). Brown also adopted mathematical systems and serial repetition to her movement-making and choreographic structuring, as in *Accumulation* (1971), which involved the simple repetition of rotations of the body’s joints creating an accumulated series of gestures and more full-bodied movements. From 1973 onwards, she performed this work whilst also ‘telling stories about performing’ it (Banes 1987, p. 82). Works such as *Accumulation With Talking* reveal the body as both subject and object (Banes 1987). The dancer as person is revealed whilst engaged in systematic patterns, but equally the patterning of movement dissipates the sensuality (or other meanings), that gestures may evoke (Banes 1987).

In its exploration of matter-of-fact style, objectivist dance embodies a seemingly paradoxical relation between human feeling and movement: by focusing on the performance of movement as a neutral activity... The individual dancer... [can] express the body both as a physical structure and as a subject (Foster 1986, p.181)

2. Addressing the audience and highlighting the choreographer position

² In *We Shall Run*, Yvonne Rainer limited the vocabulary of the dance to a jog. The work was performed by a group of 12 men and women, both dancers and non-dancers, dressed in street clothes. The runners followed floor patterns, breaking up into smaller groups and joining together again. See also Banes, 2003 8-9 & Lambert-Beatty 2008 p.5.

The performances at Judson Church lent themselves to informal up-close viewing. Furthermore, the space in which performances took place was designed as a rehearsal space, which contributed to 'the process look' of the choreography' (Wood 2007, p.12). Performances of the Grand Union³ as an example took place in informal settings and 'in the round', implicating the audience within the event by making the audience visible, and by performers moving into the audience seating area or addressing the audience directly (Foster 1986, p.191). The Grand Union also employed improvisatory and dramaturgical devices that disrupted a linear and unified reading of work, serving as another way of breaking the conventional performance frame. Their work was episodic in structure, shifting from movement sections to sudden dramatisation, which in turn, was broken by characters stepping 'out of role' to comment on the action.

Foster (1986) describes The Grand Union's use of metacommentary as having four voices in their works '*those of the characters, of the actors playing the characters, of the choreographers and playwrights scripting the action, and of the stagehands...*' (Foster 1986, p.194). Their work began to point towards self-reflexive viewing. By adopting ever changing points of view and commenting on its own making, the dance highlights a back and forth, two-way relation between performers and audience. The choreographers/performers, take up the audience position in evaluating the work as it unfolds:

And as viewers determine the placement and significance of events for themselves, choreographers assume some of the critical perspective normally assigned to the audience. That is, the choreographers are located both inside the dance, composing it, and outside, evaluating it. (Foster 1986, p. 225)

A further device used to point to the theatrical framing of performance was the inclusion of the act of 'witnessing'. In Grand Union performances as well as in Rainer's *The Mind is a Muscle*⁴, performers would watch each other while they were not directly involved in the action (rather than disappearing into the wings as in conventional proscenium performance). Through on-stage witnessing, the act of observing performance was underscored (Foster 1986, Lambert-Beatty 2008). The informal presentation, the use of direct audience address as well as an episodic structuring and commentary engendered a proximal, embodied mode of viewing. This allowed for a more porous relationship between performers and audience as well as implicating the viewers, who could no longer simply adopt a passive stance towards the performance.

As will be seen, all of these features have maintained their significance in current contemporary dance practices.

³ The Grand Union was set up by a collective of choreographers, many of who took part in the Judson Church performances. Key members of the Grand Union included Yvonne Rainer, who initially led the group, Steve Paxton, Trisha Brown and David Gordon. See Foster (1986).

⁴ Yvonne Rainer staged *The Mind is a Muscle*, in 1968 at the Anderson Theatre, New York. The programme was clearly billed as Rainer's own work as distinct to her work with The Judson Church group or The Grand Union. The programme was purposefully presented within a proscenium, emphasising and problematising the act of performance. See Lambert-Beatty (2008).

Traces of the 1960s and 1970s in the work of Anne Theresa De Keersmaeker, Siobhan Davies, Nigel Charnock, Ohad Naharin and my own

1. Pedestrian traces in the work of Anne Theresa De Keersmaeker, Siobhan Davies and my own

Cunningham's matter-of-fact approach to the body, Rainer and Brown's minimalist compositional approaches and exploration of trace are evident, in different ways in the work of De Keersmaeker, Davies, and my own.

De Keersmaeker's masterpiece *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983), although different in terms of dramaturgy and movement style to the work of the 1960s and 1970s, clearly draws on the formalist, conceptual and mathematical choreographic approaches first developed by Trisha Brown and Lucinda Childs. As in Trisha Brown's *Accumulation*, this work was constructed using serial repetition. The repetition draws attention to similarity and difference, and '[makes] *explicit meanings disappear*' (Burt 2006, p.). Crucially, the repetition offers the performer places of resistance, the possibility of '*not repeating faithfully*', subverting the choreography to assert their subject position (Burt 2006 p. p.156). The functional movement aesthetic and performance stance as well as the use of pedestrian movement is also evident in *Rosas Danst Rosas* (1983) the dancers exploring, through strict repetition, lying, sitting, standing and walking in turn (Burt 2006).

De Keersmaeker's recent work *The Song* (2009) while moving away from serial repetition still maintains a functional and pedestrian performance stance. It remains formalist in its exploration of movement for movement's sake, or movement that is inspired by the structure of the body. Performed by a cast of 9 male performers and a female vocalist *The Song* (2009) is constructed primarily of solos and ensemble sections. Solos vary from abstract movement based studies (which resonate with Brown's exploration of trace) to dancers singing and playing the guitar or walking, limping wearing one stiletto. While some ensemble sections are virtuosic, such as the dancers jumping exuberantly across stage to the sound of the Beatles' 'Helter-Skelter' other ensemble sections are fairly pedestrian. A central feature and repeating section in *The Song* (2009) uses the circle, dancers walking and running in circles, whilst keeping eye contact or tracking one another.

Created a year later, *A Series of Appointments* (2010), by renowned British choreographer Siobhan Davies is equally formalist in its investigation of circles and it too highlights the pedestrian. *A Series of Appointments* (2010) is choreographed using only the circle as its pattern. The dancers form the visible radius of a circle, the dancer at the centre of the circle sets the pace, the faster they move the faster the outer most dancer has to run to keep up. As the dance develops, the dancers change directions and play with different formations, subtly chasing one another.

As with *The Song* (2009) and *A Series of Appointments* (2010) the main compositional feature throughout my work *The Living Room* (2010) is circles, metaphorically signifying cyclical time, whirlpools, pattern and its disruption or simply running in circles, hinting

to a history of dances. Created before *A Series of Appointments* (2010), one of the sections in *The Living Room* (2010) also involves the dancers forming and following the radius of a circle. Similarly to *A Series of Appointments* (2010) this section explores the configurations brought about by this pattern, but in the case of *The Living Room* (2010) it is interspersed with virtuosic choreographed moments, rather than remaining solely with the pedestrian.

The Song (2009), *A Series of Appointments* (2010) and *The Living Room* (2010) compositionally deal with the spatial and temporal configurations inherent to the circle as well as the meanings that emerge in the playful and sometimes predatory dynamics of the dancers chasing one another. While I knowingly reference the Judson Church era (in particular dances such as Rainer's *We Shall Run* (1963)), I suggest that both Davies and De Keersmaeker are also aware of the meaning of use of the circle within the context of dance history and practice.

A review of *The Song* (2009) notes that:

*“In the same way as birds constantly adjust their flight in inimitable patterns, this performance belongs in the transit zone between **mathematical precision and human freedom.**”* (Van Campenhaut 2009, my emphasis)

All three works use the circle to point to an ‘in-between’ of order and chaos, or control and freedom. Choreographically this refers to the dancers’ negotiation and response to being caught up in a pattern. It also refers to the choreography itself, the way in which the use of the circle pattern brings in an element of unpredictability with chance disrupting any strict choreographic rule. In *The Living Room* (2010), we found that the circling section continually changed in performance depending on the size of the space and the speed dancers chose to move in. On occasion, as in our performance at Tmuna Theatre in Israel, we had guests joining our performance⁵, changing the mass of bodies circling and the speed with which the circle was completed. In this way, although very limited, the use of chance brought an element of ‘the everyday’ as dancers had to respond to each situation uniquely and spontaneously. ‘Mistakes’, which happen frequently, highlight our ‘humanness’ against or within the set pattern.

In all three works (as in most current contemporary work) the dancers are dressed in casual everyday clothes, t-shirts and jeans, trousers and shirts or simple dresses, as they were in the Judson era. The dancers in *The Living Room* (2010) and *The Song* (2009) are visible throughout most of the work even when they are not performing, they are often seen sitting or standing casually observing each other’s solos. This ‘casualness’, or ‘non-performance’ aesthetic is reminiscent of the 1960s use of witnessing discussed in the introduction. It underscores the act of viewing the performance, and is suggestive of rehearsals or the 1960s ‘*process look*’ as described earlier (Wood 2007, p.12).

⁵ As part of the tour in several performances we invited ‘guests’ to join the performance. These were local professional dancers and emerging companies. The guests would appear in three sections of the work which included dancing and text before leaving.

The stage in *The Living Room* (2010) is bare, apart from a couple of microphones, fluorescent lighting strips and two chairs (for the choreographer and cellist). *The Song* (2009), begins more formally with a hanging reflective piece of material which creates intriguing lighting effects, but it is pulled back towards the middle of the work to reveal the back of the stage. As in *The Living Room* (2010), there are no wings, nowhere to hide, the stage remains bare (Van Campenhaut 2009).

In De Keersmaecker's *Zeitung* (2008) the appearance of the work 'in process' is even more accentuated. A wooden dance floor placed on top of the theatre stage serves as a set. Some of the theatre flats are visible and, as in *The Living Room* (2010), strip fluorescent lightings runs parallel to the edges of the dance floor, suggesting a rehearsal place or a work room. In both *Zeitung* (2008) and *The Song* (2009), just when one senses that the work is coming to a close the stage gets revealed or turned around to begin again. It is as if a new dance suddenly emerges out of the old. This dramaturgy references the process of making dances and De Keersmaecker's uncompromising interest in choreographic formalism, but is also a hint to her acknowledgement of dance history. *A Series of Appointments* (2010), performed in the same studio where the work was originally made, also carries a flavour of its process. The smiles, nods and disapproval in the dancers faces reveal not only the game happening between them 'in the moment', but a shared history of playing and exploring those same patterns in the same room.

The musical score for *The Song* (2009) consists of live body percussion and vocalization by the single female performer interspersed with songs by The Beatles. Reinforced by its title, it clearly directs the viewer to consider not only the dance presented on stage but also the dances that preceded it, not only the songs but also their political and social significance 50 years on.

In The Song, the choreographer returns to her own constructional principles: how do you admit freedom into a clearly-marked framework? How can you be political when in the hold of history? (Van Campenhaut 2009)

A Series of Appointments (2010) on the other hand references the 1960s through its informal mode of presentation. Reminiscent of The Judson Church performances, the dance was presented in the Siobhan Davies studios with the audience seated on three sides. The dance was presented as part of an event, alongside works by a range of artists who took Davies's *The Score* (2010)⁶ as their starting point. This form of presentation directly evoked the spirit of mixed media experimentation and cross art collaboration prevalent in the 1960s. As will be seen in the next sections, *The Living Room* (2010) through its use of commentary and text further references the aesthetics and choreographic devices of the 1960s.

Banes and Foster both suggest that the aesthetic of the pedestrian in the 1960s and 1970s had social and political significance, the emphasis on 'the everyday' not only reflecting

⁶ *The Score*, a short work by Davies, filmed from above, formed the basis for the creation of a number of works by other artists, alongside *A series of Appointments*. All the works were presented together as an exhibition entitled *Rotor: The Score*, at the Siobhan Davies Studios, London.

pedestrians' movement on the street but also 'serving as a metaphor for radical democratization' (Banes 1994 xiii). Every movement can be defined as dance, every body/person (trained or untrained) can be a performer. One cannot overlook the correlation between the 'breaking of the rules' in postmodern dance and the political upheavals and 'breaking of the rules' associated with the era, namely the protests against the Vietnam War as well as the emergence of the civil rights movement (Wood 2007).

The choreographic use of pedestrian movement and performance stance underscored by onstage witnessing and a bare stage in *The Song* (2009), *A Series of Appointments* (2010) and *The Living Room* (2010) mirrors the functional and formalist choreographic aesthetics of the 1960s and 1970s. Furthermore, I suggest that the play between control and chaos in the investigation of the circle, as well as being dance-referential carries political significance. While the 1960s was concerned with 'breaking the rules' there is a more sombre edge to pedestrian aesthetics and the use of the circle in these recent works. Caught between 'mathematical rule and human freedom' (Van Campenhout 2009) it indicates a recognition of the limitation of both 'the rules' of performance, 50 years on, and a recognition that politically we are in a different moment than the 60s desire to 'change the world' (Beatles, Lennon, 1968).

2. Performative traces: addressing the audience through gesture, facial expression and commentary in *The Living Room*

Both *The Song* (2009) and *A Series of Appointments* (2010), present the dancers as 'people'. The dancers watch one another and, to varying degrees, are 'given permission' to react to one another spontaneously. This casual aesthetic of 'non-performance' is even more pronounced in *The Living Room* (2010). Here performers comment on their own or each other's performance as well as the performance itself through gesture and facial expression, dismantling the fourth wall by addressing and acknowledging the audience directly. This brings attention to the mechanics of performance and to the frame of performance and highlights the performers' subject-object position.

Cooper-Albright argues that in the Judson Church of the 1960s dance existed as an 'in-between', as an overlapping between subject and object, performer and audience. Seeing the work of the 1960s and beyond through this prism begins to point to a choreographic conception of the performative, that is the performance of 'the everyday' set against the framing of performance. Works developed from the 1960s onwards can be seen as suggesting a more complex and even paradoxical understanding of performance, re-envisioning an active subject-object relation between performers and audience, performance and its reading.

The Living Room (2010) interweaves a stylised and formal movement language, performed by highly skilled dancers, and a quotidian or *everyday* movement language and modes of behaviour⁷. This reveals the dancers not only as exceptional, non-ordinary,

⁷ I refer to quotidian or *everyday* codes and gesture which operate as a form of communication between the performers and the performers and the audience. This is distinct to use of pedestrian movement (such as

trained bodies but also as ‘real’ people. They perform formal or abstract movement vocabulary but equally they comment on their own and each other’s performance through gesture and facial expression. It also uses spoken commentary.

A play with commentary and gesture is evident throughout *The Living Room* (2010), through glances, approving and disapproving nods, raised eyebrows, smiles, hand gestures, shoves, firm holds and physical manipulations. We comment and critique our own and each other’s dancing as we perform or complete phrases of movement, assessing both the execution ‘that was pretty terrible (or spectacular)’ or the choreography, adding a ‘jazz hand’ implying, ‘its only dance, its only a show’. Throughout, the performers either gesture or comment on each other’s performances, their glances operating in parallel to the dancing body, signifying within a social space.

Yael Flexer talks of being interested in awkwardness, imperfection and her performers are real bodies, showing oddities and difference. They are masters of the little gesture and undercut each other, maintaining an ironic separation... The social exchanges, the definition of social space and the strategies being adopted are recognisable to the spectator...[who] locates and translates significance through this exchange. (Duffield 2009, p.35)

The use of gesture and facial commentary ironically underscores, and points to the gap or distance between the action, the executer of the action (i.e. the performer him/herself), their reflection upon it, and the audience’s reading of the action.

This distance or parallel speaking resonates with the 1960s assimilation of Brechtian Alienation affect (or *Verfremdungseffekt*) creating a distance that enables the actor to comment on or ‘quote’ the character (Schechner 2002, Counsell 1996)⁸. The commentary, which occurs spontaneously as an improvised response within a set of predetermined choreographed ‘steps’, offers the performer a way to assert their agency.

Operating as a resistance tactic (Foster 2002), or a ‘talking back’ to the audience, through facial, bodily stance and hand gestures performers are able to shape their own identity. They are able to comment on their representation, as they perceive it to be formed by the choreographer/author or in the viewer’s mind. The use of commentary by the performers reinforces the aesthetics of ‘non- performance’ prevalent in the 1960s. As is evident in Duffield’s description above, the gesture is identified and recognizable to an audience from their own experience of everyday social space.

2. Performative traces: textual address, prologues and the choreographer position in the work of Ohad Naharin and my own

walking or running) as the basis of formal choreographic construction as in the discussion of the work of key postmodern makers of the 60s and 70s.

⁸ Sally Banes states that Brechtian *Verfremdungseffekt* was ‘well known to (and extremely potent for) for American artists and critics in the sixties’ (Banes 2003, p.4, Lambert- Beatty 2008).

Since the 1960s the use of direct textual address and more specifically the use of prologues to introduce a performance has become common practice in live art and dance practice. Textual commentary and prologues can be seen in works by British dance and live artists Ursula Martinez, Wendy Houston, Tim Etchells (Forced Entertainment) and Charlotte Vincent. As suggested by Albright, the voice ‘*calls forth a bodily presence, and recognizes the performative nature of that presence*’ (ibid p.124). A choreographer addressing the audience, therefore brings attention to the construction of performance, they are embodying as well as enacting the role of ‘choreographer’ or ‘narrator’, equally their bodily presence highlights their ‘in the moment’ subjective and somatic experience but also their role as ‘performer’.

This section focuses predominantly on the use of the prologue in *The Living Room* (2010), with some reference to Ohad Naharin’s *Three* (2005). In both works, the movement and the text are pre-set. In *Three* (2005) Naharin uses a prologue at the start of each piece, discussing what each piece will entail. Although *The Living Room* (2010) uses text and commentary throughout, its prologue is of particular significance.

In relation to *The Living Room* (2010) Alan Duffield states,

...direct address, dancers facing the spectator after a particular section...or the use of the prologue, the involvement of the spectator as a direct and conscious part of the choreographic field is consistently present (Duffield 2010, p.32, my emphasis)

Prologues are a signature feature in my live works⁹. They are usually delivered close to the frame, downstage in-between the auditorium and central stage area. As such, they spatially (and temporally) act as a bridge, fraying the fourth wall and intimating a shared space between the stage and auditorium, audience and performer, the performance, spilling over its edges onto the audience’s designated space. The prologues, serve to demystify performance, they ‘break the ice’, informally welcoming the audience to the show as well as directing the viewer, giving clues as to how to read the work.

In the case of *The Living Room* (2010), in common with *Three* (2005), the prologue offers descriptions and commentary¹⁰ on what the show might entail. Delivering the prologue in person, I both ‘am’ and enact the role of ‘choreographer’, ‘author’, ‘director’, ‘narrator’, ‘presenter’, and/or ‘stand up comedian’.

The prologue gestures towards the choreographic concerns driving the work. I lift my script and state:

This is our manifesto:

⁹ The prologue is present in works created for my own company, *Shrink’d* (2005), *Doing, Done & Undone* (2007) and *The Living Room* (2010) as well as recent commissioned work for other companies, Ludus Dance- *What if* (2010), Lila Dance- *Not About Love* (2010) and Cat Casbon- *Flying Solo* (2009)

¹⁰ As discussed in the introduction *The Grand Union* employed commentary as a device, discussing the performance as it unfolds. Foster refers to this methodology as metacommentary (Foster 1986).

There's not going to be any deconstruction or reconstruction, unless we reference some early modern dance pioneers, preferably dead [dancers interject saying Martha, Merce, Nijinsky, Isadora]. There's going to be construction followed by more construction. Basically we're going to dance and you're going to watch. Because we like to dance, and because we're good at it. Well, better than thinking about it or talking about it...

The prologue thus operates as a dance 'manifesto', a set of beliefs or decisions about what the show should or might contain. The spoken manifesto serves to mark out a presumed territory for the work, its boundaries and tone. It sets up expectations whilst placing the work within wider discourse. It also clearly gestures towards Yvonne Rainer's 1965 'No Manifesto'¹¹ as well as literally naming key dance 'pioneers'.

However, any political or dance referential tone suggested by the word 'manifesto' is immediately undercut by the fact that the manifesto is read from an Ikea chair-assembling manual. The irony of the textual delivery, the knowing looks to the audience, the interjections by the dancers direct the audience to consider the ambiguity, doubt and slippages that are inherent to this text. That which is intimated as about to take place (in the performance) does not necessarily get realised. That which eventually does get realised in performance questions the assumed position the text might imply as well as the authority of its author (the choreographer). The dancers interjections assert the centrality of their role, their place alongside the author, choreographer (the assumed originator of the work).

This resonates with the Grand Union's use of metacommentary. It suggests that the work exists and is formed in the nexus of or 'in-between' the choreographer, the performers and an audience, in their negotiation and exchange. This position is reinforced by the references to Rainer and other choreographers, asking the audience to consider not only this dance but also its relation and place within dance history. The reference is reverential, echoing a 1960s choreographic (or perhaps political) desire, but equally it is ironic, recognising the limits of performance (or political protest). Indeed, Duffield suggests that,

the prologue...continues to create a humorous, knowing atmosphere where the spectator is invited to laugh at recognisable dance forms together with the performer and at what Yael Flexer recognises as trademarks of her own choreography. However, underpinning this is a serious and committed approach to the use of the dancing body as the location of meaning. (Duffield 2010, p.33)

¹¹ 'No to spectacle no to virtuosity no to transformations and magic and make believe no to the glamour and transcendence of the star image no to the heroic no to the anti heroic ...no to involvement of performer or spectator no to style no to camp no to seduction...'. Sally Banes in her discussion of Rainer, suggests Rainer's 'manifesto' operates as a strategy of denial in line with the 1960s focus on objectivist dance, 'demystifying dance and making it objective' (Banes 1987, p.43).

In addition, the prologue sets me up as an ‘in-between’ figure, located both inside and outside the work, I construct the work but I am also part of it. As the work progresses I seemingly try to direct the action from within, albeit unsuccessfully, for example, by repeatedly asking one of the dancers, Aya Kobayashi, to do her solos (which are subsequently hijacked by the other dancers). This ‘in-between’ position again echoes Grand union’s use of metacommentary. It also echoes Brecht’s Epic Theatre, emphasising the author function,

[it] advertises its own fictionality, for overt artifice reveals an author’s hand at work behind the text’s constructions. As a consequence, Epic theatre always shows itself in the act of telling... (Counsell 1996, p.105)

In works in which I do not perform, I, on occasion, also insert the choreographer/author function into the performers prologues in order to explicitly direct the viewer to consider the process, artifice and fictionality of events taking place¹². This underlines the nexus of choreographer, performer and audience and resonates with the use of the prologues in Naharin’s work *Three* (2005).

In *Three* (2005), one of the dancers, stands at the front of the stage holding a TV monitor, on the screen the audience can see the dancer’s ‘talking head’ delivering a prologue while the ‘live’ dancer keeps silent. The dancer in this work could be seen as a ‘stand-in’ for the choreographer’s voice, or as in *The Living Room* (2010), the delivery of text by the dancer’s talking head may direct the audience to consider the dancers role in forming the work. Similarly to *The Living Room* (2010), the prologue is delivered at the very front of the stage in close proximity to the audience serving to bridge the audience performer divide.

Deborah Friedes-Galili, suggests that ‘*the absence of complex stagecraft and elaborate visual design reveals the movement and the dancers’ performance of it as the main subject*’ (Friedes-Galili 2010). Like Duffield, she sees the dancer’s body as the location of meaning. In *The Living Room* (2010), the dancers create a line up, facing the audience. Similarly in *Three* (2005) the dancers often stand still, facing the audience before or after they perform a sequence of movement. Their stillness accentuates the moving body. When they move, they are not only executing movement but seem to have a deeply somatic experience and relation to that movement.

The prologues in *Three* (2005) reinforce movement as the content of the works by pointing out moments in the dance, elements for the audience to consider. They also highlight the artifice of performance-making. The dancer in one of the prologues informs us the lights will go on and off. Indeed when the lights go off, as an audience member one is at first surprised but then recalls the prologue. This reinforces the notion of choreography as a fictitious construction.

¹² Pointing out the author function within dance work resonates with Andre Lepecki’s discussion of the work of choreographer Jerome Bell, see Lepecki (2006).

In these ways both *The Living Room* (2010) and *Three* (2005) echo a 1960s aesthetic of 'baring the device' (Banes 2003). Both place the moving body at the centre of the work whilst at the same time highlighting the dancer's subject position, their somatic engagement with their moving body as much as their relation to us as viewers. Moving beyond the 1960s one can argue, that these dances recognise that the 'dancer as subject' is in itself a contested position. One's subjectivity as a dancer is tainted with other bodies, other dances and the choreographer/author's hand (Lepecki 2006).

3. Subversion and the outrageous, some conclusions via the work of Nigel Charnock

Nigel Charnock's largely improvised solos *Frank* (2003) and *One Dixon Road* (2010) employ many of the devices discussed above, but carry a distinct queer, and radically 21st century postmodernist aesthetic. Charnock plays with genre and character, switching from stand-up comedy, to cabaret songs ('life is a cabaret' in *One Dixon Road*) to exuberant, athletic and at times punishing solos. At other times, he is clambering over the seats and dancing with members of the audience or undressing to reveal the 'ballet dancer's bulge'. As with *The Living Room* (2010) and *Three* (2005), Charnock uses a prologue, except here it serves to prepare the audience to the outrageous, and for some, shocking nature of his performance: '*I'm bound to swear a lot, I get my cock out, it's going to be disgusting, so if you're really really old and conservative and don't have a sense of humour, f*** off now*'.

His monologues throughout the works are long rants about the state of the world and the state of dance. But he too directly references dance history in his performances. In *Frank* (2003) and in *One Dixon Road* (2010) he runs through a brief history of dance which at different times includes acute and hilarious renditions of ballet, Martha Graham, postmodern dance or physical theatre. In the performance of *One Dixon Road* in Jerusalem, he escapes into the wings and shouts "*right, I'm Dancing now but you can't see me*", then steps out of the wings to promptly conclude, "*that's postmodern dance*", a perfect 'one-liner' to Rainer's statement that '*dance is hard to see*' (Lambert-Beatty 2008 p.1). In performances of *Frank* in 2006 (as part of Dance Umbrella Festival) in London, Charnock unleashed his 'frank' opinions of many of the companies performing in the Festival that year, with renditions of William Forsythe and Wayne McGregor. In this, like in *The Living Room* (2010) Charnock not only recognises his place and plays homage to dance history, he also acknowledges that the audience is at least partially if not equally dance literate.

Charnock's solos, move incessantly from the personal, to the local, the political to dance itself. On the way he is not afraid to break open any taboos, from Nazism in his performances of *Frank* (2003) in Germany, to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict when performing *One Dixon Road* (2010) in Israel. What is acute about Charnock's work, is how he is able to connect and cross reference such wide ranging discourses, dance is not separate to the world, politics, dance as much as Charnock as person and queer performer are enmeshed in an exhilarating, messy and profoundly witty way.

While De Keersmaeker, Davies, Naharin and myself play with subversion, allowing a distance between the performer, the choreographer and the scripted steps in order to point to the spectatorial dynamic, Charnock is seemingly outrageous. Improvising as he goes, he clearly draws on the 1960s 'breaking of the rules'. Yet, however shocking, his banter and dance references show that he is also fully aware of the limits of performance.

Although some audiences may find his performances profane, I find Charnock is meticulous. While he rubs against the edges he is completely in control. As an audience I am moved, I am interfered with I am taken for a ride, but I am happy to be taken. While De Keersmaeker, Davies, Naharin and myself evoke the 1960s, nostalgically, critically or even sarcastically there is a refreshing, direct and obvious sobriety about Charnock's work, that simply states things as they are. Or, in his own words, while drawing a big circle with his finger in the air, '*rubbish, shit, there is no now... all there is is this, there's nothing else, it's nothing, and what does this mean, nothing....It's absolutely, totally, beautifully, divinely, amazingly meaningless, right, I'm glad we got that sorted now*'

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