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**BALLERINAS IN THE CHURCH HALL:
IDEOLOGIES OF FEMININITY, BALLET, AND DANCING
SCHOOLS**

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Doctor of Philosophy

DANCE IN THE SCHOOL OF VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

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ABSTRACT

The 'Church Hall' is a metonym for the Private Dancing School, ubiquitous in the UK, whose principal clients are young girls. The thesis interrogates the notion that taking part in ballet is a capitulation to the 'stereotypically feminine', by analysing the testimony of girls aged between 8 and 11 who attend local dancing schools. It presents their comparative assessment of the pedagogies in their primary schools and dancing classes. The thesis interrogates the stability of the idea of 'feminine' and its relationship with the political position of women, employing the theoretical, conceptual foundation for the obverse of a phallogocentric value system developed by psychiatrist Ian D. Suttie (1935), and the possibilities of loosening binary oppositions offered by the semiotic (Greimas') square. The thesis also proposes that the 'symbolic spread' (Frye, 1976: 59) of ballet, and hostility to it, are cognate with the concerns, dynamics, and reception of literary romance, and that both are perceived by the 'guardians of taste and learning' (Northrop Frye's phrase, 1976:23) in terms which demonstrate Suttie's 'taboo on tenderness'.

The thesis brings into representation the history and relationship to the state of British dance culture's 'Private Sector', in dialectical relationship to the largely negative terms in which it is cast by the academic dance community and the maintained education sector. The thesis challenges most private dance schools' exclusion from access to an authentic ballet 'text' by arguing it to be, like ballet's history in the working theatre, marginalised on ideological as much as artistic grounds. It recognises the place of the dancing class in social history, and presently, as a locus of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and, with reference to information from parents and popular culture, as a 'Women's Room' (French, 1977).

The study is in part ethnographic, in part literary criticism, and in part historical; it considers representations in fiction, criticism, historiography, and other sources; it also draws on research in cultural and critical theory, education, anthropology, the history of art, sociology, hermeneutics, and other philosophy. It is post-positivist and qualitative. Neither its historical and social findings, nor its theoretical approach, have appeared before in the critical record.

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The study owes most and the author offers most thanks to her principal informants from Miss Richards' School:

Cassandra aged 9 -10

Elizabeth aged 8 - 9

Jane aged 11-12

Buffy aged 8 - 9, sister of Helen

Karen aged 10 -11

Helen aged 10 - 11, sister of Buffy

Anna aged 11 - 12

Susanne aged 8 - 9

Kerry aged 10, cousin of Jessica

Jessica aged 11, cousin of Kerry

And in addition, to the Summer School participants *Clio* aged 9, *Hermione* aged 8-9, *Jo* aged 10, *Carolyn* aged 10, *Perdita* aged 9, *Rosa* aged 9, *Lucy* aged 10, *Sophie* aged 10, *Paul* aged 8, and *Christopher* aged 14: from the Southern School, *Barbara* aged 9: and to the 41 other girls who contributed to interviews, and to the girls and parents who returned questionnaires.

DEFINITIONS AND ABBREVIATIONS

1. Abbreviations and Special Terms Used in Transcribing Interview Material

- cause because (contraction)
- dead a superlative (spoken Northern English, in use in my 1950s childhood)
- errrm vocalised particle denoting a process of thinking underway
- inaud. inaudible
- me my (pronounced short 'i' as in *win*)
- phatic Phatic: my appropriation of the term, defined in my Oxford Talking Dictionary as 'serving to establish or maintain social relationships rather than to impart information'. I use it specifically to denote a vocal but not a verbal response which the girls used frequently to offer support, agreement and recognition to something said, particularly something which for one reason or another was slightly revealing, difficult to express, or especially important. It is an unvoiced moment of breath, a sort of quasi-laugh. On the tapes I discovered that I did this too; I don't know if I do it in every social context or if I was unconsciously reflecting the girls' conventions. I think, although it is worrying to say so, that it is a culturally feminine English speech code, just as Swedish girls (but not boys) say 'ja' as an indrawn breath with the initial letter implicit. This was told me in conversation with a dance group of mixed nationality (Swedish, Danish, US, French). It may indeed have a Nordic origin since I have heard older male Westmorland speakers express agreement with a similar [y]es.
- 'play voice' a high-pitched, largely unvoiced tone. Adults retain it to talk to small children, animals, and sometimes to other adults in distress. ('Here, kitty kitty')
- s.r. 'sous rature', (under erasure): that is, crossed out, but the original term still present. In recent theoretical usage, a word crossed through, deleted suggests 1) it cannot have its meanings completely removed and 2) the word is inadequate, but there is no viable alternative to it. This idea loosely follows Derrida following Heidegger. I do not mean here Heidegger's original distinguishing Being from beings, or indeed the more complicated of Derrida's analysis of the line of erasure (see Silverman 1989), but I appropriate the term's imaginative resonance.
- skit tease, parody (verb: not in use in my childhood 40 miles away – either new or specific to locality. Sounds Norse so probably local).
- stuff noun denoting 'big abstract concepts'
- V author's initial, used to denote her speaking in interviews
- yeh yes (local pronunciation, open e – yes with missing s)
- ~ denotes change of speaker, when I cannot identify the voice.

2. *Historical Note*

The southern girls used what I call ‘rising intonation’, a newish phenomenon common among younger English speakers, possibly an Americanism, to invite agreement and understanding. The voice rises at the end of a sentence in quasi-interrogative style. I believe it is thought sophisticated or cool. The northern girls did not do this. It may well serve the purpose of ‘phatic’ above – but is less ‘tender’ (Suttie, 1960 [1935]), demanding agreement rather than hoping for it. The majority of my present English-speaking undergraduates use ‘rising intonation’, although so far, those with English as a second language do not.

3. *Style and Conventions*

(i) *Singular They*

He/she: unless the sense or sentence renders it impossible, I will use an impersonal singular ‘they’ or ‘their’ to avoid using bulky his/hers and s/he. ‘Singular they’ is discussed in Ann Bodine’s ‘Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: singular “they”, sex-indefinite “he”, and “he or she”’ (1998:[1975]). Bodine points out that English has linguistic devices to use for sex-indefinite referents, and that the present movement against sex-indefinite ‘he’ (sometimes seen as a feminist attempt to alter ‘correct’ language) is a counter-reaction to attempts by prescriptive grammarians to alter the language in the opposite direction (ibid.: 125), that is, the move to institute ‘he’ to supplant other strategies in use. An Act of Parliament of 1850 legally replaced ‘he or she’ with ‘he’. (ibid.: 130). Current usage of singular they is frequent: examples are ‘Has anyone lost their ticket?’ (sex unknown). ‘Either Mary or John should bring a schedule with them’ (mixed-sex, disjunctive); ‘Anyone can do it if they try hard enough’ (mixed-sex, distributive) (these last two examples and definitions ibid.:135). Bodine points out in her example ‘When you call on a student, it’s better if you can remember their name’ that if ‘they’ were perceived as a plural – possible in this case – the speaker would refer to names, not name. (ibid.:134). Therefore, since spoken English retains this elegant and economical solution to a problem created by English’s loss of most of its pronouns, with resulting political implications for relative gender status, I propose to reintroduce ‘singular they’ with courage and aplomb into my written usage, even though it may be considered ungrammatical by some.

(ii) *Anglicise/ize*

I have anglicised all spellings in quotations, except in titles of books or other instances where American spelling seems intrinsic to the word’s use. I also prefer -ise to -ize throughout.

(iii) *That/Which*

Although Microsoft’s grammar check chides me constantly for using ‘which’ when it wants ‘that’, I consider that ‘which’ is frequently preferred UK English usage. Mary Douglas, and many other authorities present in my quotations, are scolded too: I have therefore stuck to my guns. Similarly I have ignored Microsoft’s inexplicable aversion to the passive tense and reflexive pronouns.

(iv) *Punctuation*

Having been educated in the non-conformist atmosphere of 1968 and Cambridge, when indeed one wrote by hand, I retain a preference to punctuate according to rhythm rather than to imitate the conventions of professional printers. I endeavour to follow what I believe is currently thought standard usage of colons and semi-colons.

INTRODUCTION

'Ballerina' is a curious and paradoxical word. Historically, the word denotes an honour, bestowed within ballet companies on their highest rank of female ballet dancer; but it is also the popular word for a ballet dancer, or rather for an iconic figure embodying a rich seam of connotations and associations. Shops, advertisements, films and stories throughout the capitalist world contain an indefinitely large number of ballerinas; as do the church halls of Britain, where access to the title is self-claimed through identification, imagination, desire – and by going to class. As one of the participants in this culture, 8 year-old Clio, asserted, 'when I grow up I want to be – *stay* – as a ballerina'.

To use the word 'ballerina' shows you do not have access to the cultural capital of the opera house, in the same way that for most of the 60s using the phrase 'with it' proved you were without it. Cynthia Novack opens her article *Ballet, Gender, and Cultural Power*, 'People know and understand ballet because they watch it or study how to do it or perform it.' (1992:34). Many 'people', however, watching TV and living in the present of popular culture, seem perfectly able to have a strong imaginative relationship with an idea of ballet on no knowledge whatsoever. Considering so few people actually do it, at the level at which it might claim authenticity – and how few people go to see it – the idea of 'ballet' provokes a disproportionate amount of cultural attention and interest. Ballet flourishes happily in popular culture in contemporary British society as a widespread and imaginatively powerful code, with aspirations and definitions unregulated by any academy. This cultural curiosity has led me to try to understand and theorise why people who cannot be said to 'know and understand ballet' in the cultural terms implied by Novack, find it meaningful: and what those meanings which ballet produces for them, might themselves *mean*. The idea of ballet and the icon of the ballerina are truly overdetermined, the ballerina's distant and not-so-distant relatives an accretion of associations and connotations from secular cosmology and classical and other iconographies, (see e.g. Warner, 1996) reaching towards the winged female form on the Rolls Royce bonnet in one direction, and in another to princesses real and imaginary, living and dead (see e.g. C.Taylor, 1989; V.Taylor, 2000a). 'Ballerina' represents an unacceptable face of ballet: ballet dancers are used in advertising by Hellman's mayonnaise to represent lightness and health, and by the British nuclear industry to represent

that it is fail-safe, clean and somehow magically effective. Ballerinas can be teddy bears or ostriches, as easily as they can be accomplished and beautiful women. Herman Munster can have a magic pair of ballet shoes (*Dance with me Herman*, 1965); the British Officers escaping from Colditz can disguise the construction of the tunnel by dressing up in tutus and performing a number called 'Bally Nonsense' (*Escape from Colditz*, 2000).

I suggest that this symbolic world, the cultural ubiquity and metaphorical power of ballet in its popular redactions, exists largely independently of the present historical professional world of ballet companies, performance and choreography, and importantly was not produced by them. Of course the sign equipment of the ballerina image was established on the professional stage, but that image is itself a product of meanings, sensibilities, impulses and imagery outside it: cognate images and meanings from the cultural repertoire accrue to the idea of ballet (see Chapter 1, 6-8: & Taylor, 2000a). My working strategy is that is that no cultural artefact which refers to ballet should be excluded on grounds of lack of authenticity, but rather to consider most critically what it is about the value systems which lead to a ring-fence being put around 'ballet'. The construction of these fences is considered from a historical and political perspective in Chapters 2 & 4, and from that of the 'thought styles' (Douglas, 1996) and ideological premises which lie behind them, in Chapters 1, 6 & 7. I do this in order to historicise and democratise ballet culture.

As well as representing an unacceptable face of ballet, 'ballerina' is seen as representing an unacceptable face of femininity. Ann Daly and the recent academy have emphasised one aspect of ballet's ideological connotations, that of the 'patriarchal underpinnings' which mean that the 'ballerina icon...can never [be known] outside of the male constructs that have created her' (Daly, 1987/8: 58). The logic of this statement is impeccable; for having set up these terms – that classical ballet is a 'discourse of [gender] difference', the title and burden of Daly's article – as the parameters of definition, of course the ballerina cannot be seen outside them. Although the ardis of scholarship has moved on since this article (Carter, 1999, and others) ballet continues widely to be read as a locus of outmoded and repressive feminine roles (Adair 1992, Griffiths, 1996, et al), and indeed having a single valency to its gender implications, as can be seen in Jan Mathew and Kay Lynn's (1985) calling their video study of a girls' ballet class *A Lesson in Gender*. Vivienne Griffiths, in her article 'Getting in step: young girls and two dance cultures' (1996), describes taking her small daughter Ella to ballet class:

On the first Saturday morning that Ella went there, we walked into a room crammed with what seemed like hundreds of little girls, all dressed in pink;

pink leotards, pink ballet shoes, even pink hairbands and ballet bags. It was a nightmare vision to me, Ella's idea of bliss. (1996: 484)

The power of Griffiths' language in this resonant image delivers not only the different perspective of mother and daughter, but also the strength of opposition between them. Her mother knows that for Ella the pink vision is *bliss*, not just pretty, not just fun, not just nice, but a full-blown visceral *bliss*, loaded with fantasy resonance. And for the mother, the vision is a 'nightmare', a nightmare that represents the cultural and political position of women. Ella's fantasy world is a danger not only to Ella's future, but it represents the whole political situation. How can pink, frilly, sentimental, not lead inexorably to passive, dependent, silenced, powerless, immanent? Are these little renegades conjuring back into existence that pink ghost feminism thought had been laid to rest? (Taylor: 1999a).

Ella allies herself to her peer group by choosing pink, but this does not explain fully her aesthetic response, and it comes nowhere near to making sense of her *bliss*. Griffiths allies herself with a sophisticated adult political position, but I do not think this alone can explain her affect - that it is a 'nightmare vision'. What is it about pink which can evoke bliss, or create a nightmare? To see if such meanings might reside in 'pink' itself, I examine its cultural meanings in Chapter 7: and Ella's 'bliss' I consider in terms of literary experience Chapter 6, where in a similar incident a girl called Sarah is 'mesmerised' by the image of a dancer.

A ten-year-old interviewee said, 'When people think of ballet, they think of pink.' This 'pink' clusters girly, infantile, sentimental, irrational, 'romanticised', a group of ideas which can be seen as 'tender'. 'Tender' is a term used by Scottish psychiatrist Ian D. Suttie in his 1935 study *The Origins of Love and Hate*. Suttie's work can account for why pink created a nightmare for Vivienne Griffiths, for he recognised that there is a *Taboo on Tenderness* (Suttie often italicises it), which, what is more, is 'the leading feature of our own culture and the main reason for the substitution of the power-technique for that of love' (1960:80). Suttie uses the term 'tender' in a lived-experience way to denote the feeling-tone of 'pink' and so on, but also in a more technical way from within clinical practice to denote the 'love' which does not have an independent existence within Freudianism. 'Why', asks Suttie, 'if tender feeling is a sublimation of sexuality, should it evoke a more active repulsion than its supposed origin?' (ibid.: 84). Suttie accuses Freud fairly and squarely of reflecting the misogynist phallogocentrism of Judeo-Christian culture, and offers an alternative to the prevailing masculinist bias of Freud. 'Tenderness' is that missing term within 'theory', a theoretical, conceptual foundation for the obverse of a phallogocentric value system which

otherwise exists, like Freudian femininity itself, only as a negative, as an 'other'. Alone amongst the founding fathers (for such they be) of psychology and psychiatry, Suttie's theory is not built on an intrinsic foundation of gender difference, let alone one which privileges the masculine: as he says, 'the assumption of a constitutional ("biological") difference in the sexuality of men and women is "a priori" and proceeds from the same anti-tenderness, anti-feminist bias' (1960:224). Suttie's insight is important, and in my readings unique, in that it does not require a notion of 'femininity', yet takes into account both the prevailing hegemony of Freudianism and lived experience. This in turn creates the crucial possibility to consider whether 'feminine' is feminine, or, as I propose, a range of feeling and thought that has been projected on to femininity, and in turn on to biological females, in a kind of scapegoating process: Kenneth Burke in *A Rhetoric of Motives* defines this as 'the use of dyslogistic terms for one's own traits as manifested in an alien "class"' (1953:142). That is, I consider that the aversion to 'femininity' is the result of repression, suppression, and inhibition of a legitimate sphere of emotions and sensibilities, creating a problem for both men and women. 'The world, our world, [cannot] be carried on upon any other footing than that of strength and independence' (1960:224), said Suttie in 1935: and present logocentric culture continues to perceive 'tenderness' as 'other' to its own concerns, while feminism views adopting 'tenderness' as a political capitulation which results in women's subjection. I examine Suttie's ideas further in Chapter 5, but for now I remind the reader that 'tenderness' is not sopiness (although it does not reject that) but is a term to denote an otherwise nameless field of emotions, values, and meanings which are not part of the dominant phallogocentric value system.

Christy Adair, in her cultural assessment *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (1992), assesses 'the image of the ballerina' as 'a popular one with young girls [which] idealises "feminine" aspects of woman' (ibid.: 30-1). Much of this thesis, throughout Chapters 5 – 9, presents excavations into the ideas of 'romanticised' and 'feminised', in an attempt to come to terms with the complexities of hostility which lurk in the scare quotes, in particular interrogating the widely-made assumption that taking part in ballet is a capitulation to patriarchy. Vivienne Griffiths, for example, sees ballet and girls' attraction to it as a vehicle of feminine stereotyping, 'derived from strong cultural and social pressures' (1996: 483), which if correct would suggest that the girls who do it have bought into a view of themselves which is unitarily 'stereotypically feminine.' The best way of testing this assumption, is to ask them, which I did: I interviewed girls between the ages of 8 and 11 who presently attend

ballet class in a 'private' dance school, and in this thesis (and elsewhere) I represent some of the many interesting things they told me about their experience and world-view.

This study considers, in Chapters 5 – 7, the cultural context in which hostility to the popular uses and imagery associated with ballet obtains, to disentangle what is proper to what; what is proper to people's hostility to that kind of feeling (sentimental, 'tender', 'romantic') in general; what is proper to hostility to the irrational; what is proper to hostility to the historical form of ballet; what is proper to hostility to women; what is proper to hostility to the proletariat; what is proper to hostility to popular culture; what is proper to hostility to girls. As my research proceeded, it became clear to me that none of these things are proper to themselves, but displacements and slippage constantly occur, because all these things form an obverse to that phallogocentric value system which privileges an individualistic idea of rational perfectionism and strength, and which marginalises, as Valerie Walkerdine puts it, 'those qualities considered most feminine and least like the pursuit of truth in the social sciences: subjectivity, the irrational, the unconscious, the telling of stories' (1997: 63).

The girls I interviewed are expert witnesses to a culture, rather than the subjects of a study, ethnographic or otherwise. I am, as it were, a longitudinal participant observer: the girls related to me as a dancer, and my own journey across geography, class divisions, history, and different dance practices has rendered me sensitive to the uncertainties of judging ballet practice as unitarily representative of an élitist cultural position – for much ballet practice takes place in 'The Church Hall'.

'The Church Hall' is my metonym for a widespread but virtually invisible culture: that of the local dancing school, ubiquitous in the UK. I have taken the church hall as metonym for an alternative dance practice to that of the opera house, or, in American usage, 'downtown'. Downtown is a geographical trope for high culture: going down town is going up market, and going from the private to the public; from the community to the proper world of public art. I argue in Chapter 2 that an examination of the evidence suggests that the need to go 'downtown' to do proper ballet is a retrospective rewriting from the point of view of the survivors in British dance culture, and that the ballet practised in the church hall is not an increasingly muddied text flowing from a true source in the opera house, but a legitimate cultural practice. Both Church Hall and Opera House shared a parent in the working theatre of the nineteenth century, which lived on in the theatre of entertainment until the demise of that in the 1950s and 60s.

Dancing schools in the Church Hall are part of the 'private sector', as dance practices outside the remit of the state system of dance education and arts funding are known to those within it - schools, universities, the arts funding bodies, and local authorities. 'Private' dance teachers bear allegiance to one or more of the organisations which are known generically within the culture as 'The Societies'. These Societies, of which there are at least 16, form a network largely invisible to the outside world, outside government and the maintained education system, and with no public subsidy: they are anomalous institutions, with a largely unwritten cultural, social and aesthetic history. They act principally as examining bodies, and as trade associations for their teachers. I will distinguish a dancing Society from society (in which we live) by giving the word a capital letter.

My research, in addition to interrogating the idea of dance as a 'stereotypically feminine' practice, represents an attempt to establish cultural validity for a practice universally denied it – denied it not so much in historical analysis or criticism or statistical proofs, but in silence and certainty – indeed, in the 'goes-without-saying', which Barthes regards as 'ideological abuse' the characteristic of *Mythologies* (Barthes, 1972 [1957]: 11). There is a slightly pejorative tone to the phrase, the 'private sector', perhaps a peculiarly British sensibility, where 'liberals' prefer the BBC to ITV, and ideological suspicion attaches to sending your child to a private school or 'going private' in medical treatment. I examine this issue further, particularly in Chapters 2 & 4. The 'private' dance school is, however, a historical reality, pre-dating universal state education, the NHS, the Arts Council and national ballet institutions: established since the late nineteenth century at least in cities, towns, and villages throughout Britain. I consider throughout this thesis (most particularly in Chapters 2 & 4) some of that history, in dialectical relationship to the attitudes towards it maintained by those in a position to represent it.

The private dance school represents a wide field of cultural difference, both in the dance forms it offers and in its clientèle, yet this seems quite invisible to commentators. The 'private sector' stands accused of being élitist (expensive, white, middle class: see Chapters 2,3,4): dangerous (the spectre of 'bad teaching': see Chapter 4): uncreative (rote-learning of the technical and conventional: see Chapter 9): stagey and in bad taste (although rarely brought into representation, other dance styles such as tap and 'stage' are practised there: see Chapter 4). The private dance school, indeed, manages to be both too high and too low all at once: is outside representation, or misrepresented. This presents me with a most interesting exercise in comparative ideology, to examine in this thesis.

Peter Brinson in *Dance as Education: Towards a National Dance Culture* (1991), Cynthia Novack in 'Ballet Gender and Cultural Power' (1993), and Angela McRobbie in 'Dance narratives and fantasies of achievement' (1997) McRobbie, all emphasise the class fraction of those they consider take ballet class, suggesting as Christy Adair does in *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (1992) that cost, race, and class are excluding and undemocratic factors.

Ballet training usually begins at an early age with private dance classes after school. The majority of students come from white, middle class families who have the affluence and values to support such training (Adair 1992:14).

This is, I think, a general view. However, Adair offers no demographic or other information to support the claim, and does not elaborate its significance. I am therefore left with the necessity to interpret Adair's implication, which is less that it would be better if ballet was accessible to all classes, races, and incomes, more that it is always-already snobbish, exclusive and racist, and this is coded as 'middle class.' Adair's charge may be valid in relation to aspiring professionals, especially in terms of ethnicity, for employment opportunities are indeed racist, but she conflates professional training and recreational local practice. (An apologia for the few references to race in this thesis may be found in Appendix 1). It does not seem very historical to judge ballet as Adair does, while rendering invisible the considerable dance activity, such as the ballet recorded by Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen (1989) which is emphatically not middle-class, and indeed may be marginalised by a kind of eugenics on precisely those terms. Performers, for example, from the dancing school of Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's study *Step by Step*, are photographed wearing dance-shop tutus 'on stage', in what I take to be a social club (Konttinen 1989: 27). What is Balanchine to them, or they to Balanchine, (to paraphrase *Hamlet*) dancing at the Terminus Club on Tyneside? Do we see them dieted and technically tortured? No. Are they all white? No. Are we pleased with what we see? I doubt it. The same professional eye that rejects ballet on grounds of élitism rejects their practice. It judges them - not very good (Taylor: 1999b), which in turn pronounces their culture as problematic on inverse grounds of class, in relation to an educated taste.

The ballet class is a powerful cultural form, and it is something its participants enact whether they become professional dancers or not. Achievement in the world's terms - accessing the public world, the material economy, of the opera house - is neither justification nor validation for its practice. For those taking class in the Church Hall, dancing is not a fantasy

of an absent state: it is something they actually do. One girl in interview compared professional ballet with 'the normal ballet we do downstairs.' I consider that it is possible to recognise value in local practice and popular forms of dance by, firstly, questioning the stability of a history which assigns to those at the top of the present hierarchy within dance culture – for which the Althusserian concept of 'Ideological State Apparatus' is most appropriate - both the appropriation of quality and the right to make canonical judgements: and, secondly, by recognising the place of the dancing class in social history, and as a locus of social capital. The dancing that the girls, the women, perhaps a few boys, do in the church hall is their dancing, out of the eye of the profession, connected with distant dance culture, geographically and historically, by the most attenuated of tendrils; it is, however, firmly a part of local culture, and it shares in the sense of community and history hanging in the air, along with the smells of damp, drains, and gas.

That such dancing is outside the ideological control of the state and high culture is a principal characteristic. Such cultural dissociation both allows and refuses ownership – it allows Clio, to assert, 'when I grow up I want to be – *stay* – as a ballerina', but refuses her that status and access to it by appropriating the legitimacy of the dance 'text'. The Opera House, and indeed those who write about dance, those who are in a position to represent Clio, would not recognise Clio's claim. It is ballet's élitism which many writers maintain as the greatest charge against it, but since the church hall is not élitist, but a locally and traditionally available participatory activity, why does the private dance class continue to attract such opprobrium? A great part of my task has been to find ways to resolve such contradictions.

The girls say they 'go to ballet', or even more performatively, they 'do ballet'. Can Clio, and the other ballerinas in the church hall claim the title? Clio does go to ballet class, but ballet culture has normalised that this alone does not give her access to the status of ballerina. In terms of technical standards the professional companies are, of course, *better* than one of our church hall ballerinas. But what does that imply? Little girls – and indeed adults – who dance, can only be denied the authenticity of their practice if, firstly, externally judged by a set of technical standards; or secondly, by the status of the ballet 'text' they study; or thirdly, by the company they keep, that is, the context in which they dance.

Firstly, if access to an authentic ballet text is defined by technical standards, attained when dancers are able to perform the movements properly, when would that be? when the leg is at 180°, 90°, 45°, or is well-placed *à terre* enough? Ballet is not a can/can't skill like abseiling

or driving a car, so cannot be measured in the sense that they can, where success could be deemed to have been achieved if you neither fall to your death, nor crash.

Secondly, Church Hall ballerinas being validated by the status of the ballet 'text' there studied raises a complex issue, which implicates the history of the development of 'British Ballet' through the twentieth century: this issue is considered further in Chapter 2. Different interest groups in that process have left a legacy of conflicting claims to authenticity and quality between schools and the institutions which underpin them, the Dance Teaching Societies.

Thirdly, access to being a ballet dancer is frequently seen as being defined by context: by the attainment of 'professional' status and performing (Buckroyd, 2000:69: Donald Macleary in *Darcey Bussell*: 1998). I have drawn attention before to the employment opportunities – or rather, lack of them - for professional ballet dancers in the UK (Taylor 2000a, 2003). On-line company lists in February 2003 revealed the grand total of 219. Statistically therefore, you are three times more likely to be a Member of the House of Commons at Westminster (659), or thirteen times more likely to be a professional footballer (2875) than a ballet dancer with a regular pay packet. (Note 1. Notes will be found at the end of each chapter: in this case, p.11).

Being 'professional', then, cannot itself define authenticity. If there are only 219 jobs, there are always going to be unemployed dancers regardless of their worth: this is an issue of supply and demand arising from the economics of the profession as a whole, in particular from its low audience base. Aspirant professionals who do not get one of those 219 jobs may have their sense of being a ballerina infinitely deferred, perhaps forever out of reach, for their own dancing requires validation by an external context; indeed, one over which they have no control. Church Hall Ballerinas' ballet is 'normal ballet', not a pedagogic preparation for some notion of real dancing which is only done on the professional stage. In this, the Church Hall Ballerinas' ecology may be healthier for the dancer than that of the profession; they dance ballet, ergo, they are ballet dancers.

The aims of this thesis are to report on the testimony of the girls I spoke with, about school, boys, and girls; to examine the antipathy to the 'private sector' in the academic dance community and the maintained education sector, particularly in relation to class, and the differing 'thought styles' (Douglas, 1996) of these various bodies; to consider the status of the 'stereotypically feminine'; to consider the role of the private dance school within the

social capital of its community, and the families of the girls who attend; to historicise the culture of the private dance school, particularly in relation to the hierarchies resulting from the creation of the institution of 'British Ballet' through the early and middle years of the twentieth century; and to examine and account for the uses of ballet and dance as a metaphor in popular culture, particularly that it shares in the 'symbolic spread' of literary romance (Frye, 1976: 59).

In Chapter 2 I place myself in this picture, not because I think that revealing my autobiography will correct for any theoretical blind spots, but perhaps to reveal those that are there: my attitudes have shaped my approach to the problem. I am a 'participant observer' in the complex cultural situation of ballet, and the girls I spoke with related to me as a dancer, and perhaps as a possible future self: and I related to them at least in part, as to my former self. My autobiography may clarify why I am less concerned with ballet and dance as means of social control than as a locus of social capital (e.g. Putnam, 2000, and see Chapter 4); less of feminine stereotyping and more as a 'Women's Room' (French, 1977, and see Chapter 8); and less as a means of political suppression and more of self-realisation, than are most writers about the subject. Quite simply, the latter, not the former, was my experience. I came from the low art world of ballet and tap, and the culture of the north whose profile of 'working class' is not necessarily proletarian, and of 'middle class' is not necessarily bourgeois and exclusive. And finally, I did not see my participation in dancing, refracted through the lens of femininity: my first clear memory of ballet is of the dancing, not of ideas of femininity, social prestige or the profession; and the dancing was done by me and by a peer in the school playground, a direct personal experience.

Epiphany

In the Infants' School playground, a girl who already went to dancing class showed me a changement. I was amazed by the criss, change, cross: I received it as a brilliant and beautiful thing, which at four years old I desperately wanted to do. I remember my physical relationship to her, close and en face, looking down at her feet, finding this miracle of co-ordination and form quite astounding. All this image I can 'see' but I cannot visualise. I do not know what the girl looked like, although I think she had dark short hair and a fringe. I experience this clearly visual memory in a non-visual way.

This study focuses on girls who go to ballet class in local schools, girls like my former self who do not have actualised professional ambition. I look on their testimony as valuable firstly because it is rarely represented, and secondly because much of the political objection to ballet, particularly in terms of class and gender, is built on a premise that ballet is a tool of patriarchal and social conditioning. 'Conditioning' is not an abstract idea but one in which

ideas are imposed on bodies and minds: it is a process, which should occur, a social reality. As a process, it should occur through time and on individuals; not just theoretically, on generalised populations. Should it not therefore be observable? I consider this issue in Chapter 8, where I report on the views of some of my research subjects' parents. And what is the process by which this 'conditioning' imposes itself? Is it contagious? As Mary Douglas puts it, why do individuals act as a sponge to some things and a repellent to others? (Douglas, 1966:49: and see Chapter 6). I have to ask the reader to tolerate these faux-naïf positions, since they create an opportunity to differentiate and to question, what is too often assumed to be a proven reality and truth.

My study arose from a moment when I returned to a favourite childhood novel, *Ballet Shoes* (1936) by Noel Streatfeild. I discovered that my memory of this book was faulty, and that my adult self, then occupying a much more orthodoxly feminist position than I now can, had suppressed the considerable elements in the text which questioned the very 'romanticised' and 'feminised' view of ballet that my memory had cast it as promulgating. This moment I have dubbed 'The Streatfeild Incident', and the implications of this incident revealed themselves to be wide-ranging and complex – indeed, overdetermined. I will commence by returning to the moment which initiated this study, for encapsulated in that moment may be found, in microcosm, all the issues which I found myself challenged to consider.

Notes

1. Company sites were consulted 8.2.2003 and dancers counted. Birmingham Royal Ballet 56 (www.brb.org.uk): English National 20 (www.ballet.org.uk): Northern Ballet Theatre 30 (www.nbt.co.uk): Royal 87 (www.royalopera.org/ballet): Scottish 21 (www.scottishballet.co.uk): Independent Ballet Wales 5 (www.welshballet.co.uk). Sites did not give dancer numbers for other and occasional projects which might be included, e.g. Debbie McGee's Ballet Imaginaire, George Piper Dances, or Swansea's Ballet Russe, and there will doubtless be others. Any statistics are fallible but I trust the reader will concur that the count is low. MP numbers <http://allasabover.uk/parliament/guide/co1997.htm>, footballers www.the-fa.org., supplemented with estimates of apprentices &c. from professional football writer Ian Alister.

CHAPTER 1

The Origins of the Research: 'The Streatfeild Incident'

Some years ago I was preparing part of a multi-media presentation to be performed alongside an academic paper, 'I dance and I see myself dancing' (Briginshaw and Taylor: 1996), which explored the captation of dancers into their visual image through a largely psycho-analytical reading of mimicry. Images were easy to find to convey the relationship between ballet dancer and the structures of power which form their environment - Ashton, unceremoniously rearranging a ballerina's position, while smoking a cigarette within inches of her face (shown on his TV biography); de Valois, tiny, elderly and stern, dominating both male and female dancer in the pas de deux she was arranging for a photograph (Karsavina, 1962: 2); a little girl at the Royal Ballet School, wearing only her knickers, marooned in the centre of a large room, touching her toes with her back to a panel of scrutinising adults seated behind a table (Jessel, 1979: 28).

Needing quotations to show similarly repressive ideology in the cultural presentation of ballet for girls, I turned to my own childhood copy of Noel Streatfeild's novel *Ballet Shoes*, published in 1936, to collect some. I could not find any. I found instead a carefully constructed *Bildungsroman* of self-discovery and social and economic reality, well-written, questioning, and funny, deeply moral and responsible: a complex novel actively examining the very ideology I had remembered it as promulgating, with a particular interest in the relationship between names, identity and autonomy.

The three protagonists of the novel, orphan girls living as sisters, are aware that their guardian's is, as they say, 'not our real name' since they are 'no relation' (1949: 19) to her. Therefore they choose their own surname 'Fossil'. 'The Streatfeild Incident' occurred when I encountered the following affirmation:

Pauline put both her feet together and folded her hands.

'We three Fossils,' she said in a church voice, 'vow to try and put our names in history books because it's our very own and nobody can say it's because of our grandfathers.' (1949: 37)

This vow, the leitmotif of *Ballet Shoes*, is made after Pauline, the eldest of the three adopted girls, is told by Dr. Jakes, one of the two women academics lodging at the Fossils' house:

The three of you might make the name of Fossil really important, really worth while, and if you do, it's all your own. Now, if I make Jakes really worth while, people will say I take after my grandfather or something. (1949:33)

It is hard to think of a clearer call to arms than wanting to put 'our very own' name into 'history books', that is, infiltrating the public sphere and appropriating one's own autonomy, one's own name. As a child, and before the dawn of postmodern sensibilities, I could not have understood the Lacanian implications of women's access to subjectivity, and of the relationship of that to the *nom-du-père*, of male appropriation of access to language:

Lacan thus makes the phallus the transcendental signifier – the paradigm 'I am'. Thus, despite Lacan's refusal to equate the 'phallus' with anything as mundane as a simple penis, 'The Law of the Father' turns out to be that hoary (and not very venerable) grandfather of European philosophy – the *logos spermatikos*. (Battersby, 1989:196)

But surely I had heard the girls vow to each other, in response to that thought of Dr. Jakes about the inevitable ascendancy of her grandfather, whether he was hoary or not, that they would 'vow to try and put our names in history books because it's our very own and nobody can say it's because of our grandfathers'? (Streatfeild, 1949: 37) (Note 1, p.20).

This unresolved flaw in my own thinking, which I term 'The Streatfeild Incident', provided the 'breakdown' which led to my study. The term 'breakdown' originates with Heidegger, according to Michael H. Agar in his *Speaking of Ethnography* (1985), a proposed schema of language to describe and evaluate ethnographic studies. A 'breakdown' occurs when:

Expectations are not met; something does not make sense; one's assumption of perfect coherence is violated. For convenience, the differences noticed by an ethnographer are called *breakdowns*. (Agar, 1985: 20)

'Breakdowns' are the moments encountered in a tradition which do not make sense, which, Agar goes on, provide a 'cue' to what to study (*ibid.*). The first thing that did not make sense, was the fact that my memory had been overwritten. I had caught myself out in it, but I was not alone in remembering *Ballet Shoes* as promulgating the very values she questions. Streatfeild's novels are mentioned as if they were promoting the very values they consider and explore by Christy Adair (1992), Vivienne Griffiths, (1996) Lesley Ann Sayers (1997), Angela McRobbie (1997), Julia Buckroyd, (2000), Helena Wulff (1998b) – by most, that is,

of the present generation of British writers who consider, in greater or lesser depth, the dance class, the ballet class, and young girls' involvement with dance. McRobbie (1997) Sayers (1997) and Griffiths (1996), the three writers who engage most fully with the 'private sector', use the content of stories about ballet to stand in for the opinions and thoughts of contemporary girls, making considerable assumptions about what their thoughts and attitudes might be, constantly eliding the literary structure and content of the narratives with the political implications the writers see that content representing. These political ideas they read back into society at large, finally projecting those attitudes on to a mass of fictive subjects. However, such stories may have been an important part of our mental landscape when we were children, but they are not of those of the girls I spoke with. Fantasy material about ballet in the popular form of comics is no longer culturally available, and although ballet stories continue to be written, these girls did not read them. I could not use them, as I had hoped, as a starting point to discuss their somatic experience of dancing, femininity, their personal and political horizons, or the penumbra of conventional links between girls, ballet, fairytales, and princesses, which McRobbie (1997) Sayers (1997) and Griffiths (1996), find so troublesome – or to compare the girls' thoughts directly with theirs – or ours, for I have to include myself in this. I certainly did not accept the premises of these scholars, that such stories were solely media through which ideological information was imposed, but I had yet to find a way that these troublesome tropes could be understood or validated.

Continuing with Agar's terminology, what one does with breakdowns like the Streatfeild Incident is to bring them, through a process of resolution, to a 'coherence' which will 'apply in subsequent situations' (Agar 1985: 23). That is, I was charged with placing this breakdown in a context which would resolve the ideological premises of commentators on ballet classes for girls; the experience of the girls themselves; the historical reality of the culture; and the generalised mythology 'of *what-goes-without-saying*' (Barthes, 1972 [1957]: 11: his italics) both in the conventional cultural position of girls and ballet in society's mythology in general, and more particularly in the values which lie behind the assessments of dance writers. These writers do not have a framework in which to read the status or cultural position of the stories positively– but, I found, such terms exist within literary theory, which will place the stories in the wider context of literary romance. McRobbie acknowledges the utopian potential of the stories, and interestingly picks out two functions of literary romance, that such stories are 'a form which is capable of transporting the reader or viewer away from the difficulties of everyday life' (1997: 216) and that they offer 'active role models and incentives to achieve' (ibid.: 230). However, McRobbie sees

engagement with them as offering ‘*fantasies of achievement*’ (ibid.: 216: my italics), which is somehow pejorative, implying not facing up to something thought of as ‘real life’ (see Chapter 6). All the writers make very partial readings of the novels: for example, Sayers’ lengthy examples of ballet fiction (1997: 144ff) have quite a different implication if mapped over a detailed knowledge of the history of literary romance and its cultural position. Sayers refers to a children’s novel (Yee: 1994) whose ballerina imagery employs ‘the common association of ballerinas with fairies and vice versa’ (ibid.: 146), which, Sayers continues, is therefore ‘perpetuating the all-too familiar stereotypes’ (ibid.: 147). Sayers reads this in social terms, that the tropes and images surrounding ballet are retrogressive. However, in literary terms, they place such novels within a highly formalised, established genre, that of literary romance (see below, and Taylor, 2000a, for a consideration of fairies’ cultural significance). This idea of romance is important since it both brings the ‘breakdown’ that I encountered to a ‘coherence’ which will ‘apply in subsequent situations’ (Agar 1985: 23), and places the ‘symbolic spread’ (Frye, 1976: 59) of ballet in a wider cultural context, introducing terms which destabilise the political charges against it (see Chapters 6, 7, 8).

As I studied more and more narratives about dance, *Flashdance* (1983), *Stepping Out* (1991), *Strictly Ballroom* (1992), *Billy Elliot* (2000) &c., it became clear that they shared not just their subject matter, but also plots, motifs, and a general aspirational tone which is also very common in popular culture. This is the world of romance, which as literary critic Gillian Beer says, is ‘a quality, an imaginative power immanent in the “real” world’ (Beer, 1970: 70): for also part of the genre of literary romance are the myths of Greek, Norse, Celtic, and other cultures, folk tales and oral literature, fairytales, ghost stories, Austen, Scott, most of the ‘great’ children’s literature from Nesbit to Dahl, science fiction, much of the Old Testament and of Shakespeare, Arthurian and other legends – and an endless list, constantly renewed, from all contemporary media: *ET* (1982), *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (1982), *Harry Potter* (1997 & ff.), Philip Pullmann’s *His Dark Materials Trilogy* (1995 & ff), *Pokemon* (c.1999), *FairyTale – A True Story* (1997), *Loch Ness* (1995), *Photographing Fairies* (1997), the *Final Fantasy* (c.1985) computer games.

In order to reject the romance motifs in *Ballet Shoes*, orphans and their adventures, struggle and success and becoming oneself, one has to reject a considerable proportion of all literature also. Such themes and motifs are not a product of ballet; rather, ballet, and dance, has itself become a recognised and recurring motif within contemporary literary romance. The historical position of romance within society is low status, proletarian, feminised,

irrational, and the illusory solace of those without power or achievement. I consider that such judgements mirror the way the culture of ballet classes, and the symbolic spread (Frye, 1976: 59) enthusiastically embraced by little girls – fairies, princesses, pink-ness, and so on – is devalued by those in more sophisticated cultural positions. If you have a serious interest in ballet, you will regard its fairytale associations as trivialising; Janet Wolff, for example, questions her own enjoyment of classical ballet, since ‘many of [its] works of repertory are based on reactionary and sexist (not to say silly) stories’ (1992: 23-4). If you hate ballet, you can use the associations as further ammunition in your rhetoric against it (Everitt, 1994, Lawson, 2001, and see Chapters 6 & 7). But if you are a non-judgmental commentator such as one of the 9 year-old girls I have been interviewing at their dancing school you will be able to say, ‘Ballet and fairytales... they’re the same, somehow.’ Imagery of fairies and princesses is firmly attached to ballet and ballerinas, in the popular imagination: an insight that makes sense within the range of imagery, tropes, and concerns that is literary romance. All this may be sentimental, irrational, and incompatible with a realist, rational, cognitive, project, but that is not my concern; nor the concern of many users and producers of popular culture.

Fairies, flight and the supernatural are motifs which occur and reoccur in literary romance, and their association with ballet was firmly in place in the 1840s, when these concerns, unusually, were at one with the episteme. (Note 2, p.20). To see these ideas as a product of ballet’s present canonical status and political implications does not seem very historical; not only do these cultural ideas predate ballet’s current standing, but they have remained constant while the art form’s social, political, and artistic standing in the world has undergone considerable changes.

This symbolic world has its own history and cultural dynamic, and I propose that it found in ballet a very appropriate host. The ballet establishment itself, as host, may perceive this clutter of pink frilly sentimental naïve junk more as a parasite than as a welcome guest. However hostility to such irrational and proletarian pleasures in ballet reproduces the abiding hostility of the educated élite, well documented historically, towards romance in all its manifestations. As literary critic Northrop Frye puts it,

Popular literature has been the object of a constant bombardment of social anxieties for over two thousand years, and nearly the whole of the established critical tradition has stood out against it. The greater part of the reading and

listening public has ignored the critics and censors for exactly the same length of time.' (1976:23)

Romance is seen by Frye as the 'Secular Scripture'; that is, as 'the structural core of all fiction... considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest' (Frye, 1976: 15). Romance is a form of storytelling whose quest structure and utopian dynamic parallel religious narratives of salvation, purification, and a process of developing into a truer and more perfect person. Romance is not a mirror to reality, but expressive of desire; in Marina Warner's term 'optative - announcing what might be' (1995: xvi); or in the Greek terminology referred to by Frye, neither true nor false but 'plasmatic', again, 'the presenting of things as they conceivably could be' (1976: 17).

However much romance is despised by the educated, rational, and politically evolved, its persistence, its vitality, its ubiquity, and the way that its motifs remain little changed from the earliest literature to present day television and films, is a historical reality whose refusal by dominant culture is itself relevant to my study. It is particularly relevant because even the productions of ballet's elite are frequently denigrated by cultural commentators such as Mark Lawson in his article 'What's the Point of Ballet?' (2001) in remarkably similar terms to those used against the various redactions of literary romance – they object to its fairytale associations, to its not being about real life, to its not having serious content, to its not, therefore, having 'a point'. The point I am making, and to which I will return from different perspectives through this thesis, is that many anxieties associated with ballet imagery are anxieties about romance motifs in general, not specific to ballet at all. Ballet itself does not have to bear sole responsibility for the opprobrium attached to some of its connotations. Ballet – and romance – are devalued by a logocentric, rationalist, anti-tender (see chapters 6 & 7) value system.

'Antipathy for hierarchy' (Douglas, 1996: 101)

The 'breakdown' of the Streatfeild Incident struck deep at the premises of a feminist position. My first task was to interrogate the theoretical underpinnings of the position I had held – against, it now appeared, the evidence. It is easy to notice what is wrong with what other people think but catching oneself out in 'cultural innocence' is an uncomfortable experience. Mary Douglas's term 'cultural innocence' refers to 'a discourse that takes values as given even while arguing normatively about them; a discourse that seeks to

persuade and justify action' (1996: 95). Elsewhere in *Thought Styles: Critical Essays on Good Taste* Douglas proposes a theory of culture which divides 'thought styles' into four types, each of which maintains its own identity precisely through hostility to the other three. Douglas's first cultural type is 'based on hierarchical community, and so in favour of formality and compartmentalisation', the second is 'based on equality within a group, and so in favour of spontaneity, and free negotiation, and very hostile to other ways of life'. One might assign ballet to the first cultural type, and ballet's radical opponents to the second. (The third is the competitive culture of individualism, and the fourth the culture of the isolate [ibid.: 43]: these do not concern me here.)

The working model which Douglas proposes provides 'a technique for thinking about culture without indulging subjective bias' (ibid.: 45). It also affirms that, as Douglas says, 'One type of culture is not ineluctably, eternally better than another' (ibid. 101). Douglas's schema follows the pattern of a logical, or semiotic, or Greimas' Square. The Greimas' Square offers the possibility of avoiding binary opposition – a crucial playing-piece in a consideration of a culturally gendered activity such as ballet, which I consider further in Chapters 5, 7, and 9.

I draw attention to Douglas's example from within social science of a dispute between 'thought styles', comparable to one I was brought, by the Streatfeild Incident, to recognise as prevailing within dance criticism:

There is currently a general prejudice in favour of the egalitarian home, in favour of the individualist home, or of attempted compromise combinations of the two, and a strong prejudice among social science professionals against the hierarchical home. Is this antipathy for hierarchy culturally innocent? (ibid: 101)

Mary Douglas takes no prisoners, in her consideration of *why* social scientists reject the hierarchical home: comparing the socio-economic distribution of preferences for hierarchy, or for egalitarian individualism, she suggests that the reason 'is partly simply snobbism, partly opportunism, a conforming preference for an elite lifestyle' (ibid.). That is, hierarchical homes tend to be working class: egalitarian and individualist ones are the sort of homes of the social scientists themselves, educated and middle-class. I need to consider, in a similar way, what the objections of dance writers might be, to the symbolic spread (Frye, 1976: 59) of ideas and associations around ballet.

'Antipathy for hierarchy' (Douglas: 1996: 101) makes a reasonable fit for the 'thought style' which underpins antipathy for ballet, which, I suggest, is held as a result of an allegiance to notions of 'egalitarian' and 'individualist', two of the leading characteristics commentators see lacking in the private dance school, but that their position is 'culturally innocent' (ibid.: 95) to the extent that it considers itself 'ineluctably, eternally better' (ibid. 101) than the culture it is criticising. Douglas's further observation that 'Formality cannot be practised at the same time as informality ...Hierarchy disvalues equality' (ibid.: 44) perhaps illuminates why ballet, formal, structured, is viewed with such suspicion.

Lesley-Anne Sayers' statement of interest in her chapter 'Madame Smudge, some Fossils, and Other Missing Links: Unearthing the Ballet Class' (1997): 'lies with the ... history [of the ballet class] in Britain, and above all with finding its social history and cultural significance' (1997: 130). Such an aim is largely congruent with my own. Sayers, however, reports:

Watching a primary-level class.... I was reminded that the amateur ballet class can also have everything to do with ballerinas. The class consisted of a group of five- and six-year-old girls in various shades of pale pink.... one had already assumed an unmistakably balletic form of affectation along with a respectable turnout. (Sayers 1997:132)

What Sayers giveth with the right hand – that amateur classes may have a legitimate cultural status - she taketh away with the left: for she has already decided that assuming the conventions of ballet is a 'form of affectation'. I suggest that it is 'culturally innocent' (Douglas, 1996: 95) for an aversion to hierarchy to be so powerful that practices enabled within an incompatible 'thought style' which do facilitate egalitarian and individualist goods are rendered invisible. I refer to the practices of dance in local schools, which cannot unitarily stand accused of social élitism, or the technical competition of the profession, as I will examine in the next chapter, but which are projected with inadequate evidence on to the lived experience of its participants.

'The question of judgement', writes Mary Douglas, 'is why people make different inferences from the same evidence' (1996: xiii). In the case of ballet in popular culture, and the historical and institutional circumstances of private dance schools, judgement has been made in the public record of academic writing, but the evidence remains unrepresented, and the inferences of the culture in question and its users have not been heard. I recognised that the

voices of 21st century girls (and indeed 20th century ones) are missing from the record. These girls are actors in a social and historical reality, and my task was to go and ask these people, girls who go to dancing classes in local schools, what they thought about what they were doing, since this is not known. This study aims to speak from their point of view, and to contextualise and historicise the culture they inhabit. This part of dance culture – the private dance school – is itself not known in detail, but taken to be either the same as the opera house, or as a pale shadow of the opera house, or as representing unacceptable aesthetic and educational values. The private dance school is suspect in political – especially class - terms too, often presented as an economically and socially exclusive place for ballet classes, even though a wide range of dance activities happen there. Prior to the girls' point of view, is my own: and in the next chapter I will contextualise my own historical circumstances, and some places I have inhabited within dance culture, considering those in relation to the wider circumstances of the church hall and the opera house.

Notes

1. If determined, one could argue that the Fossil name does come from patriarchy, since it refers to the scholarly pursuit of their great uncle, who 'collected' the girls along with fossil specimens and once addressed them as such. I draw attention, however, to the girls' appropriation of the name for themselves, in a conscious act of free will.
2. This historical contingency may, indeed, be implicated: the Romantic sensibility's excesses came and went in literature and painting, but remain infixed in *Giselle*. The sensibilities of the Romantic Movement have a family resemblance to the genre of literary romance, but are not entirely cognate with it (Beer, 1970; Frye, 1976; Coupe, 1997).

CHAPTER 2

Apologia, Ephemera, North and South: the Working Theatre, the Opera House, and the Welfare State

Apologia

It has become customary, to include an autobiographical contextualisation within studies about dance, for example Sayers (1997), Wulff (1998b), Adair (1992), Griffiths (1996), Burt (1995): as well as within much feminist writing, Cherland (1994), Steedman (1986), and Walkerdine (1990). The following narrative not only serves to supplement my 'open identities' (Wulff 1998b: 16) of English, white, somewhat reluctantly middle-aged, dance worker, writer, mother, elder carer, and so on, but also records information which appears nowhere else in the academic record. Indeed, this is personal testimony, and I am aware that reminiscence offers the best and worst material – an incontrovertible record but one which may be rewritten or forgotten, deliberately or not, and one without parallax between source and historian. It is needed, in an absence of other sources for me to refer to, to enable a more authoritative critical machine to grind into action. However accurate the fictional voices may be in the novels of Noel Streatfeild (e.g. 1936, 1957) and Angela Carter (*Wise Children*: 1997), which record the experience of children in the 20th century working theatre, they cannot be appealed to, to stand in for history. I have endeavoured to place my own experience within as many frames, in as many known contexts, as I can.

I record a particularly complex and multifaceted journey through post-war social history, interlocking with dance culture, geography, social class, and gender, as an example of lived experience – and to lay some ideological cards on the table. There is a ring-fence around the cultural capital of an authentic ballet in Britain, and this chapter considers what is inside that fence, what outside, and suggests some reasons why this boundary was erected. I consider the institutional circumstances in which the ballerinas in the church hall dance their dances, and the formation through the first half of the 20th century of a hierarchy within the profession, whose repercussions have resulted in the present pattern of institutions, values, and practices. I do this not with a view to devaluing the ballet of the Opera House, but to question the exclusion of other traditions and initiatives from the status of history or of quality.

Ephemera: 1950

Some time in the late nineteen fifties, an 8 or 9 year old girl led a coven of little witches, run run leap! run run leap! in single file around the circus ring in the King's Hall at Belle Vue in Manchester. She wore a black leotard with a zip up the back, made at home from cotton jersey and a lousy fit; this is a world before nylon, let alone lycra, and one where every woman could run up a costume in no time, skills acquired through wartime necessity. The girl wore black home-made gloves with spiky long fingernails made out of cigarette packet silver paper – no shortage of this, for all the adults she knew smoked – rubbed to make it flat and shiny, and wrapped around cardboard shapes. Greasepaint was indeed greasepaint, a white cold unguent from a big tin, and Leichner sticks, numbers 5 and 9, mixed on different parts of the face; those who did the makeup knew many other arcane practices too, a red dot on the inside corner of the eye, a black comma curling up at the outer.

In the tunnel from which the animals would on other days emerge into the ring, the little witches waited to go on stage. Standing waiting also were older girls in white romantic tutus, a spray of purple flowers at their waists. Nothing could have been more exciting than going run run leap! and being witches, arms Graham-sparkling with malevolent intent on every leap, wearing make-up, getting ready, waiting to go on, performing, dancing, getting it right. No-one could have been more important than the big girls waiting to go on stage, so beautiful, their romantic tutus seeming so much more elegant and higher status than the classical tutus – made of tarlatan, weighing a ton – which the little girls wore in their ballet numbers. Indeed, I have never forgotten it; I still have a memory, looking up as they smiled down, their hair smooth, so kind to talk with us, and those wonderful purple flowers, those white white dresses, the contrast of colour intense.

All this took place at the National Union of Railwaymen's Gala. Why hard-bitten trades unionists would want to see an 8 year-old doing a witch dance, (Grade 3, blue certificate with red-stamped world-map-circles around the edge, from the 'Empire Society'), beats me; but children's dancing troupes, surviving now 'professionally' (the scare quotes because they are only paid a gratuity) only in pantomimes, were still a regular act in the entertainment live theatre, then in its final years. Dancing children did not display the cultural capital which is the property of those middle-class white families, who, it is widely reported, are those who value classical ballet. Alternative pictures appear in the novels of Noel Streatfeild (e.g. 1936, 1957) and Angela Carter (*Wise Children*: 1997), which record the experience of working theatre children, who danced their numbers – ballet, tap, song and dance and acrobatics –

and earned a good wage, which just as for their Victorian predecessors in pantomime and music hall, was often necessary for their family's survival. (*vide* e.g. Davis: 1986, Lipton: 1986). The School of Witch Dancing provided a cheap alternative: and this witch records her experience as a child dancer.

For working people in Britain, for dancers and for audiences, my Witch Dance at Belle Vue was not so unusual, from the nineteenth century to the recent past to the present. Ballet was and is to be found not only insulated and isolated in the Opera House, but down in the circus ring, the fun fair, the variety show. The juxtaposition of high and low art, entertainment and class acts, working people and their appreciation of the ballet number as something posh, nice, and classy, forms a far larger part of the history of dancing – and ballet – than is acknowledged. Many of the founders of the ballet now established in the opera house, de Valois included, had their early performing experience in the working theatre. Ballet has a long history as 'low' art as well as 'high' art.

As well as the circus and varieties, at Belle Vue there was speedway, greyhound racing, and a funfair featuring *The Bobs*, the biggest ride in Britain, or Europe, or the world, or possibly in Belle Vue; which cost, my octogenarian father tells me, the shilling of its name – a lot of money at the time. 'Between work and sleep comes the time we call our own. What do we do with it?' asks Laurie Lee's commentary for Humphrey Jennings' documentary film *Spare Time*, made in 1939: then as now, spare time is spent in the creation of social - and cultural - capital. Images of Belle Vue are intercut into Jennings' film, alongside others of the Manchester Victorians' Carnival Band in a windswept recreation field, playing *Rule Britannia* on their kazoos, their silky suits more like pyjamas than military uniforms. Twenty years later, a member of the former band might be spending some spare time between work and sleep watching dancing in the King's Hall, perhaps as mother of a little witch, before promenading with their friends and family, treating themselves to candyfloss and a fairground ride, as people can still go from a concert to Commedia del Arte to a meal to a funfair to fireworks in Tivoli in Copenhagen – I think the only pleasure gardens to survive. The Manchester Victorians' Carnival Band in the thirties, and dancing at the edge of the professional world now, are equally problematical to represent. Jennings came under the criticism levelled at such documentary photographers and filmmakers as Robert Flaherty, of objectifying, even denigrating, their subjects (Hodgkinson and Sheratsky 1982: 41); the band, with their naïve patriotic tableau, costumes and instruments, and deadly serious performance style, now appear almost surreal across history. My Witch Dance would appear the same, but that at least is self-representation, over which I assume editorial control. My

research is concerned with the synchronous context, the world of dancing schools where Witch Dances are still going on, and to establish a cultural legitimacy for such dancing.

I am considering British ballet culture – by which I mean the present pattern of institutions, ideologies and dance ‘texts’ whose construction was initiated in the early 20th century– as an example of a canon, and as art historian Eric Fernie says, it is important ‘to be aware of the artificiality of the canon and the criteria used to construct it’ (1995:329). British dance culture tends to a narrative of certainty, that the good has survived and that the forgetting or marginalisation of the rest is the result of a quasi-natural eugenic process. Class and élitism are too easily assumed to be ‘essential’ attributes of the art form, whereas its particular historicity involves a much wider social and cultural picture. I question the certainty that the present hierarchy obtaining within British dance culture reflects only the aesthetic and artistic value and quality of the various institutions, individuals, and practices within it, and suggest that that hierarchy is the result of social, political and historical factors as much as aesthetic ones. (Taylor: 2003)

Ballet in the working theatre

Dance artist Molly Lake mentions appearing in 1920 in what she calls a ‘fantasy’ written by Sir James Barrie for Karsavina, entitled *The Truth about the Russian Dancers*, which shared a bill with George Robey, Little Tich, and Grock – all legendary comedians and clowns – and, I quote, ‘a hypnotist by whom the girls [the dancers, presumably] used to try to be hypnotised.’ (Benari, n.d.: 16). *O-kay for Sound* (1937) is a film of a successful London Palladium show following the formula of a Hollywood ‘backstage musical’, which features the group of comedians called ‘The Crazy Gang’, performing as male and en travesti female ballet dancers in a comic (though scarcely acceptable to present-day political sensibilities) ballet piece called *An Episode of Don Juan*. This was choreographed by Walter Gore, a choreographer and dancer working with Marie Rambert, and ‘starred’ Patricia Bowman, a well-known American ballet dancer, with a corps of dancers I would love to be able to identify. Espinosa gives a list of Jean Baptiste Blache’s (1765- 1834) ballets including ‘La Laitière Polonaise’ which ‘first introduced a dance intermixed with roller-skating. This has often been copied since in many ways; at the Porte St.Martin, in the four seasons [lower case sic] of Taglioni père, and at the Opera, by Mabile, in “Le Prophète.”’ (Espinosa, 1948: 122). ‘Taglioni’ and ‘roller-skating’ is a juxtaposition which might be thought of as post-modernist irony... for roller-skating is *Starlight Express*, ideologically separated from ballet. Ballet history does not wish to see itself as Taglioni père copying a dance performed by a Polish milkmaid on roller skates; it looks for authenticity to the Romantic Beauty of Taglioni fille,

of her ballet shoe being cooked by a chef and eaten 'by her most fanatical admirers', being showered with jewels and furs,' and leaving Russia 'with a fortune.'(Fonteyn, 1980:121). Information about such productions is not buried in undiscovered documents: it is in published works. It is not unknown in fact, but it is marginalised from ballet history.

Tracy C. Davis, in *Actresses as Working Women: Their social identity in Victorian culture* considers that the historiography of the later Victorian theatre 'has been skewed by the metonymic substitution of successful West End performers for the Victorian stage as a whole' (1991: 42), since comparison of this historiography with census returns for other areas indicates that 'if the social history of the acting profession is based on Westminster, then either the West End is anomalous or the history is bad'(ibid: 46). I would suggest that an analogous situation prevails in terms of the history and historiography, past and present, of dance and ballet. There is a metonymic substitution of dancers from a very few historical situations for the art form and the profession as a whole, which even extends into ballet's recreational and amateur practice, regardless of history, geography, economic and other circumstances. This history acts therefore as a partial one of some dance, partial because the history has other aims than recording a balanced or complete picture. Official histories are written from the standpoint of the survivors and the victors, and the history of British ballet is no exception. Canonical dance history, both criticism written at the time and the secondary sources of subsequent 'historical' assessments (see Taylor: 2003), provide, to follow Davis's model, a bad one of much of dance culture, since it excludes the dancing that is done outside élite contexts, in the working theatre and amateur performance. It is also bad history because we hear almost nothing from the women and girls (and indeed the men) who dance, then and now.

In the late nineteenth century, ballet had acquired a very low reputation in middle-class social mythology, even though there were, at least in London, a number of dancers, choreographers, and teachers, with impeccable pedigrees. Katti Lanner had been Première of 'a famous troupe of Dancing children from Vienna, known as Les Enfants-Viénois' (Espinosa 1948: 133) and took up residence in London, where she was mistress of 'The National Training School for Dancing' in Tottenham Court Road choreographing and training female students who performed at Drury Lane through the 1880s: the school seems to have survived until 1894 (Davis, 1986: 119). Edouard Espinosa's father Léon had studied with Albert, Henri, Coralli, Perrot, Taglioni and Lucien Petipa at the Paris Opéra, (Espinosa 1948:133) and arrived in London in 1872, 'to produce The Ballets and Dance in the forthcoming "Feerie" Babil and Bijou, at Covent Garden and to bring with him, the great

French Etoile Henriette Dor' (ibid: 134). His son Edouard Espinosa, known as 'Espinosa', sets out like a family tree – as if to emphasise its authenticity - his inheritance of knowledge, which runs unbroken from Beauchamps and Pecour (ibid.: 25). Espinosa founded a 'Normal School', a teacher training school, in 1896 (1948:19), which was attended by Ninette de Valois.

The Opera House

P.J.S. Richardson, in 'A Chronology of the Ballet in England' in the Ballet Annual of 1947, assigns British Ballet's year zero to 1910, 'The commencement of the "Russian Invasion"' (1947: 115). It was, and remains, an assertion central to the creation of 'British Ballet' and its continuing self-image that there was no ballet before, but this is simply not true; the claim that there was no ballet in Britain is not an historical, but an ideological one. There was plenty of ballet, at the Alhambra, the Empire, and elsewhere (e.g. Guest, 1992: Carter, 1993). There is no reason why ballet on a mixed bill of entertainment is not-ballet, unless ballet is claiming to itself a special status of some kind. I think that this was exactly what was underway through the 1910s to the 1940s, for the ideological mission of 'British Ballet' was in the business of creating a history, and therefore, rewriting what was there already.

To this extent the 'Russian Invasion' did indeed constitute a Year Zero, in that Russian Ballet presented radically different models of the material conditions through which ballet was produced, and of ballet's position in culture. Firstly, there were in Britain no institutions able to put ballet's interests above other concerns, especially above the concerns of the marketplace; there were no designated ballet companies, state or court schools, or funding for them. Secondly, doubtless as a result of the first factor, the Russian dancers were indeed technically superior. Thirdly, ballet was tremendously popular within Russian society, a popularity strong enough for classicism to reassert itself, imperialist connotations and all, against early moves in Soviet society to reform ballet within socialist realism (Morley: 1945: 14-20). But fourthly, and I consider most importantly, Diaghilev used known, named, practising artists, creatively important in their own fields in high culture, instead of using theatre professionals as designers and composers. High culture's value system renders invisible such theatre workers, regardless of the quality or appropriateness of their work, because of the context in which their work is done: they have the status of craftsmen, not artists.

Russian Ballet provided a model which would at one and the same time distance ballet from the working theatre, and reflect on to ballet some of the prestige which other art forms,

music, painting, already possessed, since these art forms were ‘enmeshed in the network of intertextuality that continuously *constitutes* the high culture of the orthodoxly educated population of the West’ (Weinsheimer 1991: 134: Note 1, p.34). Ballet could become part of that intertextuality of British high culture by the company it kept, just as it had been kept out of it by its association with the working theatre.

This process replicates the construction of the modern idea of the fine artist in the Renaissance, when, as art historian Marsha Meskimmon says, in order to establish fine art’s association ‘with the liberal arts, above craft production and the low concerns of the marketplace’ ... ‘fine artists challenged for a particular type of social status which would differentiate them from “artisans” or “craftsmen” as they had been defined through the medieval guild system’ (Meskimmon 1996: 19). I argue that it was a similar social and historical project which caused British ballet to dissociate itself from its theatrical past and its popular uses, not by redeeming the reputation of dance in the theatre, of dance as work or craft, but by separating itself from it at theatrical dance’s expense, and becoming art - in part by having the inferior form still there to be superior to.

The social narrative in the project to promote ballet is perceptible in the following comment by William Chappell:

‘The Ballet Club was really a very elegant thing. Everybody went because it was the only place with any ballet in England. We used to have the most fantastic, glittering audiences...’ (Dominic and Gilbert 1971: 38)

Chappell’s comment reveals the developing association of ballet with the exclusivity of social prestige; ‘everybody’ went; this ‘everybody’ not being the everybody living nearby in Notting Hill Gate. It is the new social milieu and the context of the performance which now defines the authenticity of the art form – for these ‘glittering audiences’, people of taste and fashion, were seeing the *only* ballet in England. Chappell’s comment demonstrates how practices can be marginalised and put ‘outside the canon’ simply by ignoring their existence. There were a considerable number of independent small ballet companies: there was plenty of ballet, in plenty of places in England (Note 2, p.34).

Ballet within British Culture, under de Valois, was set on course to be institution-sized. My son, at 12, expressed surprise that de Valois was a founder of the Royal Ballet; ‘I thought it would have been older than that,’ he said: that is, that it had been in existence longer than the lifetime of one person, even one who dies aged 102. This is an interesting reading of cultural mythology, not because the institution is false or developed in bad faith – selfinvention is

fine by me - but because an important function of a state, royal, ballet company is that it should *appear* immutable and eternal: truly 'classic', outside time and history, forever present. The Royal Ballet embodies these characteristics of the classical isolated by Joel Weinsheimer in his study *Philosophical Hermeneutics*:

the classic is the mature fruit for which its predecessors prepared; but the classic is also the seed that generates a line of successors and thus initiates a history.... [the classic] gathers a history to it, organises and unifies history. The classic makes history and thus is not merely the object of historical research but also its condition (Weinsheimer 1991: 138-9).

The high art tradition of British ballet did not continue a history but invented itself, 'gather[ing] a history to it, organis[ing] and unify[ing] history'. (ibid.) Powerful and charismatic individuals appropriated characteristics of the Russian tradition, cultural elements transposed from a quite different political and cultural situation, and projected them into a British future. As Weinsheimer says, 'the classic ...prophetically projects a history before it' (ibid.: 138) and, I add, rewrites history, including and excluding members into its canon. A canon is:

essentially plural but determinate....however many it includes, there are still others it excludes.... from the viewpoint of the excluded, the...canon exhibits a telling ideological homogeneity – hundreds, thousands of works all with one message: members only' (ibid.: 130).

Metropolitan classical ballet institutions, those who emerged triumphant from the phase of canon formation of 'British Ballet' through the 20th century, have become normalised as the way classical ballet is, while other ballet 'texts' with different pedigrees, some preserved in local dancing schools, are excluded from membership. While this process was underway, not all dancers agreed that the new British style was superior. Molly Lake, for example, lost dancers to the Sadler's Wells Ballet, 'where conditions were easier and work more secure. Apart from the sadness at losing her dancers, Molly was sorry to see their dancing change in order to conform to the "Wells' style"' (Benari n.d.: 126). Espinosa looked to a falling-short from what he considered higher standards in 'The Forgotten Years' (1946b) of the late 19th century: he, Lake, and innumerable others, (see Taylor 2003) were excluded from the new order.

'Ballet', then, is not a single text but a history of disputes over claims to define what ballet should be, culturally, and aesthetically. Unsurprisingly, many of these disputes conceal – and at times reveal – a vestigial narrative of class difference, reinforced by a difference between London and the 'provinces', north and south, the opera house, the working theatre and the

church hall, cultural and social capital. These tensions continue to be worked through, preserved and displayed in the mutual distrust of one Dancing Society for another, and one dance style for another.

The Welfare State

My relationship with dance paralleled the post-war social and educational revolution, indeed expressed geographically as my family moved from the supposedly monolithically working class north to the supposedly monolithically middle class south. The conventional class positions of north and south still obtain. Sirrka-Liisa Kontinen's study of a Tyneside dance school, *Step by Step* (1989), provides the most comprehensive source extant of testimony from the users of a private dance school, and in it a young dancer, Lisa Hynes, assesses an audition she attended:

It was no good. All the other girls were fantastic, they were from contemporary dance schools in London and the Royal Ballet...you know, dead skinny and everything, *properly* spoken, buns in the hair ...I caught meself in the mirror – a massive fat body in a catsuit!!....I thought this is not for me... (ibid.: 81)

Not only does Lisa feel that 'all the other girls' are better dancers than she is, they are socially superior too; she considers the way they speak to be 'proper', receiving the southern accent not only as high class but correct; her own accent and social background she herself assesses as illegitimate. Even her impression that 'all the other girls' are 'dead skinny' while she has 'a massive fat body' is inextricable from a narrative of class and privilege: in the west, the present epidemic of obesity is primarily a disease of poverty. (Lisa, the reader will understand, is not 'massive' or 'fat' at all). Satirist 'Dame Blandine', a unique commentator on the private dance school and the surreal penumbra around ballet culture, announces the launch of a (fictional) 'scholarship scheme for children from the North', at her (equally fictional) dancing school in London. The cultural capital appropriated by the élite, and by 'the south', is reaffirmed, for as 'Dame Blandine' says, 'we are proud to say, [the fund] has never been used.' (www.ballet.co.uk/mar98/dancingcrimes accessed 28.11.99). The metropolitan dance culture claims possession of legitimate dance and, like Dame Blandine, grudges it in measured charity to 'children from the North': accessing being-a-dancer, for Lisa, and for the non-recipients of Dame Blandine's scholarship, is a social, economic, political, issue prior to its being an artistic one.

When I was carrying out the interviews for this study, travelling from Northtown to Southtown, I apparently carried out an object lesson in applied Marxism, viewing the unshiftable injustices of the base and superstructure of capitalism. I would leave a northern

city, once great and prosperous, and the train would take me past a scarred landscape of industrial decline, closed coalmines, poverty, social deprivation, mass underemployment and casualisation in the remaining heavy industry: and arrive at a pleasant southern town, where no-one made anything, nor had they ever made anything: and they sold each other soap and postcards and cups of coffee, and they had plenty of cash with which to do this. Within the culture of the private dance school, 'North' and 'South' occupy similarly divided positions, with the distribution of societies and schools reflecting greater or lesser access to the metropolitan hub of culture, as represented by the Society having the resources for its teachers to be registered with the Council for Dance Education and Training. 'North' is, more properly, 'not-Southern England', since other countries and most areas in the UK are equally marginalised.

I left competitions in the Town Hall behind, for a new world in London which was, in a word and by definition, as Lisa Hynes and 'Dame Blandine' know, posh. The new dancing school did Royal Academy of Dancing exams; my mother was persuaded that it was the thing to do, to attend two classes a week; and the idea of doing twenty minutes ballet, change your shoes, twenty minutes tap, once a week, was quite clearly just too embarrassing even to think about, any more, the quaint practice of provincials who know no better, aliens from that unknown 'other' place north of Watford. The London school's high art credentials were pretty skin-deep, however. We all stacked up in Elementary grade, as one year group after the next completed the children's exams, mostly unable to progress, until for one reason or another people gave up and left. On stage in the local little theatre, by now we mimed instead of sang, magnetic tape having followed nylon into the technologies of the dancing school; 'Getting to know you,' (drinking from an invisible cup, left hand an invisible saucer, right little finger elegantly crooked), 'my cup of tea!'

Although it may be an illusion created by living through history, my own autobiography seems to mimic or mirror wider economic and social history: of which my most intense personal experience is to embody the transformation through education of what had been, before the 1944 Education Act, the working people of Britain. Along with such feminist writers as Carolyn Steedman, (e.g.1986) and Valerie Walkerdine (e.g.1990), I was one of the 'girls growing up into upward mobility' (Walkerdine, 1997: 94). The post-war discourse of new social opportunities, through education, was a force alive and very well in the house, in the street – it was crucial to pass the 11+, crucial to enter the post-war meritocracy. No-one in my family before my brother and myself had previously stayed at school beyond the age of fourteen: the 'A' level maths being studied at evening classes by my uncle assumed the

dimensions of the Nobel Prize. I drank all this in with the orange juice and cod liver oil that the new welfare state provided me with, and bought into this upwardly mobile business with heart and soul. Why? Partly, I had no choice; that was what was going on, in the world I found myself in. But I think I took it on with a will because of the other dynamic I remember from this time; fury and humiliation at being thought inferior because I was a girl.

Particularly, at being thought less intelligent because I was a girl; this was justified because they, we, I, were *irrational*: of lower intellectual ability, with judgement impaired by feeling and emotion – such faculties being thought of lesser truth and value than moral and ethical scales which were (allegedly) absolute and impartial. Do not think that such ideas are beyond someone of eight: the eight year old girl that was me could see this very clearly, just as my research subjects, as will be revealed, are astute political commentators.

Although dancing was the first thing I wanted to do, and finally became the way I spent my working life, I never remember wanting to be a dancer. As I grew older and started to trade as an intellectual, this dancing school world became something of a secret vice. I went twice a week until I went to university – but never dreamed of inviting boy or girlfriends to see the junky stuff we performed, songs from musicals I would never admit to seeing, ballet numbers of unsurpassed naff-ness; I was watched by other people's family, other people's friends. Dancing had become secret consumption, like trashy magazines in the bedroom while serious ones are on display in the house's public areas, or like older children watching TV programmes designed for younger ones. (Goffman, 1969: 50 - 1). As an intellectual, song and dance was not a legitimate outlet; and I loved ballet class but was not, did not feel like, a ballet dancer. My ambition was moving away from that of the dancing school's provision of local social capital, to the cultural capital, not of the opera house, but of the university.

It was dancing and only dancing that was my very own choice, but I had taken on board the collective narrative of social achievement through education so completely that what I might have wanted for myself wasn't considered important enough even for me to notice. That didn't bother me then; but it bothers me now. I was lucky: I attained the luxurious position of being able to lay the ghosts of class, and fears of inadequacy and inequality because of my gender, on the terms that society had on offer, through participating in its rites of passage for its élite; *going to Cambridge*. I was brainy enough to prove myself on society's terms, and to emerge fortified by its own privilege to question those terms – the privileging of the Logos, and the marginalising of dance as a practice of lesser status. I use the word 'brainy' with full consciousness; it is a curious historical contingency, that society's élite are separated and

marked by being shovelled into an institution to write essays for three years, with for the vast majority no direct vocational aim. Other societies might mark their élite by sending the chosen ones into monasteries, to be soldiers or athletes, to learn magic, gardening, astronomy, divination, healing, or to make art. Or, indeed, to dance. It is a building-block of my thesis, that the logos – and its lieutenants, the ‘phallus’, rational perfectionism, Suttie’s ‘taboo on tenderness’, and misogyny – should be seen as cultural habits, which have become naturalised as arbiters of cultural hierarchy and worth, and dance’s marginalisation is a symptom of this.

I have been myself in many of the class positions, economic positions, historical and geographical positions which I consider contribute to the formation of different dance discourses that make up British dance culture. I have reinhabited and reconsidered many of these positions in researching and writing for this thesis: from the little witch at Belle Vue, to an undistinguished candidate at RAD major examinations; from a position of suspicion of ‘creative’ dance, to a Road to Damascus revelation into the expressive possibilities of ‘contemporary’ dance; initially being part of the post-war educational meritocracy, but finally spending my life as a dance artist. And now, writing again, but writing about something normally excluded from the cultural record.

These multiple positions in society and in dance lead me to see the opera house not as legitimate apogee, but as a hegemony which marginalises, invisibilises, the rest of dance culture. Such a position challenges that being starved, abused, silenced, middle class, and élitist are necessary conditions of dancing the form of classical ballet. Rather, such conditions are produced as historically-specific effects of power maintenance by training establishments and company managements, exacerbated by insufficient employment opportunities within the ballet profession. For 45 years I have taken ballet class, for 25 years of that every day. I have never once got bored with it, with its form, with its repetition. There is nothing else that I have done, more or less exactly the same, often daily, through my whole life – and this even though I never saw myself as a ballet dancer, or wanted to do it as a profession. I know that the historical reality of ballet is far more differentiated, and its practice has far more possibilities for personal experience, than is recognised by the professional world, whose self-defining canonical constructions, and whose ideological asset-stripping, are somehow taken at face value by many, even as they make their hostile critiques of ballet’s élitism.

My position on present popular practices may indeed be nostalgic, but aspires to be respectful, regretting the loss of opportunities for dancing in the theatre to be done by people without their needing to be subject to extreme training practices and competition, or to enter the metropolitan economy; and for ballet to be defined not only by membership of the dynasty of the opera house. Angela Carter's novel *Wise Children* offers a parable of high and low, legitimate and illegitimate, in the consummate conceit of the parallel fortunes of twin sisters, song-and-dance performers in entertainment theatre from the 1930s to the form's demise, and of the legitimate 'great' tragedian 'Hazard', who abandons his illegitimate twin daughters, the 'Chance' Sisters – infixing in their names, a reminder 'to be aware of the artificiality of the canon and the criteria used to construct it' (Ferne, 1995:329):

Tragedy, eternally more class than comedy. How could mere song-and-dance girls aspire so high? We were destined, from birth, to be the lovely ephemera of the theatre, we'd rise and shine like birthday candles, then blow out.
(Carter, 1997: 58)

The 'lovely ephemera of the theatre', song and dance girls, have all but disappeared from the professional stage, Belle Vue is bulldozed and redeveloped, and the summer seasons shut; much of the culture of working people, that Jennings recorded, carried on 'between work and sleep' has disappeared; but song and dance, tap and ballet, is still done by girls and women, week by week in church halls, in competitions, and on special occasions on stage. I admit to a nostalgia like Angela Carter's for days when the theatre was an avenue of opportunity for working people to access the earning of money through their own talents, for self-invention and self-creation, for rich experiences, and for having a good time; and for a theatre full, with an audience enjoying their Spare Time together, with jobs to go to and a functioning community. So perhaps, an elegy for the prosperous cities, industries, and what is now called the social capital of the working people of the north, is for me inextricably mixed with the loss of accessible regional theatre work, the loss of the culture of working theatre people under the hegemony of the culture industries and state arts funding and direction. Indeed, all this is intertwined with the lost world of my own past: for even if, after all that fancy and expensive education, and all that creation and performance of art work, it is a world to which I cannot, myself, return, it does not mean that it is a world I cannot respect, and regret.

Why should I deny to others, who maybe do not leave the church hall, the circus ring, and the variety stage as I did, for whom being the 'lovely ephemera of the theatre' (Carter, 1997: 58) is enough, or perhaps the only option which presents itself, or indeed their heart's desire – why should I deny them the possibility of multiple perspectives on their dancing practice?

And it is from such a perspective, that I resist the prevailing assessment of private dance school culture, and have attempted to theorise and validate its historical and cultural context, and represent the ideas and thoughts of some of its users.

Notes

1. This is a quotation from Barbara H. Smith. Weinsheimer gives her page numbers (34-35) but the work does not appear in his bibliography and I have been unable to track it down. The italics are in Weinsheimer's text.
2. I do not intend to deny the importance of the Ballet Club as a creative crucible for a genuinely exciting development of the art form. Indeed, I regret that the artist-sized 'dance concert' did not establish itself permanently as a form for dancers, choreographers, and audiences to share ideas, as it has done in NYC, but only intermittently and on the smallest of scales in the UK.

CHAPTER 3

Interviews, The Dancing Schools, Methodology, A Critical Assessment of the Sources

This chapter's function is to provide necessary information to situate the project. Firstly, I provide practical details of interviewing, the girls, and the schools, along with some discussion of the particular problematics of the research situation; secondly, a brief assessment of methodology; and lastly, a detailing of sources I have used which relate to the private dance school. This last is presented in dialectical fashion in order to establish the 'breakdowns' (Agar, 1985: 20) which the writers have required me to bring to 'coherence' (ibid.: 23). For brevity, the chapter's presentation is linear and utilitarian.

Finding the girls to talk to

I was held up for some months at the beginning of the research, since there is long-established mutual suspicion, if not hostility, between the 'private sector' and dance in maintained education and in state-supported contexts, which encompass contemporary dance, concert dance, 'creative' and community dance (see Chapter 4). Any organisation that invites a foreign element into itself takes a risk. Such a risk is particularly marked in this case, since the power of representation is enjoyed by the one culture, to which, as academic and as contemporary dancer, I might be seen to belong. The other culture, the private dance school, is the subject of representation, and has good reason to feel itself generally misrepresented: I consider some of these (mis)representations in the next chapter. And last but not least, private dance school culture is in general somewhat volatile, offence being easily taken: the school runs the risk of losing pupils, should a problem of any kind occur, with a potential knock-on effect on reputation and, indeed, on income. Other schools and other societies hover as a threat in the cultural atmosphere of the private dancing school. Going to another school is an act of betrayal: moving to another Society is as significant as a religious conversion, or at least as an MP 'crossing the House'.

I was very fortunate in finding, eventually, two 'gatekeepers', 'Ruth' and 'Francesca', to mediate between the two very different cultures of the private dance school and that of an academic researcher whose contemporary dance and maintained education sector

background supersedes her 'church hall' origins. 'Ruth', the gatekeeper for the principal school in this study, is unusual in that she herself, through her education, employment, and own research (into dance science) crosses between the two cultures. I knew Ruth personally from when she had studied for a state qualification, partly under my tuition. Ruth teaches at The Margaret Richards School of Dancing, which was founded, and at the time of the interviews still run by, her mother. Without Ruth's mediation, entry into the school and communication with parents would have been impossible. Ruth also facilitated my meeting 'Miss Davis', who ran and hosted summer schools at her school. These teachers are members of a Society central to the formation of 'British Ballet'. Miss Richards' and Miss Davis' schools are situated in a lower-middle income suburban area in the northwest of England, near a formerly great city perhaps beginning to recover from considerable economic and social decline: for convenience, I will call this Northtown.

'Francesca', my second gatekeeper, also teaches in both private and state sectors. Her 'private' school teaches the syllabuses of the Society which historical events have enabled to claim the gold standard for its ballet pedagogy. Francesca's school is in a prosperous, middle class area in the south of England – Southtown. Again, it was through her mediation that I reached participants and parents, that consent forms were distributed to parents, and appointments made. The project made considerable inroads on the time and attention of my hosts, and on Ruth's in particular. I am tremendously grateful to 'Ruth' 'Miss Richards' 'Miss Davis' and 'Francesca', all of whom took some risk in allowing me into their schools, and demonstrated considerable confidence and trust in me. In particular I was grateful since they introduced me to children and parents as a professional and as a dancer, which identity enabled me to be accepted by the children and treated with considerable respect by the adults.

I chose to speak with 8 to 11 year old girls, a group I considered to be old enough to discuss abstract and complex issues and to reflect on their lives, but still to be children rather than adolescents. It is generally thought that girls will gradually cease to attend class as they become teenagers. This is ascribed by teachers and others, to increased schoolwork or having 'boyfriends' – probably a generic term for looking forward to the concerns of adulthood. As a collective cultural practice of girlhood, there will only be those who are individually committed to dancing still attending class when the age group is passed. I was particularly interested in how these younger participants viewed that collective practice. 62 individuals were interviewed between March 1998 and July 1999, the majority only once. Interview groups were divided by age, the number of participants varying between one and nine,

depending on circumstances. My 'principal informants' were 8 girls at Miss Richards' school in Northtown, interviewed over a two year period, mostly in three groups: the 8 – 9 year-old 'Aces', Cassandra, Elizabeth, Buffy, and Suzanne, who consistently provided me with unexpected thoughts; Jane and Anna, (11-12); and Helen and Karen (10-11). We discussed 'issues': why they 'go to ballet', as they usually phrase it, and what they thought about school, girls and boys, families, toys, stories, games, princesses (a discussion about Princess Diana arose spontaneously, and was repeated with later groups), their future, and their ambitions. These groups also wrote stories, played word games, drew pictures, and considered – deconstructed, in fact, and some of them were extremely good at it - ballet information books. Interviews were held with girls in the same age group, at the 1998 and 1999 Summer Schools at Miss Davis's school. At the 1998 summer school, we discussed Degas' ballet paintings. A few interviews took place with 9 girls at Francesca's school in Southtown (1998/9). These were mostly discussions of school, fairytales and fairies, princesses and Princess Diana; drawing and story-writing games; and looking at ballet information books.

One interview was held with 2 boys, and another with 2 young men, all attending the 1999 Summer School, mostly considering their experience of dancing as boys and men. There were no boys at Miss Richards'. Boys regularly attended Miss Davis' school, but I did not interview there, and a couple of boys attended Francesca's, but they were slightly outside the interview age. The absence of boys from dancing schools was noticed and commented on by my respondents. Anna compared ballet on television with 'the normal ballet we do downstairs': when asked, she defined the difference between 'normal ballet' and professional ballet as 'We haven't got like as much boys here'. (Her ownership of the 'text' in defining their practice as the norm is worthy of note). Elizabeth once volunteered, with seriousness as if it had been troubling her, that 'it's funny you see men dancing, but you never see boys dancing'. Boys (and men too: of 679 teachers in the 1999 Council for Dance Education and Training *Directory of Teachers*, only 6 are male) are indeed largely absent from the recreational practices of private dance school culture (see Chapters 4 & 5, and Appendix 5).

All interviews were audio-recorded and subsequently transcribed. I have omitted dates from individual interview extracts in the text, since situating them that way does not contribute to, or materially affect, their meaning. I attempted to achieve some degree of triangulation by interviewing girls in the different geographical and social milieu of Southtown; through the questionnaire for slightly older subjects and interviews with boys at the Summer School in

1999; and by analysing the published 'League Tables' for Keystage 2 tests. There was no 'control' group of other girls who did not attend dancing, since there was no intention to look at how its participants did or did not differ from their peers.

The first group of questions, at interviews in 1998, were wide-ranging and exploratory. The material arising from these led in myriad directions, and there is not space to discuss all in this thesis.

- Is there a girls' culture, along the lines studied by the Opies? (1969)(Skipping games, rhymes)
- What ballet books and stories do they know, and what do they think about them?
- What do they think about and feel when they dance?
- Toys such as Skydancers – what is their mythology?
- Change of doll from baby to be mothered, to courtesan. What is the relationship with the courtesan doll?
- How do girl children relate to their creativity? Do they make up dances? Does this matter?
- Do they imagine themselves being watched?
- Do they imagine themselves as other than they are, more beautiful, princess, adult ballerina &c.
- Children as consumers, mediated by the adult, economics, marketing
- Miniature toys.
- Do girls see dance as a girls' thing? What do they put into categories 'girls' and 'boys'?
- Mimicry – as they do it, they *are* it, on what level? Do they transform their bodies?
- 'Throwing like a girl' (Young: 1990): boys' somatic behaviour traditionally externalised on to sports, competition, feats of achievement and mastery– do girls eschew these things?
- Mirror behaviour – what do you think you look like?
- Wishing
- Princesses, Fairies, Diana
- Degas' images
- School
- Jobs and ambitions
- Families

A final short-list of research questions for interviews, refined over two years, was given in questionnaire form at the 1999 summer school. This was intended to collect responses from over-11s, who were not being interviewed, and to ask a larger sample a number of key research questions which had been clarified over the 2-year period. There was no attempt to compare numbers actually returned with potential maximum. 19 were returned in all. Some were also returned by younger girls who must have filled them in simply because they wanted to. Responses to the questionnaire are referred to throughout the thesis, although there is unfortunately not space to analyse all the issues. I resist making a resumé, since this process of editing inevitably includes and excludes according to what I want to prove, not representing the detail of what they say. A transcription of the 'raw' responses appears in the appendix.

- how old they were when they started, and whose choice it was to go (is it an element in social conditioning?) These responses are referred to in Chapter 8.
- school (boys, curriculum, their assessment of the difference between how they were treated at school and at dancing). These responses are considered in Chapter 9.
- did they make up dances? (did their attendance at dance classes debar them from being 'creative'?) some small reference is made in Chapter 9.
- Girl Power (how did they perceive their political status as girls?): analysed in Chapter 5.

Unfortunately, for reasons of length, the full analyses of the following have had to be omitted from this thesis:

- ambition – what did they want to do when they left school? (did dancing lead to an acceptance of stereotyped feminised jobs, did they see their future as a domestic one?)
- did they want to become a dancer? Did this ambition change as they grew older? (was 'being a ballerina' an infantile ambition which would be left behind?)
- What dances had they seen/dancers had they heard of? (their knowledge of the professional dance world – and did they see their dance practice as a shadow of the profession?)
- what they thought about when they danced, what they felt, what they felt they gained from dancing.
- what 'being a dancer' meant to them.
- fairytales - what did they remember about them? (their attitude to the penumbra of fairies and princesses associated with ballet)

Copies of parental consent forms, covering issues such as anonymity, publication, and the right of withdrawal, are reproduced in Appendix 1. A proposal for the project was presented to the Research Committee at University College Chichester: such a project being a novelty, we appropriated a form relating to research ethics (also in Appendix 1) from elsewhere in the institution. There are risks, 'ethical' and of confidentiality, in the interviewing of children in whatever context. However additional constraints applied, because of the delicacy of the relationship between school, client, and parents: it was important not to give any grounds to be thought to be being intrusive or to be asking inappropriate questions. Therefore certain issues – attitudes to body image, the participants' social or economic background, or family life, for example – were off limits, although they occasionally entered into the conversation unasked. I have not suppressed this material now since none of it is objectively controversial, and can in any case not be tracked to the individuals concerned, particularly after a gap of some years. It was the potential effect on the child at the time, and perhaps concern from parents, which I wished to avoid. I felt sanguine about asking questions about the girls' own sphere, but became anxious when we started to encroach on adult domains. I was aware of the possible implications for my hosts were the child to tell the parent 'Virginia Asked Us About This', and being censured for fomenting revolution or rebellion - or, better or worse, for being nosy. However, even their families would be unlikely to recognise their comments, since they talked to me in a way they did not talk to their parents or their teachers. I am not claiming any special credit here; it is simply that we created a 'time out' context where we could step outside everyday structures. The girls were happy to be listened to, and very ready to talk about, often to criticise, their experience. And at Miss Richards', since they had to hang around between classes, it gave them something to do.

A questionnaire for parents at the 1998 summer school was returned by 14 individuals. There was no compulsion for the children to take a form or deliver it, so I do not know if the form reached the parents of the 25 or so children at the summer school. The responses are analysed and discussed in Chapter 8. An attempt was made to interview parents, a request for appointments accompanying the parental questionnaire in 1998. Only one family returned the invitation, and it turned out they wanted a careers seminar for their daughter, indeed interrogating me about the professional standing of the school: this put me in a delicate position, so I did not solicit further parental interviews.

The Schools

The Margaret Richards School of Dancing, the main school of my study, was established 50 years ago, while Miss Richards was still in her teens. At that time there were a considerable number of regional schools offering training, as this school still does, 'for examinations and the stage.' Unusually, two schools offering full-time training still exist in the nearby city. The girls call the schools' owner 'Miss Richards', and her daughter 'Ruth', and classes are taught by these two. Miss Richards has a somewhat sardonic manner and commands considerable respect, while Ruth dramatises less authority. The adults – helpers, mothers, and dancers - hold Miss Richards in great esteem and affection.

There was a more 'modern' informality at the southern school: the girls called the teacher 'Francesca', although she was old enough to be their grandmother rather than their mother. This was definitely a ballet school, run by a former professional ballet dancer, (and a lovely one). Francesca's teaching persona was not at all grande-dame-ish: indeed, she seemed to assume a slight dottiness about practical necessities, which led the girls I interviewed, despite their youth, to regard her almost protectively. This school did not have a 'stage' atmosphere: class took place in the dance studio of a college, a few other styles (e.g. tap) were offered but taught by a visiting teacher on weekday evenings. I was present on Saturdays, when only ballet (along with the styles within the Society's syllabus) was taught. There were a few boys attending class. The students came for their own class, changed in a designated room, and went to the studio at the appropriate time. This school simply provided dance classes, and did not fulfil the community function of the northern one: there did not seem to be the presence of involved adults, either dancing or assisting.

Miss Richards' school has for many years used a very large building owned by a non-conformist church: it is situated on a wide suburban thoroughfare, near a busy crossroads of shops, banks, and garages. The school takes the building over on Saturdays, and on a couple of early evenings in the week. Classes take place in the very large main hall, and in a smaller room upstairs. Entrance to the school from the outside is, for security reasons, routed through doors at the back of the hall, so everyone who arrives enters the room where classes are taking place. A considerable amount of talking and socialising and a constant stream of comings and goings go on at the entrance end of the hall, while the pianist plays and classes take place at the other. This situation does not seem to bother anyone. There is no effort to wait for exercises to finish, or the teacher to stop speaking, before talking or moving around: no special performance is made of class, but each activity continues as if inaudible and

invisible to the other. People waiting for class and parents sit around the edges of the hall. The smaller children get changed, with their parents or by themselves, in the hall itself. Older girls go off to change in the 'Ladies'. There were no boys attending the school at the time of my visits. The school does not have barres, and the students use stacks of chairs instead. (Portable barres have since been purchased, in 2001). There are also no mirrors. A table is set up to take class fees from those who pay weekly; women who are involved with the school, as mothers or dancers, do the money-taking, as well as making coffee, and undertaking the general organisation and some coaching of younger children.

The Saturdays are very clearly structured, although this is not displayed or announced – everyone knows the timetable. There are different levels for ballet, while a general tap class appears to be joined in en masse from seven year olds upwards, and the considerable number of people tap to and fro, generating considerable volume, across the hall. Some 'song and dance' and modern classes take place in an upstairs room. A patient pianist plays set music for ballet, children's songs for the babies, and old-fashioned standards for tap. The older girls have a considerable amount of time to spend between their various classes, and they spend it chatting - and eating from their various stores. Although different dance styles have different uniforms for examinations, on Saturdays the children only change their shoes for their different classes.

The smallest children, mostly of pre-school age and known as the 'babies' (a term in general use which I suspect to be a survival from the Victorian theatre), come for their class and leave after it. Marie Rambert describes classes she took as a child, where ballet exercises were practised by the pupils as they held hands in a circle: they then went on to do ballroom dances (1972: 19-20). The 'baby' classes in ballet I observed at Miss Richards' also started with the children in a circle, clapping rhythms (which I thought they did remarkably well) and practising exercises. A few older girls joined in to help, interspersed around the circle. Miss Richards asked the children for the French names of some steps – the children were pleased to know, and be able to give the correct answer. Then the class improvised to rhymes and stories, moving freely around the room.

Methodology

This study did not arise from within an academic discipline, but from an encounter in lived experience. The project therefore did not bring with it a single established methodology, value system, or agreed ways of deciding what does and does count as proper knowledge

and/or 'truth'. This research project draws on a number of different disciplines: ethnography, hermeneutics, literary criticism and theory, psychology, sociology, cultural theory, historiography, oral history, and others. It aims to provide a Foucauldian archaeology or history of the present, an examination of the conditions which produce taken-for-granted practices.

The methodology underpinning interviewing and fieldwork follows qualitative ethnographic practice: however the project as a whole is not exactly an ethnography of research subjects, but a quest for information about a cultural situation from expert witnesses. As a mature person, as a teacher and a mother, as a dancer, and being of an egalitarian disposition, I think I was as well-equipped to talk to the young dancers and listen to them, as a researcher with a more formal training in social sciences would have been. I did not want to find out what they thought about a known range of issues, but to find out how they thought and what they thought. The world which I was studying was not just what went on in the interviews with my informants, and my world was not discrete and separate from theirs, since I could be considered a kind of longitudinal participant observer, being regarded by the girls as an insider because I was a dancer, and indeed I related to them at least in part as to my former self. The studied group was not finite, and did not represent a definitive slice socially except in age (which is itself passing) and gender. The interviews turned into a question-raising, even a consciousness-raising, experience for me. The ideas they suggested affected my theories, the direction of my research, and provided ideas I have considered in a number of papers (1999a,b,c; 2000a,b; 2001; 2003), some parts of which may be found in this thesis.

The intellectual tradition to which I belong is one of literary criticism, and this has enabled me to pay close attention to the meanings and ideology implicit in the language used by the girls I interviewed. My skills in literary criticism and knowledge of literary genres and the motifs and dynamics of literary culture have enabled me to make connections between them and the metaphors and tropes of dancing, particularly in their redactions in popular culture, whether in films, fictions, advertisements, or the media. I am using language of qualitative distinctions, as Charles Taylor defines it: 'a language ...culturally bound, [which] articulates the significance and point that the actions and feelings have within a certain culture' (Taylor 1989: 80). 'English' in schools, and to some extent in the university, talks about characters in texts as if they were living people, picking over their motivation, behaviour, psychology. Literature is talked about not only as itself, but used as a starting point to talk about 'life'. In my presentation of the interview material, I do the reverse: I treat 'life' as if it were literature. I cannot know enough about my informants legitimately to make a certain

assessment of their motivation, thoughts, beliefs, biographies. I consider what they say is of interest in general terms. So I treat what they say as if it were a literary text, which I then feel free to talk about, without presenting this as an item of truth in social or psychological terms. They have presented me with a possibility: what explanations may lie behind it?

Although not steeped in academic anthropological or ethnographic tradition, studying Dark Age culture (languages, literature, history and archaeology) has given me insight into how much and how little one can extrapolate from insufficient, partial, lacunary, evidence: and how value can be concealed in fragments without the absent totality being seen as a lack. Such studies have left me with an awareness of the past's subliminal network of meanings surviving in the present; not to make claims to origins, but to see how fragmentary traces in poetry, history, place names, regional difference, visual culture, behaviour and customs, imagery and language, create identity and meaning, one set of meanings different from another. These sensibilities, along with knowledges drawn from fine art theory concerning the formation and nature of canons and classics, I have employed to historicise of the culture of the Church Hall within the wider history of British Ballet.

My research finally arrived at a number of key concepts which underpin the thesis: Suttie's 'taboo on tenderness' (1960 [1935]) to create an obverse to a phallogocentric, rationalist value system; the genre of literary romance (Beer, 1970: Frye, 1976) to situate the 'symbolic spread' (Frye, 1976: 59) of ballet in a wider cultural context; the semiotic, or Greimas' square, as used by Mary Douglas (1996), to interpret the interview material and to create a way of stepping outside binary gender distinctions; and social capital, in its recent sense as used by Robert Putnam (2000) and others, to valorise the culture of the Church Hall.

A Note on the Greimas' Square and the Work of Ian D. Suttie

I found two useful theoretical models, by which I could create a concept of 'feminine' which allowed that this was a quality which was not the product of being biologically female. The first is the semiotic, or Greimas' square, which I use in Chapters 5 and 7, as well as referring in Chapters 5 and 9 to its use by Mary Douglas in her *Thought Styles* (1996). This allows an escape in philosophical terms from a binary gender model, and offers the possibility that there is not-feminine and not-masculine. This is however somewhat abstract, and not a powerful weapon against the weight of social habit, although non-binary possibilities were conceived by both boys and girls in interview.

The second model is found in the work of Ian D. Suttie, which accounts for the full range of issues that I address; the aversion to the feeling-tone of ‘tender’ things, misogyny, and the association of masculinity with aggression. He also provides an understanding of the continuing hegemony of phallogocentric systems – while I need to validate their obverse – by pointing out that such theories will deny ‘independent existence’ to things outside themselves, even though lived experience provides evidence which challenges those convictions:

We find [in the work of R  heim] that same [as Freud’s] theoretical assurance that there is no love apart from genital desire and its derivatives; yet here again we find the same uncertainty when dealing with fact, not abstract theory, and the same tendency to help out the description with casual references to the love and tenderness whose independent existence theory denies. (1960:224).

Suttie strikes at the root of the Freudian narrative by pointing out that ‘theory’ denies ‘independent existence’ to ‘love and tenderness’ (1960: 224), and that this is culturally and psychologically damaging: Suttie’s Chapter 13 is entitled ‘Freudian Theory is itself a Disease’ (ibid.: 205 – 224). Freud and logocentric theoretical positions are constitutionally unable *not* to deny validity and existence to things outside themselves: ‘theory’ is not merely maintained by such power and differentiating mechanisms; it *consists* of, and in, them.

It may be worth considering, why Suttie’s insights have remained only with an ‘underground reputation’, as his work is described in the publicity for Routledge’s International Library Of Psychology, in which *The Origins of Love and Hate* was republished in 1999, since it also judges that Suttie’s theories advocate ‘a view of human nature congruent with the findings of modern biology - a more optimistic vision that that of traditional Freudian psychology’.

Suttie was writing in 1935, when Freudian theory was still in formation and under challenge, and not the seemingly unshiftable body of knowledge it has become. Like much of Freud’s writing, *The Origins of Love and Hate* is not exactly a medical work for other professionals, but presents clinical practice as a template of cultural understanding for general readers. That Suttie did not initiate a school of theory is, I think, in part a proof of its own thesis – a testimony to the strength of the taboo itself, a continuing demonstration that society remains obdurate in its ‘taboo on tenderness’, and that Freudian theory has become even more fixed and dominant than it was in Suttie’s time. Freud’s models, even though they emerge from pathology, have been central in configuring how western society imagines itself. Suttie’s thesis depends on challenging both Freud’s and society’s own habits of thought. Suttie saw the taboo on tenderness as ‘the leading feature of our own culture and the main reason for the

substitution of the power-technique for that of love' (1960: 80): that is, phallic sexuality, male sexuality, *substitutes*, usurps, the love which is, in this discourse, prior to it. Although many mental health professionals, psychiatrists and psychologists, do not subscribe to Freud, Gillian Beer points out, in *Darwin's Plots: Evolutionary Narrative in Darwin, George Eliot and Nineteenth-Century Fiction* (1983) that:

We now live in a post-Freudian age: it is impossible, in our culture, to live a life which is not charged with Freudian assumptions, patterns for apprehending experience, ways of perceiving relationships, even if we have not read a word of Freud, even - to take the case to its extreme - if we have no Freudian terms in either our active or our passive vocabulary...even those who query his views, or distrust them, find themselves unable to create a world cleansed of the Freudian (ibid.: 5).

Reversing the magnetic poles of Freudianism, which is the mental map 'theory' tells us is a reflection of the truth of the human condition, would be a life's work: but Suttie himself died shortly before the publication of *The Origins of Love and Hate*, and so was not able to continue to fight for the survival of his own insights. Contributing to the fixity of Freudianism, is that the practice of psychiatric clinicians writing for the intelligentsia as a whole, who are looking for a scientific basis to form popular narratives of how people behave, appears to be in abeyance. Suttie's most obvious peer, Sandor Ferenczi, did not write for a popular (if intellectual) audience. Popular interest amongst the intelligentsia appears to have transferred itself away from psychiatry to the physical basis of the mind: while the Reith lectures in 1962 were presented by psychiatrist G.M. Carstairs, (R.D.Laing was also influential at this time), those in 2003 were given by Vilayanur S. Ramachandran, the Director of the Centre for Brain and Cognition at the University of California. The other popular theoretical body of knowledge, evolutionary psychology, is incompatible with the anti-teleological, post-humanist concerns of post-modernist dance theorists. Its popularity with some of the intelligentsia is, however, a salutary reminder of uncertainty and difference.

The work of Judith Butler (1990), and many other feminists, challenge binary gendering, but have not provided me with such a useful model as Suttie's 'taboo on tenderness'. This is because, with the exception of Monique Wittig (1992), they are also engaged in presenting anti-humanist models of the subject. I am concerned, rather, to affirm the subjectivity of the girls I interview (see Chapter 9).

A Critical Assessment of the Dance Sources

1. Commentaries on the British Private Dance School and its Clients

There are a small number of articles, chapters, which consider the British private dance school and its clients. These writers' articles are less representations of the private dance school's complex institutional identity than critiques of the private dance school's place in ideology: this is largely taken for granted, and adequate evidence for these judgements is not presented. Two of these writers, Griffiths (1996) and Sayers (1997), carried out interviews with young dancers, but little of this material is reported in their articles. In addition to the following resumé, I refer to these articles, and deconstruct some of their claims, elsewhere in the thesis.

Angela McRobbie's wide-ranging article 'Dance narratives and fantasies of achievement' (1997) firstly regrets the lack of a 'sociology of dance', and proceeds to consider some sociological issues herself - social and club dancing, links between dance and club culture, the impact of Afro-American culture on white youth culture and performance dance. There is not much space given to considering the private dance school, and its sociology is unaddressed except in generalised terms, with an assumption of an income-related social exclusivity within the sector. McRobbie recognises that dance is an art accessible to girls who do not have cultural capital 'dance exists as a largely feminine and thus accessible practiceMore readily available than other arts... (ibid.: 209-210) but she looks towards fictions, 'magical narratives' (ibid.: 210) as creating this entrée. My interviewees told me that they do not read these books. McRobbie does not consider the strength of dancing class culture amongst children themselves and their families, the ubiquitous availability of the private dance school, or the wide range of dance styles which can be practised there.

Vivienne Griffiths assesses her project in the article 'Getting in step: young girls and two dance cultures' (1996) as a comparison between the 'traditional dancing school' which has a 'competitive ethos and predominant emphasis on ballet and technical excellence,' (1996: 481) and an 'alternative culture of creative dance classes' which 'encourage spontaneity and free expression' (ibid.). Griffiths' cultural preference for freedom over tradition, for democracy over hierarchy (Douglas, 1996) she sees reflected in these 'two dance cultures', but in comparing ballet classes with creative ones, she is displacing her reservations about ballet on to what she calls 'traditional' schools as a whole. She describes these schools as 'traditional' but does not examine that tradition if it is an historical term, or define what it might represent if it is an ideological one. The term acts, therefore, as a periphrasis for

‘hidebound by tradition’. In fact some private schools offer ‘Natural’ and Greek’ dance forms, idealistic genres developed early in the 20th century, whose ethos is one of creativity and freedom, exactly the qualities Griffiths sees as lacking within the institutions in which they are practised – and close cousins of the Margaret Morris Dancing which Griffiths herself employs to act as opposite pole to the ‘traditional dancing school.’

Lesley-Anne Sayers’ statement of interest in her chapter ‘Madame Smudge, some Fossils, and Other Missing Links: Unearthing the Ballet Class’ (1997): ‘lies with the ... history [of the ballet class] in Britain, and above all with finding its social history and cultural significance’ (1997: 130). Sayers’ article is made up of a ‘collage of selected materialin fact, fiction, and personal memory’ (ibid.: 131). She visits a primary class, and discusses dance fictions. Sayers’ social history is more of a critique than a representation, and the items in the ‘collage’ seem chosen implicitly to criticise ideological aspects of the ballet class, often for somewhat comic effect. Sayers’ authorial assumption is that we will share the jokes: she is writing from a position where the ‘cultural significance’, or if I may rephrase that, the ideological significance, of the ballet class is, in fact, already known and established. Sayers is concerned about class, pretension, and authenticity, placing in those categories both the penumbra of ‘romanticised’ (her word) ideas around ballet, and examples of Erving Goffman’s (1969) ‘items of front’ from dancing school and ballet culture. Sayers draws attention to ‘the pretensions of the ballet class; the absurdity of its ‘sausage curls’ and curtsies, and a set of values upheld, regardless of context, within Britain’s entrenched class system’ (Sayers 1997: 138). The genteel ‘front’ of ballet class – Grecian sandals, transformed hair, displays of courtesy and formality – is, like all fronts, a performance. Performance, as Erving Goffman’s (1969) work demonstrates, is normal social behaviour, perhaps always rather comical when estranged (the telephone voice, the putting of appropriate reading-matter on view for guests). Sayers’ examples of ballet’s ‘front’ come from fiction or from generalised assessments; I do not think they can legitimately be used to stand in for a genuine class position. Sayers mentions that her mother took her to an RAD school in town, in preference to a school in her village (ibid.: 139; but what was bad about that school is undefined, and its historicity, good or bad, is unrepresented.

Christy Adair refers briefly to private dance schools, in her *Women and Dance: Sylphs and Sirens* (1992), but mostly in negative terms, without considering the sector’s institutional or historical circumstances, or the testimony of its users. She considers that cost, race, and class are barriers to access, conflates professional training and recreational local practice, and privileges ‘creating work’ over ‘learning the technique’. She also tacitly conflates the private

dance school with the teaching of ballet (1992: 14), whereas many other dance styles are practised there. All these positions are unsupported by evidence.

Peter Brinson's *Dance as Education: Towards a National Dance Culture* (1991) sets out 'to provide the historical, political, and structural elements necessary' (ibid.: ix) to provide a history of dance in Britain 'in relation to social and industrial development' (ibid.: x). The book provides an overview of the history of dance culture within the theatre, education, and community. The late Peter Brinson, a lifelong agent provocateur on dance's behalf, sees British society as hostile to dance (1991: xiv) and dedicates *Dance as Education: Towards a National Dance Culture* to 'the Unity of British Dance Culture - all of it'. British Dance Culture is and was, however, a plurality, and Brinson is clear that many parts of it impeded his vision of what dance culture should be. Brinson wishes to redress problems he perceives in dance provision in schools and the 'private sector', in arts funding, and indeed aesthetic ones in the productions of the 'professional' dance world. He considers, as I do, that 'The dance class ... is a place for excellence and for thinking' (ibid.: 78), but he denies these qualities to certain kinds of dancing, and particularly to certain contexts in which dancing is done. He considers dance in schools to be in 'the grip of the physical education lobby' (ibid.: 65), where it is 'just' physical, lacking in 'imagination' and 'creativity' (ibid.: 63). The institutions of the 'private sector' he sees as maintaining dance values, and having a social structure, which fell short of his radical, indeed Marxist, vision.

'A Lesson in Gender' (1985) is a video intended, I imagine, for educational purposes, produced at Brighton Polytechnic by Kay Lynn and Jan Mathew. The first part of the video shows girls in their ballet class, with a voiceover of first the teacher and later the girls themselves being interviewed: in the second part graphics draw attention to 'feminine' images of women in advertising, arguing that women are subject to the tyranny of those images and to the 'judge' of the mirror, while dancer Françoise Sergy describes her experience as a dancer, and in particular her struggles to be valued as a dancer at her professional school, because of her body shape. It is suggested, by the title, the narrative, the editing, that ballet class is where all such values are disseminated. Sergy's exclusion from being thought a successful dancer at a professional level is indeed an important issue, but the connection between that and members of an open, general class for children is assumed rather than proven. The girls in the class are not given an open-ended opportunity to speak. My principal point of issue with the work is that it is assumed there is only a single meaning to the ballet class, and that this connection between 'gender' and 'ballet' is so self-evident that it does not need to be supported, justified, or argued for.

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's *Step by Step* (1989) is a book of photographs and text made over several years, which documents the activities of women and girls attending a dancing school in an economically depressed district on Tyneside. *Step by Step* is important as a photographic work, as social history, and as an ethnographic text, and is I believe the only attempt to represent – as opposed to critique – the private dance school. Konttinen considers herself to be following in the tradition of documentary photography initiated by Walker and Evans (Martin 1983: 1154-63), and she is part of Amber/Side, a radical arts collective based in, and committed to representing, Newcastle upon Tyne. Konttinen follows her subjects over a number of years, through marriages and divorce, in and out of jobs, as children grow up and babies are born. Konttinen has presented personal testimony and evidence of social attitudes which I felt were outside the remit of the terms on which I was given access to the girls who were my informants: that is, it was not appropriate for me to enquire about or comment on the socio-economic and other situations of the girls' families. I have drawn on Konttinen's material when it seems to me that their testimony has similarities with, can shed light on, the lived experience of 'my' dancers and of their mothers, and of the emic and etic workings of private dance school culture.

The public visibility (or rather, invisibility) of *Step by Step* is also a matter of some ideological interest: indeed, a new slant is put on the phrase 'literature search', since Konttinen's work is not widely available. It is of note that the University Library in Cambridge, a copyright library, could have acquired it for its collection but has either chosen not to, or marginalised it by not cataloguing it in the main index. It does have two copies catalogued, however, of Konttinen's *Byker* (1983, 1988), a work with many similarities to *Step by Step* in format and content. That the one volume is included, and the other excluded, demonstrates (as if further proof were needed) the cultural invisibility of both dance (especially dance in popular culture) and also of women and girls – and above all, of working-class women and girls. *Byker*, presumably, is seen as a legitimate social document, a study of an area with an already established status as paradigmatically, even mythologically, working-class. *Step by Step* covers a similar socio-economic group and a similar geographical area, in similar photographs. But the practices of women and girls are invisible – their history is not seen as part of the labour history or social history they live in. Not only are they not heroically working-class, they are just not interesting.

Even more problematic, for me, is that I cannot find Konttinen's work in the on-line library catalogues of UK universities with dance departments. That this valid and work is

unconsidered by the sorts of writers who define ballet by its supposed class fraction implies a value judgement which is far more problematical: the preferences of the intellectual élite, the keepers of the dance text, dismiss equally the practices of a popular art which is not transgressive but, apparently, conformist. The private dance school is, indeed, pariah.

‘Dame Blandine Ebinger’ is a unique commentator on the private dance school and its eccentricities, on ‘backstage’ (Goffman: 1969) behaviour amongst professional dancers, and on the peccadilloes of dance culture at all levels. ‘Her’ subversive, extremely funny and well-observed, ‘column’ ‘Dancing Crimes’ appears in www.ballet.co.uk’s on-line magazine, as well as on Dame Blandine’s own website. Dame Blandine acts as a sophisticated commentator, and is a source of fragments of culture which are nowhere recorded, or only intermittently recorded.

There are considerable numbers of ballet information books regularly published for children and young people, although these are mostly, in effect, new editions of the same material, with a description of ballet class, how to tie ballet shoes, and more or less about dance history, dance stars, and present productions. These books are useful in providing a representation of the ballet class for children, even though this is a somewhat mythologised one which emanates from the opera house rather than the church hall. They provide an interesting reflection on the changing attitudes to dance teaching and training, and the role allowed to the student. For example, the students who appear in the photographs in *The Young Dancer* (Bussell ‘with Patricia Linton’, 1994), published ‘in association with the Royal Ballet School’, are credited by their full names on the ‘acknowledgements’ page, while in Camilla Jessel’s *Life at the Royal Ballet School* (1979) no-one is named, apart from the first names of students in specimen biographies. Jessel’s book reflects the monastic exclusiveness of the ‘training’ then adopted, along with presently unacceptable attitudes to gender. These books provided useful material to consider the public face of ballet classes for children.

2. Other Works

Helena Wulff’s works ‘Perspectives towards ballet performance: exploring, repairing and maintaining frames’ (1998a) and *Ballet Across Borders: Career and Culture in the World of Dancers* (1998b) focuses on ‘the dancers, choreographers, technicians and ballet directors backstage, not the dance onstage’ (1998b: 104), and therefore considers the Opera House rather than the Church Hall.

Julia Buckroyd's book *The Student Dancer: Emotional Aspects of the Teaching and Learning of Dance* (2000) is concerned 'to stimulate debate and inspire development in the training of professional dancers' (ibid.: 206). The book comprises examples from Buckroyd's five years' experience as a counsellor at the London Contemporary Dance School, offering practical suggestions for improvement of practice in pastoral care and teacher/student relationships. This book does not consider the private dance school, but has provided insights into attitudes to a distinction between training and education, which I have drawn on to consider my informants' testimony about their differing experiences in mainstream school and 'at dancing', in Chapter 9.

Cynthia Novack in her article 'Ballet Gender and Cultural Power' (1993) describes her childhood experience of dancing, and relates her own social circumstances, which lead her to see ballet, in the USA, as a choice made with the intention of providing culture for the daughters of an upwardly aspirant, white, lower middle class (Novack, 1993: 37). It is implied that this is anti-democratic in function and that the 'culture' aspired to serves only to provide a veneer of gentility for social advancement. Such culture is a Bourdieu-style cultural capital, the competitive property of the individual, not social capital. No doubt schools in the US do create social capital for their users, loyalties, networks and support: but Novack does not give information about this. I do not examine Novack's article in detail because it reflects the American situation, where the position of ballet has its own historical and cultural dynamic.

Also a study in US dance culture is Linda Tomko's *Dancing Class: Gender, Ethnicity and Social Divides in American Dance, 1890 - 1920* (1999), which reads the Dancing Class in relation to social history within a finite historical period; the work has little specific information of relevance to dance classes in 21st century Britain.

3. Research into the Private Dance School

I made personal approaches to all the Teaching Societies for which I could find contact details: some responded fully and others not at all. The history of most Societies is largely invisible, and most complicated to find out about. I was met with deep suspicion, by almost all the societies, as I asked about teachers' and syllabuses' (under that name is formalised the Societies' dance 'texts') lineage and background. It was clear that such questioning was received not as a request for historical information, but as a disguised challenge to their authenticity and quality. The Societies have good reason for defensiveness, since they are

belittled by researchers such as myself, by educationalists and the media; and, it has to be said, by each other.

I visited The British Ballet Organisation's headquarters and the library at the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing: I also attended some Society events. The facts and opinions I give about present practice are either directly from officers of the Societies or their publications, or from my own experience and observation, from long years of greater or lesser involvement with the sector. Any history of the general picture of the development of dance within the 'private sector' as a whole can only be partial and provisional, since even such written records as there are, are produced from the standpoint of one interest group or another. There may be chronicles, and hagiographies: but no real history. The British Association of Teachers of Dancing (founded 1892) has produced an interesting chronicle, *A Brief Review of One Hundred Years*, despite the complaints of its author (Bryan Isaac) that BATD have lost most of their early documentation: of 'six books of importance' mentioned in a 1905 inventory of BATD property, only one survives. Isaac blames this on their Head Office's moves (1992:46); the ISTD has also lost almost all its archives in various office moves. The RAD has retained at least some of its archive, but recently sold the Richardson bequest of rare books from its library. The BBO is the honourable exception to this culture of forgetting, with its complete archives at Woolborough House, not to mention the considerable writings of its founder, Edouard Espinosa. Information has to be gleaned piecemeal, where one can, from material in *The Dancing Times* in particular, which provides throughout the 20th Century useful 'current awareness bulletins' of material which has otherwise been lost; and from such few and far between articles as Sheila Dickie and Lesley-Anne Sayers' 'The origins of the ISTD' (*Dance Now*, 1992 1, 2: 73, 92/3 1, 4: 73-75).

Kennetha McArthur, in her MFA Thesis *Association of Operatic Dancing, 1921: A re-creation of examination technique and style* provides much useful historical information but comes to the, to me, somewhat surprising conclusion that the present style of English dancers 'can now be understood as remnants of the music hall dancing technique and style which were solidified in the AOD work. Music hall dancing became the technical basis for the British style of ballet' (1985: 48). I do not think de Valois would have been pleased with McArthur's assessment, since as de Valois reveals in her assessment of Markova's performance in *The Bar aux Folies-Bergère* (Genné 1996: 81), 'music hall' was, for de Valois, a term of abuse. 'Music Hall' may, however, be a somewhat imprecise nomenclature for an observation I agree with (see Chapters 2 & 4) that the present ballet text owes debts to pre-canonical as well as post-Diaghilev British Ballet.

Kathleen Gordon wrote her article 'Footprints in the sands of time' (1968: pp.570-1) for *The Dancing Times* on the occasion of her retirement as Director of the RAD. It presents a vignette of the earliest days of the AOD, indeed a snapshot of British Ballet's selfcreation: as well as endearingly candid thumbnail sketches of PJS Richardson, Espinosa, and others.

There is much information available about the early years of 'British Ballet', for part of the construction of the British Ballet canon was the creation of its own generation of connoisseurs: 'balletomanes'. Many books were published (e.g. Haskell 1938, Ambrose 1944), stressing the importance of technical and historical understanding and giving information about steps, pointe shoes, all the paraphernalia, canonical history, great stars, the 'rhetoric of training', and construction of 'sign equipment' (Goffman 1969). Information on a wider spread of dancers and works can be found in memoirs and testimony, Societies' own publications, and dance publications, notably the *Dancing Times*. I have found particularly illuminating, in forming a wider picture of British Ballet culture than the canonical history of the present major players, *Vagabonds and Strolling Dancers: The Lives and Times of Molly Lake and Travis Kemp* (Benari, n.d.), and above all the many works of Espinosa (e.g. 1928, 1946a&b, 1948).

Many sources of information about ballet culture in Britain are found in curious, and often enjoyable places. *The Red Shoes* (1948) records Rambert's Ballet Club and dancers in class; Caryl Brahms and S.J Simon's comic murder story *A Bullet in the Ballet* (1942 [1937]) is set in a Russian Ballet Company in London, and contains social detail about dancers' behaviour, and incidental information about the circumstances of class, rehearsal, and performance which, although undoubtedly exaggerated for comic effect, depends for its resonance on a certain degree of accuracy. The impetus to write about a topical situation, is in part to represent what is novel; and the observations suggest a certain authenticity.

Considerable information was provided about the present circumstances of the 'private sector' by the CDET, The Council for Dance Education and Training, which is 'the leading body in the United Kingdom representing professional dance training and related educational interests'. It is a registered charity and an 'unincorporated association governed by means of a constitution' (CDET 1999:4). Peter Brinson credits its establishment to the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation in 1979 (he was director of the Gulbenkian Foundation at this time) with the aim 'to speak for the whole profession. The Council, however, speaks today mostly for the private sector.' (Brinson 1991:63).

The CDET has a number of functions – regulation, representation, advocacy, and services (CDET 1999:5). The CDET operates an accreditation system for professional training institutions: accreditation is a critical factor for students seeking public funding. This system appears to be effective, institutions being visited periodically by a panel of senior figures from both the professional dance and maintained education sectors, in order to validate their practices against a list of criteria, including health and safety, and pastoral care. Most importantly for this study, the CDET is concerned with ‘the validation of dance teaching societies’ (CDET 1999:5) which is something of a circumlocution for regulating teaching. In this, the CDET has a complex, indeed contradictory mission. Funded by its membership, it is charged with both representing and policing it.

Only five of the sixteen Societies are ‘validated’ by the CDET. The CDET publishes a ‘Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers of Dance’, (ibid.: 5-7) which covers business matters – the section ‘conflicts of interest’ dictates terms of taking pupils from other schools, and setting up schools in competition to others – but also more complex issues such as ‘integrity’ and ‘confidentiality’. The CDET’s ‘Standards of Good Practice for the Relationship between Teacher and Student’ (ibid.: 7-9) includes clauses that teachers should ‘recognise the role of dance in the development of the whole person, irrespective of the student’s ethnic origin, religious beliefs, personal attributes, or any other factor’: and ‘endeavour to recognise physical anomalies, modifying the teaching and seeking medical advice where necessary. The teaching and choreography must be anatomically safe, and physical corrections must be attempted in a careful and sensitive manner.’ (ibid.: 9). The language of the Code of Conduct reflects the sensibilities of modern dance training and education, and the clauses’ presence suggests a sub-text, whether justified or not, that in the ‘private sector’ the ‘development of the whole person’ may *not* be recognised, the teaching may *not* be anatomically safe. The CDET’s mission is equally complex and contradictory in mediating amongst the value systems of state education, arts funding bodies, the profession, and the oral cultures and microhistories of the Societies, schools, and teachers.

4. The lived experience of children

Similarities between the articles by Griffiths (1996), McRobbie (1997), and Sayers (1997) are that each of us is negotiating with our own memories of dancing in girlhood, and each is drawn to engage with a text by Noel Streatfeild. All use ballet fiction in their studies, but however accurate the fictional voices may be in the novels of Noel Streatfeild (e.g. 1936, 1957) and Angela Carter (*Wise Children*: 1997), which record the experience of children in the 20th century working theatre, they cannot be appealed to, to stand in for history, or to

represents the thoughts, feelings, and lived experience of the present users of dance school culture. Both Sayers (1997) and Griffiths (1996) include some interview material with young dancers, but this follows their thesis rather than leads it.

Some dancers have written their autobiographies – although only Odette Joyeux’s *Child of the Ballet: Memoirs of an Opéra ‘Rat’* (1952) attends to the experience of childhood, describing, for example, how she and her 10 year old colleagues explored the Opéra building, roof and all, for the four hours between their entrances in *Parsifal*, having genuinely dangerous adventures, which they clearly relished (1952:104ff). The reported childhood of most dancers represents a Vasari-like first chapter in a ‘Life of the Artist’ (see Meskimmon, 1996, Battersby 1989): de Valois’ (1959) is a case in point, complete with precocious talent and prophetic incidents.

Noel Streatfeild has recorded the lives of English working theatre children - albeit in fictional form - from the late 19th century, in *Thursday’s Child* (1970), *Far To Go* (1976) through the 1930s in *Ballet Shoes* [1936] to *Wintle’s Wonders* (1957), set in the 1950s, and the end of theatre-going as an integral part of British life. Angela Carter’s novel *Wise Children* (1997), referred to by Sayers (1997), presents the ‘autobiography’ of song-and-dance performers the Chance Twins. Cross-referencing the considerable detail in Carter’s fiction about life in the theatre and its political context with historical accounts (e.g. Lake and Kemp’s memoirs, Benari, nd), and that in Streatfeild’s novels with the few autobiographies available (e.g. de Valois, 1959), reveal the authors’ research to be remarkably accurate: but they remain fiction. Similarly, the many novels written with a ballet school or company as their setting, such as those by Jean Estoril (1958ff.), Rumer Godden (1992), and Jean Ure (1993ff.) provide details of changing attitudes to ballet, girlhood, and childhood, but their direct use as source material is problematic.

Much research remains to be done, about the private dance school and its clients, and I have endeavoured to give a précis of sources and methods which is full enough to situate what lies behind my own. In the next chapter, I consider some of the ideology, history, and historiography of the private dance school and its institutional bases.

CHAPTER 4

The Private Sector Dance School

In this chapter I will present an abbreviated assessment of the economic and political status, and of the workings and history of the 'private sector', and consider the terms in which it is criticised by the few writers who have given it their attention. By setting up a kind of dialectic between these two assessments, I hope to create a more detailed and differentiated view of the 'private sector' and its practices than that maintained by, to borrow Northrop Frye's phrase, the 'guardians of taste and learning' (1976:23). Much of this consideration attends to issues of the private dance school's overdetermined class position.

The very coinage of the phrase, 'the private sector', makes it 'other' to the British dance establishment. 'Independent' would be a more value-neutral term: outside state control, not an ISA, a positive one. Ideological attitudes to the 'private sector' are implicit in the choice of epithet: 'public' is egalitarian, democratic, a social good: private is privatised, capitalist, profit making. But teachers in the state sector are paid, probably more than private ones: the one has a right to a wage, the other, according to Peter Brinson, is driven by 'commercial needs' (1991:61). Peter Brinson equates the ability to pay for dance classes with social class, 'reflect[ing] the pattern of Britain's intensely class-divided society impeding a broader development of dance', sharing with many dance activists (e.g. McRobbie 1997: 210) a strong animus against the institutional circumstances of the private dance school: 'Hence their [private schools] existence reinforces the notion that dance itself is divided – dance in the private sector and dance in the public sector, dance for those who can afford it, less dance or no dance for those who cannot' (1991:62). Being 'private', however, is not dance's choice, not the realisation of its own ideological preferences, whether for exclusivity or commercial gain.

State Recognition

The exclusion of dance from the state education system can be tracked back to the statutory establishment of 'The Teachers Registration Council' on February 29, 1912. This Council, as well as regulating school and university education, included in its remit commercial subjects,

handwork, technology, art, music, gymnastics, physical education, and the education of those with disabilities; but excluded dancing. The potential import of the lack of 'State Recognition of Dancing', and the constraints on dance's development in relation to cultural prestige and to funding, was recognised at the time; an article of that title was published in the *Dancing Times* in 1913 (August, 687-8), and the problem is returned to by P.J.S. Richardson, (1947:116,122,123), Peter Brinson (1991) and other advocates of dance culture over the intervening 90 years until the present. By 2002, 90 or so years after the discrepancy was first pointed out, the state has finally accepted the BBO, ISTD, BTDA, and RAD (see below and Note 2, p.76) as examining bodies within the 'National Framework' of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority. Although some of their qualifications can now be delivered and examined within the state sector, teachers trained only by the Societies do not have the state's Qualified Teacher Status, so cannot themselves teach within state institutions (Note 1, p.76). Although it is doubtless better for the Societies to have a foot in the door of comparability with the maintained sector than not, it is somewhat difficult to see a practical benefit to individual teachers. For students, their certificates will now be embellished with QCA and other logos. Time will tell, whether this will result in Grade 5 ballet having the recognition of, for example, Grade 5 violin.

It is somewhat anomalous that of the people staffing a cruise liner- cruise ships being one of the few surviving employment opportunities for dancers - the cooks, the waiters, the hairdressers, the masseurs, the exercise teachers, the aromatherapists, the beauticians, the technicians, will all have received subsidised training and received a state qualification - but not the dancers (or, possibly, the musicians). Should a dancer study *contemporary* dance they will find there is a degree course, or even a vocational course, in a state-funded institution, but such an education will not provide them with the skills needed to dance the way the 'entertainment industry' requires. The state and its concerns have consistently marginalised and refused the dance that has grown up in British theatre and recreational practice. Either the state wants people to have jobs, and to train people for them, or not. In the case of dance, it would appear, it doesn't. Visionary dance educators, much of the art dance profession, and a puritanical, and/or logocentric, educational establishment, all agree that entertainment dancing is beyond the pale.

The Institutional Circumstances of the Private Dance School

'Private' dance teachers bear allegiance to one or more of the organisations which are known generically within the culture as 'The Societies'. There are at least sixteen of these

organisations, such as The British Ballet Organisation, the Association of American Dancing, and the Royal Academy of Dance. Each Society can trace its origins to a spirit of reform, the energies of individuals who saw a problem in existing provision and wished to create an institution to remedy it. Each Society and its members must think they are the best; otherwise the institution would dissolve. One Society will accuse another of being rigid, overacademic, not 'dancey'; that Society will accuse the other, in turn, of not having good 'standards'. Each Society fulfils complex functions, as a trade association for its teachers, as examining body, and since its examination syllabuses define what dance is taught, as guardian of the dance text which distinguishes its schools from those of other Societies. Membership of a Society depends on teaching these dance texts, and entering candidates for its examinations: it is necessary to be steeped in its culture. Teachers will normally remain with the Society in which, through geographical or other contingency, they took their first class as a small child, since those are the values they have grown up with, those are the syllabuses they know, the administrative structures they are familiar with, and indeed there are found the people who inhabit their dancing world.

The Dancing Societies trace their origins - as, also, do women's education, public libraries, the football league, many charities, the Olympic Games and 'British Ballet' - to a time of social energy, reform, and optimism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The earliest, such as The British Association of Teachers of Dancing, founded in 1892, were established to protect the professional interests of teachers of social dance (Isaac: 1992). It is not historically indicated to see local dancing classes as having been produced by the performing dance profession; indeed, if one is disposed to look to origins as a guarantor of authenticity and truth, chronology suggests that the British system of ballet teaching appropriated a system created by amateur, social, dance teaching, not the other way around. There is at least one recorded acknowledgement that the ballroom societies were prior to the theatrical: PJS Richardson was Guest of Honour at the BATD Conference of 1954, where he:

gave his usual brilliant and witty speech.... He recalled that by strange coincidence he left school in the same year that the B.A.T.D. was founded and that he commenced Ballroom Dancing lessons when he was 14 years of age. As the B.A.T.D. was the only Dance Association at that time, it naturally followed that his Tutors were all Members of our Association. He went on to congratulate the British on being the "Father" of the Dance Associations' (Isaac: 108-9).

I am not sure that the BATD was in fact the only Dance Association in 1892; but claims to being the first or the only are ubiquitous within the culture. It is normalised in Britain that private dancing schools offer examinations, but this is not a necessary condition for the

teaching of dance: it is not the case world-wide, or in contemporary dance. The syllabuses, examinations, tests, medals, and competitions developed by the ballroom dancing societies, formed a useful structure in which dance can be danced; they shape experience, give a rhythm to the year, and create goals and social events: and, indeed, generate revenue for the dance schools (Isaac: 1992). Although money-making is seen as problematical by a number of commentators (notably Peter Brinson: see below) I myself do not see that it is inappropriate to earn a living from one's work. Dancing Societies are a phenomenon unique to British dance culture, although both examinations and institutions are structures which are exportable, like a franchise. The British Societies spread to the former colonies to serve expatriates, in which countries they still have a significant presence; and now the RAD in particular continues a global spread which follows international capitalism. Indeed, the RAD had a promotional campaign in the early 1990s, producing publicity material entitled 'The Way the World Learns Ballet' (*Dance Gazette*, June 1993, no.213 p13); and in October 1992 claims to have run 'The Biggest Summer School in the World' (no.211, p14ff). British Ballroom dancing remains the world leader, and this may be in part effected through the institutional network of the Societies and their established practices.

Lesley-Anne Sayers suggests, in 'Madame Smudge, some Fossils, and Other Missing Links: Unearthing the Ballet Class,' that:

The history of the ballet class in twentieth-century Britain is inseparable in many respects from the history of the two major providers of ballet classes, the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD) and the Royal Academy of Dancing (RAD). (1997:130).

It is of interest that Sayers only includes the ISTD and the RAD in 'the history of the ballet class'. The RAD and ISTD are better known, and function in part as Ideological State Apparatuses (both have or had Higher Education courses within state institutions) - but are they *better* than the other 14 (see Note 2, p.76); if so, better at what; and what is more, on what grounds is that judgement made? It does not necessarily follow, that the dance they do is better or worse; indeed, each Society must consider that their knowledge and ethos is superior, for otherwise the Society would dissolve.

Peter Brinson in *Dance as Education: Towards a National Dance Culture* (1991) recapitulates canonical and metropolitan-based dance history by naming as the first Dancing Society the Imperial (1904), omitting at least five earlier ones formed in the north and in Scotland. He goes on to name The English Folk Dance and Song Society, the RAD, the Cecchetti Society, the BBO and the IDTA, and says 'There are other smaller organisations

(too many)' (1991: 61). 'Too many' for what, exactly? Not too many if you live in Scotland, for example, for in the CDET's 1999 *UK Directory of Registered Dance Teachers who enter students for society examinations*, there were 246 schools in and around London and 28 in Scotland (see below, and Appendix 5). The British Association of Teachers of Dancing – not in the CDET directory – is not 'smaller', as Brinson describes the invisible Societies, but has about 1,000 teaching members in Scotland (personal communication from the BATD, 8.5.2002). The BATD's not being part of the metropolitan economy, and the value system of the CDET, must be allowed to be ascribed, at least in part and in circular fashion, to its being based in Glasgow. It does not seem likely, that all 1000 teachers in Scotland are inferior to all in the metropolis. It is a characteristic of the metropolis to claim such authority: all roads lead to and from Rome. Quality in the outposts of empire only exists in reference to its centre, in this case to the dizzy heights of perfection of a Platonic ideal of ballet, maintained like a standard kilogram or metre in the controlled atmosphere of the opera house. Such an ideal is not a universal: different opera houses within the international élite are not of a mind about style and values. The atomic weights of their ideals may differ considerably, though each is perceived as standard within that culture. Similarly, differing syllabuses and dance 'texts' are performative of each Society's identity. Another Society's ballet is not an alternative; it is wrong (Taylor: 2003).

The Societies Brinson mentions are the five whose teachers are registered with the Council for Dance Education and Training. A principal aim lying behind Brinson's foundation of the CDET (initiated, he reports, following 'discussions... with Peter Pearson of the Imperial Society towards the end of 1968' [1991.: 63]) was, he says, to 'reorganise all the various bodies of the dance teaching profession in line with current social change and politics' (ibid.). Active involvement in the Council for Dance Education and Training can hardly be attractive to the 'too many' Societies, if the CDET's 'attempts at collaboration' (1991: 62) intend, rather, to dismantle most of them.

Peter Brinson seems to me to overvalue the size, wealth, and power of the Societies, and to misjudge the complex economic situation of teachers (see below). He compares the development of dance with that of sport, tracking both back to capitalism and imperialism:

Partly under the need to regulate and develop standards, partly under the impulse of capitalistic enterprise, British sport in the twentieth century, especially rugby, tennis, cricket and soccer, became mass spectator sport, part of a vast entertainment industry organised on capitalist enterprise lines rather than being guided by preferable philosophies of public education, social welfare or leisure service. (1991: 60-1).

Brinson compares the division between ‘capitalistic enterprise’ and ‘preferable philosophies of public education (&c)’ to the relationship between the ‘private’ and maintained dance education systems. Brinson finds the ‘philosophies of public education, social welfare or leisure service’ not only preferable to the perils of commercialism but in some way in binary opposition to them. It is useful to me that Brinson chooses rugby as an example, since the two kinds of rugby played in the UK are divided along class lines, but in inverse relationship to ‘capitalistic enterprise’. That is, Rugby League, which is working class and northern, is also professional, while Union, maintaining a link to its public school origin, was until recently amateur. The amateur game was made possible because its players’ financial status allowed them surplus resources to take time off work for training and matches: being able to be an amateur is inexorably classed. The former ideologies of Rugby Union, and cricket, of being above filthy lucre, above the contaminants of commercialism, displaying the ‘fair play’ of the classed gentleman sportsman, represents a wholly different aversion to the capitalist enterprise from that of the radical left-winger. I suggest that this parallels the way that both radical writers, and those who promote an Arnoldian idea that art is improving, each suspect the commercialism of entertainment dance – but for an incompatible set of reasons. And as for dancers, being ‘professional’ functions as a validation of ability and status, rather than as a charge of greed. Dancing is not a very well paid job. Brinson’s view strikes me as something of an anomaly within radical thinking, since he reads state power not in Althusserian fashion as overtly controlling in Repressive State Apparatuses or more subtly in Ideological State Apparatuses, but as a social good, because it is seen to be outside ‘capitalistic enterprise’.

‘It is amazing what teachers in the private sector have to shell out!’ a senior educationalist, who has acted as consultant to one Society, wrote to me in an email which included those costs (see Note 3 p.76: they do not seem to me to be particularly exorbitant in themselves). Indeed, I felt quite guilty, as a lecturer in state education, that I had an all expense paid trip to a ‘Majors’ (the Societies’ ‘professional’ examinations, encountered after the children’s grades) course at a Society’s London HQ, while my ‘private sector’ colleagues were having to pay out perhaps a week’s income for the same experience. Teachers in the state system expect to have their training paid for, and their travel and accommodation too. My course was paid for from taxes paid by, amongst others, the teachers and clients of private dance schools: that is, the women alongside me were paying for me as well as for themselves. The Society will also receive entry fees for examinations (which sum has to pay for an examiner’s judge-like circuit from school to school throughout the country: and it is to be remembered that ‘public’ examinations, GCSEs and A levels, also have to be paid for), and

fees for courses and an annual conference. The societies provide a service for the teachers and their pupils – the societies are not businesses with responsibilities to make profits for shareholders. The BATD is a Friendly Society, and many others are registered charities. Abuse is of course possible, but the system itself is not as institutionally exploitative as Brinson suggests.

Private schools are indeed businesses to the extent that they provide a service and charge for it, but they have varying economic profiles and ambitions: in some, the owner alone may teach a very few classes a week, in her own home, while other schools have many assistant teachers and run a wide range of classes in different locations. While directing Cumbria Dance Project I was in receipt of subsidy to which my ballet colleague, an exemplary teacher, did not have access, although we were often working with the very same children in the same village hall at different times of the weekend. Indeed, she acted as an unpaid amateur, approaching me initially to work with ‘her’ students. Had there been real money to be made out of teaching children dance, I would not have needed subsidy either. It would have saved time making endless applications to what was then the RAA if I could have just taken the punters’ money. Similarly, if you are a ‘private sector’ teacher, by the time you have paid the hall hire, the pianist, the dues to whichever ‘Society’ you bear allegiance to, there is not much change for you, from however much you can ask for a child’s dancing class. This tariff will be set by local circumstances rather than the financial ambitions of the teacher. The salient difference between my colleague in the ‘private sector’ (supposedly running a business) and me as amateur (supposedly a social provision) was the differing conditions, historically developed, under which we operated. To ascribe this difference to the class base, read as spending power, of the client group – as McRobbie does (1997: 210), see below - seems inadequate. The children did not change their socio-economic background or political horizons, as they took off their ballet shoes to dance with me. These differing conditions, historically developed, are firmly ideological ones. Dame Blandine sets up a splendid fantasy which exposes this. She ‘inadvertently applied for an Arts Council Lottery Grant’ instead of the disabled parking permit she intended, by filling in the wrong form at the post office.

This was both good and bad news. The good news is, we have been awarded a generous sum of money on the condition that we commission new community dance projects in Rayners Lane and sever all links with ballet. The bad news is that I can no longer park outside Tie Rack on a Friday night.
(www.ballet.co.uk/jun98/dancing_crimes_5.htm., accessed March 6 2000)

'Severing all Links with Ballet' is indeed necessary to access state funding for dance teaching; yet if one is a major ballet company, one will appropriate the lion's share of all state funding for dance. That is, perhaps, material for another thesis.

The state sector maintains an assumption that the private dance school stands in chronic need of reform, which recapitulates the century-long anxiety about the spectre of 'bad teaching', from Espinosa and the then Association of Operatic Dancing, to Peter Brinson and the CDET, about this dangerous group of apparent incompetents who need to be brought under external control. There is not a similar anxiety to control 'contemporary' dance teachers, and good intentions and connections with acceptable dance institutions are all you need to go into community dance (see also Sayers 1997: 143). There is no regulation of those sectors, although Graham teachers, for example, can do physical damage to their students just as ballet teachers can, and community dancers often work with vulnerable social groups. Community dance is of particular interest, since its aims are openly interventionist, yet neither social work, medical, nor educational qualifications are thought essential. The ideological assumption of the state sector is inescapable: community dance and contemporary dance are good for you so whatever happens is good, while ballet and tap classes, being bad for you, need to be subjected to external control by those who know better.

Different Dance Styles

Angela McRobbie, in her article 'Dance narratives and fantasies of achievement' (1997) comments that 'Ballet lessons cost money and they are not usually provided during school time. This limits the range of those who can learn ballet' (1997: 210). I am particularly concerned that, firstly, such claims are unsupported by evidence: and secondly, that they reiterate an assumption that the 'private sector' provides only ballet classes, and therefore a displaced hostility to the perceived élitism of ballet is projected on to it. McRobbie continues, 'Disco dancing and modern dance lessons are often provided free by local authorities. Pop and jazz dancing are therefore more widely available forms'(ibid.).

There is a concealed value system of a different order than a literal search for 'wide availability' in McRobbie's claims, which privilege dance offered in the context of local authority provision as a putatively democratic social good, over the 'private sector's' uncertain class, art, and commercial status. In the twenty years or so I spent touring and working in community dance I did not observe 'pop and jazz dancing' to be generally 'more

widely available' or provided free, although of course it may be locally the case, perhaps in some densely populated cities. There are, however, few areas which do not have a private dance school. Even in remote areas of low population, such as where I live in North Cumbria, there are private dance schools within the same travelling distance as to go swimming or to a shopping centre - though nothing at all offered by the local authority.

Lesley-Anne Sayers' assessment of the availability of different dance genres differs from McRobbie's: she considers that the alternatives to ballet outside major cities are 'likely to be ballroom, yoga, jazz or aerobics' (1997:144). In fact, the same providers who teach ballet also teach tap dancing, and a popular theatre form, known as 'modern' dancing (also known as 'stage' or 'modern theatre'). Neither tap nor 'modern' carry the same social or political implications as ballet, but their presence does not affect the perceived social exclusivity of the private dance school. Tap's provenance is not white and its use is not middle class, it is a popular participatory form for adults, but these things are not sufficient to rehabilitate it in the critical record. 'Modern' dancing, perhaps a homeopathic strength solution of jazz dancing, distilled over 70 years or more (I was unable to find out its provenance, apart from the names of some of the creators of examination syllabuses) is offered by the great majority of dancing schools in the CDET directory, but its existence is absent from the critical record. 'Song and dance' is also absent, although it is a nomenclature with solid historical precedent, being used as a synonym in 19th – 20th Century USA for 'soft shoe' (Stearns 1994: 49). Schools offer styles of widely differing ideological profiles. The Imperial Society of Teachers of Dancing (ISTD), has within it a wide range of 'faculties', from revived Greek Dance, to ballroom, theatrical dancing, national dancing, and two forms of classical ballet; in 1998 it initiated a South Asian Dance Faculty.

All these classes cost no more than ballet classes, (for an example of actual costs, see Note 4, p.77), and dance teachers will fix their fees according to how much families will pay locally for that kind of recreational activity, comparable perhaps with prices for martial arts classes or group tennis coaching, less than tuition on a musical instrument, and a lot less than for skating, or competing in sports at a national level. All of those things cost money - swimming costs money, as does being in a local sports team: but such activities do not carry the same ideological opprobrium as the private dance school. Song and dance, tap, modern, can hardly be assessed as the property of the socially and culturally privileged. Moreover, the so-called working class is not necessarily cash poor, and the families that are - the long term unemployed, hill farmers, and some single parent families, for example - are not unitarily part of any one sociological or educational grouping. For families of whatever class,

cash can be diverted to a valued activity, and indeed many families make great sacrifices to pay for dance classes for adults and children alike. The mother of Cassandra, my principal informant, takes on extra cleaning shifts to pay for classes for herself and her three daughters, and one of the mothers in Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's study of a dancing school on North Tyneside reports:

Tanya dances on my tips; I worked all last night and never made a bean...you can't live on my wages. That's why I don't want Tanya to end up working in bars! There's so many mothers fight like mad to give their kids a chance.'
(1989: 25)

What that 'chance' might be is considered briefly in Chapter 8, and at greater length in my paper 'The Historic Present' (Taylor: 2000).

In order to compile a systematic picture of the geographical distribution of schools and faculties, I analysed the entries in the CDET's 1999 *UK Directory of Registered Dance Teachers who enter students for society examinations*, into the categories of *Male teachers*, to confirm gender distribution; *Ballet only*, to investigate the assumption that the 'private sector' is a socially exclusive place for ballet classes; and *Classical Greek*, to ascertain how widespread – geographically and in numbers - this idealistic genre might be. The Classical Greek 'faculty' is within the ISTD, so it is likely that its presence (in 69 schools, roughly 10% of the total schools, all but one in England), indicates an ISTD teacher – and, indeed, one trained at the London College of Dance and Drama some years ago. It was still taught there when I did (1980 –2), but had already dropped out of their Diploma course when that itself ceased c1995, when the merger with Middlesex University took effect. The directory details a total of 679 schools, of which 550, roughly 80% of the total, are 'Multi', that is, schools which teach modern and/or tap as well as ballet: a few also teach national. 129, approximately 20%, teach *Ballet only*. There is a certain ideology behind the categories in the Directory – ballroom does not feature, and neither do the Irish and Highland Dancing likely to be regionally available. The figure in 'Multi' added to that in 'Ballet only' represents the total number of schools in an area. Male teachers – 6 of them, less than 1%, and Greek teachers, are in one or other of those figures as well as in their own column. Each teacher is allowed entries in two geographical areas: I have counted their entry at their first alphabetical appearance. The data appears in full, and by county, in Appendix 5.

ANALYSIS OF 'FACULTIES' BY GEOGRAPHICAL AREA
STATISTICS FROM CDET DIRECTORY 1999

	Multi	Ballet only	Classical Greek	Male Teachers
CI	1	1	0	0
IoM	2	0	0	0
N.Ireland	5	2	0	0
Scotland	21	7	1	0
Wales	8	5	0	0
E.Mids	75	9	16	0
North	15	1	3	1
S.West	70	8	2	0
N.West	56	8	7	1
Yorks	21	8	3	1
Eastern	18	4	1	1
South	88	24	15	0
Gtr.London	126	34	14	2
W.Mids	12	9	6	0

No writer recognises the full range of dancing available at private dance schools. Such private dance school practices as 'song and dance' and showgirl tap may be somewhat out of fashion, but they provide important creative, social, and somatic experiences for the people who practise them. They refer to an idea of 'going on the stage' - a stage that no longer exists. Although into the middle years of the 20th century many schools trained pupils for 'the stage', a claim still made by Miss Richards, escalating technical standards in ballet and the demise of live theatre as entertainment have reduced the frequency with which this connection can in reality be made. There were 150 'Summer Seasons' in British seaside resorts in the 1960s, while in 1999 there were only 8, of which only the Cromer Pier Show offered a traditional variety programme. (Channel 4 news, 9.9.2000). I do not take a Darwinist view that these practices are naturally and inevitably declining because of lack of quality. This decline in theatre-going is described in markedly similar terms in fiction, in Angela Carter's *Wise Children* (1992), and in Travis Kemp's first-hand account in his and Molly Lake's memoirs (Benari, nd: 161). That this catastrophic decline in employment

opportunities for dancers is little remarked is doubtless because of the sort of dance done there – not being serious art dance, its passing is not mourned by those in culturally influential positions.

An officer of one Society (not one of the CDET five) justifies schools' teaching a range of dance styles by appeal both to the needs of the profession and to the teacher's business success:

Producers these days do demand a more all-round training and although ballet is the base for all forms of dance it really is necessary that for performance a dancer can cover all aspects (unless working purely with a ballet company of course), and from a teaching point of view it is necessary to be able to offer pupils as many types of dance as possible, only if specialising in ballet, possibly in London could the average teacher cope without offering other subjects.
(personal letter, 15.9.98)

The officer is quite right that there are fewer schools which teach only ballet, but not, according to the 1999 CDET directory, that such schools will only be found in London. I am somewhat sceptical about these 'producers', 'these days'. Who are they, and what are they producing, that a dancer with the technical skills attainable outside full-time professional training can be employed? Contemporary pantomimes, presented with stars from TV soaps by freelance specialist producers in local authority halls and theatres, do indeed use local dancing school dancers, who are pleased to get a chance to perform, even though the producers pay only a gratuity. Other than pantomimes it is hard to think of any branch of the 'entertainment industry' where such dancers can find work, except at the risky and exploitative limits of what could be considered dancing. Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's informant Deborah describes being successful at an audition to be a Singing Telegram. 'The show was supposed to go to all these different countries', but her father 'went down to see the man' and vetoes it: 'Dad wasn't very pleased with me having to live in a *lorry*.' Deborah has some regrets, seeing it as a stepping-stone to better work: 'If I'd gone, I would have got me Equity card!!!', and describes trying another tack. 'Then I went to a modelling agency in Newcastle. Next thing we heard, they'd gone bankrupt!' Deborah's mother goes on to conjure up a graphic picture of the battle for survival in the 'entertainment industry', and the grey economy at its edges:

That [agency] was Capricorn by the Central Station. We opened the door; there was nobody there, just photos scattered all over the floor...None of them were hers like. (Konttinen 1989: 77)

The Societies negotiate differently with the popular dance which will provide the major employment opportunities for those of its graduates who do become professional dancers, by adopting a system of value judgements based on signifiers of taste – which in their turn are the product of class allegiance. If ballet is too middle class, then ‘stage’ and entertainment dance are not middle class *enough*. I asked an examiner of one Society about the work of another: ‘teeth and tits’ was her assessment. Having recently visited a performance of the teeth-and-tits Society, I could not see that the work I saw was any more sexualised than the theatre dance of more prestigious societies, which the examiner did not brand in this way. It is not said, but there is a tacit assumption that teeth-and-tits also means it isn’t any good as dance. This association of popular dance with sexuality and with low quality can be paralleled, and perhaps even traced back, to the historical circumstances of ballet in the late 19th and early 20th century, where the art had become inextricably confused with a discourse of sexual licence (Taylor: 2000). Espinosa was concerned to recover the reputation of its dancers: he wrote in 1897, ‘his first article in defence of “British Ballet Girls” good name and in support of their natural abilities.’ (1948: 19). The ‘front’ of gentility associated with ballet was formed at the same time as the construction of British Ballet as a high art form. Kathleen Gordon, former Director of the RAD, explains the early choice of the name ‘Operatic Dancing’: ‘It is well to remember that the word “Ballet” was very suspect at that time!’ (1968: 570).

Lesley-Anne Sayers expresses an ambivalent attitude towards entertainment:

The star of our school was a gorgeous creature seemingly destined for greatness. She had dark hair parted down the middle, a slender, sylph-like body, large, downcast dark eyes and a lyrical sweep to her easily extended *developpé* that was both inspirational and humbling. She got honours for all her examinations, went on to full-time ballet school and was next heard of dancing topless on ocean liners. (Sayers 1997: 139)

It is very difficult to work out where Sayers’ ideological position is, here. From being critical of ballet, as elsewhere in her chapter, Sayers has now revalidated it as desirable; the place where ‘gorgeous’ ‘sylph-like’ and technically accomplished dancers will achieve ‘greatness’. The necessity to dance topless is as a result of employment opportunities, not as a result of the moral or aesthetic characteristics of ballet, or the virtue, turpitude, or talent of the young woman. As they were in the Victorian theatre, attitudes to sexualisation in entertainment are in complex relationship with class, gender, and education. Dancing topless is not a career I would choose or recommend, but I would not take it upon myself to blame women and girls who earn a living by it in the absence of better jobs.

I assume that Sayers' motivation is in part one of feminist anxiety at sexual display, seeing it as the product of male power: however such a position presents problems of economics and freedom of choice for performers. (*vide* Judith Lynne Hanna's 'Ballet to exotic dance – under the censorship watch' [2000]). Valerie Walkerdine in *Daddy's Girl* demonstrates a class difference in response to such issues, by comparing the broadsheet and tabloid – that is, polarised positions of class and education - reactions to the television series *Minipops*, in which children performed pop songs. *The Observer* (27 Feb 1983) found the children-as-adults disturbing, especially in their sexualisation: 'is it merely priggish to feel queasy at the sight of primary school minxes with rouged cheeks, eye make-up and full-gloss lipstick belting out songs like torch singers?' (1997:161).

The *Daily Mirror* (24 Jan 1983) was apparently unconcerned with such undercurrents of inappropriate sexuality, and just noticed the 'talent'. Indeed, child performers occupy a niche within the tradition of the variety theatre, where the more 'precocious' (in both the dictionary sense and in popular usage) they are, the more they can be admired: 'The minis will sing and dance their way into your hearts the children are out to prove that they are just as talented as The Kids From Fame' (*Daily Mirror* 24 Jan 1983).

Early in my interviews my 'Aces', Cassandra, Elizabeth, Buffy, and Susanne, spontaneously performed for me, with actions, a song from *Chorus Line*. 'Choose me, use me!' they sang. I was myself somewhat alarmed, but my own position on this became much less certain, the more I saw certain preferences for 'child-like' behaviour as definitively bourgeois. This conviction grew, the more that the children told me about their distaste for school; for in the school, as Valerie Walkerdine reports, the idealised proto-rational child of the primary school classroom 'has always been an idea that has come from the bourgeoisie ... projected on to working-class children, both to save them from exploitation but also to stop them rebelling, hence another of the fears beneath the precocious and unchildlike presence of the working classes.' (1998: 197-8). In addition, I was led to question my own assumption that the conventional performance of entertainment songs and dances was not worth doing.

The Dancing School in the Church Hall

The institution of the dancing school is loosely defined and differentiated; it rarely has permanent premises, it may have an official name which is rarely used, in favour of the owner's personal name. In terms of modern management systems, it is a miracle it exists at all, having little corporate identity and following none of the rules of engagement that it should, for survival and success.

The dancing school's performance, as Erving Goffman uses the word, has very few items of 'front' which are fixed; the 'setting' (1969: 32) does not involve much in the way of 'furniture, decor, physical layout and other background items which supply the scenery and stage props for the spate of human action played out before, within, or upon it.' (ibid.: 32-3). The barres, often imitated - as at Miss Richards' - by chairs, fulfil this function to some extent, as do the mirrors if they are present; but the ritual performance of the dance class is not dependent upon them, the class can take place wherever it is enacted together; its strong form is a virtual one and leaves no trace. In Sirkka-Liisa Kontinnen's study Margaret Bull, school caretaker, single mother of two daughters, Trades Unionist and worker for women's rights, explains how the story, to work properly, requires the audience to accept the imaginative power rather than the 'reality' of the 'front' (Goffman, 1969: 32) she presents. The part the performers are playing may 'implicitly request his observer to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them' (Goffman, 1969: 28); but she can manage, even if they won't play. The caption, possibly in her hand, and presented as speech, says:

Nelly the Elephant dressed like a fairy on a Christmas tree! It doesn't matter to me how idiotic I look in a tutu; it's just when you get someone who doesn't understand what it's all about, and you come trooping on ... Mind you, we WERE born to laugh ...! (Kontinnen, 1989:119).

The impression Margaret Bull wishes to make is hardly that of being a professional dancer, or a quest for admiration, for sexual or social success, or a dream of feminine perfection. Her 'understand what it's all about' is a legitimate negotiation with an art form, even if she is not particularly proficient, and does not match the requirements of the profession. The strength of the form of the ballet class is a principal factor in its continuing presence in culture. The girls and their mothers choose to go; they go; they get ready; they do their hair; they tie their shoes. It exists as it is done, and needs no 'setting' (Goffman, 1969: 32). The dancers 'terminate their performance' (ibid.: 32-3) when they close the class, in ballet normally with a 'révérence', a formal danced curtsy or bow.

At the opera house or the professional school, there is a special place where the class or performance takes place, and they can take place there, and only there. The church hall setting owes nothing to the Ideological State Apparatuses of state or critics or high culture, it needs no official permission or ratification to exist. The church hall is not a no-place, not just not-the-opera-house. Both an actual building, and an institution, the church hall, and its country cousin the village hall, are public places which form part of the social capital of the community, not under the authority of local or national government. The church hall is a

place of loosely differentiated policy and aims, what goes on there an ad hoc response to local initiatives and needs: the hall and its uses make for a better local society, as much because of, as despite, its ragtag programme of activities. Churches may typically have a dwindling, ageing congregation, and their halls be used mostly by outside groups: they may maintain some ideological control over the activities in their hall, as when my local Methodist church refused to allow a yoga class to take place on their premises, seeing yoga as unchristian. But such acts are rare; usually the hall has become secularised into local civil society. Accessible for the community to spend their 'spare time', layered with history and the presence of others, its shabbiness and character are inscribed with the idiosyncrasies of its users. The dancing school also stands outside what Peter Brinson calls the 'preferable philosophies of public education, social welfare or leisure service.' (Brinson 1991: 60 - 1): its shows are presented without intervention by community arts workers or local authority animateurs. An important characteristic is *not* being under local authority control – a passive population waiting to be provided with preferable philosophy by an educated élite, empowered to put on a dancing show. Putting on a show is a metonym for moving outside official controls and boundaries and doing it yourself. That is the whole point: 'Hey kids, let's do the show right here!' said innumerable movies, Judy Garland and Mickey Rooney in endless virtually identical scenarios.

The dancing school creates its own front, regardless of physical context; it can do its class anywhere. For most participants, it does not refer to a more authentic kind of ballet somewhere else, on stage, in a ballet company. Without institutional support, without institutional obligations, this ballet's setting is chiselled out of the community, out of the week, out of the everyday life of school, childcare, paid work: inhabiting together *Spare Time* (Jennings, 1939).

Social capital

The local dancing school has an important function as a locus of social capital for the participants, their families, and friends, in addition to a greater or lesser quantity of cultural capital. That dance school shows may only be watched by the nearest and dearest is not a product of their lack of the cultural capital proper to the creation and performance of art in the intertextuality of national and international high culture, or of the technical standards, practices and values of the present profession. Such shows are *for* the nearest and dearest. The cultural capital of these shows (for they are cultural products, their 'standard' is another issue altogether) is 'a form of social capital, meaning that when a community gathers to share culturally, (through celebrations, rites and intercultural dialogue), it is enhancing its

relationships, partnerships and networks (social capital)' (Gould [2001] in www.statistics.gov.uk/themes/socialfinances/soccaplitreview.pdf [hereafter ONS] 2001: 7).

I am using 'social capital' in its recent sense, whose first isolation in the mid-1990s is widely attributed to Robert Putnam (e.g. 2000). Putnam, in the assessment of the Office for National Statistics, 'successfully exported the concept out of academia and into a wider media' (ONS 2001: 8). Social capital is variously referred to as social glue, social ozone (ONS, *passim*) and is seen by social policy makers to be of critical importance to the health of society and its members in all senses, medical, economic, and a sense of security and trust. It has a family resemblance with the *Spare Time* of Humphrey Jennings' 1939 film, time spent in community activity, recreation, creativity. Most relevant to the distinction between ballet of the opera house and of the church hall is the distinction between social capital as the finite private property of the individual, and as the limitless collective production of the community:

Social capital is generally considered an attribute of communities, whereas human capital is considered an attribute of individuals and comprises a stock of skills, qualifications and knowledge. Cultural capital has been considered an aspect of human capital, something that an individual can accumulate over time through talent, skills, training and exposure to cultural activity (Matarasso, 1999 in ONS 2001: 7)

The distinction between 'social capital' in the sense used by Putnam (et al), and as Bourdieu defines it, is critical. Craig Calhoun, in *Bourdieu: Critical Perspectives* states that Bourdieu's notion of social capital is competitive, a finite commodity which some have and others do not. This is a neo-Marxist concept which 'consistently sees capital ... as a resource (that is, a form of wealth) which yields power.' (Calhoun in Calhoun et al., 1993: 69). Calhoun here refers to *Distinction* (Bourdieu, 1984):

Bourdieu's key original insights are that there are immaterial forms of capital – cultural, symbolic and social – as well as a material or economic form and that with varying levels of difficulty it is possible to convert one of these forms into the other. It is this notion of multiform, convertible capital that underpins his richly nuanced account of class relations in France.' (Calhoun in Calhoun et al., 1993: 69).

Bourdieu's social capital is the property of the individual, whose project is to push themselves into a higher place within the class system, either by existing membership of a superior social class or by accessing that status through converting other forms of capital – cultural, symbolic, or economic. While Bourdieu's neo-Marxist social capital involves getting ahead, Putnam's neo-Liberalist social capital involves keeping together (Davies,

2001 in ONS, 2001: 8). There are some cultural differences between both of these models and British society, for Bourdieu's model originated in French society, and Putnam's in the US.

Ballet is widely considered the sort of middle-class activity which possesses Bourdieu's, not Putnam's, social capital, and it is for this reason that Putnam's definition is useful, in that it reflects the historicity of many private dance schools, allowing them an authenticity which cannot easily be claimed in terms of Bourdieu's definition of a 'multiform, convertible capital' which refers to the opera house and a genuine socially superior status. There were no unproblematic ways I could access information from the girls about their class position, to test whether they might be part of Bourdieu's economy. As children, their social status is dependent upon their family's. Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) sorts confidently into categories by employment, income, and educational attainment, but as Mary Douglas says:

The trouble with Bourdieu's model is that it is so French. It is just as firmly rooted in the perspective of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century French bourgeoisie as the Hindu purity scale is rooted in India. (1996: 30)

The problem with trying to replicate Bourdieu's schema, seductive though it is, is not so much the differences in details between French and British models, but an absence of clear categories within contemporary British society, an absence of certainty that education, employment, culture, follow matching patterns across society. Class is assessed in government statistics by the occupation of the 'Head of the Household', an anachronistic concept which I find unacceptable since that 'Head' is expected to be the father - particularly unhelpful when arguing for the autonomy and self-hood of household members likely to have little power - its young girls. Mary Douglas, in *Thought Styles* (1996) argues that, in any case, demographic concepts and categories themselves do not necessarily produce the one-to-one match frequently imagined. Douglas refers to a study made by Gerald and Valerie Mars (apparently unpublished) on the cultural alignment of households in London, in which they surveyed households that belonged to the same social class, where the householders had the same educational level, the families had the same numbers and ages, in the same kind of locality, with the same level of incomes, in order to test the assumption that 'the only significant differences between households depend on that very same set of demographic variables that is collected by the Census' (1996:96).

The Mars' results revealed widely differing attitudes to hierarchy, enactments of gender, and other fundamental ways of structuring experience and relationships, held by families within the same group of demographic variables. I suggest that trying to correlate the received view

of ballet as 'middle-class' against the 'demographic variables' of those who engage in it, is equally inconclusive. Buffy and Helen's mother for example, was a schoolteacher, which would have given the family a clear position in Bourdieu's schema – indeed, high up his hierarchy: but they were not a cultured family. Being a schoolteacher in year 2000 UK does not bring with it a clear set of social characteristics, as it apparently did in an undifferentiated France of the 20th Century. I suspect that Bourdieu's distinctions, indeed, have as little certain applicability for a multi-ethnic France as they do for my informants. There seemed little use for information about the children's families' employment, income, and educational attainment, even if it had been appropriate to ask the children for it.

It occurred to me that it was not inappropriate to ask the children where they went to school, since that was in the public domain, and then to use published statistics from the Key Stage 2 'League Tables' to see if any correlation would emerge between the girls' political thought style, and, through a generalised discourse that educational attainment is congruent with social class, an assumption that girls who go to ballet are middle class. These statistics did not produce clear enough results to shed light on the girls' social background, to correlate with attitudes the girls may have to the political situation they find themselves in to school, or to speculate on the relationship between their class fraction and such views. They do provide food for thought and some 'scientific' information, however, and can be found in Appendix 3.

The girls do not form a discrete group sociologically or culturally just because they attend ballet class. They come from a wide variety of social backgrounds and I felt socially, rather than as a scholar, unable to assume the right to make a judgement in which I assign Elizabeth to the middle classes or, worse, assign Cassandra to the working class. Elizabeth and Cassandra's social class outside dancing is only relevant if I expect that assignment to explain their behaviour and attitudes (*vide* Douglas referring to the Mars' research, 1996:96). Elizabeth and Cassandra had more in common as girls, dancing, suffering in their fathers' absence, than they were divided by social class.

Having given many reasons why it is impossible to categorise my research informants into classes, and reaffirming that I resist doing so, feeling both on a social level that it is presumptuous to do so to people I know, and also uncertain what characteristics nowadays are definitive indicators of class; nevertheless most of the northern group do labour under difficult economic circumstances and the social isolation which is commonly ascribed to the working classes, and most of the southern appear more socially confident and prosperous.

In this chapter I have attempted to destabilise the perceptions of the 'middle class' position of the private dance school as an institution, even if it proved difficult to define my own informants, who did not spontaneously discuss such issues. However, they were very willing to talk about the political problems which affected their own experience, and in the next chapter they will challenge assumptions that girls who do ballet are 'stereotypically feminine'.

Notes

1. Although under 'Local Management of Schools' this is no longer illegal, it requires a certain degree of perseverance to effect.

2. Sayers does not mention The British Association of Teachers of Dancing (founded 1892), the International Dance Teachers' Association (itself a merger of six Associations, of which the earliest, the Manchester & Salford Society of Teachers of Dancing was founded in 1903), the Allied Dancing Association (Founded 1922), the National Association of Teachers of Dancing (founded 1906), the United Kingdom Alliance of Professional Teachers of Dancing (founded 1903), the Northern Counties Dance Teachers' Association (founded 1925), or the Scottish Dance Teachers Alliance.(founded 1934). The preceding list of societies was prepared by the Ballroom Teachers' Committee of the Council for Dance Education and Training; this list omits the Association of American Dancing, the British Ballet Organisation, the British Theatre Dance Association, the Cecchetti Society, the Royal Academy of Dancing, the Spanish Dance Society, or the United Teachers of Dance. One thing I have learned, every list of societies will reflect a hierarchy of exclusions and inclusions, and a complex history of alliances and disputes. I may have missed some myself.

3. *An example of an economic exchange between teacher and society*

'The 2002 BBO fees for fully registered teachers are £100 for 1 style, £105 for 2 styles, £110 for 3 styles & £115 for 4 styles. Fully registered teachers can teach the qualifications & enter candidates for examinations. Provisional teachers pay £75 to teach 1 dance style, £80 to teach 2, £85 for 3 & £90 for 4. Provisionally registered teachers can only teach, they are not allowed to enter candidates for examinations.

Having paid fees teachers receive access to BBO facilities (including library & archives), the Dancer magazine, free syllabi for qualifications taught, Quality Assurance Manual, & access to professional development sessions such as Concourse & short courses in the regions.

Fully registered teachers can also enter their students for auditions for the Organisation's

Scholarship Scheme. Being a scholar has perks such as regular classes taught by really good folk & a free place at the students' concourse. This year the students' concourse was held at White Lodge.' (Email from a colleague).

4. *Tariff at Miss Richards' School*

In 2000, one lesson of ballet and tap cost £4 for 1½ hours, or £40 per term. That 'ballet and tap' count as one choice represents, I think, a tradition from the working theatre surviving in a context where there is no need to modernise. The other pairing is modern and 'song & dance', at the same price. The 'baby' class is £2.50. The adult class, completely inconsistently, costs a lot less, (£30 a term for 1¼ hours a week). All the above prices are for 2000, when Miss Richards still ran the school. Ruth mentioned that she was going to revise pricing, following her inheritance of the school in 2000, commenting that for some mothers, such as Cassandra's, amassing a full term's fees as a lump sum was an impossibility, so they missed out on the discount and ended up having to pay more overall. This is, of course, a familiar element in the poverty trap.

CHAPTER 5

‘Girl Power’: or ‘We’re different from them but we’re not really’

In the questions following my conference paper ‘Respect, Antipathy and Tenderness: Why do Girls “Go to Ballet?”’ (1999a), I was asked what the girls thought about ‘Girl Power’. I had previously considered ‘Girl Power’ to be a superficial marketing exercise to sell the song of the same name by the Spice Girls, rather than a political reality, but I realised that this was indeed a good question to ask. This was an idea familiar to them and available in popular culture, and as such was a useful way of introducing the topic of gender discrimination, which would in turn give them the opportunity to talk about how they conceptualised what being a girl meant to them.

Power and the Phallus: Boys’ Side

I will start by reporting why ‘Girl Power’ might be necessary – by reporting the views of the boys. I asked Christopher (14) and Paul (8) what they thought about ‘Girl Power’, but they did not volunteer a response: so I gave them a range of options. Christopher (14) ignores the other cues, but finally picks up on it not being ‘real’.

- V Are you impressed by that - are you threatened by that - are you bored by that - do you think it’s real?
Christopher No [V echoes]
Paul No
V What do you think [‘Girl Power’] is? You’re very emphatic it’s not real.

Unfortunately the older boy did not expand on his judgement, but the younger took it up:

- Paul It’s like - erm - If they see a boy, you know the boy just whacks them full out girl power is like kicking them and stuff like that really and they’re calling it ‘Girl Power’.

Paul’s immediate association of girls’ having power with a discourse of violence, and girls’ lack of right or authority to retaliate to boys’ violence, would corroborate the research

findings of many, such as Becky Francis's research on sexism in the classroom (1997). Paul went on, 'Well that's what my sister used to do ...she was like aggressive back or even started it then she would say oh "Girl Power" I've got the right to do it.' Paul, by saying 'even started it', clearly considers that his sister *doesn't* have the right to be aggressive. I asked again the older boy, Christopher, why he had said 'Girl Power' wasn't 'real.'

Christopher They're just trying to sort of - copy
Paul Yeah
V Right but they're copying...What are they copying?
Christopher Like the way boys sort of have power
Paul Yeah have sort of like power and strength

We appear to be well and truly in the realm of the Lacanian phallus here, that boys 'sort of have power', which girls can only access by 'copying'. 'Sort of' is an interesting verbal construction, which the boys repeat three times: it implies that Christopher at least is aware his words are approximating a somewhat indistinct state of affairs. I never had a chance to find out how Christopher might be conceptualising this abstract 'sort of' power, but I think it likely that he, at 14, does not equate 'power' simply with physical strength or violence. 8 year-old Paul does, however, and immediately leads the abstract (power) into the concrete (physical strength). It is true that I provided the words, but his body language at the time led me to verbalise that interpretation. I referred back to Christopher's assessment that Girl Power was not 'real' to see if they might have a more abstract conception of male power.

V So do you think that the power that they're copying isn't real either?
Paul Well I think that a boy's power is sort of real - because you could get sort of power just like that from a boy really -
V Are you talking about physical strength?
Paul Yes

The older boy, Christopher, was generally less forthcoming, and did not engage with this debate. For the younger one, however, masculinity, 'power', physical strength, and violence seemed to be a 'natural' set of associations. Both boys thought that boys were more aggressive than girls, but when I asked, 'Do you think that's natural or do you think you just learn that boys are expected to be that so you do that?' the older boy came down on the side of social construction, although he merely agreed with my statement. The younger answered as follows:

Paul You see it's sort of like more boy it's not exactly being ... a boy, you don't exactly see a boy being really soft every day going into a toyshop to see a boy with all these the cuddly toys and stuff...

Paul's answer is essentialist, that boy behaviour is a product of being, *a priori*, a boy: but the terms he uses to define this boy-ness recapitulate the terms that Jo and her colleagues used which will be examined later: 'really girly-girly, like dolly and teddy-bears'. Might Paul's answer demonstrate that the 'taboo on tenderness', 'the substitution of the power-technique for that of love' (Suttie, 1960:80) is intrinsic to his conception of masculinity? If an allegiance to 'ballet bits and pieces' can be equated with tenderness, Paul confirms that his attitude to this is a building-block in his construction of an essentialism of gender:

- V Have you got any ballet bits and pieces?
Paul I've got a couple of badges from when I've been up to London to perform
 ...
V Right...But you haven't got ...you wouldn't collect the stuff
Paul No
V like the girls do, no. So do you think there's a...what do you think about the
 girls doing that ...why do you think ballet means that to them? and doesn't
 mean that to you?
Paul It's just the way girls act [laughing]

Paul's choice of the word 'act' may reflect an awareness of 'performativity'. Or perhaps, – remember he is only 8 – merely circularity. I reintroduced Christopher's suggestion, that girl power was 'a sort of fake that girls are pretending to be something that they're not really.'

- V And do you think it would be better if they didn't do it?
Paul Yes
Christopher It doesn't really make any difference

It was a pity that Christopher, a reserved 14 year-old, was not more forthcoming. But then, he knew there was more at stake in this discussion than the 8 year-old did. Paul wants to maintain the status quo of male domination. Christopher is not so open about this. I wish I knew whether his answer 'It doesn't really make any difference' implied that he doesn't mind if the balance of power is threatened, or that the Spice Girls' efforts are futile in the face of male hegemony. I continued to press Paul over his idea of male superiority, demonstrated through an *a priori* idea of physical strength and violence, by asking him about his older sister. Paul was quite a little boy and I could not imagine that he was, in reality, stronger than the older sister I had met.

- V I imagine you don't feel that your sister should - or maybe you do - I mean
 your sister should bow down before you and...
Paul [laughs]
V I mean clearly that might be a good idea
Paul [laughs again]
V I mean realistically you're not expecting that ... are you?

Paul Well...[demurs, comically]
 V Well...[echoes]
 Paul Yes and no - My sister acts as if she wants me to bow down to her just because she's the oldest sort of like I'm this ... Well wait a minute I'm sort of like the strongest here.

At this point it is clear that Paul's narrative of male supremacy is not unchallenged, but he persists in considering that physical strength trumps other claims to this 'power', claims such as seniority. I continue to wonder whether it is symbolic or not.

V *Are you? [the stronger]*
 Paul Yes -
 V Are you sure? Do we have contests to prove this?
 Paul I've got this huge cardboard box and it weighs about - I don't know about nine stone or something really heavy, my sister, we have contests to see how far we can carry it and my sister, she can carry it halfway down the hill, but then I picked it up and I carried it all the way down to the bottom.

Whether this nine-stone cardboard box is a reality or a fantasy is hard to say. I had challenged him directly to justify his claims to being stronger, and this was his spontaneous 'proof'. Even if a box-carrying incident took place there are any number of reasons why his sister might not have carried it to the bottom, such as getting bored with this nonsense, not knowing Paul saw it as a competition and thinking they were just transporting a box, realising her life would be a misery if she didn't let him win, and so on. All of those suggestions are still implicated in the issue, of course, which is Paul's need to maintain his self-identity as being stronger than she is. This leaves her no option but to negotiate with this in some way. Becky Francis's interviews with primary school children repeat the picture Paul paints. Francis points out that the girls in her study were as big or bigger than the boys, and that two girls (aged 9 and 7), 'observed that they could beat up any of the boys in their classes. Yet such self-confidence was very rare, and most girls appeared intimidated by male physical assertion' (1997: 524-5). My own interviews corroborate this aversion to violence, although I think the girls' position (some examples appear below) is a more complex one than simply being 'intimidated' by it as Francis suggests: indeed, their position includes some bona fide political, even ethical, judgements.

One of the categories of sexist behaviour which Francis isolates, 'teasing,' consists of claims of female inadequacy, 'open ridicule and disdain of things female, simply *because* of their being female/having female associations.' Francis's example, 'Men have got real muscles and ladies have got paper muscles' (male, aged 11) (ibid.) is very similar in tone to Paul's various refusals of the possibility of girls having access to a discourse of physical strength,

and reiterates that this 'phallus' is in some way linked to authenticity – even if ladies have muscles, they are not 'real' but 'paper'. It is also depressingly similar to the quotation from George Balanchine which Ann Daly uses as epigraph to 'The Balanchine Woman: Of Hummingbirds and Channel Swimmers':

Man is a better cook, a better painter, a better musician, composer. Everything is man - sports – everything. Man is stronger, faster. Why? Because we have muscles, and we're made that way. And woman accepts this. It is her business to accept. (1987:8, originating Gruen 1976: 284)

Such testimonies trace how custom – with the assistance of those self-same muscles, perhaps - normalises infantile anxiety about masculinity, or rather as Walkerdine puts it, the 'desperate terror of its loss' (1990: 55) into a status quo of universal male supremacy, preserved into adulthood. The girls occasionally talked about 'muscles' too, but in relation to developing their dance skills. I think they used the word, at least in part, as a synonym for 'technique', which doesn't appear to be a concept they had available. 'Muscles' do not seem to have, for girls, the possession-of-the-phallus implications Balanchine and Paul are negotiating with. That, as I discuss below, appears to be reserved for 'football'.

Paul, as I have mentioned, was quite small for his age, and his next comment, that the littlest can be as strong as the oldest, suggests that his attention to physical strength may be asserted against a fear of the lack of it, perhaps in relation to other boys, not to girls at all. Who, I wonder, is 'weak and really tiny', what unconscious thoughts caused him linguistically to invert the first part of his sentence, from what I take to be his intention, and who is the phantom boy he starts to talk about at the end, before the conversation changes? I cannot help but wonder, whether it is Paul himself.

Paul It doesn't mean just because you're the oldest you haven't got as much power as the weakest, littlest, [sic] but if you're weak and really tiny and not that strong it still doesn't mean you can't beat somebody up it's like erm there's this boy...[tails off into silence]

The intrusion of 'weak', which I would have thought precluded the power and ability to 'beat somebody up', may be a refusal to identify his own little-ness with weakness. He had, perhaps, embarked on too complex a set of conditionals and hypotheticals for him to handle the language accurately. Then again, this could be an intrusion of unconscious anxieties, and his assumption of a position of superiority against girls to be at root motivated by a feeling of anxiety at maintaining his own position against other boys. Again, Francis's and others' research corroborates this: 'As Buckingham (1993) observes of boys' group interaction,

boys' sense of their masculinity appears very fragile in their discussions, but seems extremely important to them, and depends on mutual support and policing' (Francis, 1998: 36). It is to be remembered, however, that Paul's masculinity is under continual threat amongst his peers because of his participation in dance, and especially in ballet. This is not a unitarily macho little guy (for otherwise he would not take dance class in a milieu dominated by girls and women), but one who by his choice of activity is thrust into negotiating for himself an unusual spin on the simplified gender definitions practised by boys of his age. Despite their antagonism to boys at school, and their complaints (some will be seen later in this chapter) about being excluded from equal opportunities and recognition in sports, the girls of my interviews were sensitive to the problems boys would face if they danced. I was struck that they were concerned to remedy this, by thinking of ways boys might feel more comfortable dancing, rather than playing tit-for-tat and excluding boys in the way that boys excluded them, from 'football' and from the occupation of classroom and playground space. The boys maintain their identity by the 'power-technique' (Suttie: 1960:80): the girls make an effort to be socially inclusive. This strikes me as paradigmatic of gendered social behaviour, (see Francis, 1998: 35) and critical to the exclusive possession of the 'phallus' (social power). Suttie's insights are again useful: as he says, 'it may seem incredible that so harmless and amiable an emotion as tenderness, the very stuff of sociability, should itself come under a taboo' (Suttie, 1960: 86).

Football and the 'Popular Phallus': Girls' Side

If for Paul the defining metaphor for masculinity, 'power', is physical strength and violence - the 'phallus' indeed - for the girls it is what popular culture also uses as the 'popular phallus' (my coinage) - football. The first definition of 'Girl Power' by one group of Year 5 girls (aged 9 - 10) was:

~ I think it's the same stuff as boys, boys play football, and that 'Girl Power' means also that we play football

There are innumerable examples from my interviews, corroborated by research by Francis (1997), of girls' using football as a paradigm of 'doing boy', using it as a metaphor to represent gender relations. (It may be of some interest that the word for 'large abstract and polysemous concepts' turned to again and again by my respondents is 'stuff': this is the third time it has appeared in this chapter). The girls have not invented this yin/yang girl/boy ballet/football set of binaries: it is in common usage. In *The Full Monty* (1997) the dancers are unable to get a choreographic pattern correct until it is re-interpreted for them in terms of

the Arsenal offside trap, at which point it becomes effortless. This trope is doubly culturally specific, because women are supposed to be unable to grasp the off-side rule, while women, not men, are supposed to be able to dance.

The film of *Fever Pitch*, (1997) adapted from Nick Hornby's novel about his obsession with the Arsenal Football team, dramatises that obsession by characterising it as a binary contest between male and female, football and personal relationships; an example of the culturally established, gendered, 'taboo on tenderness'. The commercial video has a fold-out cover, which has provided the subtitles for this chapter. One face is entitled 'Boy's Side,' with a photograph of the male lead looking to camera, making a triumphant gesture with clenched fist, while the text 'a love match made in heaven' has the word 'love' under erasure, replaced by the word 'football'. The 'Girl's Side' of the cover shows the female lead wearing a short skirt and high heels, looking away from the camera, arms defensively folded, and reverses the erasure in the text; 'football' being replaced by 'love', exemplifying the 'taboo on tenderness', which as Suttie says is 'the leading feature of our own culture and the main reason for the substitution of the power-technique for that of love.' (1960: 80). Nick Hornby's novel (1992), it may be worth pointing out, is not 'about' this gender binary at all, but such enactments of gender stereotypes are conventional and frequent in films and television.

I only met the next interview group once, so being unable to identify most voices, have only marked a change of speaker. Jo, however, has a distinctive voice - and very strong views.

'Girl Power', says Jo, means that:

Jo We have the same rights as boys
V Do you feel you *don't* have the same rights as boys?
~ I feel like, we don't get treated the same as boys
~ [because?] we're different from them but we're not really.

I am impressed by the ability of the second speaker to discriminate between the abstract concept of rights, and the lived experience of how you are treated. She knows that having rights is no guarantee of being treated equally. I am even more impressed by the elegant negotiation with the problem of essentialism and social construction, in 'we're different from them but we're not really': a statement which may be as far as even the greatest minds and arguments can extend with certainty.

- V Can you give me some examples of how you feel you're treated differently?
 Jo Well people say that only boys can play football but girls can

The immediate return to football was followed up by anecdotes from other girls about exclusions from trials from teams, and Jo (who has claimed access to this particular phallus) said, 'It's all right in our school because I play football with the boys in my school.' Two more voices said they played as well. History is moving very fast here: it is less than twenty years since one of Walden and Walkerdine's respondents pronounced, 'I think [boys] [have more fun than girls] 'cos they play football and games like that.' (1985: 66). Girls are not now unitarily excluded, but football remains a metonym for male supremacy. I continued to hope someone might be able to verbalise *why*.

- V You're all - often using football as an example why is that? (...)
 Jo Because like only professional football players are boys, and they don't have girls
 ~ Yes and professional girl players, they don't like showing the matches on TV
 Jo Yes I don't like that
 ~ They should have girls' sports that only girls can do
 ~ agree
 ~ netball!

Here the girls have moved from their own experience in the school to a consideration of a public marginalisation of women, both by exclusion from men's activities, and by the invisibility of women's own activities – they are quite correct that women's football and traditionally women's sports are rarely shown on TV. The girls moved on to consider why.

- ~ Some people don't think that girls are as good at sport as boys
 V Right - what do you think about that
 ~ It isn't fair
 ~ Very wrong
 Jo Some girls might be better than boys at sports but nobody knows that because nobody takes any notice
 V Do you think they could have mixed professional football teams?
 All *Yes!*

Talking amongst ourselves, then, these girls at ten years old, were quite certain of their equality with boys, even in areas where they are traditionally, generally, and publicly thought to be inferior: as Balanchine said 'Everything is man – sports – everything' (Daly, 1987:8). The girls, however, think it is 'very wrong' to consider girls as less good at sports, and 'unfair' to maintain as true something that isn't. The reason Jo gives for this erroneous

belief is that 'nobody takes any notice,' and indeed, women's history, not just in sports, would bear her out in this. Women are gradually gaining access to sports events conventionally thought too demanding for them: the first women's Modern Pentathlon competition was included in the Olympics in 2000, and Ellen MacArthur took second place in the Vendée Globe yacht race, the youngest person to have raced around the world, as well as the fastest woman to have done so; she is 2001 FICO World Champion, not a gendered competition; some female tennis players (e.g. the Williams sisters) have faster serves than many men, and so on. Although mixed professional football teams may seem unlikely at present, men's clubs are increasingly running women's teams. However, the Arsenal team only went semi-professional 17.5.02 (www.givemefootball.com/html/womensnews 17.5.02); the wages they earn will only be a fraction of those their counterparts in Arsenal's Premier Division team can command; the matches are rarely televised; Fulham is the only professional women's team in Europe; while the rest of the 'Ladies' teams remain amateur. It may be a while before Jo can play alongside Freddie Ljungberg.

Despite their stated certainty that they are boys' equals on the playing field, the girls remain sensitive to aggression, which they find disturbing, and consider to be a male behaviour. Jo thinks that the presence of women would reduce aggression.

Jo When it's all boys, I mean boys just - like - *attack* everybody whereas if you had girls *and* boys it would be like a friendly one except even though you're playing against each other - it wouldn't be...horrible.

If Jo were simply 'intimidated' by male violence (Francis, 1997: 524-5) then she would not propose playing with them. She has a much more complex take on it – she considers aggression 'horrible', and that the presence of girls would encourage boys to adopt behaviour where competition can still exist and yet be 'friendly': a situation devoutly to be wished. I felt it was time to explore whether the girls considered gender characteristics to be 'natural'. When presented with a set of choices in verbal form, the girls come down on the side of social construction, against essentialism, even though when describing their experience they treat boys' and girls' behaviours as if they were fixed characteristics.

V Do you think boys are naturally aggressive and girls are naturally not aggressive or do you think you just learn to behave like that because it's what's expected of you?

Sophie I think that's how you're - how you're like, grown up to be because boys take after their dads and child[ren]... - the girls take after their mums.

This girl has acquired her name since she unconsciously appropriated the category 'children' as coterminous with the category 'girl' – she as speaker claims the category of the norm against which the universal subject is measured, even though historically Emile, rather than Sophie, gets to do this.

The girls agreed when I asked, 'so you think you learn to behave - you model your own behaviour on the behaviour of other people', but when I continued, 'Do you think there's anything at all that's sort of essentially girl which is always going to be like that and essentially boy which is always going to be like that or do you think it could change?', the girls embarked on a rap of popular gender division, although they can hardly be blamed for this, given the prevalence of popular narratives which perpetuate this sort of 'thinking'.

- ~ maybe the beauty parlours ...that's really girls ...it's shopping as well
 sometimes
~ (agree agree)
~ the men they're all carrying the bags just waiting there for the girls who are
 buying the things [all laugh]
Jo you wouldn't see a boy shopping, no [Jo is sophisticated! the tone of voice
 recognises that this is storytelling]
~ I think sewing is more girly because you hardly ever see men sewing
 [phatic]
V Do you think men could? I mean tailors, you know....
All chip in -
~ If they tried
~ I think they think oh no that's girlish I'm a boy I'm going to do boy stuff
Jo Fight, not sew! Fight! [again, Jo is maintaining a jokey double perspective
 here]

Because this question turned up at the last minute in my interview process, I do not have responses to it from most of the interview groups, but I was able to include the question 'What do you think about "Girl Power"?' in the summer school questionnaire. Most of the answers given in the questionnaire were as much of a soundbite as the question. Four people said 'It's Great', one said 'cool' and one 'It's wicked!!!' Four took it as a discourse of equality, 'I think we should be the same as boys,' 'girls should be the same as boys,' 'I think you should be independent,' and 'Boys + Girls should be treated the same especially in dance.' I am not sure whether this last was a general observation, or a specific comment on what had been happening at the summer school. On the first day the professional teacher had used language and imagery which was very feminised; some of the girls as well as the boys had noticed this, and the girls spontaneously commented on it in a critical way. It is somewhat ambiguous, whether this answer is speaking up on behalf of boys, girls, or

pleading for an end to gender discrimination. Another person (13) took a cynical view: 'Something that the Spice Girls made up,' and a number chose to distance themselves from the idea. One person didn't answer, two actually wrote 'nothing' and Jo wrote 'Pass.'

Jo was the only person who, for no particular reason except she must have picked one up when I handed them around in the dressing room, filled in a questionnaire as well as attending interview. When this topic came up in the interview she said, 'I wrote pass for that because I don't know what you mean by "Girl Power".' Her tone was somewhere between disingenuous and belligerent. In fact she knew very well what 'Girl Power' was, and having established her distance from the concept, was the first to give her view. What lay behind Jo's ambivalence, and that of another girl: 'It's a good idea, although it shouldn't be taken too far,' is difficult to assess. It could be a conservatism, although not in Jo's case - she is a strenuous proponent of girls' rights, equality, and worth. It could be a reaction to the image of the Spice Girls which she doesn't wish to emulate. Another response is equally difficult to interpret: 'I think its sad', which the respondent scribbled out with some venom, and replaced with 'groovy.' Perhaps the media product is 'sad' and the intention behind it is 'groovy' - or vice versa. Or perhaps she was influenced by the answers others gave. The final reply perhaps expressed my anxiety about 'Girl Power' as a cynical ploy to sell records like any other marketing campaign: 'I think it's good but it's gone out of fashion.' It would be a pity if the girls were left thinking that the possibilities at least implied in 'Girl Power' were a consumer item like any other, a fashion now in the past.

Girly-Girly

We had talked for a while about the social difficulties boys would encounter if they did ballet, and I asked, 'do you think girls get the same sort of teasing for playing football that boys do for doing ballet?'

~ I think sometimes they can get skitted at but usually people don't
Jo I don't get skitted at for playing football.
V No. So why is that? Why can girls do boy things but if boys do girl things they get, you know, in a lot of...
~ [new thought!] I don't know! [phatic]

This was a very electric moment for the interview group, the sort of consciousness-raising which caused me some sleepless nights from time to time. In this case, however, I do not think anyone could reasonably object. Unfortunately, that the recognition was vibrant, did not enable us to solve the problem, although we tried:

~ I reckon that it's because, like, boys think we're all poofs, and ...we're [they're?] hard, and if we do ballet, that's girly, and everyone skits at them because they get they think that they're all girly and all like flowery, but if a girl does a boy thing it's not as bad because like it's...not really girly-girly, like dolly and teddy-bears.

These girls have learnt that 'girly' is a term of abuse, for girls as well as for boys: they pinpoint this by reduplication, 'girly-girly'. The long sentence above appears to move from boys criticising girls, to boys being themselves accused of being 'all like flowery' should they dance. It seems to me that there is less concern about inappropriate gendering than about whatever 'really girly-girly' means. I suggest that we are once again in the terrain of Suttie's 'taboo on tenderness'. Most importantly, 'going to ballet' for them is not a signifier of unacceptable femininity; even though they are fully aware that it is practised almost exclusively by girls, they classify ballet as 'tomboy', not as 'girly-girly'.

V Right do you think people actually don't like girly-girly teddy bear and all that?
~ Well some people do
~ My friend does [phatic: her friend's position needs apologising for. The 'friend' might also be herself, of course]
V So you lot although you do ballet and come here you don't consider yourselves girly-girly teddybear and all that?
[Loud response...no no]
~ No we dance...a tomboy...
Jo Dolls and ponies and all that stuff that's sort of like more than girly-girly that's really, really, girly-girly [Jo's use of her voice expresses more than her words!]
[others laugh]
Jo Whereas ballet, is just like, girly, and that's it.
V Oh right so there are gradations of girly...
Jo Yes
V But the absolute outer limit of girly is Yuk.
[Yes yes]

Jo could be creating a logical, rhetorical, or semiotic square, recently known as a Greimas' Square, after its use by philosopher Algirdas Julien Greimas (see e.g. Rulewicz, 2000). Mary Douglas's 'grid' in *Thought Styles* (1996), which I use in this thesis and elsewhere (Taylor 1999a), is an example of a logical square. Each corner is marked by one of four related terms clockwise around it, such as 'beautiful' and 'ugly', then 'not beautiful' and 'not ugly' (see e.g. Langholz Leymore 1975: 29).

The advantage of such a structure is that it allows for implication and relationship, as well as opposition, and creates the notion that there are empty spaces in which gradations of

meaning are possible, rather than being only a situation where the strength of binary oppositions suppresses less formulated, more ambiguous and slippery, possible meanings. Something which is not beautiful is not necessarily ugly: something which is not ugly is not necessarily beautiful. I propose that such a structure is of great use in a consideration of conventional gender characteristics, in relation to the lived experience of individuals who are possessors, or performers, of one or other gender, or one or other biological sex. In this particular square, the corners are feminine and masculine, and not-feminine and not-masculine. It is a useful model to consider how people divide their experience and their attitudes to the world, since it allows for personal choice, even if that is within the historically bound field of possibilities available for any individual at any time.

Jo, then, could be creating fresh terms, feminine and not-feminine, masculine and not-masculine. For her the 'feminine' corner, 'really, really, "girlygirly"' is really, really, unacceptable. Why it is unacceptable, whether aesthetically or by association with the political position of women, is central to a problem I am trying to solve. The girls claim for themselves the possibility of engaging with differently 'gendered' experiences and to inhabit different roles at will: one described a friend, 'when she was at ballet she absolutely loved it, but when she went out she'd go play with my brother...playing football and everything ... with the boys.' Such an idea, of not-feminine, not-not-feminine and so on, may seem very abstract and theoretical, particularly if I refer to Greimas' Square. But in fact the children of my interview do this; they do try to create such terms. 8 year-old Paul said, 'The thing is the boys they think that ballet is just for girls, really, they think you just have to wear pink ...but it isn't really.' He is indeed projecting a space where ballet is not-feminine, although he knows he cannot make it masculine. He looks to the idea of 'pink' to render the idea of the totally feminine corner of the square, and using that as a fixed point against which to posit this possible other corner of not-feminine - or not-not-masculine - for himself. Paul knows that saying ballet is just for girls is not strong enough, because he and Christopher both do it, and do not see it as a problem for their own gender identity - although they have to negotiate continually with the fact that others do. Therefore he has to look for a further term, as Jo had, coming up with 'not just girly, but really, really, girly-girly.' Christopher, at 14, is yet another Greimas-ian rhetorician, although he did not use the 'pink' metonym. In talking about the vocabulary of ballet movements, Christopher said 'They are slightly feminine, but they are changeable'.

The girls have a clear conception of displays of 'stereotypical femininity', and scorn them.

- ~ Some schools have like, a girls' section and a boys' section and the girls, when the girls have to do PE they sort of go 'Oh no! that'll be too dangerous' [high-pitched silly voice]
- ~ Yeah that's what they think like 'Oh ...? nails?' They think we're all like ... *mancho* [sic] and that...[others, phatic]

Here the girls construct a fantasy of helpless vain femininity, which refuses PE and worries about its fingernails and so on, from which they then distance themselves. Girls who choose ballet might be seen to be part of such a group – but Jo and her friends distance themselves from such behaviour and claim to be 'mancho'. I would like to emphasise that these parodied female positions are all *imaginary*. The schools divided by gender are 'some schools', their own school was segregated '90 years ago'; the school where this still takes place is 'the old school' in Spain: and linguistically, that the above story is narrated in the historic present tense implies that it is an invention:

- ~ At the lower site of our school when it first opened which was like, over 90 years ago, the boys were in one part of the playground with like a yellow line then there was the girls' part so they separated the girls and the boys.
- V Does anybody's school still separate girls from boys?
- ~ No
- ~ I did at the old school I went to but that's in Spain ...

Playing with boys does appear to be an issue, or some kind of statement, albeit rather an imprecise one. The next girl suggests that her boy peers still operate the muscles economy that Paul described.

- V Do you still tend to talk and play with girls or do you have friends who are boys as well?
- ~ I have a few friends who are boys but at times they get a little bit er- over-angry...[phatic] ...so...just walk off! because they're OK, sometimes, but sometimes they get all angry and start having a fight and I don't want to get into a fight with the boys.

I noticed in transcribing the interview that having friends who are boys and playing with boys is subtly different. It was rare to admit to having friends who were boys, but many said they spent time playing with them: the difference between them remains, although the gap can be crossed when the girls go to play their games. And it is no surprise to me that no-one mentioned the boys coming to play with them. In another interview, slightly younger girls than these did mention 'the boys' playing with them, but the boys appeared to maintain a kind of jokey distance from the game (of 'families'), disrupting it as much as playing it –

they crouched down, put their coats over their heads, and waddled around doing silly things and pretending to be toddlers.

- V Right. Do you play with boys?
~ Sometimes I do.
Jo I just play with boys all the time because it's what I do because I'm sporty and I'm fit and all that -

Jo implies that despite her claims to equality, active play continues to be gendered boy, as in traditional educational theory, which is indeed borne out by playground research (Bray [1987], Walkerdine [1990 &c], Francis, [1997a], et al). The boys lay claim to its possession, and even though the girls may join it, there is a sense that they are being allowed to access it. Jo suggests that although girls can move from one activity to another, the gender/activity status quo is pretty unshakeable, 'I stay with like my girl, you know my friends that are girls, but like at playtime and stuff I actually play with the boys and I don't go by them [the girls?] unless they play with us.' One of my first interview questions had been about the games the girls played. This was in part to assess whether their play was circumscribed by gendered expectations, either as girls or as ballet-choosing girls, and in part to find what forms their children's culture took. The girls did not describe their games as non-active - they described a number of complicated games with rules based on chasing, catching, and being 'on' and 'off', whole body activities in response to certain stages in the game. They ride bikes, roller blade, play tennis. The younger ones also play imaginative games, play with dolls, and with the marketed 'collectables' like Polly Pocket and Skydancers. In short, they play games which could be described as gendered 'girl' and games which could not, although they play almost exclusively *with* other girls. The political implications of gendered expectations of play do impact on the girls' conscious experience, particularly when (gendered) access to playground space is maintained by power structures at school: this issue is examined further in Chapters 5 & 7.

The girls I talked with did not report any pressure to be feminine, in the way Paul implies he is under pressure to be masculine. Meredith Cherland, whose study in a Canadian classroom will be the focus of the next chapter, considers that girls were 'punished', as she puts it (1994: 64-66,152), by their peers, if they adopted gender-inappropriate behaviour. Jo, at least, does not report being 'punished' by her friends when she plays with boys:

- V Do you think other girls think, you know, there's that Jo again - are you slightly different from the main group of girls, do you think?

Jo No - because my friends still treat me with the same respect that they would if I played with them instead of the boys, whichever...

The next girl raises a different issue:

~ They say Oh there's so-and-so with the boys, and they say Oh I think they, I think she likes him and they start saying that because people play with the boys, the girls play with the boys, they think that, you know, they all love each other and stuff like that...

This is the only reference to boys in relation to 'love...and stuff.' I wondered if they were under genuine pressure from their peers, as well as from the media and marketing, to embark on a premature heterosexual career. Asked if this were the situation at their school now, the answer 'Errrm - it doesn't happen a lot but sometimes' is inconclusive – accusations of romantic attachment are a perennial excuse for teasing in the primary school.

The Narcissistic Wound

On one level one might read that these girls have come to a healthy compromise position, rejecting 'girly-girly', 'stereotyped' femininity; but there is a suggestion that they have to *allow* themselves to practise any feminised activities, by themselves marginalising girls who practise them and projecting on to them the opprobrium associated with 'girly'. 'Dolls and ponies and all that stuff' may be rejected by 10 year-olds as much for their infantility as for their girly-girly associations, although the slippage between these two categories is certainly implicated in Suttie's 'taboo on tenderness' (Suttie, 1960: 86). This is an appropriate moment to consider the terms in which Suttie formulated this notion of a 'taboo on tenderness'. Questioning the negative relationship between himself and a female patient in the clinical situation, Suttie recognised that they were both demonstrating an:

intolerance of sentimentality (I use the derogatory term to indicate the bias which is embedded in our very language) [which] appeared the most natural, rational, and practical attitude possible. The world, our world, could not be carried on upon any other footing than that of strength and independence. (Suttie, 1960: 84)

Suttie 'began to study both the patient's and my own defences and came to the conclusion that there is a *taboo on tenderness* every bit as spontaneous and masterful as the taboo on sex itself' (ibid.: 85: Suttie's italics). In infancy, when presumably 'dolls and ponies and all that stuff' will have their first appeal, girls will begin to learn that others hold these things in contempt. Toy advertisements on television, and the aisles of toyshops, segregated, largely by the colours chosen, into clearly gendered sections, offer a reminder of children's cultural

susceptibilities (see also Zipes, 1997; Walkerdine, 1997). The marketing industry reads cultural signals every bit as well as the academy, and has no hesitation in producing a heap of objects to gratify these tastes. For boys, there is camouflage green and brown, machines, gadgets, hard materials, things that make noise, move around, and throw projectiles; for girls, there is pink, extravagant dresses and jewellery, princesses, long hair, silky and fluffy textures, miniature things, puppies, kittens, ponies, fairies and ballerinas. Even though the boys' toys refer to harmful practices - war toys, or science fiction computer games whose goal is to generate violence between soft porn characters, it is the girls' toys and tastes which evoke almost universally the more negative reaction.

Already bolted into girls' and boys' separatist choices of play are symbols which uphold that ideas of effectiveness, violence, adulthood, and real world are grouped together as male and acceptable, while ideas of not effective, sentimentality, infantility, fantasy and private world are female, and unacceptable. I suggest that intolerance of girls' cultural choices is a manifestation of this 'taboo on tenderness' that Suttie isolates, and with Suttie, suggest that it 'bespeaks a cultural antipathy to a range of feeling and emotion which is socially harmless.' (Suttie, 1960: 90). Girls' choices of symbols are not aggressive, damaging, anti-social, or immoral, but are despised because society rejects sentimentality, dependence, fantasy, and weakness. Suttie realised he was requiring himself to believe that 'the world ...could not be carried on upon any other footing than that of strength and independence' (ibid.: 84). Their opposites, weakness and dependence, militate against self-determination, and are therefore dangerous politically; particularly since they have been traditionally thought to be 'natural' characteristics of women, leading to the association of women with the infantility to which children are indeed 'naturally' attached. (Taylor: 1999a).

Those adults – parents and others - who reject the symbols of infantile femininity do so, undoubtedly, out of anxiety that they represent 'social conditioning', a capitulation to the 'stereotypically feminine'. Though well-intentioned, this is not without practical problems, some of which will be examined further in Chapters 6, 7, and 8. More importantly, I am opposed to the approach of many feminists, to despise the 'stereotypically feminine,' along with rationalists despising the same objects for their sentimentality, and misogynists in circular fashion despising feminised characteristics because they are associated with women. This scorn, whatever its political origin, has the same effect; it confirms the impression that girls have that their aesthetic choices are wrong ones. Since what they like to play with and

wear is wrong, and there is something wrong with being girly-girly, so they themselves must have something wrong with them, as in Alice Miller's analysis of the 'narcissistic wound.'

The child has a primary need to be regarded and respected as the person he really is at any given time, and as the centre - the central actor - in his own activity. In contradistinction to drive wishes, we are speaking here of a need that is narcissistic, but nevertheless legitimate, and whose fulfillment is essential for the development of a healthy self-esteem.'(Miller, 1983: 21. [In the rewritten version of Miller's book, (1995), among other revisions, 'he' is replaced by 'she'.])

Although psycho-analyst Alice Miller ascribes to the mother alone the power to inflict additional 'narcissistic wounds' on to their daughters, since 'erstwhile little girls can pass on to their children at the most tender age the contempt from which they once suffered' (1983: 90), I suggest that society as a whole takes the role of promoting or withholding a sense of 'healthy self-esteem' for girls, the legitimate narcissistic need to be sure that there is nothing wrong with being a girl. I asked the girls about their sense of self-esteem as girls.

V Do you feel a bit negative about girly-girly and if so why?
~ I don't like teddies, and ribbons, and pretty ponies but I like ballet because I
 really enjoy it and I...
~ But some people think, we wear tutus that...don't wear the tutus...

I think this girl is trying to separate out the reality of dancing from its stereotypes, and its metonymic portrayal in sign equipment, in order to validate dancing as a 'general' or 'not-feminine', not a girly-girly, practice: a part of lived experience with which she has an active relationship. 'Tutus' are exaggerated signifiers of femininity and therefore risk attracting contempt.

All the children in these interviews were engaged with the utmost seriousness, in negotiating their own sense of self-worth and freedom against binary gendering. The boys, particularly the younger one, bore out Buckingham's observation that 'boys' sense of their masculinity appears very fragile in their discussions, but seems extremely important to them' (Francis, 1998: 36). The girls did not express anxiety about attaining femininity, indeed seemed concerned to maintain it at a distance, and did not report any negative consequences should they adopt behaviours coded masculine. They did not report a limited role choice, and appeared to claim the right to pick and choose whether to be 'feminine' or not in different situations. However, they observe and resent society's belittling of women, and revealed a consciousness of inhabiting a paradox between confidence in their own worth and awareness that this is not recognised – as they said, 'Some people don't think that girls are as good at

sport as boys... It isn't fair... Some girls might be better than boys at sports but nobody knows that because nobody takes any notice.' No-one regarded dancing, and ballet in particular, as 'girly-girly' or reported parental or peer pressure to do it. Nevertheless it remains a 'stereotypically feminine' practice in society's mythology, which bears out the girls' observation that 'nobody takes any notice' – whatever girls actually do or do not do, they are marked by their gender in a way that the boys are not (see, e.g., Wittig, 1992). The girls did not demonstrate that they were unitarily always-already-passified by their adoption of the 'stereotypically feminine' practice of going to ballet class – indeed, offered considerable resistance to that, in a way which confirms they are already well aware of the 'sociocultural squeeze play' (Agar, 1985: 67) girls and women are caught in. This term is used by Michael Agar, to describe the resistance of his research subjects (independent truckers), who 'are used to personify a traditional American cultural myth while experiencing work-based social relationships that contradict it' (ibid.). I consider that these girls are aware of being seen to represent, or personify, a mythic role of 'girly-girly' while their own experience, their own sense of themselves, contradicts it.

The question, whether the conventional outward signs of femininity are the origin of female subjection or of capitulation to it, seems to me to be implicated in the squeezing in the squeeze play. *Billy Elliot* (2000) would not have been a successful film, had it been about Sally Elliot; for then, the desire to be a ballet dancer would not have had transgressive overtones, but conformist ones. Crossing the gender boundary the other way is also culturally interesting, as in *Bend it like Beckham* (2002) where a young British Asian girl struggles against her family's cultural expectations to realise her footballing talent. The implications of power and status in these two gender-crossings are dissimilar: it is always implicit that authenticity is conferred by being practised by 'the boys', that such 'feminine' activities as ballet may be valorised if boys do them. As Ninette de Valois said, 'when a boy at an ordinary school in any part of England makes the decision to become a ballet dancer, he must have a real vocation. With a girl, it means nothing. Everybody thinks it would be much nicer for her to go to the Royal Ballet School than to become a secretary' (quoted in Dominic and Gilbert, 1971: 191). Such positions in turn imply that things 'feminine' are not, objectively, always and forever 'feminine'. I argue, then, in this chapter, and further in Chapters 6 and 7, that 'feminine' tropes are potentially valid choices rejected, suppressed, and projected on to women by patriarchy. In the next chapter I will consider how the tropes of ballet may be read as factors in the repressive socialisation of girls, and suggest that such

charges are shared with those levelled against the motifs and feeling-tone of literary romance. The implications of the rejection of literary romance, from a point of view of class and education, have been well studied, and I draw on this work (e.g. Beer, 1970; Frye, 1976) to consider what light those findings may shed on ballet's being conceived as a threat to the independent self-hood of girls who choose to become involved in it.

CHAPTER 6

Plato, Aristotle, Romance, and the ‘Taboo on Tenderness’

Meredith Rogers Cherland, in her book *Private Practices: Girls Reading Fiction and Constructing Identity* (1994) returns three times to discuss a ‘vignette’ (Cherland’s word) she observed in the Canadian classroom where her study took place. Cherland describes a conversation between two girls and herself about a novel called *Satin Slippers #1: To Be a Dancer* (Bernard: c.1989), whose cover ‘was made from a photograph of a tall, slim young woman in pink tights and leotard with a gauzy skirt and toe shoes. She stood by a window in a graceful pose, long blonde hair flowing, arms extended. It was a hazy photo, in soft focus’ (1994:2). One girl, Leah, has already been bought six of the *Satin Slippers* series by her mother, and she reports, “‘when I got to reading them, I liked them too, but first my mother just fell in love with the cover of them. She bought me the first three because she liked the cover so much.’” The other girl, Sarah, continued:

‘I read this one, the first one, and it was okay. But I just love the cover too. I stare and stare.’

The end-of-recess bell rang and the two girls moved to their desks with everyone else. It was silent reading time. Sarah took *Satin Slippers #1* with her and placed it flat on her desk. She sat, hands in her lap, gazing at the cover. (ibid.: 1-2)

This ‘vignette’ is the starting-point and something of a leitmotif in her study, and questions raised by it created one of the early ‘breakdowns’ (Agar, 1985: 20) that I encountered in mine. The ‘vignette’ is particularly appropriate since it implicates five main themes of my study – dancing, literary romance, femininity, the ‘taboo on tenderness’, and the trope of ‘being a dancer’, frequent in popular culture – while recapitulating the suspicion and hostility with which the idea of ballet is surrounded.

For Cherland, the group of ‘tender’ visual tropes slim, pink, gauzy, hazy, graceful, all in circular relation to the trope of ballet, has only one valency, as nothing-but an example of the cultural construction of gender. Dancing is absent. The girl’s literary experience is absent. The feeling-tone of softness, ‘couleur de rose’ indeed (I will consider this in Chapter 7), its sensory information and symbolic spread, are all absent. What ‘to be a dancer’ means – and being a dancer, as I consider in Chapter 8, is a well-understood trope in popular culture - is

also absent. Cherland continues - and if this vignette was central to her study, so Cherland's response has been central to mine:

How does a researcher explain the meaning of a scene like this one? [the 'vignette'] She writes a book. This is a book about gender and reading...It is about gender as a cultural construction, and about the reading of fiction as it happens within cultures (ibid.: 2).

Illuminating though Cherland's study is about 'gender and reading', and helpful though it has been in theorising the political sub-text of many classroom practices, I do not think she ever adequately explains *the meaning of a scene like this*. For me, the meaning of the scene is in Sarah's own response: 'I just love the cover too. I stare and stare.' Cherland ascribes to the scene a political function, perhaps a psychological one. I have to find the 'meaning' of Sarah's experience in quite a different place in culture, for Cherland's explanations, 'meanings', cannot even approach the imaginative power of the scene, for Sarah, or for me, as proxy observer of the scene. The political status of being a woman in society cannot explain Sarah's aesthetic response. Crucially, is it the engaging with such imagery that creates her subordinate political role, and if so, how? In the case of the vignette, Cherland's social and political assessment of the uses of reading forecloses on why the girls were 'mesmerised' (ibid.: 193). Cherland sees the image as a 'cultural sign' that 'signal[s] certain beliefs about gender', and portrays 'idealised femininity: slim, graceful, pale, soft' (ibid.: 149). It would appear that she considers identification with femininity is all that the girls are doing with their imaginations. This does not seem to me to be an adequate assessment; apart from anything else, they do not need to read to do those things. This chapter will consider the 'vignette' in the light of literary theory, the history of fiction and especially of literary romance, to find deeper reasons for Sarah's being 'mesmerised' – the word Cherland herself uses to describe Sarah's staring at the cover (ibid.: 193) – and why Cherland is hostile to this. I see this complex of meanings as being cognate with reactions, for and against, involvement with ballet and, as will be further examined in Chapter 7, with other feminised tropes. My investigation of how Cherland views girls' and women's attraction to the imagery that such novels embody and celebrate is in dialectical relationship to the cultural identity of romance itself, because, as I described in Chapter 1, I see romance as a comparable cultural reality to the meanings and uses of dancing and ballet.

Valerie Walkerdine, in her study *Daddy's Girl: Young Girls and Popular Culture* (1997), critiques the class dynamic which underpins feminist educationalists' tendency 'to discuss children's fiction in terms of stereotypes, with the assumption that sexist fiction distorted the

reality of women's lives' (1997: 45). At issue in that, and in 'the meaning' of this scene of Cherland's, are opposing interpretations of the literary experience, and its relationship with lived experience. (I return to the class dynamic shortly). Cherland's position sees literature as a mirror to reality, and therefore considers that gender models in literature will infiltrate the lived experience of the reader – dangerously so in the case of girl children, for it will construct their view of the world, it will 'socialise' them. Northrop Frye, in his study of Literary Romance, differentiates between this primarily Platonic view, and an alternative, Aristotelian one. Frye considers an effect of literature which he calls the 'symbolic spread,' that is, 'the sense that a work of literature is expanding into insights and experiences beyond itself.' (1976: 59)

The symbolic spread of realism tends to go from the individual work of fiction into the life around it which it reflects: this can be accurately called allegorical. The symbolic spread of a romance tends rather to go into its literary context, to other romances that are most like it in the conventions adopted. (ibid.)

Cherland can never 'explain the meaning of a scene like this' to my satisfaction because her horizon of meaning is a Platonic one, that is, she sees the primary relationship of literature as being with 'the life around it which it reflects' (Frye: *ibid.*). The true meaning and value of reading in this model is seen entirely in terms of whether it reflects the world accurately. This literary world has to be reflected back into the real world too: Cherland appears to accept that reading has a direct effect on the reader, in this case producing the construction of gender – producing it 'somehow' (1994: 152-153 [see discussion below]). She defines what she considers reading 'means' when she describes an atypical reader, atypical because he is a boy: 'Anthony did not read for the reasons that a girl would read. He did not read, in other words, to emulate his mother, to learn how to 'do gender', or to be part of a community of readers' (*ibid.*:152). Such an assessment of the reasons why girls read omits completely the reader's imaginative and other engagement with the text and its imagery, with the resonance of literary experience itself, and with literature's potential to construct an ideal world. I suggest that what 'mesmerises' them is not the 'symbolic spread of realism' but the 'symbolic spread of ... romance' (Frye, 1976: 59). Although Cherland allows the existence of a 'community of readers', she offers no clues as to *what* they share - other than the somewhat circular charge that it is a bonding of gender. In addition, she never says why Anthony does read. Anthony's reading appears to be acceptable to her; is it what he reads that she prefers, is it gender-specific, or might girls have access to this 'other' use of reading too?

Cherland has a notion of 'female experience', which she observes is devalued in the classroom, and I am in complete agreement with Cherland in her observation that:

The design of the school's literature curriculum worked against the girls' interests by making it clear that female experience of the world was not valuable enough for inclusion. Female experience was, in fact, largely invisible in the curriculum. Girls confronted various male experiences in *The Book of Three* and *The Black Cauldron* in a context that suggested that those experiences amounted to *universal* human experiences. (ibid.: 153).

Although Cherland's study appears to valorise 'female experience' (Cherland, 1994: 153), by pointing out that the experience promoted as universal is, in fact, 'male experience', she proceeds to denigrate the redactions of 'female experience' that the girls and their mothers enjoy. The problem for me is that Cherland does not specify what she would prefer the girls to read, what subject matter there might be which promotes a 'female experience' (ibid.) but not 'cultural gender ideals' (ibid.: 194). What the girls choose to read themselves is clearly not representing the right kind of female experience, but one that perpetuates women's being forever 'other' to the status of universal subjects. There is no shortage of cultural information to let girls know that they are denied access to '*universal* human experiences' (ibid.: 153), and with Monique Wittig, I consider that this situation is not the result of anything the girls themselves do or don't do:

The abstract form, the general, the universal, this I what the so-called masculine gender means, for the class of men have appropriated the universal for themselves. One must understand that men are not born with a faculty for the universal and that women are not reduced at birth to the particular. The universal has been, and is continually, at every moment, appropriated by men. It does not happen by magic, it must be done. It is an act, a criminal act, perpetrated by one class against another. It is an act carried out at the level of concepts, philosophy, politics...(Wittig, 1992: 79-80)

Girls are given early seminars in the appropriation of the 'general', the 'universal' by 'the so-called masculine gender' (ibid.) in the gendering of the characters in the narratives they encounter, in books, on television, in films, computer games. There is a whole village full of Smurfs of all ages, roles and types but only one Smurfette, who has blonde hair and wears high heels. All Christopher Robin's friends are male, except for Kanga, who has no identity apart from being Roo's mum, and counts vests rather than takes part in adventures. The Mister Men books explore simplified human behaviour and characteristics in the adventures of Mr.Noisy, Mr. Silly, Mr. Rush and so on; but the eponymously feminine series of books, a later series with the ring of the afterthought in any case, are called 'Little Miss' Giggles, Little Miss Chatterbox and so on - not equal possessors of 'general' human characteristics,

but of contingent and lesser status. Thomas the Tank Engine pulls coaches Annie and Clarabel, who are identical to each other, without much of a character, and most importantly and with startling Freudian implications, *they have no motor*. In later books and in TV versions female locomotives arrive but they are silly and vain and think they know better than these more experienced, that is, male, engines; they get themselves in predicaments from which they - knowing now their place- get rescued, by the aforesaid male engines. And although they now have a motor and so can pull things for themselves, this is only a diesel. They can never attain the supreme aristocracy, the heroic humanist genius, the exciting emissions, of being *steam* engines. As 14 year old Christopher said, Girl Power is only 'copy' power: and leatherette, with a feminine suffix, is an inferior imitation of leather: I discuss the implications of such linguistic forms in the next chapter.

I suggest that much of Cherland's hostility to *Satin Slippers* is congruent with the hostility of the educated reader to romance in general (cf. Walkerdine 1997: 45): the pleasures of romance are indeed politically and socially ambiguous. Literary critic Gillian Beer paraphrases objections which Samuel Richardson critiques through the voice of his eponymous heroine Pamela (1740). Such charges which have been made against romance since it began to be an outlaw literary form in the seventeenth century: 'it drowns the voice of reason, it offers a dangerously misleading guide to everyday life, it rouses false expectations, and stirs up passions best held in check'. Beer goes on to add another charge: that its enjoyment is supposed to show 'lack of intellectual power' (1970: 14-15). Cherland's anxiety about gender stereotyping in literary experience can be read through those four concerns; the girls are passified about their agency (romance drowns the voice of reason), misled about the real world (romance offers a dangerously misleading guide to everyday life), given false dreams and ambitions (romance rouses false expectations), and anxiety about 'lack of intellectual power' can be seen in Cherland's observation that the girls' mothers,

had, at one time, been bright little girls who read fiction, just as their daughters were now; and yet none of them had gone on to acquire a postsecondary education. I found myself surprised. The culture seemed to value reading and education, and to connect the two things and yet, despite this, the little girls who read were *not* growing up to be highly formally educated women - not, at least, in Oak Town. I began to wonder if the reading of fiction in Oak Town might have involved a form of 'improper literacy' [Cherland quotes from Lankshear and Lawler 1987] that worked somehow to reproduce both gender inequality and, perhaps, difference in social class. (1994: 152-153)

Cherland here sees the reading of romance as 'reproducing' class and gender inequality, 'somehow'. I want to know a lot more about this 'somehow', not to mention *whether* this is the case. I wonder by what mechanism, a personal imaginative pleasurable experience can have a material effect on social and political reality. This is infinitely complicated. Dividing literature into 'improper' and (presumably) 'proper' perpetuates, is based on, cognate ideological divisions (and their signifiers) which need to be destabilised, in order for the production of the social position of girls and women to be fully addressed. Germaine Greer in *The Female Eunuch* considers romance to be 'the opiate of the supermenial,' 'romantic trash,' 'titillating mush.' (1970: 188). Greer's position fits snugly into the context of romance's wider history, with its class implications, and the abiding hostility towards it of the educated, since it privileges the kind of literature which is expensive, not trash, intellectually rigorous, not mush, and with a socially superior reader, not menials; and it undervalues the sensory and transcendental experience of the reader. In short, although the political origin of Greer's opprobrium is radical, the terms of her attack reproduce those of the antipathy to romance of not only the educated élite, but also of the bourgeoisie, a social group I doubt Greer would wish to be part of: 'In bourgeois society, a good deal of anxiety about popular literature has had a vestigial class motivation' (Frye, 1976: 25).

Cherland's and Greer's attitudes seem to me to demonstrate 'vestigial class motivation', and so are internally contradictory in terms of their manifesto for women's choice and freedom. Cherland tacitly expects reading to lead to being 'highly formally educated' (1994:152-153), and so, presumably, to occupying a superior social and economic position. Cherland's and Greer's attitudes make a lot more sense, when seen in the longer context of attitudes to romance. It is romance itself which is improper, and proletarian, exactly as Frye describes:

Any serious discussion of romance has to take into account its curiously proletarian status as a form generally disapproved of, in most ages, by the guardians of taste and learning, except when they use it for their own purposes. (1976:23)

Despite Cherland's feminist project, with, presumably, an intention to emancipate, Cherland is herself acting as a 'guardian of taste and learning', policing the boundaries of what is and is not acceptable reading matter. The example she gives equates 'proper' literacy with educational and employment achievement, both usually associated with attaining middle-class status. Cherland is not clear why their 'improper literacy' is 'improper'. Is 'proper'

reading an Arnoldian programme of 'improving' books, or of a progress toward rationalism, or is it a sign of cultural capital, a passport to the bourgeoisie, which leaves behind this improper, non-rational, working class? This working-class, Cherland implies, has created itself through non-rational, 'improper', reading, the dangerous popular literacy which Frye analyses. As Valerie Walkerdine observes, 'being working class can only be lived as a rootless pain, which can only be cured by finding a haven within the bourgeoisie' (1997:105).

One way Cherland conveys her disapproval of the sorts of books the girls read is by never mentioning the author of the *Satin Slippers* series, suggesting the absence of a pre-Barthesian god-like author (1977) whose genius infuses their art with existential worth. She suggests that these novels are not really literature at all, but an example of publishers' promotion of formulaic series books as consumer commodities, intended 'to manipulate children in such a way as to increase their own profits' (Cherland, 1994: 194). This might be compared with one of Frye's descriptions:

romance, where the story is told primarily for the sake of the story...assumed to be much more of a commercial product, and the romancer is considered to have compromised too far with popular literature. Popular literature itself is obviously still in the doghouse. (1976: 41)

Cherland again ascribes the novels' success to their 'appeal to cultural gender ideals' (Cherland, 1994: 194), and that they appeal to the girls' acquisitiveness, providing 'yet another material possession' (ibid.); but this commercial practice is not gendered. I have a copy of a title in 'The Hardy Boys' series (*The Mystery of the Aztec Warrior*, Franklin W. Dixon, 1964) whose back cover directs the series' readers, 'boys from 10 to 14', to a list of 49 titles headed with the question 'How Many of These Books Do You Own?'. I found the *Satin Slippers* novels, by Elizabeth Bernard, to be stories set in the world of a professional ballet school which examine the personal relationships between the characters, and issues of ambition and achievement, in a questioning and interesting way. Bernard may indeed be a professional writer producing novels to known formulae, for the *Satin Slippers* novels are firmly within the genre of literary romance, and indeed within its sub-genre of stories about ballet, along with *Flashdance* (1983), *Billy Elliot* (2000), and so on. Cherland's generally pejorative tone about the obviousness of the plot motifs might be said to imply that writer, reader or both demonstrate 'lack of intellectual power' (Beer, 1970: 14-15) since they are satisfied with formulaic plots. Literary romance and its readers, however, depend on, even relish, formulaic plots. The familiarity of plot motifs is, like the rest of romance, not a

problem or an error: it is a characteristic of the genre, as recognisable motifs resonate with other stories. As Frye puts it, 'The lack of plausibility does not matter, because the formula holds the attention like a bright light or colour' (1976: 50-1: he is discussing the Apollonius story). It is not only jobbing writers who can enjoy playing with romance: Frye comments that Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* 'almost goes out of his way ...to emphasise the naïve and corny nature of his plot.' (ibid.: 51). It is to be remembered that privileging artistic originality and personal authorship is a culturally specific position, which despite its contemporary dominance (Charles Taylor, 1989: 22) cannot lay claim to absolute value. This is of direct relevance to attitudes to dance in the 'private sector', since it is charged with being 'uncreative': the girls and I consider this in Chapter 9.

Cherland adopts an anti-essentialist position on gender, to which I do not object at all as a *modus operandi*, since at least it leaves doors open for what people are allowed to do, and closes them on allowing patriarchal hegemony by an appeal to an ideological foundation:

This book takes an *anthropological* view of gender. In other words, it does *not* treat gender as a matter of biological circumstance.... There are still some who cling to biological determinist and essentialist arguments, but much contemporary anthropology views gender not as something people *are* but as something people *do*. (1994: 10)

Although such a theory may be politically preferable, to my mind, it does not solve all the problems I observe. I am very interested in Cherland's phrase 'cling to'. It is an emotive term which implies the sort of progressive rationalism which anti-humanism, in another guise, would dispute. But more importantly, Cherland, and her anti-humanist model of a subject 'doing' rather than 'being', cannot explain to me the problem of transmission and reception: why Sarah is acting as a 'sponge' to the imagery of *Satin Slippers #1*, and as a 'repellent' to the masculine imagery of the books read together in class, and depicted in posters on the classroom wall. (e.g. ibid.: 194). These two evocative words are Mary Douglas's: in discussing why Judaism adopted some practices of other religions with which they came in contact while rejecting others, she states, 'it is no explanation to represent Israel as a sponge at one moment and as a repellent the next, without explaining why it soaked up this foreign element but repelled that one' (Douglas, 1966: 49). If one looks on gender as a function of society, and one does not 'cling to' essentialism, why any 'foreign element' is 'soak[ed] up' or 'repel[led]' – why people 'do' one thing or the other - remains unresolved. Judith Butler, indeed, concedes this problem (1990: 7ff). Cherland is convinced that the need to identify with femininity is reason enough, as if patriarchal conditioning were

a contagious illness against which girls have no antibodies; and if they resist, that social controls will 'punish' them. 'When Marcia asserted her will, it was seen as inappropriate for one of her gender, and she was severely punished by her peers for doing so....' (Cherland, 1994: 152, discussed 64-66). It was notable, that the girls I interviewed did not report that adopting gender-inappropriate behaviour met with peer disapproval, but, as examined in Chapter 5, they did report that they were aware that such a situation applied to boys.

I am not saying that Sarah's aesthetic response can be simply ascribed to her being a girl: but I will say that Sarah is allowed to express such aesthetic responses because she is a girl, and is less subject to the 'taboo on tenderness' than are boys. This is the reverse of the coin to masculine experience appropriating universality: Sarah's being so entranced by the idea of a dancer, and the visual imagery associated with it, and the literary romance strung around it, is an imaginative engagement with a realm of feeling and experience which rationalist masculine culture represses and projects on to femininity. From this perspective, the function of such 'stereotypically feminine' things as a mechanism of social control and patriarchal repression is deflected from this being the fault of Sarah, Leah, and Leah's mother. This notion, in case my point is not yet clear, is equally applicable to the socialisation thought to result from participating in ballet. I will now consider an example of dance criticism, to show that the issues arising from Cherland's 'vignette' have close parallels with the ideological suspicion attaching to ballet and its 'symbolic spread' (Frye, 1976: 59).

Then and now: romance and realism

Lesley-Anne Sayers in her article, 'Madame Smudge, some Fossils, and Other Missing Links: Unearthing the Ballet Class' (1997:130-148) is, like Cherland, without literary terms to discuss the motifs of princesses, fairies, and fairytales associated with ballet, seeing their symbolic spread (Frye, 1976: 59) as an unwelcome intrusion – here, into children's ballet fiction. Although Sayers alludes to a 'lively alternative history' of ballet, she sees this as formed by ballet's 'trivialisation, romanticisation, elevation and vulgarisation' (1997:147). All those words ending in '-ation' imply that there is an essential ballet text, prior to and holding precedence over popular uses of it: and all those -ations move from the rationalist world to the 'tender' one.

Sayers frequently uses the words 'romanticise' or 'romanticisation,' (1997: 144-7, *passim*) tacitly objecting to such a sensibility. The history of literary romance and its reception, as I

have discussed in this chapter, renders uncertain what to Sayers goes-without-saying, in Barthes' phrase. Aversion to the feeling-tone of the 'romanticised', coupled with an absence of reference to the context of the literary genre's history and conventions, create what I consider to be an upside-down reading:

The romanticisation of ballet dancing in children's ballet fiction relates directly to the star-centred nature of the art form and its fairytale associations. As in fairy tales there are an abundance of orphans, little rich girls do not tend to do very well, and if the shoe fits the heroine is assured a happy-ever-after ending (Sayers, 1997: 145).

Here Sayers adopts a position in which she sees the associations as being *produced* by the dangerous political status of ballet in the real world. I have already endeavoured to prove from a historical and demographic perspective (that is, very few people dance or watch professional ballet) that the fairies, princesses, angels, imagery of flight and weightlessness, ideas of beauty and perfection, supernatural overtones, and the salvational and quasi-religious associations which accrue to ballet are neither social and political products of ballet's elite status, nor need they be seen as unwelcome, superficial, and trivialising accretions to ballet's classic purity.

The historical persistence and ubiquity of romance questions the way Sayers reads the 'symbolic spread' (Frye, 1976: 59) of ballet fiction and ballet imagery in popular culture in political and historical terms. Sayers is in good historical company when she objects (as she does) to romance in general, and her objections can be compared with Gillian Beer's paraphrase of Richardson's in *Pamela*, already encountered earlier in this chapter: 'it drowns the voice of reason, [Sayers' 'as in fairy tales'] it offers a dangerously misleading guide to everyday life, ['abundance of orphans, little rich girls do not tend to do very well'], it rouses false expectations, ['if the shoe fits the heroine is assured of a happy-ever-after ending']. (1970: 14-15). That it is supposed to show 'lack of intellectual power' (1970: 14-15) is a charge I think implicit in Sayers' dismissiveness of the genre.

There is a teleological assumption, a tacit narrative of a laudable historical progress towards rationalism occurring through time, in Sayers' observation, 'However, by 1979, the romanticism that is so much a part of ballet fiction is noticeably beginning to give way' (Sayers, 1997: 146). The idea that there is a historical process underway, leaving fairytale and romance behind, is a common one. This may be partly produced by romance's being

'situated in the perspective of both archaic past and living present' (Coupé, 1997: 131); in this case, its familiar motifs produce a somewhat unformulated sense of being old-fashioned, since they have been seen in stories from the past. (I have examined this issue at greater length in my paper 'The Historic Present', 2000). This 'then-now' sense can also be put into a context of the history of ideas. There remains a rationalist inheritance from the enlightenment that mythic thinking (if I may compare the non-rationalist concerns of romance as a whole with that part of its corpus properly called myth) is a stage in human history which has been, or should be, outgrown; this is elaborated by nineteenth century evolutionism and ideas of development, as well as by the schema from anthropologists, notably James Frazer, that a unitary progress from magic through religion to science resolved Western history and the understanding of other cultures at a stroke. I detect an unacknowledged shadow of this theory in Sayers' view that the apparent progression towards being 'ordinary', towards a 'realist' direction, represents a kind of development. Sayers considers that 'romanticism' used to be the norm, but is no longer present in contemporary ballet stories. Historical change does indeed affect the disguise in which stories appear: but that does not mean that earlier stories are more 'romanticised', or the later any the less romances, although this is how Sayers reads them:

By 1994, Mal Lewis Jones's series begins by reversing entirely the thematic use of predestination as an association with balletic success....Amanda Renwick, the principal's favourite...suffers under a huge psychological burden ... she is the only daughter of a once great ballerina who died in childbirth at the height of her career. All her genes, wealth and privilege do not make her as good as otherwise ordinary but talented heroine, Cassie. (Sayers, 1997: 146)

The motifs in these books are different in detail from those of 40 or 70 years ago - there has been historical change, particularly in terms of class structure and children's relationship to the world. But that does not mean the stories are any the less romances. The motifs have been shifted around a bit, rearranged, but they are still there; they are the fuel which drives the story - the very stuff of which the stories are made. Amanda may fail to live out her expected destiny, redeeming the 'once great ballerina' who died to give her life: but the motif is still there in the story. *Reversing* such motifs does not make them any the less romance; the power of the narrative rides in part upon the absent, understood, cultural reference. The story has its romantic cake while eating its realist one - indeed Cassie, the real heroine's, own story is a romance too, that of the 'industrious apprentice' (cf.. Dick Whittington).

Along with the romanticisation, Sayers refers to the ‘trivialisation’ and ‘vulgarisation’ of ‘the profundity of ballet’s aesthetic significance’ (1997: 147). These are two interesting words, which denigrate and immediately lessen the credibility of the ‘lively alternative history’ of ballet in local classes which Sayers proposes. ‘Trivialisation’ represents a falling-short from seriousness, while ‘vulgarisation’ is a startling word to emerge from a tacitly radical, egalitarian, anti-hierarchical position; surely an élitist text, such as ballet, appropriated by the ‘vulgar’, the people, would be a cultural move to be applauded, not denigrated. Even in a tacitly anti-élitist argument, as here, ballet’s proper position remains, implicitly, not trivial and vulgar; however any of the opposites to these terms, such as serious, high-status, ‘good taste’, present considerable ideological difficulties of a different order. Sayers’ hostile reaction to the feeling-tone around these tropes is so strong, that it can reverse the polarity of the political burden of her argument. This would appear to be a further example of what Frye calls the ‘vestigial class motivation’ (Frye, 1976: 25) behind hostility to romance.

I dispute on literary and historical grounds Sayers’ claim that ‘a great deal of changing cultural context separates the romanticism of Noel Streatfeild’s little Fossils in *Ballet Shoes*, destined for stardom, and the “bun heads” of the most recent *Scrambled Legs* series destined for a life on diet coke’ (Sayers, 1997: 145). As I found myself in the ‘Streatfeild incident’ of Chapter 1, *Ballet Shoes* (1949) is not a demonstration of ‘romanticism’ in the terms Sayers implies. I suggest that the ‘giving way’ of ‘romanticisation’ that Sayers sees is a shifting of the details of the stories towards displacement, (‘the adjusting of formulaic structures to a roughly credible context’ [Frye, 1976: 36]) but that the romance structure remains intact. Even the stories which consciously negotiate with ballet’s status as ‘stereotypically feminine’ continue to use romance motifs. In *Scrambled Legs “We Hate Ballet!”* (Malcolm, n.d.: c.1980) the heroines are a group of ‘mancho’ (see Chapter 5) girls who don’t want to do ballet, but the narrative involves them proving themselves through their ingenuity, and triumphing over the ‘bunheads’ – the snobby ballet girls – by a successful performance, following exactly the narrative pattern of ballet stories by authors such as Jean Ure (1993 ff), Rumer Godden (1992), Jean Estoril (1958ff) &c. Then, paradoxically, the ballet-haters like ballet a lot. The message of this book is somewhat confusing, perhaps a demonstration of the conflicting needs of the ‘symbolic spread of realism’ and the ‘symbolic spread of romance’ (Frye, 1976: 59) in the same story.

Meredith Cherland undertook to 'explain the meaning' (1994:2) of the vignette of the *Satin Slippers*. Her terms of reference, that the 'meaning' is in relation to lived experience 'about gender as a cultural construction' and 'about the reading of fiction as it happens within cultures' (ibid.), have not allowed her to do this to my satisfaction, at least. She does not consider what that 'fiction' is, and tacitly values only the symbolic spread of realism (Frye: 1976: 59).

To suggest, with Cherland, that Sarah is in thrall to being socialised in gender terms cannot explain her excitement and pleasure at it; especially since adopting such signifying practices is against her (and all women's) political interests. I have suggested that a recognition of the power of literary and sensory experience can explain why the girls and their mothers are so 'mesmerised' by these stories and their symbols. A reaction of automatic hostility to such pleasures becomes less certain, within the larger context, that of the historical position of romance within society – that is, low status, proletarian, irrational, and the illusory solace of those without power or achievement. Cherland, and writers about dance such as Griffiths (1996), Sayers (1997), Adair (1992), bring, despite their intentions to ameliorate the position of girls and women (an intention I do not doubt for a moment), a logocentric, rationalist, anti-tender value system, to girls' engagement with practices seen as 'stereotypically feminine'. This can only judge them lacking, in the same way that the dominant patriarchal culture has judged them lacking. This does not seem to me either morally fair, or sisterly, and falls short of attaining the complex non-binary distinctions that the girls themselves fought for in Chapter 5, coining 'girly-girly' and 'mancho'.

The next chapter approaches this problem yet again, from a different perspective. I have so far taken as premise that there is nothing intrinsically, objectively, wrong or inferior in the 'tender', the irrational, the feminine, the romantic. But culture and history certainly behave as if there were: so let me be devil's advocate and consider whether the taboo on tenderness might have some 'objective' origin. I will do this by considering the meanings and history of pink, whose reception bears much in common with the romance discussed in this chapter.

CHAPTER 7

‘When People Think Of Ballet, They Think Of Pink’

‘A young ballet student’ asks the agony uncle on Dame Blandine’s website, ‘Father Vicky’, what colours are appropriate for ballet dancers to wear, since she ‘would hate to appear modern or worse still look like a contemporary dancer’. ‘Father Vicky’ replies:

Pink is the only acceptable colour for ballet. Aquamarine [sic] has a tendency to make one sickle, whereas pink keeps the spine upright and poised.
(www.blandine.co.uk/problempage.html accessed 17.3.00)

Such hyperbole is only possible, if what is being played with has a strong enough presence within culture to be thus extended. Similarly, although some might be opposed to the political or other implications of my young informant’s statement, ‘when people think of ballet, they think of pink’, her reading of the culture she finds herself in, her observation of a generalised mythological position, cannot be faulted. ‘Pink’ is volatile and finds its way into discourse all by itself: as a 12 year-old boy said, ‘I’m not going to let my daughters have Barbies - because pink is sexist’ (some implications of this will be considered in Chapter 8). Since resolving all of ballet’s denotation and connotation would take longer than this thesis, in this chapter I am going to attack from the other end; the pink end.

Design historian Penny Sparke in her *As Long As It’s Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* says that in the 1950s, ‘Pinkness reinforced the idea that femininity was a fixed category in the lives of women from childhood onwards’ (1995: 198). Pink represents a certain display of exaggerated feminised, perhaps infantilised, characteristics. But why? Colours are not in themselves symbolic. Pink is a colour among colours: it cannot itself be blamed for any political sins. Does the fact that pink is ‘stereotypically feminine’, and femininity is in turn despised, mean that there is anything intrinsically wrong with pink, or has it simply become the mark of the slave? The difference between denotation and connotation is as clear as may be possible, when it comes to colour. The one has a wave-length: the other has a great deal of ideological and other baggage. It is an interesting question, why ‘pink’ should have accrued to itself such a curious cluster of cultural meanings. In this chapter I consider the penumbra of meanings around *pink*, and the understood absent term of femininity, in history,

etymology, psychology, and literature, as well as in popular culture and in observations and comments from lived experience.

Although 'pink' occurred frequently and spontaneously in interviews, it never managed to break out of the circularity of pink being conventionally feminine, therefore women and girls, and feminised practices such as ballet and fairytales, are in turn associated with pink. Indeed, this connection was mentioned as if it were an explanation of the phenomenon. One girl said, 'the colour associated with girls is pink, so, that's probably why pink is to do with princesses.' It is extremely difficult not to get caught in a loop, of needing a term 'feminine' which is impossible to define without short-circuiting exactly what one is trying to define. Penny Sparke (1995) wishes to valorise tastes which are suppressed by rationalist, modernist design, and has therefore to situate them as a legitimate choice made from an alternative aesthetic scale of values. In order to do this, she has to posit something called 'feminine taste' to act as opposite pole not to something intrinsically gendered, but to demonstrate the dominance of a certain kind of design sensibility – which is rational, public, industrial, hard and geometric, rendering inferior sensual, domestic, soft and unfixed. Sparke never establishes *why* pink is coded feminine, and how the situation arose in which this is apparently universally accepted. The phenomenon is crucial enough to form the title of her study, but she does not resolve the question of how there can be such a thing as 'feminine taste' within a generally held anti-essentialist view of gender within the academy, even though this position may not be held as firmly within society at large. It is very difficult not to be sucked back into the black hole of why 'feminine practices' are as they are, without suggesting or implying an essential femininity which is displayed in 'feminine taste'. Therefore at the risk of repetition, I suggest - with Suttie in particular - that such tastes are 'tender', not feminine, and that men have suppressed such feeling in themselves. Since 'tenderness' is associated with ineffectiveness, it must be eschewed by anyone of any gender who wishes to act in the world. This avoids rather than solves the problem which, I suggest, is harmful to both men and women. (Taylor, 1999a)

Pink and the Logical Square

A fundamental question I am posing is whether 'pink' is 'feminine'. Ian D. Suttie's consideration of the complex relationship between sex and love is most useful, for as Suttie points out, although Freudianism suggests tender feeling is sublimated sexuality, sublimated because sexuality needs to be restrained, the reverse can equally be observed - that 'the privations imposed upon tender feeling are almost as important as those imposed on sex.

Indeed it seems possible that refuge from tender feeling and pathos generally is being sought in sex.' (1960: 90) Suttie chooses the remarkably appropriate analogy of theatre, which he suggests has 'the function of meeting the interest and emotional needs left ungratified in everyday life' (ibid.), and he proposes as 'hypothesis':

Does the "sickly", "sloppy" sentimentality of the Victorian Theatre and Concert Halls and of the pantomimes of pre-war [pre First World War] times express the sexuality that became goal-inhibited under the repression of these [sic] times, or is it an ebullition of tender feeling that is equally repressed in a puritan, patriarchal, community? (ibid: 91)

Suttie's comparison between the openly sentimental Victorian theatre and a contemporary (to his time of writing: 1930s) one which was not 'sickly and sloppy', is to exemplify the problem of whether 'tenderness' is a somewhat pathological expression of disavowed sexuality, or whether the suppression of tender feeling is itself a pathological symptom of patriarchy. Suttie's trope is specifically relevant to ballet and dance: rationalist pretexts for the rejection of ballet extends from the 'clever literary gentlemen [who] will call it all nonsense' (1847:13) ironically referred to by Albert Smith 150 years ago, to their heirs who are still writing articles in *The Guardian* (Everitt in 1994, Lawson in 2001), in a culture now saturated in Freudian certainty that attention to the body can be nothing-but disavowed sexuality. The 'puritan, patriarchal, community' continues to be unable to perceive ballet as anything other than as 'other' to its own concerns. Additionally, a comparable historical transition occurred, in a move which created British Ballet as a modern high art form, and left ballet in entertainment behind. In *Ballet Vignettes* Arnold Haskell denigrates Pavlova for her performances 'devoid of real taste or discrimination', judging that 'she was not a conscious artist', comparing her unfavourably with the ideal of Karsavina, whose dance is 'perfectly controlled, perfectly reasoned.' (1948: 14-15). Haskell is privileging a discourse of conscious rational genius, recapitulating Suttie's observation that 'intolerance of sentimentality (I use the derogatory term to indicate the bias which is embedded in our very language) appeared the most natural, rational, and practical attitude possible' (Suttie, 1960: 84).

My suggestion, then, is that in our dealings with 'pink' we are considering something that is 'repressed in a puritan, patriarchal, community', and with Suttie, that there is 'a *taboo on tenderness* every bit as spontaneous and masterful as the taboo on sex itself' (Suttie, 1960: 85 [his italics]). Only the introduction of further terms, of not-rational and not-not-rational, of not-feminine and not-not-feminine – that is, the construction of a logical, rhetorical, or

semiotic square, recently known as a Greimas' Square, can prevent the gravity of those binary black holes pulling one towards either a masculine or a feminine demise.

The semiotic square may also assist solving the problem in Sparke's *As Long As It's Pink* (1995), since it allows that there is space for more than those two alternatives, 'feminine taste' and 'masculine design'. I suggest that there is not only irrational and rational, but there is also not-irrational (not-not-feminine), and not-rational (not-feminine). The particular corner of the semiotic square that the idea of 'pink' represents in general culture is unambiguous: stereotypically feminine and not-rational. I think it is a lot more ambiguous. If one adds a further 'not' to those, not-feminine and not-not-rational, there is the rather slippery but I think viable space where it is possible to explore and inhabit the not-irrational without having to adopt the Logos. I suggest that this idea, unstable though it may be, is a way to counter the problem that Walkerdine sets out:

the fraudulence of the Logos is that it holds masculinity not in an assurance of control but in a desperate terror of its loss. It is important, then, that we, as women, should not also be caught in an attempt to master the Logos, to take it as our guarantee and arbiter of truth, and of the possibility of change and transformation. As I have tried to indicate, its very production and reproduction depend upon a denial of desire and a displacement of the irrational on to women. (1990: 55)

Fixed in a loop, pink is disparaged and not-serious because it is associated with infantile femininity, which in turn is not respected and valued because its practices (such as liking pink) cannot be justified within a rationalist society with a 'taboo on tenderness' intact. Girls are despised because of their tastes; those tastes are despised because they are associated with girls. 8 year-old Paul's essentialist or fatalist position, 'It's just the way girls act,' is no more determinist than a position which sees culture as the origin of the association. From this standpoint, indeed, involvement with feminine practices is even more of a threat. If gender is performative, then it is only feminine practices which both construct what women are, and produce women's political position. In this view, liking pink is not only the outward sign of feminine practices, but liking pink is the origin of female subjection or capitulation to it; liking pink is a symptom of 'patriarchal conditioning', not a potentially valid aesthetic choice.

This problem has already been considered in Chapter Five, where I referred to Suttie's interpretation of the hostility towards the sentimental and the tender having its origins in their association with childishness (Suttie, 1960: 84). However, the marking of a liking of pink as infantile affords no closure, since that itself projects this realm of feeling on to a

group who are not fully rational subjects in society. It is, thereby and in effect, itself a rejection of a body of knowledge thought irrational, and that is not a step that I wish to take, but to see all range of feeling and bodies of imagery as equally valid. I would therefore extend Suttie's 'taboo on tenderness' to feminist knowledges which regard pink as hostile to feminine self-realisation. It cannot be proven that it is feminine practices which create the political position of women; nevertheless, it is feminine practices which mark women as other to men.

I thought some light might be shed on why pink is coded feminine by finding out when, or how, this occurred in history – or had it always been present? I set out to discover what information the use of the word 'pink' might suggest about the history of this symbolism. If, following Lacan, we are structured by language, then we are structured by the political and other implications and associations embedded in etymology every bit as much as by a narrative of psycho-analysis; we are structured by layers of meaning in words, their usage, and the structures they have. 'Pink' is a case in point.

The Archeology of Pink: from Little to Inauthentic

The origin of the word 'pink' as a colour would appear to be taken from the name of the dianthus flower, which is frequently pink in colour. The flower is called 'pink' possibly, suggests the Oxford Dictionary of Etymology, from 'pink-eyed' which means narrow-eyed, little-eyed - the flower looks like a little eye. The French word for dianthus is oeillet, also meaning little eye. Pink's primary meaning here is little, as in the American use of 'pinkie' for the little finger. Pink is therefore already associated with little-ness; and it is a short move from there to associate it with lesser status, and with childhood. It is just as short a move to associate it with femininity, as in the suffix 'ette'. This, grammatically speaking, is a feminine diminutive, of which there is also a masculine variation, -et, with which, the Oxford Dictionary of Etymology informs, 'old adoptions' such as egret, hatchet, and pocket usually survive. From the 17th Century 'ette' begins to prevail, and the list of examples given in the dictionary (cigarette, coquette, etiquette, serviette, statuette) is an interesting one; these are all social words; the list brings an image of the salon, fully-formed, into my mind. Even more interesting is what happens when the suffix begins to be appended to words of English origin, in the 19th century; the dictionary's examples are 'leaderette, sermonette, waggonette'; for then, overtones of cuteness, as well as little-ness began to appear.

Since '-ette' is a recognizably feminine suffix as well as a diminutive, 'This morphological dependence on the masculine has provoked a widespread association of femininity with contingent and smaller status' (Warner, 1965: 68). A further step along this marginalisation of feminine linguistic forms is again a nineteenth century one - that 'ette' is used for 'materials intended as imitations, as flannelette, leatherette, plushette' (again, the dictionary's examples). The feminine form is seen here as an *inauthentic* imitation of the masculine original: this is a familiar idea, from the history of art and its ideas of genius and creativity. Christine Battersby in *Gender and Genius* describes how through the nineteenth century a distinction was maintained between ideas of the creative/productive/ imaginative /genius opposed to the pseudo-creative/fancy/reproductive (1989: 145), while in the twentieth this was reinforced:

A kind of vulgar Freudianism was used to portray all creative activity as sublimate sexual libido. ...and as Freud himself indicated that only males could be really said to have libidos, Freudianism was very reassuring. (ibid.: 58)

The boys in my interviews think that girls are only 'copying' male power, and indeed ideological models have, historically, been based on a masculine original: in the history of education only Émile (not Sophie) was capable of true understanding (Rousseau 1974 [1762]).

I have been able to find no historical references to pink as a colour before the 19th Century. Christopher Smart's poem *Jubilate Agno* (1758/9-1763) contains a section disputing 'Newton's notion of colours' as 'alogos, unphilosophical' (1990:103); Smart mentions white, silver grey, blue, green, yellow, red, orange, black, purple, and 'pale'; but no pink. Could 'pale' be pink? The study of colour-terms is complicated by slippage in historical usage: there is evidence that the same colour-terms may be applied to different colours at different times. (Gage, 1993: 80-1). Smart goes on to claim that colours are spiritual, 'For the blessing of health upon the human face is in colour' (1990:103) - but he does not name that colour, although later he refers to 'a blush.' Pink is visible in the natural world, on long-tailed tits and other birds as well as on flowers. It is odd it does not have a name; or that if it has a name it is not mentioned; it is even odder if it has a name invisible to history, for this would mean that pink has always been suppressed, ignored, or in some other way marginalised. If this is the case, what might it represent, that is so threatening?

The Oxford Dictionary of Etymology has no reference to the word at all before its use in 1595 by Shakespeare, to mean 'embodied excellence': 'I am the very pink of courtesy': (Romeo & Juliet, in ed. Partington, 1992: 623.9). The Dictionary refers to its use in the

eighteenth century as an adjective 'of a pale-light-red colour' but unfortunately gives no examples. How, when, or why the colour became associated with femininity I have so far been unable to ascertain. Westminster, the boys' public school, has school colours of grey and pink; the pink was chosen as its sporting colour in the 1830s, replacing the previous pale blue, which had also been used by Eton. (Field, 1987: 80). At that time, pink must have been able to signify 'sporty' as much as, if not instead of 'girly'; it would otherwise be surprising that a boys' public school, not institutions noted for their tenderness, would have chosen it for its uniform. Pink as the colour used on maps to denote the British Empire, another institution not noted for its tenderness, must have been chosen at some time in the nineteenth century. I have been so far unable to find out *why* pink was chosen to represent this institution.

Penny Sparke mentions a book written by Harriet Beecher Stowe, published in 1871, called *Pink and White Tyranny*, in which Stowe lambasts the contemporary American fashion of 'Rococo Revival'. Here the colour is associated with French fashion, 'an aesthetic vocabulary derived from eighteenth-century French taste which introduced gilt and pastel colours to the middle-class Victorians.' (1995: 46). Heavy Victorian interiors were 'reformed' in America at the end of the century by such interior decorators as Elsie de Wolfe, with a palette of 'old rose, grey, ivory and pale blue', (ibid.: 148); de Wolfe was, again, influenced by eighteenth-century France. These early references to susceptibility to pink are American; perhaps the origin of the word's use and its 'little' associations are American too, since 'pinkie' (little finger) has dropped out of English usage. (I have recently been told that it is current in Scottish usage). Ballet is itself associated, non-specifically but firmly, with a generalised notion of French-ness: its terminology being in French is an important part of its 'sign equipment' (Goffman: 1969), and Degas' images form a strong element in the iconography of ballet. The use of the colour in interior design refers to French fashion, and the idea of 'French' retains its eroticised glamour well into the 50s and 60s in American mythology, with such films as *Can-Can* (1960) and *Gigi* (1958) perpetuating a Naughty Nineties discourse - in which dancers were principal actants, along with laundresses and artists' models. Renoir's *French Cancan* (1955) gives a more sociologically accurate picture of this myth, owing rather less to the Wild West Saloon and more to the Moulin Rouge; the myth, however, is alive and well, (*Moulin Rouge* [2001]) and its motifs intact, however shaky the historical accuracy. There are a number of slippages of meaning already, whereby 'pink' is acquiring connections with a number of marginalised discourses.

Pink is a sexualised colour, presumably since it suggests European skin-colour. Pink tights provided an understood simulation of nudity in the Victorian theatre, originating indeed with innovations in costume for the Romantic ballet in the 1820s and 1830s (Davis, 1989: 324 ff) Albert Smith in *The Natural History of the Ballet Girl*, published in 1847, advises ‘the Gent, who anticipates “something spicy” from the title of this *brochure*’ that he will be disappointed, ‘For we intend to touch but lightly upon pink-tights and gauze-petticoats.’ (1996: 6-7). Is it at all possible that the statement the girl makes, ‘when people think of ballet, they think of pink’ is historically correct, rather than reading a generalised mythology? Smith’s is the earliest reference to ‘pink’ I have found. Pink is also salacious by association with the boudoir (pastel coloured, frilly, and as ‘French’ as the name ‘boudoir’ implies) and underwear. This ‘French-ness’ is itself sexualised - but naughty rather than immoral, for the French are after all a long way away from Hollywood, speak a different language, and pose no threat. Degas’ works continue to make the fin-de-siècle Parisian demi-monde a familiar code, and ballet dress in the 19th Century may well have suggested undress, if not underwear; art historian Carol Armstrong refers to ‘a thematics of dressing and undressing’, a code which Degas ‘systematically examines’; the black neck ribbons emphasise the skin, the colours suggest underclothes, the bodices are like corsets, the dancers fiddle with their shoulder straps (1991: 54). In 1954 a British design advisor (Noel Carrington) draws attention to the dangerous associations of pink; ‘It is probably the association of pink with underclothes that makes it less desirable for us in its lighter shades for net curtains.’ (Sparke, 1995:198).

The Experience of Colour in Culture

Not only is the word ‘pink’ apparently absent from the English language, the colour is absent from serious academic colour theory and history. Art historian John Gage is an ‘acknowledged authority on the history of colour’, as the cover to his *Colour and Culture: Practice and Meaning from Antiquity to Abstraction* (1993) says: a status I do not question. The book is 335 large format double column pages, there are 2,408 bibliographical references; it is fascinating and full of the most extraordinary facts and ideas. However ‘pink’ does not appear in the index, either in its own right, or under ‘Colour’ ‘Colours’ or ‘Colour Terms’. Although I did not imagine that Gage’s scholarship had been skewed by conscious or unconscious cultural bias on his part to the extent of excluding existing references to pink from his work, nevertheless I felt I had to check it out for myself. Gage’s subsequent volume, *Colour and Meaning: Art, Science, and Symbolism* (2000), analyses in more depth 19th and 20th Century colour theories, which do occasionally mention the word

'pink', although it only makes it into the index in French as 'fausse rose' – an imitation again, even if an imitation of itself.

In my search for the history of pink to trace its association with femininity, I had to be content with the interesting cultural fact that pink's history is absent. I spent a largely fruitless day at the National Art Library, having assumed that it would contain information that smaller art libraries did not; however the day demonstrated and confirmed only the absence of pink and discussions of it. As a keyword in the library's catalogue it led me only to technical works on pigments: the only cultural examination was Penny Sparke's (1995). There were no works tracing its history, or early references by which I could piece together one of my own by seeing in what terms the colour was discussed or referred to at various dates. Although I am sure that a life's work could assemble such a history, or at least earlier and more complete references, it would involve an essentially random process of reading to catch the moment - which could happen in any text - when the author happens to use the word 'pink.' For now, we cannot find out about pink by searching where other colours have their written histories; this itself is worthy of note, for an absence of a history is a clue to cultural bias. I was now, therefore, looking for an explanation for this absence. John Gage assesses that:

reduced colour-vocabulary has a powerful effect in perception itself. So colour-perception and colour-language turn out to be closely bound up with each other; since symbolising is essentially a linguistic function, the available colour-vocabulary must have a decisive role in the creation of any language of colour-symbols (1993: 79).

Gage's 'available colour-vocabulary' for a serious study of colour does not include pink. It is outside language: a dangerous place to be. That surely cannot, however, have such 'a powerful effect in perception' as to render it invisible. The use of the colour pink is well-established in culture, and it appears in the natural world, but scholarship and the written word appear to have rendered unavailable for symbolising the colour-term pink. This cultural bias one can perhaps track through an interesting section in Gage's book, in which he refers to a 'seminal study' made by Berlin and Kay in 1969. In this study, *Basic Color Terms*, (I have been unable to find bibliographical details) the authors propose an evolutionary model of the development of colour-terms in languages, of which they surveyed, apparently, 98. They propose seven language stages, adding colours at each stage, starting with Stage I (black and white only) and finishing with Stage VII, which will add to the existing colour-terms accumulating through stages I - VI 'purple or pink or orange or grey' (ibid: 79). Assuming one can get past the political problems of such evolutionary paradigms in the first

place, there are two ways of looking at the apparent late arrival of pink: either pink is the most sophisticated, or it is the least important. Gage goes on to point out that both linguists and ethnographers have criticised Berlin and Kay's work, but the evolutionary idea continues to exert its drearily familiar influence. Gage's next paragraph, after setting out Berlin and Kay's theory, is as follows:

Colour-salience as revealed by language must be related to the wider experience of colour in a given culture, this experience differing among the different groups within this culture to whom colour is of some concern. Children may be one such sub-group, in whom the development of a colour-vocabulary may be close to the Berlin and Kay scheme, but women, as a group, are not and they have long been recognised as being particularly precise and discriminating in the handling of colour. (1993: 79)

Were one to take the trouble to turn to the footnote, no easy task since this is a very big, heavy and slippery paged book, one would learn that Gage substantiates this statement about women's having 'long been recognised as being particularly precise and discriminating in the handling of colour' by reference to women's lesser susceptibility to physiological colour blindness. Though undeniably true, this fact does not seem very apposite in a discussion of cultural issues. What the text actually conveys is not that scientific oddity, but Gage's rhetorical move from an evolutionary idea (the development of colour-terms in language), to applying that idea of evolution to society and its 'sub-groups'; children, and then to 'women as a group'. Despite my best efforts at textual analysis, I cannot actually work out whether Gage thinks women are or are not a group, or a sub-group, what the significance of either is or would be, and what this has to do with Berlin and Kay's scheme.

That is by the by however: the crucial issue, is that Gage does not perceive men as a group, let alone as a 'sub-group', even though a more relevant division to the matter under discussion would be to compare the group of men who are colour-blind with the group of men who are not, and *their* 'colour-salience as revealed by language'. By implication, men are society proper, and what is more, are in the colonising position which positions and defines others. At this point they are engaged in the act of 'recognis[ing]' of women as 'particularly precise', since Gage does not give any authority for this opinion. This subtext far outweighs the supposed scientific reason, in itself of dubious relevance to the cultural discussion, for his bringing these ideas together. I once attended a bird-watching group whose leader was red/green colour-blind and he used to refer to 'whatever colour that is'. This is not particularly illuminating about 'colour-salience as revealed by language' in relation to culture, with or without a hierarchical sub-text; it was his strategy to deal with his awareness that he was not 'particularly precise and discriminating in the handling of colour'.

It did not tell me about his social or cultural position, or anyone else's. Gage's rhetorical elision of the ideas of 'women' and the possession of a putatively special skill, which is not possessed by 'society' (men, presumably) is politically and ideologically effective at marginalising women from culture as a whole.

The Feeling-Tone of Pink

'Seeing the world through rose-coloured spectacles' refers to an unrealistically optimistic position. Gillian Beer connects this impulse directly to the sensibilities found in literary romance: she characterises the movement in the late nineteenth century away from French naturalist novels, such as those by Zola, towards romance as 'a determination to enjoy again objects *couleurs de rose* in reaction to the emphasis on the inescapable animality of man's fate' (1970: 73). The rose flower is associated with love: *Le Roman de la Rose* is one of the earliest literary romances (c.1230): pink is associated with romance. Love, tenderness, all are marginalised, thought irrational, and feminised. *Rose*, the French word for pink, does seem to predate the English usage of pink; perhaps 'pink' is a diminutive displacement of 'rose', that is, that little-ness is indeed implicit in signifier and signified; perhaps there is an etymological sensitivity to that, so 'rose' displaces 'pink' replacing it in serious contexts, such as in the palette of colours mentioned by de Wolfe (Sparke, 1995: 148), and indeed in Beer's own usage here, where it is additionally rendered acceptable (or unacceptable) by being quoted in French. The use of a foreign language is first learned, and second a distancing device, while the associations of 'French' (knickers, letters, leave) for the English are themselves within the field of meaning of 'pink' and 'rose'. Edith Piaf's song *La Vie en Rose* (with Pierre Louiguy) appears bittersweet rather than sugary; her rough voice, the associations with Parisian café life, the inevitability that this affair will end in tears; *la vie en rose* is unrealistic. The search engine Yahoo offers me two www sites for 'La Vie en Rose': one selling lingerie in Canada and the other offering 'luxury suites' in Paris.

'Pink', in addition to and implicated in its feminised and sexualised connotations, has a direct connection with the field of meanings associated with literary romance; sentimental, naive, irrational; and, as in Beer's observation, an opposition between the idealised world of romance and the supposedly naturalistic world of realist art, between fairy tales and 'real life.' I wonder, therefore, if pink is marginalised from academic studies of colour because of similar rationalist motivation to that which excludes romance from serious literary attention. Pink just does not seem to be a serious kind of colour; colours exist in cultural hierarchy, since some are known as primary, some as secondary, and some, like pink, do not seem to be there at all. Pink, it would appear, only emerges into written language when it has

established an attachment to a marginalised group, which it can then be projected on to. This implies that there is a field of meanings which pink itself produces, which were always already there, and suppressed; how else can its absence be explained, other than by some kind of hostility towards it? A correspondence form of truth, that things-in-the world have an objective meaning in an independent reality, is not presently acceptable within postmodernist models of the world; although there have been, and still are, philosophical and scientific systems and cosmologies - Hinduism, spiritualism, many forms of mysticism, artists' theories (see Gage, 2000) - which do consider that colours have absolute values.

'Pink' does have an external reality. Since colour is physiologically received without the prior need for symbolic interpretation, one cannot be certain that there is no physiological response to colour which is outside cultural construction - that is, that colour has an effect, and creates an emotion, or a 'feeling-tone' (a useful phrase, despite its presently problematical Jungian origins). This is an alarming suggestion, for the present condition of knowledge. However it is worth remembering that human beings are animals at large in the world as well as being sophisticated cultural constructs, structured by language. André Leroi-Gourhan in *Gesture and Speech* (1993 [1964]) suggests that the body is the source of the aesthetic sense:

If we agree that the aesthetic sense rests upon a consciousness of form and movement (or of values and rhythms) which is peculiar to the human being because only the human is capable of formulating a value judgement, we must for the same reason inquire into the sources from which we draw our perception of movement and form. A mammal like many others... the human is not known to have any organ of perception not shared with the rest of the mammals. Our sensory equipment, placed at the service of a marvellous apparatus for transforming sensations into symbols, functions like the sensory equipment of animals... We could take the a priori view that intelligent symbolisation can have a reflex action and that everything in the human being is therefore assimilable to the workings of aesthetically constructive thought. ... [however] we should have to concede that while our mind does in fact ensure a certain consciousness of our lived experience, the activities of some parts of our sensory apparatus must always remain infrasymbolic: [sic ':'] This, for example, is the case with taste in the strict sense of the word, which cannot be rendered by anything other than itself. You cannot create an image of a salty taste' (1993 [1964]): 281).

'Infrasymbolic' is perhaps a concept that challenges post-structuralist models of the person, since such models tend not to consider physiology, despite promoting the importance of an idea of the body. However, I do not think one can fault Leroi-Gourhan's observation that 'you cannot create an image of a salty taste.' There is no reason why direct experience should be reserved for that one sense alone; there is the possibility of somatic, infrasymbolic experience – pain, smell, heat and cold, the air on the skin, balance, orientation: movement

itself, indeed. Pink, of course, is not quite the same as salty: the perception of pink attracts – or produces – imagery and symbolism inseparably from its physiological reception, which in turn create political value. However it is necessary for me to emphasise that its meanings do not reside entirely outside itself in culturally constructed reference; pink is not an empty sign. It is not just not-blue, only possessing meaning by its place in a structuralist system. It is not even a conventional sign, like men and women’s clothes buttoning up on opposite sides. Clothes-openings are a sign of gender just the same, but the practice does not affect people emotionally, the way pink does. Wearing rose-coloured spectacles, or putting in a pink light-bulb, might shed a light which is pleasant and calming, while a bright white light can be construed as stressful and arousing. It is a physiological experience, which creates a powerful response. This response may be largely a symbolic response to what pink has come to denote, but it seems that response to pink is much more powerful than it should be if it is only conventional sign.

Pink and Danger

I suggest that there is a ‘feeling-tone’ associated with response to this colour which is deeply threatening to rationalist, logocentric concerns. ‘Pinko’ is a word for coward, as well as an American one for not quite communist, itself suspect in the McCarthy era.. Pink was the colour chosen by the Nazis for the triangle homosexuals had to wear to display their identity. The ‘World’s first gay and lesbian infokiosk’, situated in Amsterdam by the Homomonument in memory of those who have died for their homosexuality, is called the ‘Pink Point of Presence’, reappropriating ‘pink’ as a badge of honour. Pink can be used to define and display the anti-violent stance of a demonstrating group at summits of the International Monetary Fund: and by the complicated dialectic between vulnerability and tradition, assertiveness and equality which ‘pink’ and its use in this context sets in train, to assert women’s needs in the campaign to raise public awareness of breast cancer.

One day in interview the girls and I were going to do some writing together, so I had bought a large cheap pack of 30 fibre-tip pens of all colours. Dead centre, was the pink one. There was a mass grab for the pink pen; and Buffy won. Buffy is the girl most ambivalent towards practices seen as feminine; if I were a psychologist, and if I felt it appropriate, I could consider how unhappy she is made by her complex relationship with ‘doing girl’; she tells long stories of mutilating her Barbie dolls, and her word-association response for ‘jumping’ is not ‘high light and free’ like the others girls, but makes her feel like ‘a big clump of jelly.’ I asked her why she had wanted the pink pen. ‘I like bright colours’ she replied; that is, she didn’t want the pink because of its girly associations, but because of other properties it

possessed as a colour in relation to other colours. This may be a cultural rationalisation, it may be a deep psychological pain about her relationship with her gender and her body and her need to distance herself from signs of outward conformism to culturally constructed girlhood, it may be many things. But non-symbolically, she was absolutely right; the pink was remarkably brighter than all the other colours, and attracted the attention. Pink looks great in plastic; but it is not often that pink can be a structural function, the 29th colour among 30, be anything like infrasymbolic. Pink itself, a colour amongst colours, pink plastic above all, is not a good taste material. Sophisticated adults use pink in complex irony and self-irony, in camp and kitsch decors, filled with mass-produced objects like fluffy cushions, inflatable flamingos, and, indeed, ballerinas. It has begun to be called 'Barbie Pink', in reflexive encounter with another of these tropes. A pop song by Aqua (which the girls and I all liked and sang one interview) has the lines: 'I'm a Barbie girl/ in a Barbie world/ life in plastic/ is fantastic'. And 'Barbie Pink' is bright - interestingly, 'shocking'- pink. A pink that is excessively, shockingly, too much, the sort associated with Barbara Cartland; extrovert pink, flamboyant, lipstick and dyed ostrich feathers. Other pinks can be sugar pink; although sugar isn't pink, it is sweet – perhaps this is a memory of the pink or white sugar mice which confectioners used to sell.

There is also a more dangerous introvert pink: shocking in secret, not in display. Pink occurs in literature to denote a field of meanings implicating nostalgia, melancholy, and a certain eroticism which depends on being unfulfilled - always longing and never realised- always that problematical 'tender', never that privileged masculine phallic act. This field of meanings is associated with femininity, but I suggest that this is a secondary association, not a primary one; that these meanings exist outside femininity but form part of those marginalised irrational knowledges projected on to it.

Degas, who as far as is known never consummated a sexual relationship, either with the dancers he watched, painted, and drew, or indeed with anyone else, provides the earliest mention of these affective associations of 'pink' I have found (having not yet embarked on the lifetime of random reading to procure earlier ones). That it already implicates ballet is notable, but perhaps not definitive as an original cultural connection; I found this because these are the sorts of books I have been reading for this study. Degas writes to his friend Bartholomé, 'Even my heart is rather artificial. The dancers have sewn it in a bag of pink satin, a somewhat faded pink satin, like their ballet slippers.' (17 Jan 1886: quoted in Armstrong, 1991: 63).

This is an extraordinary drawing-together of imagery; there is an undertone of eroticism, but Suttie's accusation, 'I would say that *men* have substituted sex for love' (1960: 89) cannot be levelled against Degas, who turns to the very imagery characteristic of Suttie's notion of tenderness. In this image of Degas', love resides in the heart, not the genitals; the dancers have captured it in feminine practices, they have 'sewn' it into pink satin, its sheen and its colour reminiscent of [European] human skin; the pink is 'faded', melancholic and nostalgic, a state of the perpetual longing of a desire which cannot be consummated. This sense of unobtainable desire is doubled back on to infantile femininity by Vladimir Nabokov in *Lolita*, as Humbert Humbert describes watching the first object of his love:

There was in the fiery phantasm [stilled in the act of combing her Alice-in-Wonderland hair] a perfection which made my wild delight also perfect, just because the vision was out of reach, with no possibility of attainment to spoil it by the awareness of an appended taboo; indeed, it may well be that the very attraction immaturity has for me lies not so much in the limpidity of pure young forbidden fairy child beauty as in the security of a situation where infinite perfections fill the gap between the little given and the great promised - the great rose-grey never-to-be-had (1961: 278).

Here Nabokov characterises the perilous space of tenderness as cognate with pink, and with the feeling-tone associated with it; 'the great rose-grey never-to-be-had' is a stunningly economical and evocative trope for the tension between sexual possession and sensual appreciation of beauty. 'The great rose-grey never-to-be-had' is also an appropriate trope for the status of the non-realist fantasies of romance; its pleasures are imaginary, but this does not mean that they do not exist, or that they are invalid; only that they cannot be pulled into the real world. 'Infinite perfections' fill that space, along with purity, youth, and indeed, a trope with its own dynamic within the larger trope, fairies, fairychild beauty. Humbert Humbert's story, a deeply moral one about a deeply taboo subject, makes clear that some things can only be possessed in the imagination: and dramatises that there is independent existence for things outside the 'power technique'. As Humbert Humbert demonstrates in *Lolita*, that perilous space will be destroyed if dominant masculine phallic versions of love, Suttie's 'power technique' (1960: 80), are allowed to enter it.

My aim in this chapter has been to create a possible independent existence and value for 'pink', however strenuously its feeling-tone and connotations may continue to be denied by 'theory' (Suttie: 1960:224). This represents a redaction of the leading problem of this thesis, for 'theory' also denies 'independent existence' (ibid.) and authenticity to girls.

Psychological theories about children are theories about boys, as indeed is encapsulated in the title of Carol Gilligan's study, *In A Different Voice*: the 'disparity between women's

experience and the representation of human development, noted throughout the psychological literature, has generally been seen to signify a problem in women's development.' (Gilligan 1982: 1-2). Freud has little to say about girls, modelling his theory of feminine sexuality on its difference from the masculine. Literary critic Maud Ellmann points out that Freud acknowledges that in relation to girls 'our material – for some incomprehensible reason – becomes far more obscure and full of gaps' [*dunkler and lückenhafter*, SE XXI 233]' (Ellmann: 12), and she continues,

In this unwitting pun, Freud betrays the fact that the "gap" imputed to the little girl really represents the gaps in his analysis, the shortcomings of the theory which presumes to 'know' her. (ibid.)

The psycho-analytic discourse is not appropriate to understand or validate the 'independent existence' of love, tenderness, of these 'other' discourses. It may be useful in clinical practice, but it cannot be used as a universal template of human behaviour because finally it can only look for, find, or fail to find, its own terms and its own responses, which are ineluctably patriarchal. I do not have the clinical authority to dismiss the great authority and influence of the Freudian discourse, but claim the right to do so morally, politically, and as a result of lived experience. I am surprised that Monique Wittig is one of the few feminists to refuse it:

Who gave the psychoanalysts their knowledge? ...for Lacan, what he calls the 'psychoanalytic discourse,' or the 'analytical experience' both 'teach' him what he already knows. And each one taught him what the other one taught him. But can we deny that Lacan scientifically discovered, through the 'analytical experience' (somehow an experiment) the structures of the Unconscious?In my opinion, there is no doubt that Lacan found in the Unconscious the structures he said he found there, since he had previously put them there (1980: 23).

I propose that girls' choices, ballet, pink, romance, may be posited not as pathological symptoms, but as redactions of that missing term within 'theory', cultural developments with their own symbolism, functions, and their own valid 'independent existence' (Suttie: 1960: 224). This missing term lies at the heart of the problems of men – and women – dancing, of the marginalisation of non-power-bearing behaviours, and of girls and boys, men and women, needing to adopt or reject 'tenderness', the 'other' to phallogocentric rationalism, to comply with what are seen as gender-appropriate behaviours. A true dissolution of the taboo on tenderness would be self-regulating, creating choices about behaviour without gender signification, without the assumption of power and aggression being a necessary signifier of maintaining or constructing masculinity.

CHAPTER 8

Mothers and Daughters

When greeting a new group of informants, the first question I asked, was when they had started dancing. This was a question at which, I felt, no-one could possibly take fright, and who knows, it might lead somewhere more interesting. The sample of replies from the 19 girls at summer school bears out my generalised observation and experience. The earliest age mentioned by them was 2, and the oldest 9: the mode was age 3, with 10 girls starting at that age. However there is a will to have started as young as possible: this, as I remember from my own childhood, confers status within the culture. Sometimes the question was, therefore, not received as threat-free. One girl in the questionnaire replied 'I am in a lower grade now because I left when I was 7 and then rejoined' while in Southtown:

- ~ Could you also tell me how long you've been dancing?
- ~ [girls worry]
- V ish! or when you started, age when started.
- ~ [girls continue to fret, compare notes]
- V If you've only just started and everybody else has been doing it for about two hundred years don't worry about that it's just to give me a sort of idea ...

The next question, was whether they could remember who had had the idea to start dancing. The answer, almost universally, was 'mum'. 16 of the 19 replies to the 1999 Summer School questionnaire were 'mum': only one individual reported no involvement of family: and no males were mentioned. Christopher and Paul both reported following their sisters to class. It is confirmed within my interview material that dancing in the 'private sector' is usually a part of a culture maintained by female family members.

Perhaps these mums are contemporary redactions of the long-standing mythological figures of 'ballet mothers', as in Ludovic Halévy's well-known description of the mamans at an examination in 1870 at the 19th century Paris Opera, 'all around, restless, bewildered, breathless and purplefaced, are mothers, mothers and yet more mothers - more, I am sure, than there are dancers!' (in Guest, 1955: 12). The dancer's mother is reputedly pushy, bitchy, and over-ambitious (e.g. Brahms & Simon, 1942: 6, Sayers, 199: 139); responsible for her daughter's patriarchal conditioning (Griffiths, 1996); socially snobbish and looking for ways to rise up in society through the acquisition of cultural capital (Novack, 1993: 37);

living out her own unfulfilled hopes by projecting them, still with the possibility of success, on to her daughter (Griffiths 1996: 483). Although the mother pushing the child into going to ballet is a widely-held charge against the activity being the child's own choice, it is not surprising that girls of the age of 3 are taken by their mothers, who are the gatekeepers into the community of which the child is a member. The mother is the most likely person to attend her children at all activities pre-school. The dance taught in the 'private sector' may be largely a pre-established cultural text, but play school, nursery school, practise similar singing games and rhymes to those done in the 'babies' dance class. These involve learning and repeating, and play school and nursery school are engaged in socialising children – making them 'ready for school', in present language – every bit as much as is the politically problematic private dance school. The local dancing school has other characteristics; that of family, and of community. Mothers have to keep their children occupied all day and dancing class is an activity worth a try, where they can forget the child for a while and take a half hour break with other adults.

Lesley-Anne Sayers, however, thinks that 'Many parents no doubt still send their daughters to ballet to promote traditional female virtues of grace, charm and elegance, as well as good co-ordination and deportment' (1997: 140). I asked a senior examiner of one Society how she would account for the continuing global spread of ballet teaching. She replied, 'Parents all over the world want their daughters to be graceful'; although indeed she laughed when I added 'just like us.' (I was washing the car, she was walking her dogs.) These mythical 'parents'- simultaneously no-one and everyone - are also responsible (according to the director of another Society) for the demand for examinations. It seems curious that senior individuals within the private dance school system, who have devoted their lives to dance, should ascribe so much to social reasons and parental pressure. One issue, I think, is that the examiner did not see being graceful as undesirable, unlike the many writers who assume or imply that attendance at ballet is a function of the conscious or unconscious desire of parents to socialise their daughters along traditionally culturally acceptable lines, against their daughters' better interests and out of step with contemporary values – note that Sayers says 'no doubt [the parents] *still* send their daughters to ballet' (my italics, 1997: 140).

It is also possible that the two officers are transferring responsibility to their 'customers' for demanding those aspects of their 'product' which are frequently criticised, rather than that this reflects the officers' committed belief. Both are intelligent, experienced, humane people with senses of humour and detachment. They were, however, talking to me, and could not be sure of my ideological position. The longstanding animosity between maintained education

(which I might represent) and the 'private sector' (which they did) is supplemented by feminist antagonism and, of recent years, a particular anxiety about pressure towards thinness, leading perhaps to eating disorders. I might be ready to strike at any moment: transferring responsibility, or culpability, on to 'parents' seems a sensible displacement strategy. But perhaps 'parents' in general really do think the things ascribed to them: it was necessary to ask some real parents whether they thought as they were, in the mythology of what goes-without-saying (Barthes, 1972 [1957]: 11), supposed to. Later in this chapter I will examine how the parents of some dancers at the 1998 Summer School prioritised possible outcomes of their daughters' learning ballet, and offer some consideration of the place dancing can occupy in mother/daughter relationships, and in the lives of adult women, which implicates dancing's metaphorical use in popular culture. First I will tussle for a while with the problematics of the workings of nature, nurture, and patriarchal conditioning.

I'm not going to let my daughters have Barbies, because pink is sexist.

Vivienne Griffiths sees her daughter Ella's choice of ballet class to be 'a stereotypically feminine one and at least in part derived from strong cultural and social pressures.' (1996: 483) Since all mothers and daughters live in cultural and social life, the pressure to do ballet is no different from the pressure to do things which would be approved of. It is a question, what one would prefer: and a problem, considered in Chapter 6, of why individuals act as a sponge or as a repellent (Douglas, 1966: 49) to gendered influences. Those mothers are bad mothers, whose daughters choose Barbie dolls and ballet classes, like the bad mothers in Meredith Cherland's study (see Chapter 6), who bought their daughters the *Satin Slippers* books. However, the hazards, or haphazards, of parenting reveal salutary lessons: educated, intellectual, commentators on society cannot screen their daughters from the perils of Barbie, ballet and Chapter 7's 'pink' either. Vivienne Griffiths' daughter wants to go to ballet class 'directly ... against my own dancing background and preference' (ibid.: 483); design historian Penny Sparke's daughters display an 'inexplicable but nonetheless unquenchable thirst for the stereotypically feminine' (1995: xi); Jack Zipes, a radical scholar of fairytales, and a rare example of a mothering father, agrees with the young patriarch below that Barbies are 'sexist'. 'At age four, although I had sworn that it would be forbidden in my house, [his daughter] was given her first Barbie doll, and there was no stopping the flood after that.' (1997: 121). Note that the house is 'his'. He is distressed that she liked *The Lion King* (1994):

because I have tried to introduce her to other types of fairy tales and other types of art.... My daughter has good reasons for liking the film, though she also likes "good" films and literature. She knows how to like it because she has received commodity training in taste despite my questions and objections (1997: 122).

Zipes, like Griffiths, ascribes this to social conditioning – 'commodity training'. In addition, he ascribes one thing he doesn't like, (the political implications and formulaic nature of *The Lion King*), to others that he doesn't like: consumerism and capitalism. Is this a legitimate move? In this case, the daughter's choice represents a rebellion on her part, whether conscious or not: by choosing Barbie and Disney she is disrupting the hegemony of 'his' house. Things we do not like can be projected on to power and hegemony in society in general. Keeping this malign influence at bay is often dumped at the door of these 'parents' again. This is not without problems.

Perpetuum mobile: a conversation between mother and son

A television programme about consumer habits at Christmas time flashed up the line 'we spend more on boys than on girls.' Probably feeling anxiety about this unfairness, the boy (12) said:

Son That's because Barbies are cheap - I'm not going to let my daughters have Barbies - because pink is sexist.
Mother What if they like them?
Son Well then I'll let them.
Mother Why do they like them if they're sexist?
Son Because their parents buy them for them.
Mother What about computer games - you could say the same. [that if parents' buying their children's toys is gender formation so providing 'boy things' is also problematical]
Son Well they're more for teenagers. [NB this is not an answer to the question]
Mother Would they not like them if they didn't get given them?
Son No.
Mother What would they want if they weren't given them?
Son Lego.
Mother Well they could have Lego now why do they want Barbies?
Son ???
Mother ???
(vamp till ready: da capo, ad libitum)

The son's train of thought was initiated by a laudable sense of unease, that girls were thought of less value than boys. Jack Zipes and many others may concur with his reading of Barbies as 'sexist', and the desire for them a product of socialisation: but attempting to correct this ends up, in effect, with patriarchy patrolling the boundaries of acceptable femininity. 'I'm not going to let my daughters have Barbies - because pink' - note that 'pink' (the problems

of pink have been encountered already) found its way in there all by itself - 'is sexist.' The son is aware of girls' inferior social positioning, and that the maintenance of this is sexism. Like many, he codes the problem as 'pink', and adopts the common view that engaging with the outward signs of 'stereotypical femininity' is the cause, or possibly the result, of sexism, and that 'socialisation' ('because their parents buy them for them') is to blame. It is notable, however, that he proposes to police this by not allowing his daughters access to these signs, thereby protecting them from sexism. This simply does not work. The young patriarch assumes the knowledge and the right to control femininity – even though his motivation is to ameliorate the social position of his daughters. He has nothing acceptable to put in the place of unacceptable femininity – there is only 'the general', here represented by Lego. Lego is not general: it is largely played with by boys, although both genders play with it as infants.

It is not just parents who can be charged with social conditioning: *Every Girl's Handbook*, (1994) is a deeply dreary publication of doubtful utility, which urges the eating of fruit and suggests worthy pastimes such as tennis and painting which are unlikely to have escaped the notice of any reader. However, it is notable on two counts. It is written, for some reason best known to the publishers, by a man (Roger Coote); and dance is omitted from its suggestions, in otherwise comprehensive lists of arts and sports, for what 'every girl' should be up to. Presumably the omission of dance is to deflect possible charges of feminine stereotyping, but once again, the patrolling of the boundaries of acceptable femininity has been appropriated by a man. Most importantly, the omission of an activity which large numbers of girls enjoy, implies that 'feminine' choices are not worthwhile.

Penny Sparke dedicates her book to her daughters, because 'it was their Barbie Dolls, their love of gilt and glitter, and their inexplicable but nonetheless unquenchable thirst for the stereotypically feminine that finally spurred me to put pen to paper'(1995.: xi). That her daughters like 'the stereotypically feminine' is quite 'inexplicable' to Sparke; she was hostile to her own mother's taste for ornaments and knick-knacks (ibid.: 3), and one assumes therefore that it was not from her that her daughters developed these susceptibilities. If she is supposed to be their role model, how could such a thing occur? Such differentiation between influence and outcome, when experienced by enlightened parents and their daughters, I present as evidence to question that parental influence is the source of gender allegiance, and also that to question that the practices of girlhood produce the political situation of adult women. These intellectual parents who see their daughters as victims of 'strong cultural and social pressures.' (Sayers, 1996: 483) believe, I assume, that 'stereotypically feminine'

choices militate against their daughters' best interests. In the long term, I am sure that Griffiths', Zipes', and Sparke's daughters will become independent and successful young women. Will the daughters of the dancing school in Northtown do so too? One hopes so. I certainly hope so. However, if they do not, I think it will be less because of whatever patriarchal role imposition their experience within the dancing school fosters, than because of the social, educational, and economic opportunities available to them outside it.

Parental Questionnaire

Curious whether the parents of my respondents bore out the aim 'to promote traditional female virtues' ascribed to them by Sayers (1997: 140), or whether perhaps they might be concerned about their daughters' participation like Griffiths (1996: 483), I sent a questionnaire to parents whose daughters attended the Northtown summer school in 1998. The questions were deliberately 'all over the map' ideologically, (Smoodin, 1994: 1), and included questions which would elicit a response to commonly-held political and social charges against ballet, as well as questions referring to what might be considered positive benefits. I did not ask questions about uncontroversial matters such as dancing as exercise, which I thought would be not be thought desirable by one political or ideological group more than another. In retrospect, I could have included a question about a physical quality generally thought masculine, such as 'strength'. This questionnaire investigated a response *in general* to the qualities asked about – for example, are we for or against being graceful? – as well as eliciting a response as to whether such qualities could or could not be found, inherently or otherwise, in classical ballet, in dancing itself, or in the local dancing school as an institution.

I do not wish to imply that the participants in the local dancing schools of my study are naïve; the majority of parents and students may not have access to the cultural capital of the dancing or ballet profession, (although some do), but certainly their teachers are very skilled and two are in the forefront of bringing to their Dancing Society the newer knowledges about dance teaching from dance science and medicine. Although parents and students are not dance scholars, and their view of dancing is not influenced by the discourses which define or contest it within the academy, they are sensitive to the barometers of current public opinion about what is and is not appropriate for girls to do and be. It remained to be seen, whether they would be conservative or progressive, in the social scope they allowed to their daughters.

I was not expecting to be able to draw any general conclusions, statistically, about the worldview of parents in general: I was interested to receive the opinions of some. At this summer school, this age-group were all girls. 14 questionnaires were returned (Miss Davis had gathered the children together and handed the envelopes out, and not all forms were returned), of which two were from the father and mother of the same child. Except in that case, I was not certain whether mother or father had completed the form. I did not pursue this exercise again with other groups, since I considered that there was nothing to be gained simply by increasing the size of the sample, whether or not fourteen is considered a significant one. This would only have been appropriate had I been of a mind that more parents delivering more answers would have led to a more accurate picture of a universal cultural picture, that is, that I felt there was a better truth to be found by averaging out more answers. These parents thought these things, and only a wider spread into different cultural and social milieux would give a different picture - which might only result in a conclusion that different social situations produce different attitudes, hardly a surprise (although see Douglas, 1996: 96, discussed in Chapter 4). That other results are possible does not mean that these ones are invalidated or illegitimate.

The Questionnaire

The questionnaire opened by announcing, *'Filling in this questionnaire is quite optional, but it would be helpful to the study to have some background information,'* and then asked a group of questions about family involvement in dancing. If other people in the family dance, then the socialisation of the daughter cannot be their only interest in her attendance. This first group of questions used the term 'dancing', (because few adults attend ballet class, although many dance) whereas the subsequent questions, relating to their daughters, specified 'ballet'. The schools' cultures do not put the ideological ring-fence around ballet that the professional dance world and academic writers do (indeed, at Miss Richards' school the institutional system meant that it was not possible only to study ballet), so it is not certain whether the parents 'heard' that I was asking about ballet in particular.

1. Does/did anyone else in the family dance?	
2. Their relationship to child:	sister
	mother
	grandmother
	other (please specify)
3. Did this person go to the same dancing school as your child?	

The answers to this section bear out my observation that dancing at local schools is largely a family concern, principally for mothers, daughters, and sisters. Only three of the fourteen respondents had no other family member dancing: there were three families with sisters dancing; two families with mother; two families with mother, aunts, and cousins; and one family of four siblings and father. Two other dancing families attended different schools, one family comprising sister and mother, and one family with mother, father, and a cousin who dances professionally. The following year the girls' questionnaire reported seven mothers, four sisters, two Nan/grandmas, and one each of cousin, dad, aunt, brother, as well as two families attending the school, for whom dancing must have become their major family project - in the first family the dancers are the mother, and a list of five siblings all mentioned by name; and in the second 'All my family 2 brothers mum + dad 2 sisters.' Both families therefore pay (or have paid, since one child is now in professional training at a school where funding is virtually guaranteed) for *seven* sets of weekly dance classes, which is a considerable financial outlay, however generous the likely discounts are. There is one mum who 'danced professionally'; although 'winning medals and trophies' places her in the world of the church hall, rather than the opera house.

Dancing, then, is frequently engaged in by quite large kinship groups. Although young girls are in the majority, there are now significant numbers of adult women, men, and boys attending also. It might have been worth checking whether there are sisters - the group most likely to dance as well - who do *not* dance, especially ones who have never danced, in order to separate out how much personal choice can exist within community action.

The next section was deliberately phrased to ask what was important to the parent rather than to the child. *'What do you hope your child will gain from learning ballet? Please circle from 1 (this is not important to you) to 5 (this is very important to you).* The qualities I suggested that ballet might offer were deliberately manipulative, to cause the parent to reveal their ideological hand; I felt rather ambivalent about this Machiavellian move, but figured they were under no obligation to answer. Some questions deliberately sought responses to issues of 'stereotyping', and about the charges frequently made against ballet - its lack of creativity, promotion of 'feminine' characteristics, and so on. The acquisitions on offer were:

- Career opportunity
- Discipline
- Posture
- Gracefulness
- Confidence

- A good hobby
- Help her to be ladylike
- Creativity
- Participation in an important art form
- Physical enjoyment
- Help her to 'do well'
- Social skills
- Anything else? please specify.

The questions, 'help her to be ladylike' and to 'help her to do well' were the most (intentionally) inflammatory. Although being 'ladylike' elicited a very negative response from most, 'doing well' was not received so ideologically clearly. To the intellectual, the left-winger, the postmodernist or the paranoid, the very idea of 'doing well' might carry overtones of being an ideological trick of bourgeois capitalism. However, I endeavour not to make class judgements, and most if not all parents of all political persuasions will at root want their children to do well, although they may define and express it differently. In a geographical area which is not thriving economically, and in a time of rapid social and educational change, 'doing well' may relate directly to securing an acceptable standard of living. I gave the parents the option to add 'anything else? please specify': I was interested to see whether they would comment on the questions, or suggest other matters I had not addressed.

Three respondents had a fairly feminist perspective. One gave low importance to discipline (2/5), ladylike (2/5), and career (1/5), (that is, ballet as a career), but she did not object to gracefulness or doing well (3/5). Along with top marks for confidence, art form, creativity, and physical enjoyment, she (I assume she) valued social skills as only 2/5, and ballet's status as a hobby, 3/5. Surprisingly, she valued posture at 5/5; perhaps it implied a healthy physique to her, rather than referring to the specific formal posture associated with ballet, and seen by many as a dimension of its repressive socialisation. Another 'feminist' graded discipline and posture low (2/5), gracefulness and ladylike even lower, (1/5), with career and social skills at 3/5, art form, physical enjoyment and 'doing well' all at 4/5, and valued most confidence, hobby, and creativity at 5/5. The third did not value being ladylike or doing well (2/5), and definitely had no career aspirations (1/5). The most important things for her were discipline, art form, physical enjoyment, and social skills, with creativity less so; it rated a 3/5, along with posture, gracefulness, confidence, and hobby.

Nine of the fourteen returns had a dominance of ratings of 4/5 and 5/5 over all the questions - their picture of, and expectations from, ballet were very high. All three of the non-dancing families fell into this high-expectation category, though there was no pattern to their attitude to the career question (rated 5/5, 3/5, 2/5). The 3/5 and 2/5 ratings for the career question were the lowest marks those two returns gave.

For me the most controversial question was 'ladylike,' which indeed received 1/5 and 2/5 from eight respondents of the fourteen, suggesting that they were aware and wary of that kind of imposition of a narrow model of feminine characteristics. There were three responses of 5/5 for 'ladylike', but two of those ringed 5/5 all the way down the column, suggesting a certain generalised enthusiasm, which might not stand up to close examination.

The 'gracefulness' question was to test whether parents themselves concurred with the motivation ascribed to them by the examiner, mentioned at the beginning of this section. 'Gracefulness' was given 4/5 and 5/5 from eight of the respondents; above average, but not the highest 'score,' and given by just above half the sample. That is, it is not generally reported as being the critical factor. Quantitatively speaking, as can be seen from the table overleaf, these are confidence, a good hobby, and physical enjoyment - none of which are gendered, to do with cultural capital, or 'feminine' beauty. Invited to add 'anything else', one respondent added their own category, 'enjoy', and circled a 5. Another asterisked 'a good hobby', and footnoted 'A favourite activity from which she will gain personal fulfilment and enjoyment.'

A third comment, 'Because she loves to dance needed to channel it and hoped it would be a good basis for whatever dance she wanted to do,' was added by the mother of a girl whose father also filled in a separate questionnaire. Mother and father are not united in their expectations. The father assessed 'career opportunity' as a 1/5, while the mother assessed it as 4/5; these are Jane's parents, and Jane does want to dance as a career. Neither parent wanted Jane to be ladylike, the mother (1/5) even less so than the father (2/5), though they were both moderately happy that she should be graceful (3/5). The mother thought important the more active and experiential aspects of dancing itself: a good hobby, creative, participating in an important art form, and physical enjoyment. The father didn't think any of it was that important (no 5/5s at all). He was not sure about 'physical enjoyment' - 3/5, compared to the mother's 5/5. Helping Jane to 'do well' elicited a 3/5 from both, but the mother had second thoughts, erased it, and put the answer right down to 1/5, not important. The motivation for this could be anything, of course, from checking the wrong line by

mistake to something deeply psychologically significant. I suggest that she has a genuine desire for her daughter to fulfil her own needs, rather than to measure up to external standards. She wants Jane to be able to dance 'whatever dance she wanted to do,' as she added to the questionnaire. Her only two 1/5 ratings are 'ladylike' and 'do well', the questions which denote the most capitulation to social pressure. Answering the question whether any one else in the family danced, the mother answered yes, specifying mother, father, and that a cousin dances professionally. The father only mentioned himself. It is hard to think of any explanation of this omission of his wife and niece except self-concern – I had heard of the dancing cousin, if not the mother, in other contexts. In the very first interview, Jane referred to a highly critical television programme about the Royal Ballet School, recently broadcast, and went on to mention her father's anxiety about her participation in ballet lest she should 'go epileptic'. (Helen, despite being 9 to Jane's 11, was able to correct Jane's mistaken word 'epileptic' to 'anorexic'.) Jane's father was revealed in interview to be a generally controlling and dominant person whose intervention in Jane's eating cannot be seen as benign just because, as Jane reported, she might 'go epileptic'. (Note 1, p.147)

The other anomalous return was for Carolyn. All other respondents rated 'participation in an important art form' as either 5/5, very important (six respondents); or 4/4, important (seven respondents). However Carolyn's parent put a 1/5. This is a disturbing response, for me, as I know from other information that this family has three aspirant ballet dancers, one already in élite full-time training. The art form cannot, therefore, be being rejected in itself - is it a refusal of access to the art form, for Carolyn? Perhaps they read 'participation in the art form' as professional performance, and that local classes did not count as part of the art form, so this answer is intended to accept that Carolyn will not have a career in ballet. She is physically unlike her siblings, so perhaps the parent(s) do not want pressure her to do what she may not be suited for; but to deny her access to participation in the art form seems curiously aggressive. That is the best construction I can put on to it. The family also didn't want Carolyn to be ladylike or, bizarrely, to do well, (1/5). On such forms as this, there is always something rather in the way of a dramatic statement, in putting that '1'; it somehow denotes a really negative feeling, almost hostility. Gracefulness, confidence, creativity, social skills, and career were all rated a 2/5, physical enjoyment 3/5 - only 'a good hobby' made it to 4/5. What they wanted most strongly for her to have discipline and posture (both 5/5), which I find somewhat depressing. I do not think a grand conclusion can be drawn from one family's response, but nevertheless it is at least curious that the family with most contact with the world of the opera house should return a picture so different from the others, even from that of the family of the aspirant Jane.

**PARENTAL
QUESTIONNAIRE
SUMMER SCHOOL
1998**

	<i>not important</i> (1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	<i>very important</i> (5)
career opportunity	5	3	4	1	1
discipline	0	2	3	3	6
posture	0	1	3	4	6
gracefulness	1	1	4	5	3
confidence	0	1	1	3	9
good hobby	0	0	2	3	9
ladylike	3	4	1	3	3
creativity	0	1	1	6	6
art form	1	0	0	7	6
phys.enjoyment	0	0	2	4	8
'do well'	2	1	5	1	5
social skills	0	2	6	2	4

Figures represent numbers
out of 14 responses

Conclusions Suggested by Questionnaire

The respondents were, in general, least interested in ballet as a career opportunity for their daughters, and most interested in their gaining confidence, and physical enjoyment, and having a good hobby. The other high-scoring responses were for creativity, experience of an important art form, posture and discipline. The parents' responses did not bear out, overall, an assumption that daughters are sent to ballet by their parents to render them docile and passive. My readings of these questionnaires are supplemented by knowledge of the circumstances outside; there may be many interesting constructions to be made of other answers, but I do not have such information. It does, however, seem to me that none of these replies, whether they circle 1/5 or 5/5, make the fullest sense without knowing what the

families' construction of all these categories might be: that is, for example, if they are one of the worldwide parents who want their daughter to be graceful, what they consider that to be, and what it will confer upon their daughter.

'Gracefulness' as gendered feminine is historically specific; men in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, aristocratic men at least, were required to dance and move elegantly, if not gracefully. And indeed, if she is not to be graceful, is she grace-less, or is there a 'general' state which is ideologically neutral?

For Mothers and Daughters

Not all women are mothers – not all things about being a woman are to do with being a mother. However many women do end up as mothers. And everybody has or had a mother. I feel justified in talking about mothers. The 'private sector' is largely matrilineal, young teachers following in the footsteps of their own. Many dancing teachers teach their daughter as a star pupil, and she assists with the school until it is passed on to her. The School of Witch Dancing is now run by the proprietor's daughter, a person I remember well (as does my octogenarian father) as a 2 year old with a runny nose tap-dancing and singing 'On the Good Ship Lollipop', for all the world like the loathsome Dulsie-Pulsie from *Wintle's Wonders* (Streatfeild: 1957). Miss Richards passed on her school to Ruth in 2000: Miss Davis's school was passed on to her by her (and Miss Richards') teacher. Teaching starts very young: Miss Richards founded her own school, while still a teenager. The system facilitates moving organically from learning to teaching, with older girls first assisting with 'the babies' and with the organising of the younger ones in rehearsals and practice. The occupation does not bring much economic capital or social prestige, or provide a state-recognised qualification. Indeed, the only guaranteed outcome of studying dance in the 'private sector' is teaching the same classes to the next generation. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that of the 681 teachers who have entries in the 1999 CDET *UK Directory of Registered Dance Teachers*, only 6 are male. (I attempted to confirm a few further gender-ambiguous names by telephone but calls were unreturned).

Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen dedicates *Step by Step* (1989) to mothers and daughters. Margaret Storey, one of her respondents, reminisces:

It was more for us mums you know! We used to sit together and dream about our daughters' careers - outrageous things like models and dancers! Things we

couldn't possibly be ourselves. It was nice, I treasure the memories! I still get out those little slippers now and then - her first and last pair! She's into roller-skating and bikes and computers now - probably end up a mechanic, bless her. (Konttinen, 1989:35)

Vivienne Griffiths interprets such statements by saying that Konttinen 'suggests that many mothers relive their own dreams of becoming a dancer by encouraging their daughters to take up ballet themselves' (1996: 483), but I think this is a partial reading and a reductive interpretation of a most complex narrative. Margaret Storey is negotiating with the problem here, not exemplifying it: the impulse towards leading a better life is not to be scorned, even if the details in which it is conceived are naïve – in this case, with 'models and dancers' the apparent height of ambition. There is a difference between using your child to fulfil your own disappointed hopes, and facilitating your child's realisation of their potential. Storey is apparently amused that her daughter will 'probably end up a mechanic' – both accepting and regretful that her daughter only played this game through one pair of shoes.

The audiences at Infants' School Nativity Plays are full of parents and grandparents who, through their tears, will recognise Margaret Storey's further testimony:

I'm sure I used to be the more nervous....but what I remember best is being so proud of her! Didn't matter that she couldn't dance - it was just SEEING her there, you know what I mean.... (Konttinen, 1989: 15)

Seeing your child achieve is not only as good as achieving yourself – in many ways it is *better*, since doubled: you as parent share their present success and your own long-term achievement in enabling it to happen.

All my daughters knew what they wanted to be when they were little, and all of them got what they wanted. I have a school teacher, a nanny, a nurse - I was a nurse myself a policewoman and a model in the family...and now a dancer! You hear people say big families don't do anything...! (Margaret James, *ibid.*: 126)

The spontaneous dancing of children is often read as an indicator of future achievement in the real world. 'Because I used to start dancing to the adverts' and 'because I always danced around the house' were two of a number of similar phrases the girls used to describe their own dancing at home, which led to their being taken to classes.

Ella's been dancing since she was two years old and Lucrezia danced before she walked!....I think Lucrezia will make a career out of dancing, but Ella as well - she's always dancing in the house, she can't stand still. ...

My big hope is to see them two girls on the telly one day. (Margaret Bull, *ibid.*: 28).

I think this statement should not be read negatively against self-deceiving fantasy, but positively against the pride and excitement in the girls' spontaneous creativity - as well as being read materially and historically, against cultural and social isolation. The mother wants her daughters to take their place in the world - to be on telly. That Margaret Bull hopes to see her daughters on telly is not a product of her failure to adjust to reality - she is not naïve politically - but I suggest, just for the moment she resists the political structures which deny her and her daughters access to the means of effecting such an ambition. That their life circumstances set them far from the cultural capital which might allow them to take such a place in the world, is not a psychological problem for mother or daughters, nor specifically a problem of gender; it is a problem of economics, of class and of power. In this case, it is also a question of geography.

Passing on the opportunity to dance is in part is culturally coded as a pathway to self-fulfilment, where performing is a metaphor for self-realisation; in the case of the schools in Northtown, the dancing is in addition done within a rewarding community. The mother/daughter relationship is expressed and realised through the mother helping the daughter to dance, passing on a cross-generational message, where dancing represents that utopian expression of leading a fuller, richer, more rewarding life, and where the exchange of this gift establishes a bond between mother and daughter. It has everything and nothing to do with dancing; everything to do with its metaphorical significance, and the meaning of the situations where it is performed; but nothing to do with success in terms of the 'real' world, if that is defined by the conventions and values of the professional dance world.

This intricate web of knowledges and meanings surrounding dancing, mothers, and daughters, is familiar enough culturally to be used metonymically to express a successful relationship between parent and child. In the short film *Dance Lexie Dance* (1997) ten-year-old Laura, getting up in the morning alone in the house, sees *Riverdance* on television; enchanted, she joins in, but stops the moment her father returns from his night shift in a factory. She announces to him that she knows what she wants to do when she grows up; she wants to be a Riverdancer. 'Wise up!' replies the father; the girl asks why she can't be one.

'We don't dance,' says the father, Lexie.

'We can start'

'We can't'

'Mum would have let me'

[To which the father cannot reply.]

'You'll miss the bus,' he says.

Lexie's saying 'We don't dance' is a refusal standing in for much more than not going to dancing classes. Dancing is widely used in popular culture as a trope for becoming oneself, realising an ideal self, for conquering obstacles, and finding a framework in which life can have meaning - a connection widely, perhaps unconsciously, available within culture. In *Strictly Ballroom*, (1992) dancing your 'own steps' is a metaphor for integrity and authenticity; in *Flashdance* (1983), Alex wants to join the ballet company because '... it's just I want to make something out of my life, I want to so much'; in *Stepping Out*(1991), the students tell the teacher 'You've taught us about finding out - how to be us'. This cultural reservoir is constantly renewed and developed, extraordinarily in recent years in the films *The Full Monty* (1997), *Dance Lexie Dance* (1997), and *Billy Elliot* (2000), where the trope of dancing is seen as an appropriate one in which to examine not femininity but masculinity, in a world where traditional male roles in the workplace and in the family are uncertain and being reworked and reassessed. For me, this is not only a sign that one might be cautiously optimistic that the 'taboo on tenderness' is, at least in some contexts, lifting its hegemony a little, but a confirmation of the continuing power of romance in general, and of dance narratives as a sub-genre within it.

In another episteme, or indeed in another space in the present one, I could refer to 'the spiritual', which might be considered an acceptable descriptor for what lies behind Laura's telling her father, 'We can start'. Guardianship of whatever-this-is and access to it resides with the absent mother. This trope, 'Mum would have let me', appears identically in *Billy Elliot* (2000), where Billy confronts his father's resistance to his dancing with the challenge 'Mam would've let us'. Later, the father's journey to acceptance having been made, Billy's brother repeats, 'Dad's right you know - mum would have let you.' Central amongst these concerns is the quest for one's life to have a meaningful framework. This is a risky statement in a post-modernist world: philosopher Charles Taylor will assist me:

Moderns can anxiously doubt whether life has meaning, or wonder what its meaning is. However philosophers may be inclined to attack these formulations as vague or confused, the fact remains that we all have an immediate sense of what kind of worry is being articulated in these words.' (Taylor, 1989: 16)

The stories of literary romance provide an opportunity to inhabit an experience in which, as one reviewer of *Billy Elliot* said, 'you' can feel 'empowered in the truth and worth of your existence' (www.uk.imbd.Comments?show249642 accessed 15.3.2001: Note 2, p.147) - for Taylor's 'doubt whether life has meaning' presupposes that that searched-for meaning is good. The sense of the marvellous and the quest structure of literary romance is a quasi-religious experience, which 'represents the power of the human mind to construct a cosmos

according to the imperatives of desire,' (Coupe, 1997: 167), in Ernst Bloch's term 'Peasant Tao', (Jameson, 1971:123), or in my own, 'fuzzy metaphysics'. It is not, after all, necessary to posit a 'spiritual' for Laura and Lexie: the impulse can be found in culture, in stories, in art, in dancing.

A startling example of the motif of ballet is its use by Serbian writer and Nobel prize winner, Ivo Andric, in a political fable called *Aska and the Wolf*. (1953). In this story a young sheep, Aska, has a vocation as a ballet dancer – against the approval of her family, for sheep, like *Billy Elliot* (2000), and like Lexie and his daughter in *Dance Lexie Dance* (1997), do not dance. It is culturally *understood* what that 'means', or these stories would not work. Straying one day too far into the wood, she is confronted by a wolf. 'Her last movement could only be - to dance....They were the weak, constricted motions of a body under sentence of death, but they were sufficient to halt the astonished wolf for the moment.' Aska dances and dances, and the wolf watches. The wolf thinks, 'The blood and meat of this lamb will never escape me. I can chop it up whenever I please. But let me see the wonder out - just this next movement, and the next -'. Aska , dances for long enough for the shepherds to come, and shoot the still enchanted wolf dead, just as Scheherazade staves off death, night after 1001 nights, by telling stories. Many years later,

Aska choreographed a famous ballet of her own invention, which the critics and audiences called her 'Dance with Death' - but which Aska always called her 'Dance for Life'. And she lived happily ever after, becoming a world-famous dancer, and dying at a great age. Even today, so many years later, that famous ballet of hers is still being danced, in which art and the spirit of resistance conquer all evils including death itself.' (www.ac.wvu.edu/~kritika/AndricAsksa).

For a Nobel prize-winning writer to turn to this trope, to write about life, death, and hope in the political and ethnic struggles of the Balkans, when a parable is needed to communicate to those with an ear to understand, while avoiding the wrath of the powerful, I consider considerable ammunition against a position where 'the romanticisation of ballet' is something to scorn. Narratives about dancing and ballet do not stand alone in culture as a ghetto for little girls, but are an established trope for 'permanent possibility' (Coupé, 1997: 170).

The Private Dance School as a 'Women's Room' (French, 1977)

The adult woman has an increasingly complex role in dancing school culture. There appears to be a genuine sociological shift away from dancing of this type - performance dance, whether ballet, stage, or tap - being only practised by young girls, with a more or less formulated notion that this might be a career ambition. In the past, if that career was not attained, the practice was given up at some time in the teenage years, and then looked back on with regret and nostalgia by adult women, as Angela McRobbie reports, 'memories of dancing are always associated with pleasure and with loss as though the rest of the woman's life can be measured against such moments' (McRobbie, 1997: 212, herself referring to Rowbotham and McCrindle, 1977). Now adults also take dance classes for pleasure: women in particular, but as my research shows, a few men also. In Miss Richards' school's performance *Show Business 2000*, there were 26 dancing adults (all female), of mixed ages from early twenties to senior citizen. Indeed, there were more adults than there were children in the 'Babies', the class likely to be largest. Miss Richards' school is, I think, unusual in starting adult classes as early as 1978. One original member was still attending 22 years later. The school of Sirikka-Liisa Konttinen's study also had established adult classes from this time, and much of her book reports the testimony of those adults. Ballet as a recreational fitness practice for adults has recently become extremely popular in the US, and increasingly in the UK. Lesley-Anne Sayers recognises that adults now take ballet class and concludes from this that 'the pleasure of practising [ballet] goes beyond professional aspiration' (1997: 141), and 'Adult Ballet' sites on the www confirm that many adults continue to inhabit such dreams for themselves, uninhibited by the demands of the profession.

Girls, women, and indeed popular culture, use dancing as a cultural and social practice in opposition, not capitulation, to masculine power and cultural values.

My grandmother put me down for dancing classes the day I was born.... When I go dancing, I'm Denise - I'm not Quinn and Shelley's mother and I'm not Dave's wife; I'm there to do what *I* want to do. Even if he minded, I'd go. (Denise Butters in Konttinen, 1989: 103).

Denise Butters tells us how dancing is passed from generation to generation as a gift, and how she uses it as a means of self-determination. Dancing is one of society's accepted metaphors for a creative experience of living. The private dancing school, I argue, acts as a 'Women's Room' (French, 1977), in which survival is turned into a creative experience of living, where rich experiences can be shared and domestic responsibilities can be escaped: as

Andy says in *Stepping Out* (1991), 'It's the only thing in the week I do for me. Everything else is for other people'.

The school's identity is formed not just by the dancing it does (which is not to say that the dancing is not done, or is dispensable, or unimportant), but also by the emotional energy put into it by the 'pupils' and their mothers - who are often past (and increasingly, continuing) pupils of the school themselves. The mother is at all schools a payer of class fees, a do-er of hair, and a transport service: but at Miss Richards' and at Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen's school, the mothers and other adults are as much a part of the school as the children, even if they do not dance. These mothers are sew-ers of costumes, makers of coffee, takers of money, helpers with the little ones; part of the community and the culture. These tasks are social glue, participation, belonging, sharing: the creation and enactment of social capital. It survives and exists in the memories and imaginations of the individuals who attend, and have attended in the past. The dancing school may also, therefore, provide a source of emotional and moral support, as Margaret Bull suggests:

'I started to dance to give my two girls an example: If the old codger can do it, so can we...But to tell you the truth, there's been times when dancing's been a lifeline for me! I used to be agoraphobic, but I was cured through dancing. It's not just the dancing or the school, it's the lasses - having a regular bunch of lasses around you. They were the cure, and they didn't even know I was suffering, did you [sic]?' (Konttinen, 1989:121)

The dancing school can provide a sense of community, continuity, even family. At Miss Richards' school's Christmas event, a prizegiving and display, Cassandra's mother was given a prize, for helping with the little ones' tap: as she went to collect it, she cried. Why would she do that? Perhaps she was feeling stressed about something else going on in her life. There are many reasons why Cassandra's mother may have cried; but I suspect it was at being recognised, valued, affirmed, included, and accepted. Even Elizabeth's mother - an educated woman, teaching in Further Education, socially different from the extended local Catholic families most of the girls belonged to - seemed to use the school for emotional anchoring, just as Cassandra's mother and the women of Konttinen's study might suggest. Perhaps her attendance enabled her to inhabit a sense of being still *mothered* - for she was still taught by her childhood teacher. Being mothered is solace from the exhaustion of mothering.

The director of one dancing Society observed to me that he noticed a big difference in commitment and involvement, between the children attending schools in economically prosperous areas and in areas of economic depression. The opposition he actually used was

between south and north. He considered that in the economically prosperous south, dancing had become one among an array of activities that children engaged with on different days in the week, and so had become of less importance in their lives. Certainly there was never a problem with finding time for interviews, in the north, and it was never suggested that there was any problem in keeping children to talk after class - parents were uncomplaining and helpful, when asked to pick their child up at this time rather than that. However in the south people were continually having to leave early or limit their involvement, because of an activity of theirs or a sibling's or a parent's. Children came for their class and left; adults were not present on the periphery, just being there, as they were at my main school. In short, there was more willingness to invest time and emotional energy in the dancing school, perhaps when that 'economic capital' is in short supply; but also, where traditional local community, and in particular kinship and life-long friendship bonds between women, are intact. Indeed, this is a factor in the presence or absence of social capital: in less differentiated communities, the tradition of social capital, spare time, has not been lost.

This is a world away from the school described by Vivienne Griffiths, where attending extra rehearsals 'stretched parents' patience to the limit' (1996: 487). Griffiths reports a 'busy working mother' (ibid.) complain, "They don't seem to think we've got lives outside ballet" (ibid.). Cassandra's mother is a 'busy working mother' all right; she takes cleaning jobs, in addition to looking after three daughters. This is not, I suspect, the same sort of 'busy working mother' Griffiths spoke to, one annoyed by the additional diary items of having to bring her child to rehearsals at times she did not control. Monique Wittig credits Christine Delphy with coining the expression 'materialist feminism':

and she changed the Marxist concept of class, showing it to be obsolete since it does not take into account the kind of work that has no exchange value, work that represents two thirds of the work provided globally, according to recent figures of the United Nations' (Wittig, 1992: xiv).

The work of mothering is the epitome of work which has no exchange value, and so a mother who does not go out to work is not 'working'. A 'working mother' is one who has a second job, with exchange value: but a 'busy working mother' is one with a certain sort of a job. The role of the dancing school in the lives of these two women, Cassandra's mother and the 'busy working' one, divided by geography, economics, and industrial history - not to mention class and, presumably, education - has a very different function. And the woman or women behind the 'they' in "They don't seem to think we've got lives outside ballet", the dance teachers themselves, have no presence or identity. This is noticeable in Griffiths'

example, but dance teachers' role in creating 'social capital' for the dancing school, their families, and the community is generally unrecognised.

In this chapter I have attempted to historicise and differentiate the meanings and uses of dancing, in order to challenge the image of the private dancing school as a ghetto for girl children, a place where they can be imprinted with social manners, while their embittered mothers project on to them their vanished hopes and dreams. Dancing is a cultural activity with complex valencies to community and culture, and is at the centre of a field of utopian and affirmative meanings. The meanings which drive all those films and stories about dancing can be inhabited not just in the imagination but in real life, simply by dancing, in the circumstances you are in, not in relation to the conventions and practices of the profession. It is worth remembering that dancing is a very enjoyable way to spend time, and to be with other people: one of my young respondents made the performative affirmation (Austin: 1962) that 'I am going to stay [dancing] forever.'

Notes

1. In our first interview, Jane passed on a number of her father's opinions. This was presumably because Jane was uncertain whether I would value her own ideas, because she stopped doing it after the first week. I was pleased since I did not wish to know about his opinions, not least because, politically, they did not accord with my own.

2 This review is from the Internet Movie Database, which enables people to contribute their own film reviews, and provides a rich resource of unedited responses to the sort of culture which, in Frye's phrase 'people read without guidance from their betters' (1976: 23).

CHAPTER 9

Utopia in the Church Hall: Going to Dancing and Going to School

School will form a major part of the life experience of the 8 - 11 year olds of my study. Going to school was the only experience I could be sure my respondents would have in common, since work, housing, and families are no longer stable or predictable. Carolyn Steedman has observed, 'It is probable that more children experience primary schooling than they do being mothered by a natural parent or growing up in a nuclear family' (1982: 3). School is also the girls' only engagement with the wider world that can properly be called their own, that is, not mediated by an adult or shared with their family. It was therefore important to talk about school. In this chapter, I will report and discuss what we found out, which serves two purposes: firstly, the dancers' testimony offers, as does *The Tidy House*, the story written by 8 year-old girls in Carolyn Steedman's primary class, 'valuable evidence of the fact that children are not the passive subjects of their socialisation, but active, thoughtful and frequently resentful participants in the process' (Steedman, 1982: 31). Secondly, comparisons between mainstream school and what goes on 'at dancing' arose spontaneously in interview, and this chapter considers the girls' perhaps surprising thoughts on what school is like for them, how school differs from dancing, and how they view the positions they occupy or are allowed in these different environments.

Their commentaries show a remarkable insight into power relations and ideologies of gender. The experience of going to private dance school is largely unrecorded, and all such dance learning tends to be subsumed under ideas about professional training. As clients of both pedagogic systems, my informants are in a position to make assessments of each and to compare them: they are certainly in the position to express what is rarely if ever expressed, what it all feels like to them. I propose to submit, therefore, a case against, the case against the private dance school, from the perspective of its clients' criticism of their experience of mainstream school. My informants are not in full-time training, and are therefore not subject to the problems which undoubtedly pertain there. The only choice for aspiring professionals is to conform or to leave: while 'choice', as detailed below, is perceived by my respondents as a property present at dancing and absent at school.

A distinction between being treated differently at school and at dancing had arisen spontaneously in interview, and I then asked the same questions of different groups.

- V Do you prefer the way you're treated here [at dancing] to the way you're treated at school?
- ~ yes
- ~ I like being treated here because it's not - nasty, and...
- ~ I'm not saying school *is* nasty but -
- ~ I am
- ~ I am

These last two girls spoke in light, unvoiced voices, I think in recognition of – and anxiety about – this potential heresy. How can nice, good girls think, let alone say, that school is nasty, since does not society think school is a good place for good girls, a place where teachers are not 'remote, terrifying figures' and pupils 'learn, discover and find out for themselves'? (Buckroyd, 2000: 12). These good girls harbour resentment and unexpressed resistance to the school they have to go to, unaware that they might have legitimate reasons for feeling that way.

The girls' expression of a clear preference for the way they are treated - the person they are - at dancing presented a 'breakdown', in Agar's terminology: that is, 'a problem in understanding' (Agar, 1985: 25). Issues of concern recurred in different interview situations which could not have influenced each other, linked by a notable unanimity of language - being 'shouted at', choice and compulsion, confusion about the curriculum, dissatisfaction with how they were categorised, issues of respect and 'being a person', power, and problems created by boys. Many of these girls, I am sure, were the 'alpha' girls of their primary classroom, and in this chapter I will consider why the primary classroom does not enable its apparent successes to flourish happily, and suggest that this, in turn, interrogates the aversion of Buckroyd (2000), Brinson (1991), Griffiths (1996), et.al. to the formal relaying of knowledge in dance classes in the 'private sector'.

Those who criticise the 'private sector' have their attention diverted, by their aversion to the ideology they decry, from seeing that they are denying the workings of power within education. Julia Buckroyd in *The Student Dancer* sets out to 'elucidate a philosophical and educational theory for dance training' and suggests that 'training' would be better at its own job, as well as less stressful, if it were more like education (2000: 17). Peter Brinson considers that the 'private sector' would be better to be 'guided by preferable philosophies of public education, social welfare or leisure service' (1991: 60-1). This privileging of state education as unitarily preferable to dance training practices, is destabilised by the testimony

of my respondents. The sparse interview material with clients of private dance schools reported by Sayers (1997) and Griffiths (1996) largely confirms the writers' position on the topic of pedagogy. We appear to differ, but I stand by my own findings, considering them fuller and more nuanced than those of Sayers or Griffiths.

Educational research about children, their attitudes to gender, and the ideological environment of the classroom, such as that undertaken by Cherland (1994), Francis (1998), Steedman (1982), Walden and Walkerdine (1983), Walkerdine (1990), and Waterworth (1983), demonstrates remarkable similarities with the findings in my interview material about the political issues which confront girls in school. These authors' child-centred research, following the flow of children's talk, is able to help situate my own interviews within a field of knowledge, there being little interview material with children which focuses on dance, or is collected in dance institutions. My ballet-choosing respondents do not demonstrate a more conservative approach to life in general than their peers who have been interviewed in the general school context. If anything, the ballet-choosers are more certain in their expressions of dissatisfaction with school. This may be because the context in which the interviews took place was outside the ideological shadow of the school, or because these girls have something to compare it with – their experience of the different learning environment, and social structure, of the dancing class. While school presents itself as a forum in which the individual is nurtured, feminist educational research, and my interviews, suggest that school does not actually make girls feel valued (see, e.g. Walden and Walkerdine, 1983), (Taylor: 1999a).

Universal schooling: the social function of the school

Karen has noticed that in present society going to school is a condition of being a child, a cultural requirement in which she has no choice.

Helen (10)

V

Karen (10)

In school you get work to do –

[isn't that the same at dancing?]

It's not really because you don't have to dance if you don't want to – you can just quit whenever – with school you just can't – you've got to go – you can leave one school but you've still got to go to a school – [a pronounced to rhyme with say, emphasising singularity]

In contemporary western society one of the school's main functions is simply that it is where children go, to occupy their time. This is an exercise of social power, over and above any education or learning which may go on there. Schools are historically constructed, not 'natural' environments, and produce particular behaviours. That they follow a largely

academic curriculum (and, indeed study music but rarely dance, while 'art' is visual art) has also become normalised.

The school, as one of the modern apparatuses of social regulation, defines not only what shall be taught, what knowledge is, but also defines and regulates both what 'a child' is and how learning and teaching are to be considered (Walkerdine, 1985b: 207-8).

Philippe Ariès' study of childhood also concludes that the evolution of the European educational institution is bound up with a parallel evolution of the concepts of age and childhood, (1962: 159), and these are in turn implicated in ideas of gender (ibid: 56) and social class (ibid: 97). Dividing children into large groups by chronological age creates artificial microsocieties with their own dynamics and tensions.

Helen spontaneously isolated the rigid stratification by chronological age at school, (see Ariès: 168-9) contrasting this with a different system at ballet where different ages studied because they were at that stage of knowledge.

V Do you feel that that [child/adult] difference is the same at ballet as at school? That you're treated the same?

Karen Naah

Helen No.... because when you're in ballet and you're about four, you could be in a higher grade than what your age is – whereas at school, in a group, when you're at school it's your age – it doesn't matter if you're really goodAt ballet you could be four and in grade 2, 3.

The practices of the school are so normalised, I am impressed that Helen (who was 11) can see that correlating ability with chronological age, and dividing people into such groups, is not an inevitable feature of the world. The smaller children (8 and 9) were somewhat tickled when I presented them with this problem, although they finally were not able to verbalise their interest beyond establishing that schools have 'age ranges':

V If you think about this group [at Summer School 1999] - in the same group doing the same things there's Clio and Paul [who were both just 8] ... and then there's Sam, who's 22, now you'd be a bit surprised if a 22 year old man came and sat in your classroom with you, wouldn't you and so would he but somehow it feels all right here why do you think that is? what's the difference why is it so different?

~ Because ...

[everyone wants to talk –]

~ I think if he walked into a classroom and I was in that classroom I'd be a bit surprised because usually in schools they have like age ranges for each group and then in dancing you don't have an age range and you just go in when you want to.

I think part of the children's interest was that they had not considered how different their cultural expectations were, in the two environments. No-one expressed any value judgement on the presence of the 19 and 22 year old young men (who, perhaps in present sensibilities I had better point out, ignored the little girls and socialised with the dance student helpers).

The modern school provides not only the tuition but also the supervision, care and socialisation of youth (Ariès: 168-9). Assimilation to the requirements of school, indeed, is read as comparable to social adjustment in a quasi-psychological sense, the going there is so normalised. Helen reports:

At school you get shouted at if you talk or [are] naughty and you get demerits – but Miss Richards only shouts at you if – you're more free in dancing. You only get told off if you talk and ...You're more like free in dancing.

Helen has not actually explained this situation. The reason she gives for her (implicitly) negative feelings about school is that you get shouted at if you talk, but then goes on to say that at dancing you get 'told off' for talking too. Yet she *feels* that 'you're more free in dancing.' She says this twice. Being shouted at is how she experiences the difference – but being rebuked isn't the difference, because that happens in both environments and for the same reason. However I do not doubt the authenticity of her experience. What then is happening? In another interview someone said, 'Yes cause at school they're like all strict with you and at dancing they just let you relax and all...' It is curious that something so structured should result in her feeling 'relaxed', or 'more free', as Helen put it. I consider the girls are isolating similar distinctions to those drawn by Ariès (1962: 169) between child and adult, education and apprenticeship, socialisation and technical instruction. I suggest they perceive a difference between apprenticeship (the relaying of a body of knowledge, with no attempt to socialise) and education (what they learn in terms of academic or other knowledge is secondary to how it changes *them*). Another way of considering this is a distinction between 'visible' and 'invisible' pedagogies:

'visible' pedagogies are those in which the teacher's teaching is explicit and aimed at knowledge transmission.... 'invisible' pedagogies are those that require the teacher to facilitate and guide the children in such a way that they appear to be learning without direct instruction' (Cherland, 1994: 208-9 herself referring to Bernstein B., [1990] *Structuring of Pedagogic Discourse: class, codes and control*, Vol.4, London: Routledge).

At dancing they choose to engage with a structured activity which is a body of knowledge separate from them. It is readable: accept or reject, they 'choose', a word which recurred. Buckroyd, on the other hand, favours student-centred learning, 'invisible' pedagogy, a 'progressive' model of education. She sees progressive education as only fifty years old,

ascribing it to the 'Humanistic Educational Theory' of Carl Rogers (Buckroyd, 2000: 10), even though a dialogue between 'rote learning' and 'true understanding' has been underway since the time of Plato: Coleridge in the early nineteenth century described Plato's educational theory as that which 'awaken[s] the principle and *method* of self-development' (Coveney, 1967: 88). This short view enables Buckroyd to believe that 'old authoritarianism' has been surpassed – as if once, and recently – by new ideas adopted in mainstream education, and that this leaves dance pedagogy operating 'a model of teaching and learning that survives nowhere else' (ibid: 12).

I consider overlaying 'then/now' on to visible and invisible curricula (Bernstein, 1990) to be an ahistorical and unjustifiably teleological position, based on an anti-hierarchical cultural preference, indeed prejudice (see Douglas, 1996: esp.pp.95, 101), which is made possible by an incomplete assessment of educational history. Dance reformers often hold somewhat unformulated teleological beliefs; *A Dancers' Charter* exhorts teachers to 'update teaching' and 'remove old attitudes' without specifying what these might be (1992: 4).

It is not strictly accurate to say that a model of teaching based on transmission of information 'survives nowhere else': it survives in my local Adult Education classes, for example, which offer rag rug making and 'Know your Silage'. At such classes, one would expect a visible curriculum, (Bernstein, 1990) where students engage with an external body of knowledge. Although this might be considered a master-apprentice model, the political and power implications of 'evening' classes are not viewed as pernicious. Helena Wulff refers to a master-apprentice model in dance teaching, and like Buckroyd considers that such 'relationships have been abolished in many lines of work' (1988b: 60). The point I am trying to make, is that authoritarian power relationships are not necessarily implicit in the relaying of knowledge – as my informants make clear, the hidden agenda of socialisation in 'progressive' education can be just as uncomfortable for its clients. My respondents were not generally concerned about the restrictions of ballet technique, although some stated a preference for a different kind of dance they did - tap, stage, or song & dance. Hermione (9) said it was tap that made her feel like a robot, because of having to hold her arms still. Almost without exception they found ballet class a more congenial environment than their supposedly child-centred primary schools.

Although 'traditional' is a term used somewhat imprecisely, and with a tacit implication of 'hidebound-by-tradition', in relation to the private dance school – Vivienne Griffiths (1996) uses the word to characterise the school of her study which offers ballet and not 'creative'

classes – when it comes to pedagogy, ‘traditional’ is indeed an accurate term, because the model of the teacher is ‘a former dancer whose sole concern is with transmitting the aesthetic heritage that she embodies’ (Buckroyd, 2000: 71). Often in the case of the private dance teacher, what is passed on is the syllabus-based inheritance of her Society. The teacher’s role is indeed one of relaying a tradition, which Buckroyd reads as producing teachers who are ‘remote’ and ‘terrifying’.

Teachers in state schools are no longer seen as remote, terrifying figures; pupils are encouraged to learn, discover and find out for themselves and to use the teacher as a learning resource. Even if there is something of a backlash against ‘student-centred learning’, it is unlikely that there will be a return to the old authoritarianism. Our society has become much more egalitarian and less hierarchical over the past half-century, and mainstream education has absorbed and reflected those trends. (Buckroyd, 2000: 12)

One of Julia Buckroyd’s criticisms of traditional teachers in academies is that they lack personal connection with their students. (e.g. 2000: 149). Such a position might consider that dance pedagogy demonstrates the ‘little personalisation and an absence of expansion of language and reason as a regulative device’ (Walkerdine, 1985a: 216) which Walkerdine mentions as being considered ‘pathological’ within the rational perfectionism of the primary classroom. The girls disagree. Many girls reported they felt more personal attention at dancing than they did at school. One 9-year-old contrasts dancing class directly with the supposed child-centredness of school, which she experiences as remote and unsatisfactory, ‘I get treated better at dancing because Miss Davis can correct you personally as [sic] a teacher just corrects you in your book.’ Some associated this sense of connection with the use of physical space: ‘Well I think sometimes at school you can get ignored but whereas dancing ...you go out in a space and everyone could be seen’ (note that she sees this as benefiting ‘everyone’, not just herself): and ‘At dancing - cause at school you’re like at the back - at back of the class and stuff and people can’t see you. At dancing like the teacher can see you better.’ ‘Being seen’ is, I think, a way of expressing a feeling of being acknowledged.

In a pupil situation, their access to ‘being a person’, the phrase used by Jane as she talked about her experience, depends on how they are treated. Preferring the pedagogy of dancing school to education is in direct contradiction of what they are supposed to think, and indeed what writers about the private dance school believe - that the conformity of dancing is repressive, and the progressive, child-centred classroom is where they can flourish as individuals. That this is their interpretation is no surprise to me, to Valerie Walkerdine (e.g. 1990, 1998), Carolyn Steedman, (1982, 1985), or to the many researchers who are sensitive to the way that class and gender - and indeed, although the issue has not arisen directly in my

research, race (see Appendix 1) - structure the definitions of the flourishing child, and the pathological child.

Teaching inevitably wields power: and one of the problems with progressive education is that it does not recognise that its own régime, benign as its intention may be, is also a régime of power. In addition, there is a central paradox in child-centred education, in that it involves a certain fatalism about what each child is capable of: since the system is perfect, each child will realise their own true nature. The problem with heavens, with perfect systems, and in this case with the rational perfectionism which underpins progressive education, is that those who do not flourish must be at fault, for, since the system is perfect, it can only produce perfection. If the child does not achieve very much, that is because there was not much there in the first place: as with early Protestants, there are the saved, and the damned. Julia Buckroyd sees the perceived authoritarianism of a different institutional style in terms of 'more power', (see e.g. 2000: 80) not displayed power, or different power. Self-regulation can be more insidiously repressive than visible authority, as the work of Foucault established, and schools are the principal site in which this power is disseminated: as Walkerdine puts it, the state education system demonstrates 'contemporary effects of historical shifts from overt regulation of the population to covert regulation which depend[s] upon the production of self-regulating, rational individuals.' (Walkerdine, 1985b: 204).

It is not surprising that the girls experience a sense of unease within this system, being produced as 'self-regulating, rational individuals'. In child-centred education, those in power decide where the child's centre should be centred. Child-centred does not mean that the child is doing what it wants: a child may well not want to be in the classroom 'learning' at all. Pedagogies which attempt to give a genuine choice, as at A.S.Neill's Summerhill where lessons are or were optional, result in children frequently opting not to do them at all. And again, the 'centre' in 'child-centred' is based on a model of a paradigm child who is a boy: girls are forever eccentric.

Modern conceptions of child development understand children as active, enquiring, discovering. Yet that activity also defines an active masculinity in which passive femininity is its obverse. The Plowden report for example, consistently transposes 'child' in to 'boy' (Walden & Walkerdine, 1983: no page no.)

Being in school at all is for girls a daily encounter with ideologies of gender: a subliminal sense that boy things are OK and girl things are not is an abiding experience for primary school girls. The ideology of the classroom has positioned girls in a no-win situation since

they will be despised for doing what they are supposed to. An historical inheritance of an idea of *true understanding* vs. *rote learning* (an idea we can track, gender implications and all, directly to Rousseau, 1974 [1911] [1762]) is fixed in the deep structure of the English educational system. 'Good behaviour, neatness and rule following' (Walkerdine, 1990: 76) used to be thought harmful within the progressive classroom: girls are constructed as neat and careful, working hard, but thought to be merely reproducing, while boys are producing, somehow showing a superior level of 'true understanding' *because they are not working* (Taylor: 1999a). '[The girl] is good, well-behaved and irrational. Femininity becomes the Other of rational childhood' (Walkerdine 1997: 169). The harder girls work, the more they are demonstrating their inherent inferiority: but girls who might resemble 'the model playful child often come up against a set of discursive barriers: a playful and assertive girl may be understood as forward, uppity, over-mature...' 'a 'madam', 'bossy' (ibid.: 169).

My son, at 9 - unprompted by his researching mother - wondered aloud why all the girls in his class had such neat writing. Should I tell my son that neat writing is important, or the girls that it isn't? Neither would address the fundamental issue that girls have to be 'good' to be approved of, whereas these kinds of self-imposed limits to their freedom is not expected of boys.

Ideologies of gender in the public sphere

I find it curious that feminists and radical dance writers do not appear to question that state education is a social and political good. Such thinkers might view the state as composed of Ideological and Repressive State Apparatuses, which implies that its power is - if not hostile - at least to be treated with caution. It is beyond dispute that the position of women within the state is not good: so it is somewhat surprising that in education the state, as realised in the ISA of the school, is seen as a benevolent force even for girl children. This is somewhat against the evidence.

In summer 2000, the 'A' level results were reported by the press almost exclusively as a story about gender, for girls had achieved emphatically better results than boys 'even' in subjects like science in which, traditionally, boys are thought to excel. I do not remember excited headlines previously, that boys had done better than girls. Educational reform has created a curriculum in which girls are doing better than boys, which is such a threat to the status quo, that girls' success has to be disavowed. There emerged therefore a will publicly to disprove girls' results: the press was full of letters and articles pointing out reasons why the better results were not, in fact, better. Walden and Walkerdine's study *Counting Girls*

Out (1985a: new edition 1998) sought to discount the claim that girls' mathematical ability was inferior to that of boys, and demonstrated how even research intended to examine girls' (alleged) underachievement in effect reinforced an assumption that girls have a problem with mathematics. For example, even though the Sheffield Polytechnic Research Team's report *Mathematics Education and Girls* (1983) found that '... the between-sex differences were small compared with the variation within the sex and between the same sex in different schools' (Walden and Walkerdine, 1998: 31), and 'little difference in boys' and girls' attainment had been found initially', nevertheless as Walden and Walkerdine point out, 'Having decided to look at (and for) differences between the sexes [the researchers] are obliged to try and find them' (ibid.). Twenty years later, girls' achievements may have changed, but the will to deny them has not. Girls therefore still have to negotiate with the background noise, that even when they do better, they are still, somehow, not as good as boys.

An examination system which rewards diligence (with equal implications for the education of girls and boys) can be taken up as ammunition against women: any success is itself rendered suspect, since girls (QED) cannot be cleverer than boys: if grades are going up, 'standards' must be going down. The president of the right-wing Adam Smith Institute expressed an opinion (not based on any research, it would appear: reports from *The Independent* and *The Daily Telegraph*, both 19.1.2001) that the reason boys now do less well than girls is because the exams have become 'feminised', favouring 'hard-working, methodical girls instead of risk-taking boys.' I would normally be first in line to attack the systems and values of public exams: but it is necessary to prioritise my 'hypergoods' (i.e., 'goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about' (Taylor, 1989: 63). At present, the 'good' I am considering is the reputation of girls' abilities, not the structures which have made them public.

This *a priori* division of gender characteristics enables the commentator to go on to suggest, terrifyingly, that boys and girls should have different examinations 'tailored to their particular talents'. *Not* sitting exams 'tailored to [my] particular talents' was a lucky break for me, since I had none that I was supposed to, and many that I wasn't: indeed, it is that education which enables me to sit here, 30 years on, complaining about the Adam Smith Institute's prophecy that 'feminised' exams will result in 'a nation of civil servants rather than entrepreneurs'. Civil service mandarins I daresay would not be impressed that they have been summoned up to represent 'duller expectations' than 'the flash and fire of

entrepreneurial zeal.' Here is the drearily familiar *logos spermatikos* again, of whose hegemony Christine Battersby complains in *Gender and Genius*: (Battersby, 1989:196) this time with a seasoning of capitalism. Rosalind Franklin's role in the discovery of DNA has been similarly devalued in the same way, it being implied that her contribution was just a lot of straightforward laboratory work: the cult of genius finds it more interesting to imagine that the 'discovery' towards which her work had been directed was instead the result of the 'flash and fire' of two men having a pint in a pub, and her non-receipt of the Nobel Prize in recognition of that, not as a result of the prize's rules forbidding its being awarded posthumously (see e.g. Sayre: 1978).

This foray into a description of the public denigration of girls' abilities is, again, out of curiosity that the dance writers who see ballet classes as inimical to girls' self-determination remain silent on their experience in state education: and to emphasise that girls' self-esteem remains under constant attack. In Chapter 5, Jo and her friends complained that girls are as good at sports as boys but that '*nobody takes any notice*', an observation with good historical evidence to support it. The National Curriculum's policy of publishing test results has resulted in an unprecedented cultural moment, when a context, perhaps inadvertently, has been created in which notice *is* being taken of girls' academic success, or rather cannot be conveniently concealed.

It is therefore hardly surprising that one category of negative comments about their school experience was reports of how girls were treated less well than the boys. The following stories arose spontaneously and did not result from being asked whether they were treated differently at school and dancing.

Child into boy

Boys' dominating playground space is well attested by writers such as Bray (1987) and Francis (1997a), and confirmed by my respondents. Cassandra shows a remarkable understanding of the workings of power - indeed, she is so named by me because, like her mythical forbear, she is fated to tell the truth but not to be listened to. I asked:

- V You've talked quite a lot about boys...and what a hassle they are...do you think that boys get a better deal than girls, or not really?
- Cassandra Boys get a better deal. 'Cause they get like the better part of the playground because they get two full football matches places and we only get half of one.
- V Have you ever mentioned it to the teachers that you don't think it's fair?
- Cassandra No - They'd just ignore you and say well that's not my fault and it was the

way it was built but it wasn't, they put all the lines on it and they put all the matches on it and they divided it.

V
Cassandra The teachers did, did they?
 They kind of ...like...decide.

I would like to point out that Cassandra, aged 9, has deconstructed here not only the 'appeal to nature' argument ('it was the way it was built') but also the way that power inscribes physical space: 'they put all the lines on it and they put all the matches on it and they divided it.' She also knows, although she cannot express it clearly, that it is the teachers who maintain a power structure that enables the boys to be dominant in the playground and to get the best playing space: 'They kind of ...like...decide' (Taylor: 1999a).

I was truly flabbergasted that this was still going on in the school playground and my questions are genuine questions. What *are* the teachers up to? I wondered whether the access to this part of the playground was dictated by activity rather than gender, so the following week I asked:

V I wasn't clear from last week... whether...if you wanted to get to play
Cassandra football, if [the teachers would let you] go in to that part of the playground.
 They won't let you no.

Elizabeth observes that boys also dominate the classroom, by appropriating its physical space:

Elizabeth There's 18 boys in our class and about 11 girls, so you're always looking
 round where are all the girls oh there they are cause they're all like sitting on
 the table the boys where are the girls?

She goes on to consider this state of affairs, at her school and at the other girls':

Elizabeth If I was in Stacey, Cassandra's and Buffy's school if I told one of my
 teachers then they'd say, 'Oh that's not my fault never you mind go away
 now, go and do your work'.... Mrs. Pearce is one of our horriblem teachers
 and if she was my teacher and I said it's not fair why do the boys get the –
 she'd just shout at me – why do the boys get...it's not fair.

Elizabeth's writing and spelling are several years ahead of her chronological age, her behaviour is mature, she has to be doing everything the classroom requires of her: yet still, the classroom is unsatisfactory for her. Being other than outwardly conformist and submissive cannot be risked, even though she feels indignant that her equality, her needs, are not recognised. Here she has set up a complex hypothesis about what would happen if she attempted to confront adult power (the teachers) with her sense of frustration, but can only imagine negative outcomes for such attempts. I wonder whether, by demonising the teacher,

(for surely only the 'horriblest' people would be so unfair) she is trying to maintain the classroom's integrity as a supposedly 'fair' place, unable quite to give her own negative feelings full expression or credence?

Attempts to dispute power

The girls report that they feel 'like a person' at dancing; perhaps because they see themselves as choosing to go, they retain some personal control over their sense of self, and do not feel belittled by being 'corrected', but welcome it as advice towards improving. Jane makes an important distinction which contradicts the negative attitude to the discipline of ballet classes which is widely seen as repressive (by e.g. Adair [1992], Griffiths [1996], McRobbie [1997]).

- Jane (11) We've got a choice to go to ballet and even though we've still got a choice...we don't come there to be shouted at or anything, we've come there to learn.
- V But Miss Richards does shout at you sometimes doesn't she?
- Jane It's correcting you

10 year-old Jo – in a different interview, at a different school – uses identical words to Jane's, opposing 'shout at' and 'correct':

- Jo At school well at my school anyway if I get something wrong if I'm asked a question and I get it wrong our teacher would shout at me whereas at dancing if I got something wrong... or something then the teacher would just correct it.

Walkerdine reports girls' anxiety about 'telling off' (which I take to be the same as 'shouted at'), since this results in a 'painful suppression of conflict' where girls 'respond to the power invested in the positioning of the teacher as necessitating either active suppression and/or its conversion into helpfulness' (Walkerdine, 1983:231). 'The feeling of powerlessness [becomes] the property of the person who "feels" powerless' (ibid.: 218): that is, their sense of injustice has to be internalised and converted into self-doubt. Empirically the girls 'felt' their 'feelings of powerlessness' keenly – they expressed it, and disliked it. Powerlessness for them occurred not at their supposedly restrictive and uncreative private dancing school where they were 'corrected' – but at their primary school, the haven of child-centred progressiveness, where they are 'shouted at'. They know they will not be listened to at school, but do not know that this is an ideological effect of the classroom's supposed child-centredness, which means that the teachers are oblivious to the possibility that the classroom is not a nurturing place. As Valerie Walkerdine says, 'Powerlessness can hardly be

recognised as an effect of regulation in those practices in which power itself is denied' (ibid.). One of the eight-year olds at the summer school complained:

~ When I go to school my teacher always shouts at me for nothing, because I haven't learned me times tables, the twelve, she shouts at me and I tell the headmaster and the headmaster shouts at me for telling it, so the teacher just says nasty things...

Although this girl concedes that she hasn't learnt her 12 times table, she considers this to be 'nothing', not justifying being 'shouted at'. There is an implication that the girl does not recognise the authority of the court, as it were: she resists her powerlessness, but speaking out makes the situation worse, and she has 'nasty things' said to her. The next, similar, story comes from a different interview group.

~ At school in maths we have to bring our homework in on every Monday and sometimes I forget to bring mine because we're always a bit late or something and we're in a rush so sometimes when I forget she shouts at me really bad so it...and it hurts my feelings and sometimes I cry ...because I didn't mean to not bring it in but at school – at dancing – [inaud., resolution tone of voice]

This touching tale, of feelings hurt 'because I didn't mean to not bring it in' reveals that in this girl's moral framework only the *intention* to transgress would justify being 'shouted at'. The reason she gives for failing to bring in her homework is that 'we're always a bit late ... we're in a rush'; the girl acts not alone but as part of her family. Therefore it is not she who is culpable, but her family culture which is under attack. This may well be a class-based reaction on the part of the teacher against families who do not co-operate in the construction of the busy little rationalist perfectionist bourgeois individual, getting her targets and outcomes reached on time, and not sharing the educational system's and the bourgeois family's admiration for precocious achievement. One 9 year old isolated another implication of 'choice' in the primary classroom:

~ Well going to school you learn all different things and you haven't got a choice and then when you go to dancing you've got a choice as to whether you do want to learn this or you don't want to learn it.

It is notable that 'choice' is what the girls read as absent at school, since that is exactly what they are supposed to be being offered. Valerie Walkerdine critiques how 'The pedagogy of "choice"' represents 'a tool in the production of the rational ideal.... Thus education serves to produce [children] as unitary subjects making logical and rational choices.' (1990: 8-9). The confusion endearingly expressed in the following comment by an 8 year-old reflects the problems she encounters, being produced as a unitary subject:

Perdita At school ... cause you think... You think that you can just choose and choose something else but the teacher shouts at you saying that you can't do that, and... you go back to... you choose, you don't choose anything, you ask the teacher what you do and she goes you choose you just get your brain muddled up.

Caroline Steedman in *The Tidy House* comments that, 'the felt experience of being a child is rarely reckoned with in social history.' (1982: 37). I think here we have a rare expression of the 'felt experience' of being educated, as Perdita 'muddles', in her own words, her way through the ideological minefield of progressive education. I think she finds herself at the sharp end of the unrecognised problems the 'client' confronts, negotiating 'invisible' pedagogies (Bernstein, 1990).

Perdita graphically describes how illusory rational perfectionism is. She is having to guess what is supposed to be the logical and rational choice, proceeding by trial and error, reliant on the teacher's emotional response to her choice. The teacher will construct the category of what is to be discovered: '...invisible pedagogies offer to the children only the *illusion* of choice and control: in the end, the teacher's power remains implicit, and children are not deceived.' (Cherland, 1994: 209). Free choice is not free choice at all but fumbling in the dark towards the *right* choice, which the teacher pre-decides. Perdita is not deceived, but has no way of understanding that this insight is a legitimate response to an ideologically flawed situation: all she knows is that she gets her brain muddled up. Even Jo (10), athletic, feisty, witty, articulate Jo, who sees herself as 'fit', plays football and wants to be a police officer, says that dancing is better than school because, 'They tell you what's wrong and what's right and ...so you won't get it wrong or if you do you won't get punished.' That is, no guessing what you are supposed to do: no fear of reprisals if you guess wrong.

Being a Person

The theory of culture Mary Douglas proposes in *Thought Styles* (1996) provides a helpful structure to shed light on 'synchronic antagonisms' (ibid: 70). I have employed Douglas's categories already, in Chapter 1, to suggest motivation and legitimacy for both ballet-lovers and ballet-haters: now, I will employ them to consider the premises which underpin either school or dancing being seen as ideologically preferable. Two of Douglas's four cultural types, (each maintaining its identity precisely through hostility to the other three) are relevant: girls who choose ballet might seem to practise Douglas's first type of culture, 'based on hierarchical community, and so in favour of formality and compartmentalisation'. Those who favour progressive education might espouse the second, 'based on equality

within a group, and so in favour of spontaneity, and free negotiation'. Hierarchy is seen as repressive of the individual: however children have little opportunity to function outside one hierarchy or another, whether the family or school. Children do not have the option of equality, democracy, or free negotiation. The freedom of social equality is not available to them: yet these girls, as their testimonies reveal, have a keen sense of their rights and the respect which they wish for.

- ~ but it's nice here, they don't say, 'Oh you've done that wrong, you silly moo,' you know, you're not concentrating, but...
- ~ It seems to be more respect at ballet than at school because you're treated just like – Right! [imitating giving an order] – type (?) it's Thursday (?) – but usually Miss Davis says you've got to respect each other...

This report ascribes the maintenance of a tolerant atmosphere to the dance teacher. The dancers reported that their school teachers did not treat them with respect. Ballet represents a cultural idea of dignity and respect, to which I suggest girls are drawn as a way of enacting those ideas, not normally available to them at school or in their status at home as children. Enacting dignity and respect enables them to feel like 'a person'. Children not only understand their battle for selfhood; they can make fine distinctions in considering it:

- Jane The teachers like ...they actually say like you're only little Year sevens, First years, like they're big or something but Miss Richards just treats us normal
- V How do you mean normal?
- Jane Like we're just people... in school we're just kids...

I would like to draw attention to how Jane signifies a distinction of status: 'kids' are a category in society with neither status nor power, while in her 'people' she has an idea of political or philosophical subjectivity. This sense of 'being a person,' is an affirmation, a performative statement, like the Yiddish *Mensch*, which word Jane unknowingly parallels. This 'I' does not have to assert an ontological or psychological universality – it is a direct and conscious experience of being-in-the-world, and how the sense of self works out in interaction with others. It is something the girls over and over again recorded in terms of a fight to maintain – this 'being a person' has a political, even an ethical, dimension. Jane characterises this state of 'being a person' as 'normal,' which I suggest, is how she expressed its being a proper and just state of affairs, which recognises her rights and her selfhood. The schoolteacher has annexed access to respect and subjecthood by equating these states with adulthood. Jane, however, is quite clear that these states are not the inevitable property of just being a certain age: she sees this appropriation as unjust, and finds being called 'little'

offensive. She disputes, therefore, the teacher's adulthood - not a very secure argument, but understandable.

Jane does not now propose an alternative hierarchy with herself further up the pecking order; as she approvingly says about how they are treated at dancing school, 'The babies are just as much of a person as us.' This political 'good' Jane reads, admirably, for she has isolated some important political freedoms, not as a finite quantity to be appropriated by the few at the expense of others. It is not necessary for only 'big' people to be given access to them; even the babies can be treated 'normal'.

At ballet Jane does not feel she is being socialised, but given access to a skill she wishes to learn. This makes her feel like 'a person'. Many might be surprised that this political Utopia can be found in the local 'private dance school' in the church hall, where girls are singing, tap-dancing, doing arabesques. Such schools are thought repressive, competitive, uncreative. How come their users do not see this? The experience and opinions of the children in question, flourishing or pathological, are surprisingly absent from knowledge.

But it is a consideration, given present-day philosophical and theoretical sensibilities, whether Jane possesses already, or can gain, the faculty of being 'a person' - 'subject' at all. Judith Butler's 'critical question' is different from Jane's, and mine:

The critical question remains, however, what contingent social relations does that presumption of being, authority, and universal subjecthood serve? Why value the usurpation of that authoritarian notion of the subject? Why not pursue the decentering of the subject and its universalising epistemic strategies? (Butler, 1990: 118)

I stand behind the possibility that Jane has access to being a subject in the sense of having 'human rights', of having a voice, access to language, being listened to, of being the equal of others, of having the faculty of being a conscious being and a social actor. If you are a child and have no rights, and have to fight for your sense of self at home or school; and if you are a girl, and have to fight for your self-esteem at home, school, and against the way you are culturally represented; then contemporary debates about the undesirability of the 'Enlightenment' self or the 'humanist' subject, whether your 'subjectivity' is 'fixed' or not, are a luxury you cannot afford on a political level, as Monique Wittig points out:

I do not know who is going to profit from this abandonment of the oppressed to a trend that will make them more and more powerless, having lost the faculty of being subjects even before having gained it (Wittig, 1992: 57).

Whether it is possible to proceed against the wisdom of Lacan and Freud, and against the anti-humanist, anti-essentialist conviction of Butler and many other writers is uncertain; for several years, I was disabled by this problem (A problem shared with many, e.g. Jane Flax, 1990; Eagleton, 1996). My working strategy, if not a definitive answer, is that by still *wanting* to be 'a person', having this concept in her mind, Jane refuses to be abandoned to her post-modern fate of not having access to subjectivity. She and her peers do find a sense of self at dancing, even though they are supposed to be oppressed and passified there. And for those anxious about whether 'subjects' are 'fixed' or 'split', and the political dangers thought to be set in train by the former, Jane reported in another interview a most interesting perception, of how she felt when she danced:

- Jane I'm a completely different person... Even in class, like me best friend at dancing When we're just messing about because we're bored just erm being funny doing babyfaces and everything well... I'm just a completely different person when I dance, because I... I've got expressions on my face and everything but not in that way, but I'm not like... what Donna sees me as... it's hard to explain...
- V Yeh, I know, it is hard to explain...

It is indeed. Jane was not talking about behaving differently, but *being* 'a completely different person'.

Do all children feel this way?

Almost all of the younger northern girls expressed dissatisfaction with school, citing issues of choice, respect, conflict, gender, age, revealing a remarkably accurate reading of the workings of power. However, neither boy, and none of the Southtown girls, said they were treated differently at school and at dancing. The 19 questionnaire responses were also inconsistent: seven girls said they didn't think they were treated differently at school or at dancing, and one said 'I don't really know.' One (aged 13) was not drawn into complex theorising - 'full name at dancing, abbreviation at school.' Two said they behaved differently themselves, one (aged 12) saying, 'I am not so loud at dancing so its different.' while the other (also aged 12) says, rather ambiguously, 'I have to be quiet and that's well hard.' I suspect it is at dancing rather than at school that she has to be quiet. If so, both of these girls suggested that school is a less ordered environment than dancing, but that they themselves contributed to its disorder. Hermione also suggested that the culture at dancing produced different behaviours from the pupils themselves: 'Well I think it's nicer at dancing because if you go to school then when like the teacher's gone out the room everybody starts messing but when you're at dancing and Miss Richards goes out the room then nobody just messes they just get on with their work.' The oldest respondent, 13, said 'don't get any bullying.'

which she presumably experienced at school; one (11) answered 'I get told off less'. A 10-year-old provided yet another example of the distinction the girls perceive between being 'shouted at' (unacceptable) and 'corrected' (acceptable): 'At school the teachers shouts [sic] at us if we get something wrong at dancing the teacher just corrects it.'

Most respondents to the 1999 questionnaire were at secondary school, and the girls appeared to object less to school than did the primary school girls. My interpretation of this, is that at secondary school there is an opportunity for some personal privacy, for moments in the day in which their time is not managed, as they move from classroom to classroom, from subject teacher to subject teacher. The primary school's classroom teeters into the Foucauldian panopticon, constant self-regulation producing the rational subject of child-centredness. However, the British primary classroom has since the 1988 Education Act been the site of contradictory discourses. To the best of my knowledge, a new generation of writers has yet to comment on this rapidly changing educational history. The 'scientific pedagogy' of the post-war years, based on the premise that children are 'natural, normal children who should be left alone to develop at their own pace' (Walkerdine, 1990: 8), might be thought of as moving from Rousseau to Foucault at the present time, as the 'natural' child has transmuted into one who can do certain things at certain stages, centrally dictated by a National Curriculum, and correlated exactly in this new model with chronological age - what children of their age 'should' have achieved. The teachers have to negotiate this contradiction while being blamed for any 'failures', a masterstroke of social engineering: but it is the children who have to bear it from day to day, unable to 'choose'. The dancers of my study appear to use their time at dancing as solace, an alternative way of living, in which their experience is one of choice, being 'more free', and 'being a person'.

Dance at school: creativity, gender, and class.

The next section of this chapter is about dancing at school and making up dances. The 'private sector' is seen as promoting standardised, repressive values in its skills-based traditional syllabuses. The privileging of the educational values of the state is implicit in Christy Adair's assessment of dancing in 'classes at state schools or dance clubs run after school', where, she says 'the emphasis on improvisation and creating work is usually greater than in ballet classes where the emphasis is on learning the technique.' (1992: 14). The pedagogy of 'learning technique', however, is not specific to ballet: popular theatre forms such as tap, modern, song and dance are similarly taught. So are martial arts, and playing a musical instrument, but these do not have the same political implications. This case against the pedagogy of private dance schools does not take into account the testimonies of their

clients, the social and political implications of improvising and 'creating', or indeed the point of view and historicity of the dance schools themselves. Does practising ballet alienate such girls as I interview from their own creativity? I wondered, as much, whether the girls of my interviews might experience anxiety about their own access to creativity and having a voice, by virtue of their being girls, and by virtue of their class position. There are a number of ideological and historical positions which underpin this problem: the historical appropriation of artmaking by males; a division between art and craft; since society privileges the artist-as genius and being personally expressive, learning and repeating are not creative; certain sorts of dancing are valued more highly than others, by those who write about dance's social and cultural position; dance is not valued at all by logocentric high culture; and finally dance represents - par excellence - *the irrational*, the other to language, which loops and reloops with all of the above. All of these six issues are not discrete - and they reappear in different disguises. There is not space to argue all these to perfection: I mention them, to remind the reader that there are plenty of obstacles to an access to creativity.

Here I have an unashamed polemical aim, which is to convince the reader that all dancing is creative. Ballet, and other dance, is a creative experience. It may not be original, but it is ideologically specific to consider dance-inventing a superior activity to dance-doing. Indeed, I question that 'self-expression' and 'creativity' are only to be found in dance-making, or in improvising. Peter Brinson considers the issue of 'creativity' (1991: 77-79) but against an opposite pole that 'teaching dance steps and choreography...is the expected, but limited, role of the dance teacher' (ibid.: 79). My position is, that is not considered invalid to learn the violin without exploring music composition: learning 'dance steps and choreography' is not everything, but it is a valid and established cultural, somatic and social activity, enjoyed as itself by many people. The opprobrium it attracts is culturally specific, class and education based, and does not consider the experience and aims in view of its participants.

I asked about the dance the girls did at school. Some of their schools practised social dancing, which I found surprising, and others folk dances; others again, whether as the line of least resistance I do not know, allowed the children to dance freely to pop music. I would like to point out that these practices do not reach the creative heights ascribed to state education by Adair or Brinson. More than one interview group - that is, unprompted by each other - described dance at school as 'the teacher puts the tape on,' and they were universally dismissive of what happened next. Such will be the school dance experience of many adults too, although for them it would have been that the teacher put the radio on, tuning in to the BBC's *Music and Movement* series, which provided complete lessons, instructions and

music, in the Laban-based Modern Educational Dance of the post-war State Education system (*vide* Brinson 1991: 65 – 67). The girls were universally dismissive of this experience – which they did not judge to be ‘dancing’ at all. One girl described being singled out to demonstrate by a male teacher, who nevertheless ridiculed her dancing style and skills. Jane described being in dispute with the teacher over her (the teacher’s) technical instructions about how to land from jumps, which Jane thought in error. It was clear that the girls could not integrate their dancing knowledge with what was done in school.

Dancing school girls’ allegiance to the dance text they know is read by dance educationalists as indicative that the girls are divorced from creativity. It is certainly a dispute over possession of the dance text and knowledge – but requires the educationalists to assume property rights over what dance is worth doing, and what creativity might be. Which, of course, they do. At a residential dance course run by subsidised arts and education provision 20 or so years ago, two skinny just-teenage girls teetered on pointe while their friend played Stanley Myers’ *Cavatina*, with agonisingly inaccurate intonation, on her flute. The subject of some ridicule in the staff room, they became known as The Stick Insects. There were discussions about whether such dances should be allowed to be shown. Although showing their ‘own’ dances was theoretically important, valuing their own practice, what if what they had to show was not what we wanted to see, and more importantly, not what we wanted the other children to see, lest they conveyed the ‘wrong’ ideology? The tacit anxiety was that the children might prefer such dances, the culturally received form of entertainment dances for the stage, which they learnt at their private dance schools, to the personal expression and invention of movement we were promoting on the course. That is, that we from state-linked dance provision saw ourselves as superior to, indeed in competition with, the private dance schools, whose teaching would seduce the children away from the true path of art, creativity, and self-realisation. As you see, I am not so sure of my ground, as I was 20 years ago. If a girl thinks the tune from *The Deer Hunter* (1978) is beautiful, and plays it as well as she can, and her friends make what they see as an appropriate dance to a piece of ‘classical’ music borrowing classical dance forms, what is the cultural position which denies this validity? This site of struggle, I suggest, should lay its ideological cards on the table. Nobody bothered about the flute-playing: there are schools of thought in contemporary music, jazz, and pop hostile to ‘the dots’, but this is something of a minority view. Not so in dance education.

It was relatively simple to ask the girls whether they made up their own dances and equally simple to report that they almost universally did. Will this therefore be enough to validate their ‘creativity’ and absolve the private dance school? That is not so simple. The very first

interview that I carried out, early in 1998, with Kerry and Jessica, 10 and 11 year old cousins, brought with it a subtext of anxiety about the cultural, or perhaps social, validity of personal expression.

- V Do you ever dance, sort of like improvise by yourself to music at home or...
Kerry ('laughs') A bit
Jessica The *Titanic* music was on last night and my dad was in the shower and my mum my brother and my sister weren't there and so I just started dancing I don't know why
V Well everybody does I mean it's nothing to worry about
Jessica My dad came in so I sat down then.
V Oh did you feel that it's something you shouldn't be doing I wonder why.
Jessica I don't know.
Kerry Because when your dad comes in...
Jessica I'm looking forward to the Diana thing [changing subject – they were about to present a performance in aid of a charity in Diana's name]

This seems to me a hugely significant, almost archetypal, little story about the interface of personal expression and the social world. Privately, the girl was spontaneously expressive; but she did not have the confidence to show this expression to the world: and she did not wish to discuss why that might be. Is there any way of knowing whether this is a particularly feminine experience? Feeling one has the right, permission, or sense of self-worth to do such things may have something to do with status in society and one's access to cultural capital. The origin of these experiences could be to do with gender, or with socio-economics. Christy Adair sees it as gendered, that 'female dancers are 'socialised as women to please others, their training encourages them to be performers rather than creators' (1992: 30). The problem for me, is that again this statement privileges being a 'creator' over being a 'performer' in absolute terms, while society does not see being a classical musician, or an actor, for example, as inferior. This is indeed a feminist issue, if it is the case that a feminised art practice brings with it inferior status.

To assess possible gender difference, I asked Paul and Christopher whether they ever made up dances themselves. Eight-year-old Paul told me that he did make dances up, both improvising to music and composing: 'I plan a dance and I just do it quickly and then I do it with the music'. Fourteen-year-old Christopher did not wish to talk about this. I do not know if he genuinely did not dance by himself, or if he didn't want to admit to it. I tried displacement strategies.

- V Do you dance by yourself?
Christopher Not really
V Not *really* hmmm. ... [no takeup] hmmm... Do *you* [Paul had said he did]

Christopher ever - put music on and just kind of bop?
V Not really ...I don't have time
Christopher Sorry?
Christopher I don't have time

By now it was clear I was being told to back off, although I still have no idea whether Christopher did or didn't make up dances. Is this a gendered experience of a different order, that for a boy it is dancing itself that is the source of anxiety, rather than the creativity or the presentation of the self? Paul reported when asked 'I'm all right being watched.' Since this topic was not working with Christopher I had to abandon it. But the limited information that there is suggests that these boys do not dance for themselves as a normal play activity as much as the girls do. Does boys' not doing it make the activity more or less creative? Or the boys themselves more or less creative? There is not enough information to be certain, but their responses were somewhat different from those given by the girls.

Charles Taylor, in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (1989) observes that art-making is specifically privileged in contemporary society:

there has grown up in the last two centuries a distinction based on vision and expressive power... a set of ideas and intuitions ... which convinces us that a life spent in artistic creation or performance is eminently worthwhile... '(ibid.: 22)

This issue perfuses every example, every moment, in the cultural picture I am addressing. Taylor is kind enough to mention 'performance' in addition to 'creation', but I think doing so is the fair-mindedness of the liberal intellectual philosopher, rather than a reflection of the status quo. Creativity is, often, and certainly by dance writers, equated with art-making, and art-making is seen as a uniquely valorised human activity, Art-making is indeed a fine thing to do, but I prefer Winnicott's notion of creativity: 'it is necessary...to separate the idea of the creation from works of artThe creativity that concerns me here is a universal. It belongs to being alive' (1971: 66). I have referred to this 'feeling that life is worth living' before, as an effect of the tropes within the literary romances of dance narratives, *Billy Elliot* (2000), *Stepping Out* (1991), and others. Artist Joseph Beuys makes clear the political, perhaps ethical, implications of valorising art-making above all else:

Every human being is an artist. ...By artists I don't mean people who produce paintings or sculpture or play the piano, or are composers or writers. For me a nurse is also an artist, or, of course, a doctor or a teacher. A student, too, a young person responsible for his own development. The essence of man is captured in the description 'artist'. All other definitions of this term 'art' end up by saying that there are artists and there are non-artists - people who can do something, and people who can't do anything (Beuys quoted Nairne, 1978: 93).

'Creative' dance may represent an ideology of emancipatory feminism rather than be implicated in the transmission of traditional gender roles, but both my interviews, and the work of Valerie Walkerdine on girls in school and their performing aspirations, suggest that being 'creative' in this sense is profoundly classed. Winnicott quotes Fred Plaut, a Jungian analyst, who wrote in 1966: 'The capacity to form images and to use these constructively by recombination into new patterns is – unlike dreams or fantasies – dependent on the individual's ability to trust.' (1971: 102). This 'capacity to form images and to use these constructively' would be a good description of art-making: that 'degree of trust' necessary for its practice implies a privileged state of being-in-the-world to which not everyone has access. The educated can afford to scorn historically constructed forms, for they have access to a practice which their political sensibilities consider to be more valuable; while 'singing and dancing, offers working class girls the possibility of a talent from which they have not been automatically excluded by virtue of their supposed lack of intelligence or culture' (Walkerdine, 1997: 50). It takes a great deal of cultural capital and social confidence to be creative in public. I suggest that the preferred dance forms of the politically advanced are far more class- exclusive than traditional theatrical forms, which are nothing but surface. The girls of my study enjoy, as Jane put it, 'messing about in rooms and stuff' but many of them stop if someone enters that room. Informality and spontaneity put load on the personality - hierarchy provides a secure structure. By adopting the conventions and front, by sharing in that ceremony, you can take part on equal terms. They do not require any cultural capital to participate in - you do not have to know how to improvise, to have the capacity to 'form images and to use these constructively' (Winnicott, 1971: 102); you do not have to have the social, artistic or psychological confidence to do these things. Your social background, even your personality, are really not important. To that extent, taking class is egalitarian, and even democratic.

Vivienne Griffiths' ethnographic study, 'Getting in step: young girls and two dance cultures' (1996) compares the 'traditional dancing school' with the 'alternative culture of creative dance classes', which she as 'encourag[ing] spontaneity and free expression' (ibid.: 481). Griffiths' cultural preference for freedom over tradition, for democracy over hierarchy (Douglas, 1996) she sees reflected in these two dance cultures. The creative dance that Griffiths proposes is, I suggest, not less but more politically and socially exclusive than the traditional dancing school, with its ballet classes, that she criticises. My principal respondents live in a different cultural milieu from that of Griffiths and her interviewees. I cannot consign my respondents, as individuals, to one class or another, or generalise about them as a group, because they are not a heterogeneous group socially, and only come

together to share their dancing activities. Nevertheless the area where my respondents live is not a middle class area in the sense of possessing cultural capital in the way that Griffiths' area does. The creative dance group of Griffiths' study dance to the Carnival of the Animals, 'performed to live orchestral accompaniment', and to Peter and the Wolf, 'with a well-known retired MP as the narrator.' (Griffiths: 489). In 'my' school's performance, they sing and dance 'There's No Business Like Show Business', 'Follow the Yellow Brick Road', and 'Life upon the Wicked Stage', to an upright piano and a drum kit played with brushes, in a draughty and run-down seaside variety theatre. The social and class implications of preferring 'free expression', the confidence to be 'creative', are fostered by social privilege.

A 'breakdown' for me in this study has been the dismantling of the certainty that being 'creative' can only be accessed through art-making, or that it is restricted to certain dance forms. In considering women and girls dancing, I see it as imperative that the special value which attaches to art-making and the artist is put into its context. Such an allegiance is held not only in popular society, or in elite society, but just as vehemently by liberals, activists, and (in the case under analysis) those who privilege dance-making over dance-doing. This, I propose, overvalues a particular kind of creativity (art-making), and renders invisible the sort of creativity which goes on in the church hall – one which is not concerned with originality. Dancing itself is a space in which to experience being alive, an intrinsically affirmative and creative activity, which confirms Winnicott's belief that 'it is creative apperception more than anything else that makes the individual feel that life is worth living' (1971: 65). That ballet and learned dance forms are seen as uncreative overvalues the equation of creativity with the creation of works of art, and undervalues both cultural tradition and the somatic and psychological power of dancing itself. Finally, dancing in the artistic and social community of the private dance school offers creative experiences for those who do it, on their terms – so what do 'ours' have to do with it?

AFTERWORD

This project was started by a moment – ‘The Streatfeild Incident’, which I introduced in Chapter 1 – when I was surprised into recognising the fallibility of my own taken-for-granted assumptions about ballet, girls, and the meanings of things thought ‘feminine’. It was particularly surprising that I had come to view ballet classes as ‘romanticised’ and ‘stereotypically feminine’, when, as I narrate in Chapter 2, this had not been my own experience. This moment initiated the ‘breakdown’ (Agar, 1985: 20) which this thesis has been spent in resolving: but this breakdown turned out to be not one problem, but many – many and, indeed, overdetermined ones. I needed to consider the experience and opinions of the girls who danced, the historicity and wider context of the culture they took part in, the conventional cultural positions of girls and of ballet in society’s mythology ‘of *what-goes-without-saying*’ (Barthes, 1972 [1957]: 11: his italics), and above all what might lie behind the lack of respect and validity accorded to all these things. Going to dancing class would appear to be a socially harmless activity. But you would not think so, from the powerful reactions it evokes: I was concerned to find the positive reasons which led so many people to take part in this culture, indeed to act as its – and their – advocate.

I started from the premise that if I had been wrong, then others might well be too, and argued on behalf of the British culture of ‘private sector’ dance classes by interrogating, one by one, the largely negative terms in which it is reported. In Chapter 4 I examined in more depth the institutional circumstances of the private dance school, in dialectical relationship to its critiques by dance writers, who provided me, as I summarised in Chapter 3, with a fertile source of ‘breakdowns’. I do not bear them any animosity – as I have said, the starting point of the project was when I found a problem in my own thinking, and was led to accept Mary Douglas’s instruction from *Thought Styles* (1996):

Any choice which is made in favour of one is at the same time a choice made against the others. The choices are made by the subjects of our study, and it is not our place to let personal preference between alternative ways of living bias the discussion (1996: 42).

The synthesis that emerges from the thesis (the historical circumstances, as best as I can assemble these) and the antithesis (accusations of unacceptable practices in terms of class,

gender, élitism, racism, lack of creativity) is that the strength of the ‘personal preference between alternative ways of living’ (ibid.), even though these are the considered political beliefs, of the critics overwhelms the complexity of the detail of private dance school culture, which has thereby been misrepresented. In large part, this is as a result of the conflation of its practices with those of professional training, and by an assumption that it is a socially exclusive place for ballet classes, whereas, as I describe in Chapter 4, it offers many dance styles with widely differing ideological profiles, and schools can be found in any and every socio-economic region. For many, suspicion attaches to the political implications of ballet itself which was, it is almost universally claimed in the first chapter of secondary histories, developed in the absolutist court of Louis XIV; and so, post hoc propter hoc, classical purity or repressive patriarchal politics (depending on your point of view) are fixed in the amber of every movement, and every part of the repertoire. This is an inaccurate assessment of the history of ballet, its repertoire, its institutions; and this undifferentiated genealogy has little relevance to the lived experience of the people who dance its dances in the Church Hall. For many commentators, ballet is problematical because it is ‘stereotypically feminine’: and girls themselves, as I have discussed and will do again, are a section of society accorded little respect. For others, girls’ practice of ballet is ‘romanticised’: by engaging with a problematic range of imagery, out of touch with the nuts and bolts of the political struggle, they will be ‘passified’ into a docile feminine role.

I have considered the testimony of girls who ‘go to dancing’ with two aims – firstly, to allow them to confirm (for I never doubted it myself) that by taking part in this practice they have bought into a unitarily ‘stereotypically feminine’ view of themselves, and that this somehow unfits them from independence and critical thinking; and secondly, through their experience and thoughts to interrogate the assessment of the ‘private sector’ prevailing in the academic dance community and the maintained education sector.

The girls themselves cannot rectify the inaccuracy of how their dancing schools are represented, except in the matters of gender stereotyping, pedagogy, and access to creativity, and their thoughts on these issues are presented in Chapters 5, 8, and 9. The first part of the thesis, therefore, contextualised the schools in social and cultural history, examining issues of social class, the culture’s relationship to the state, to local society, and considering its dance texts. ‘Ballet’ in the Church Hall is not a single text, and the competing claims to authenticity and quality between schools and Societies represent a history of disputes over the right to define what ballet should be. Ballet in the British profession resolved this dispute

in the mid-twentieth century, and taking this process as one of canon-formation, in Chapters 2 & 4 I analysed the history of British Ballet culture in such terms— bearing in mind that, as art historian Eric Fernie says, it is important ‘to be aware of the artificiality of the canon and the criteria used to construct it’ (1995:329). By considering that ballet’s history as ‘low’ art has been marginalised from the canon of British Ballet on ideological rather than on purely artistic grounds (Taylor: 2003), I am enabled to challenge the exclusion of most private dance schools from access to an authentic ballet ‘text’. Since ballet history suggests that there is no such single, authentic ballet ‘text’, claims cannot be made that dancing schools have fallen short of it; this in turn led me to find alternative, social, reasons for the certainty that the present hierarchy obtaining within British private dance schools reflects only the artistic value and quality of the various institutions, individuals, and practices within it.

The second part of this thesis examined the conceptual nature and ideological implications of ‘femininity’. In Chapter 5, the girls, and boys, negotiated with their conceptions and experience of gender difference, which indeed presented them with a considerable number of problems – material ones in their lived experience, and philosophical ones as they struggled with problems of biological essentialism and social free will. Hints in their testimony suggested they had strategies which by-passed this aporia, strategies which I have compared to the possibilities of loosening binary oppositions offered by the semiotic square. This concept cannot alone conquer misogyny, but the girls interrogated the assumption that taking part in ballet is a capitulation to the ‘stereotypically feminine’. They have learnt that things thought ‘feminine’ are problematical, but ‘going to ballet’ for them is not a signifier of unacceptable femininity; even though they are fully aware that it is practised almost exclusively by girls, they classify ballet as ‘tomboy’, not as ‘girly-girly’.

- V So you lot although you do ballet and come here you don’t consider yourselves girly-girly teddybear and all that?
 [Loud response...no no]
 ~ No we dance...a tomboy...
 Jo Dolls and ponies and all that stuff that’s sort of like more than girly-girly that’s really, really, girly-girly [Jo’s use of her voice expresses more than her words!]
 [others laugh]
 Jo Whereas ballet, is just like, girly, and that’s it.

In Chapters 6 and 8 I considered issues of socialisation and transmission, and proceeded to interrogate the stability of that idea of ‘feminine’ and its relationship with the political position of women, arguing that the terms in which girls – and ballet – are denigrated, by a

rationalist, phallogocentric value system, represent less qualities possessed (or not) by biological females, but a dimension of human experience and feeling (theorised as 'tenderness' [Suttie, 1935]), which is rejected by a rationalist, logocentric, phallic culture. This denial and repression reduces freedom of choice for both men and women

The tenor of such works about taste as Goffman (1969) Bourdieu (1984) and Douglas (1996), is that choices made have no absolute value in terms of better or worse, but represent positions within the social system. "I wouldn't be seen dead in it," says a shopper, rejecting a garment that someone else would choose for the very reasons that she dislikes it.' (Douglas, 1996: 82). Choices signify an alliance with a desired group, are not properties inherent in the thing itself. Society, however, has an almost universal antipathy to things which are, in Jo's words, 'really, really, girly-girly'. In chapter 7 I considered the penumbra of meanings around *pink*, in history, etymology, psychology, and literature, popular culture and as well as in observations, comments, and references from a wide range of sources, to see whether there might be any 'objective' reasons which might be traceable, historically, why 'pink' is such a potent symbol of femininity – indeed, infantile femininity – and whether there might be found there any clue to the slippage between pink, ballet, and femininity. This search uncovered ample examples of the strength of pink's feeling-tone, along with further evidence of how such cultural realities are rejected under the 'taboo on tenderness' (Suttie, 1960) and its lieutenants, logocentricity and misogyny.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I recognised, by examining the role and ambitions of parents, the place of the dancing class in social history, as a locus of social capital (Putnam, 2000) and as a 'Women's Room' (French, 1977). The immediate antecedents of the present private dance school were teachers of social dance, and most local schools continue that social function. In Chapters 3 and 8 I emphasised the importance of that function for the dancing schools' participants, families, and friends, which is a 'good' no matter what the status of the dancing practised in relation to the standards of the profession.

What one does with 'breakdowns' (Agar, 1985: 20) is to attempt to bring them to a 'coherence' which will 'apply in subsequent situations' (ibid.: 23). Suttie's notion of 'tenderness' is the first and major playing-piece in that new, coherent, picture of what had been the problem I addressed: it offers a theoretical, conceptual foundation for an otherwise nameless field of emotions, values, and meanings which represent the obverse of the dominant phallogocentric value system. 'Tenderness' represents a missing term within

'theory', a notion which otherwise exists, like Freudian femininity itself, only as a negative, as an 'other'. Present logocentric culture continues to perceive 'tenderness' as 'other' to its own concerns, while feminism views adopting 'tenderness' as a political capitulation which results in women's subjection. By viewing the tropes accruing to ballet, 'femininity', 'romanticisation', 'pink', as redactions of that missing term within 'theory', the cluster of meanings can be seen in a wider context; one which accounts for their ability to evoke a 'nightmare vision' for Vivienne Griffiths, and an 'idea of bliss' (1996: 484) for her daughter (see Introduction). The taboo on tenderness, above all, gives a theoretical basis to question whether 'feminine' is in fact to do with biological females at all.

Suttie's uses his word 'tenderness' as a characteristic of 'love': his work is engaged in affirming the primacy of this 'love' which, being 'somewhat incongruous with the scientific interest...objectively it is vague, intangible, silent' (1960: 81) is difficult to affirm. Suttie supports his claim to love's existence by noting that Freud and his followers undercut their own 'theoretical assurance' that 'there is no love apart from genital desire and its derivatives' by an 'uncertainty when dealing with fact, not abstract theory'; and that they 'help out the description with casual references to the love and tenderness whose independent existence theory denies' (1960:224). No other theorist that I can find presents such a lucid refusal, on its own terms, of the prevailing (Freudian) model of what people are: or offers an alternative which is so useful in interpreting lived experience, culture, and power.

In chapter 6 I accounted for the denigration of the tropes and 'symbolic spread' (Frye, 1976: 59) of ballet on literary grounds, by comparing them with the cognate concerns, dynamics, and reception of literary romance – which also, in their turn, are 'tender'. The starting point for my attention to romance was the need to situate the genre of ballet fiction for girls, such as *Ballet Shoes* (1936), which most of the writers about the private dance school referred to, in largely negative terms, in their articles. Meredith Cherland described a 'vignette' in which a 12 year old girl was 'mesmerised' (1994:193) by an image of a ballet dancer on a book cover. Cherland sees the 'meaning of the scene' (ibid.: 2) as one of gender allegiance: I could not find that closure, for it did not account for the girl's affect – or for the hostility of Cherland.

The image of the ballerina is so potent that it has acquired a secondary life in popular culture and society's collective image-hoard which far exceeds its material occurrence in

performance. The 219 ballet dancers in the UK and the average of one performance a week by the Royal Ballet at the Royal Opera House (from September 2002 to early January 2003) cannot provide direct cultural source and origin of all those ballerinas in advertisements, calendars, posters, toys. As I mentioned in Chapter 6, the fairies, princesses, angels, imagery of flight and weightlessness, ideas of beauty and perfection, supernatural overtones, and the salvational and quasi-religious associations which accrue to ballet are neither social and political products of ballet's elite status, nor need they be seen as unwelcome, superficial, and trivialising accretions to ballet's classic purity. They are, however, motifs which occur and reoccur in literary romance: this symbolic world has its own history and cultural dynamic, and, as I mentioned in the Introduction, I propose that it found in ballet a very appropriate host. Hostility to such tropes reproduces the abiding hostility of, in literary critic Northrop Frye's phrase, the 'guardians of taste and learning' (1976:23) towards romance in all its manifestations. The idea of romance brings the 'breakdown' that I encountered to a 'coherence' which will 'apply in subsequent situations' (Agar 1985: 23), by placing the 'symbolic spread' (Frye, 1976: 59) of ballet in a wider cultural context, introducing terms which destabilise the assumption that political charges against ballet are peculiar to it. Romance may, like tenderness, be eschewed by rational logocentrism, but it is seen by Northrop Frye as the 'Secular Scripture'; that is, as 'the structural core of all fiction... considered as a whole, as the epic of the creature, man's vision of his own life as a quest' (ibid.: 15).

Dancing is used in popular culture - *Flashdance* (1983), *Stepping Out* (1991), *Billy Elliot* (2000) et al., as well as in the children's literature whose 'romanticisation' (Sayers, 1997: 145) could only be seen as a fault, by dance writers - as a trope through which to inhabit romance's quest structure, utopian dynamic, process of developing into a truer and more perfect person, and having one's selfhood and worth acknowledged. Suttie provides a further link between the narratives of romance, why dancing is an appropriate theme for them, and the affirmation of that nameless but positive obverse to phallogocentrism. Suttie's description of 'love', his project being to affirm its primacy and account for its suppression, offers another link in this chain of 'coherence' which will 'apply in subsequent situations' (Agar.: 23). Suttie enjoins us to notice that 'love-feeling' need not always 'take the form of reciprocal love; it may be merely an *enhanced interest in things* or a general feeling that life is worth living' (1960: 81: his italics). The 'feeling that life is worth living' appears in responses to the narratives of literary romance, as I touched on briefly in Chapter 8. And it

reappears in Winnicott's view of creativity, which I referred to in Chapter 9, in relation to the dances the girls and boys from private dance schools do or do not make up:

We find that either individuals live creatively and feel that life is worth living or else that they cannot live creatively and are doubtful about the value of living (1971: 71).

The private dance school offers, in general, classes in learning culturally established forms, and this is seen as a contra-indication to 'creativity'. To paraphrase Suttie, confirmed by Winnicott, I suggest that creativity need not always take the form of *art-making*; it may take the form of inhabiting the somatic experience of dancing, in the company of others, and that this also produces 'a general feeling that life is worth living' (Suttie, 1960: 81). The 'Women's Room' (French, 1977) of the dancing school is a locus of creative, life-affirming activity, as well as a social refuge.

Martyn Hammersley, in his work *What's Wrong with Ethnography? Methodological Explorations* (1992), suggests that:

a strong theme in much ethnographic research is what we might call an urbane romanticism that celebrates the diverse forms of rationality, skill and morality to be found among ordinary people, including (indeed specially) those who are conventionally regarded as irrational and/or immoral. But if political advocacy is the function of ethnography, why is the politics so rarely made explicit? And on what basis are we to distinguish between ethnographic insight and political prejudice?" (1992: 14-15)

Girls are not immoral, but they are certainly 'irrational', to the extent that the girl is absent from educational and psychological theory, and their thoughts are largely unrepresented. "Let us renounce the effort to reconcile those two irreconcilable things - art and young girls," [George Moore, 1885] wrote despairingly, rejecting as futile any serious critical consideration of such material.' (Foster and Simons, 1995: xiii). This work has been making, not renouncing, the effort to understand an art-making activity practised by many young girls - going to dancing class. In terms of what the girls say, I claim validity to 'celebrating' it not in terms of an 'urbane romanticism' (Hammersley, *ibid.*)— indeed the project has set out to redeem the pejorative view of both 'irrational' and 'romantic' (see Chapters 5 - 7 and *passim*) – but in terms of bringing into representation their ideas and the culture they take part in. I have endeavoured to show, that young girls' experience is fully worthy of the 'serious critical consideration' which Moore, representing a rationalist, phallogocentric value system, denies them. My thesis set out to challenge the role that they

have projected on to them, and to represent their world view, about issues which affect their lived experience, not just at dancing. Art Historian Marsha Meskimmon points out that:

For any marginalised group, simply 'coming into representation' is significant. This fact has been widely discussed with reference to black, lesbian and gay histories whose subjects have been so long invisible in traditional western history, or, when shown, wildly misrepresented (1996: 27).

It may not seem that little girls have as great a political claim, or social importance, as those groups to whom Meskimmon refers. However, as I have endeavoured to show, the terms in which girls – and ballet – are denigrated, by a rationalist, phallogocentric value system, is symptomatic of the wider problem in culture, which implicates any group considered, on one pretext or another, as 'other' to their own values. As such their problems are fully legitimate and serious, and worthy of greater attention than they are accorded. I have, therefore, considered the implications of the girls' testimony and searched in culture and theory to make sense of them.

If, then, referring back to Hammersley's statement, I endeavour to make the politics explicit: a principal aim of the interviews was to demonstrate that taking part in activities thought 'stereotypically feminine' does not preclude the ability to think critically about the world, by representing and considering those thoughts. I do not say that all girls should do ballet, want to do ballet, or all children or adults do or should. My use of the girls' testimony is neither deductive (all girls are feminine, therefore these girls do stereotypically feminine things) nor inductive (these girls are doing something stereotypically feminine, therefore all girls do, or are in danger of doing). And it is most certainly not prescriptive. Most writers have viewed the private dance school as a locus of dissemination of conventional feminine virtues, but neither parents, as I reported in Chapter 8, nor participants shared this view. Both boys and girls gave indications of a wide range of fine discriminations, alongside an equally firmly held monolithic essentialism. I do not regard this as evidence-against my presentation of their thoughts as brave attempts at self-realisation, but as reflections of the overdetermined problematics of gender: as one girl said, 'We're different from them but we're not really'.

The Second Streatfeild Incident: Coda

The study was initiated by one 'Streatfeild Incident' – and will close with a second. As *Ballet Shoes* (1936) reaches its climax, Posy sees a great dancer and decides she must study with him. Although Pauline's ambition was to act in serious theatre, she agrees to a

Hollywood film contract in order to support Posy in her studies. Petrova, who does not like dancing or acting, but flying and driving, is hurt because her sisters are leaving their collective childhood, whose bond was celebrated in their 'vow'.

Posy stopped in the middle of a pirouette.

'We couldn't vow any more, anyhow.'

Pauline nodded.

'No.'

Petrova looked puzzled.

'Why not?'

Posy came to her and leant her hands on her knees.

'Did you ever read of a dancer in a history book?'

'Or a film star?' asked Pauline.

'No, I suppose not,' Petrova agreed. 'But...' (Streatfeild, 1949: 232-3)

Posy has recognised that she and Pauline have relinquished their claim to the *logos spermatikos*, by their choice of occupation: and Pauline 'always thought you [Petrova] were the one that might ['be in history books']'. Film stars and dancers are nice things to be, but they aren't important' (ibid.). Posy decides that Petrova will become an explorer: 'That'll put Fossil ['into history books']... all right; it doesn't matter about Pauline and me.' They will amend their vow: 'I vow to help in any way I can to put Petrova into history books, because her name is Fossil, and it's our very own, and nobody can say it's because of our Grandfathers.' (ibid.)

Whose side Streatfeild is on, here, is hard to tell. At face value, she is telling the reader that names cannot go 'in a history book', except by entering the patriarchal world, represented here by Petrova's choice; that is, that the world of men is, objectively, of more importance than the world of women, so one's only option is to capitulate to its values. 'Grandfathers' cannot yet be fully escaped, for only Petrova will possess the *nom-du-père*: Posy and Pauline will only gain a vicarious foothold in the world by living through Petrova, as women have for so long lived through men. In 1936 it was important that women could see themselves as explorers, and it is to be remembered that Amy Johnson had 'made history' in 1930, by flying from England to Australia. In historical context, it is a call to arms, to resist being confined to 'feminine' things, to 'nice things' that 'aren't important', but to have access to public life and work – having a name, and taking part in history as actor rather than observer. There seems no escape from 'feminine' choices being *de facto* a choice which society denigrates: yet Streatfeild never presented dancing or acting as being 'not important' from the point of view of Posy and Pauline. Does she believe that they are 'not important',

or is she offering her readers a road-map, in present-day parlance, through the world of patriarchy? If you want to have a name you will have to ally yourself with a rationalist, phallogocentric value system, and not do 'nice things' that aren't 'important'. Contemporary girls have more choice than their Petrova, their mothers and grandmothers, but problems remain: in 2003 the *nom-du-père* remains active, reborn as a figure within supposedly radical theory, and 21st century Fossils still cannot dictate the terms on which names go into, or stay out of, history books.

The critical fact for me, is that it remains almost unheard of, to see the correction of gendered hierarchies of what things are deemed 'important' from the perspective that it is the rationalist, phallogocentric value system which needs to change, and to absorb and acknowledge those values presently projected on to women alone. It is not only women who might want to do things considered 'not important'. This is where a consideration of ballet, pink, girls, and tenderness has much to teach the logocentrists, for the obverse of those phallogocentric, rationalist values represents an area of human experience which is, as it were, nutritionally essential: that it is suppressed by 'a puritan, patriarchal, community' (Suttie, 1960: 91), is damaging to both men and women, as every boy who wants to dance, any man who steps outside 'the world, our world, [which cannot] be carried on upon any other footing than that of strength and independence' (1960:224) will experience. This denial is also damaging to society as a whole: for as Suttie says, 'It may seem incredible that so harmless and amiable an emotion as tenderness, the very stuff of sociability, should itself come under a taboo' (Suttie, 1960: 86).

While society continues to assign activities by a supposed gender-appropriateness, retaining a binary opposition rather than the further terms possible within the semiotic square, choices for both women and men remain circumscribed. I know that Cassandra, Elizabeth, Jane, Jo, Clio – and all my young informants – were thinking people, astute social observers and political commentators, with a keen and feisty sense of their own worth. All this is rendered invisible, under the strength of that charge of 'stereotypical femininity' which attaches to the practice of ballet, and to things 'girly', let alone 'girly-girly'. Also rendered invisible, under the strength of aversions to tradition and formality, are the social, cultural, and somatic 'goods' offered by the private dance school and experienced by its users. And it is from such a perspective, that I resist the prevailing assessment of private dance school culture and its clients, offering instead a more differentiated assessment of its historical and cultural context, and a consideration of the ideas and thoughts of its users.

Ballet Shoes ends, “I wonder” - Petrova looked up – “if other girls had to be one of us, which one they’d choose to be?” (Streatfeild, 1949: 235). Streatfeild is actively asking her readers to do one thing – to think about their opportunities: and in the words she gives to Petrova, she offers them the possibility that they can *choose* their life’s path. Like many field researchers, I suspect, I grew to love my ‘informants’; and I hope that they will always have the opportunity to *choose* what they want to be, whether that is to put their name in history books, or to put their creativity into the social capital of dancing in the church hall: and that whichever sort of life they choose, that they can make those choices a reality, or at the least, that their quest will provide them with a framework in which they can happily ‘be a person’.

In the quest I have engaged in, over the last seven years, it has never been difficult to maintain, as Laurence Coupé defines the critic’s task, ‘a sense of permanent possibility’ (1997: 170), for I was always surprised and impressed by what the girls told me, and they caused me to reassess many positions I had held. The only grounds there could be, for thinking one sort of dancing was worth doing and one wasn’t, were class and education specific; that my position was better than everyone else’s; or as Joseph Beuys put it,

The essence of man is captured in the description ‘artist’. All other definitions of this term ‘art’ end up by saying that there are artists and there are non-artists - people who can do something, and people who can’t do anything.
(Beuys quoted in Nairne, 1978: 93).

Beuys has challenged the hegemonies of class, education, and economics which ring-fence the definition of the ‘artist’, just as those hegemonies exclude the private dance school from serious consideration, and assume that Cassandra and Jane and the girls and women at the school in Sirkka-Liisa Konttinen’s *Step by Step* (1989) ‘can’t do anything’. One part of my thesis has been engaged in disputing that. Alas, Beuys has not yet addressed everything, and the other part of my thesis has been engaged in disputing the hegemony of the phrase ‘the essence of man’. This has to include in itself the ‘people who [presently] can’t do anything’ because they are not ‘men’. I have attempted to prove that they – girls, women - cannot be denied access to being ‘people who can do something’ even if they do not eschew ‘femininity’, but enjoy doing ‘nice things’ (Streatfeild, 1949: 232-3). That these ‘nice things’ are seen as not ‘important’ by the ‘grandfathers’ is how they maintain power: but, as I have attempted to prove, for others to deny their validity is to maintain, not to challenge, the rationalist, phallogocentric value system.

APPENDIX 1

The project's context in terms of issues of race and ethnicity

Access to multi-ethnicity has indeed long been a problem within the ballet profession (see, e.g. Horwitz 2002: 317ff). I would like to make a distinction between the profession and 'my' school in particular, and the private sector in general. This is not to be read as an unjustified attempt at denial or as a defence, but as an attempt to clarify a complex cultural situation.

Both areas where the schools I interviewed were situated have demographics largely unchanged by the immigration patterns of the 60s, so I did not have the opportunity to explore the issue of access or attractiveness to new Britons. I saw no girls of colour regularly attending any of the schools although there was one girl of colour attending both summer schools. She completed a questionnaire but was not interviewed, being over 11. She was close friends with another ('white') girl. Both of their families were in the armed forces and they lived in Germany, attending the same school there. The first year I had been told that they were sisters: a moment never arose where I felt able to ask about her. I assumed that Northtown was the 'home' of one family. The girl was completely integrated into the culture she took part in at the dancing school. There was one East Asian girl - a 'baby' - in Ruth's 2003 show.

Although I am conscious that race is an issue which demands one's attention, the absence of 'ethnic minorities' from the schools I am studying can be accounted for firstly by the demographic absence of an 'ethnic minority' *community* in the areas of my study, non-European residents in both being fewer than 1.4% (the lowest statistical category represented by Office of Population Censuses and Surveys, *Ethnicity in the 1991 Census* [1996: 97]). Secondly, involvement in the local dance school as an institution forms part of the Social Capital (Putnam: 2000) of an undifferentiated European British society, in that its established culture and practices predate the post-war influx of 'ethnic minority' groups. Here I am drawing a distinction between attending a class in order to learn a skill, where the cultural identity of the provider of those classes is not a significant factor in the experience. Learning to drive would be an example – there is no ideological relationship with the British School of Motoring, one is purchasing a service. However 'going to dancing' is a much more complex procedure, which may indeed represent concerns which are not part of the social capital of ethnic minority groups – along with growing pot leeks, flying pigeons, bell-ringing, model

railways, or any of a hundred other 'hobby-horses' of an undifferentiated British Society. Since it is almost universal that children are taken through local networks of family and friends and there is a generational continuity to this practice, local dance schools may continue to refer to an undifferentiated, formerly European-only, white-only, English culture which may not seem attractive to other ethnic groups, both because of what it represents in terms of cultural allegiance in a local and community sense, and because the dance styles practised refer, as I discuss elsewhere, to an historically constructed idea of theatre dancing which is somewhat anachronistic.

To give them their due, of recent years at least the Royal Academy of Dance, the British Ballet Organisation, and the Imperial Society of Teachers of Dance have been careful to project a multi-ethnic image in their publicity material. The two models pictured on the cover of a merchandising catalogue published by the BBO, for example, are both non-European. Racism is not, alas, unknown in Northtown, but I suggest it is not the school itself, either through 'institutional racism' or through the visual and historical tradition of the profession, that is the principal factor in the absence of 'ethnic minority' children within it.

APPENDIX 2

Consent and Research Ethics

1. Consent Forms

Introductory letter to Miss Richards' School, 1.3.98

[Address]
Girls' Attitudes to Ballet

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am engaged in doctoral research about girls' attitudes to ballet through the University of Southampton. Obviously I need to talk to some girls about this, and [Ruth], whom I have known through dance for some years, has very kindly allowed me to approach the pupils of the [Miss Richards'] School of Dancing.

This research is very child-centred; in the first instance I would like to ask your permission to talk to your daughter and the other girls in a very general way about such things as what made them take up ballet, whether they do any other out-of-school activities, what their knowledge of and feelings about ballet are, and so on. This could perhaps happen for half an hour or so before or after class one day, by arrangement with Miss Richards, Ruth, yourselves, and the girls.

I will need to have some further talks with some girls, and if your daughter enjoyed talking about her thoughts and you are willing we can perhaps make further arrangements to talk further. Agreeing to talk in the first instance does not in any way commit your daughter to any further involvement, although I would of course be pleased if some agreed. I will make some recordings of our talks, which only be reproduced in academic contexts. Your daughters will be quoted anonymously at all times.

If you are willing for your daughter to take part in this project, I would be grateful if you could write your daughter's name and sign this letter below. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Taylor MA (Cantab.) MA (Staffordshire).

I agree that(name of dancer) may take part in the study into Girls' Attitudes to Ballet.
I understand that my daughter has the right to withdraw at any time and that she will be quoted
anonymously.
Signed.(Parent or Guardian)

[Address]

Girls' Attitudes to Ballet

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am engaged in doctoral research about girls' attitudes to ballet through the University of Southampton. Obviously I need to talk to girls about this, and Miss Richards has very kindly allowed me to talk to some of her pupils over the last three months. I have learnt a lot and enjoyed our talks (I think the girls have too!) but need to talk about the same things with a few more people. I need to talk to girls in Years 3 – 6.

This research is very child-centred; in the first instance I would like to ask your permission to talk to your daughters in a very general way about such things as what made them take up ballet, whether they do any other out-of-school activities, what their knowledge of and feelings about ballet are, what their ambitions are, and so on. This could perhaps happen for two separate sessions of three quarters of an hour before or after class, ideally in groups of three or four, by arrangement with Miss Davis, Miss Richards, yourselves, and the girls. If only one session is possible for you, one is better than none. I will make some recordings of our talks, which only be reproduced in academic contexts. Your daughters will be quoted anonymously, and may withdraw from the project at any time.

If you are willing for your daughter to take part in the project, I would be grateful if you would complete and sign the attached form. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Taylor MA (Cantab.) MA (Staffordshire).

[form]

I agree that.(name of dancer) may take part in the study into Girls' Attitudes to Ballet.

Her date of birth is

I understand that my daughter has the right to withdraw at any time and that she will be quoted anonymously.

Signed.(Parent or Guardian)

[Address]

Research into Girls' Attitudes to Ballet

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am engaged in doctoral research about girls and their attitudes to ballet, through the Dance Department at Chichester Institute of Higher Education. The girls themselves are obviously the experts on this, and I have been interviewing 8 - 11 year old girls about their views on dance, school, games, toys, their ambitions, and matters arising. The research is very child-centred, and although I have some questions to get the ball rolling as much as possible the girls themselves guide the direction of discussions.

[owner of school] has very kindly agreed that I may talk with some of her pupils and I would like to ask your permission for your daughter to take part in the study. Your daughter will be quoted anonymously in academic contexts, and may withdraw from the project at any time. We hope to meet before or after class at the college, and [owner] will let you know exact arrangements. I will be in [school] on Saturday morning, 5th December, which I hope is not too short notice.

The first topic I would like to attend to in these discussions is what your daughters think about the range of books published on ballet. I will bring some with me for their responses. A couple of questions about their reading habits which appear on the consent form will help me arrange appropriate interest groups.

I enclose a consent form. It would be helpful if you could sign this form if you are agreeable in general terms to your daughter's participation, so that we can arrange some further dates to everyone's convenience. Thank you very much.

Yours sincerely,

Virginia Taylor MA (Cantab.) MA (Staffordshire).

Research into Girls' Attitudes to Ballet

I agree that(name of dancer)
may take part in interviews at her dance school as part of the Research into Girls' Attitudes to Ballet. I understand that my daughter has the right to withdraw at any time, and that she will be quoted anonymously in academic contexts. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed.

I would be grateful for the following information about your daughter:

Date of birth:

Year at School (probably 3 - 6) :

School now offering "Literacy Hour" ? Yes/No

Does she own any books on ballet? Yes/No

Does she ever read books on ballet? Yes/No

Signed: (parent or guardian)

Thank you very much for your help.

Virginia Taylor

Phone number

Note on parental questions for school in Southtown

This process was an evolving one, of learning from mistakes and discovering what I needed to know next. At this point I was exploring what the girls knew and felt about ballet stories, in part to use talking about them as a way in to imaginative ideas outside the everyday. I thought it would save time to ask the parents to ask some of my questions. The result of this was that more girls said they read ballet books, than the northern girls had. There is not enough information, to draw a firm conclusion from that. The 'literacy hour' question was intended partly to see whether any girls were at independent schools, where this would not be a requirement. None of the girls were in independent schools, although one said she did not go to school at all, without explanation - a circumstance I did not feel able to pursue. I eventually used information from 'League Tables' to explore the possibility of creating some sort of a demographic profile for the girls.

Letter for 1998 Summer School, July 1999

[address]

Girls' Attitudes to Ballet

Dear Parent or Guardian,

I am engaged in doctoral research about cultural attitudes to ballet, focusing on the attitudes of young girls and boys. Some of you will remember [teacher] allowed me to attend summer school last year, and she has kindly given me permission to return again this year. I would like to thank parents and dancers for their help last year, and ask if they can help again.

My research is now well advanced and indeed a paper I wrote was awarded the Selma Jeanne Cohen award for "excellence" by the American-based Society of Dance History Scholars. The interviews are informal and child-centred, and involve my asking a general open-ended question (such as what they think they or others get out of dancing) and letting their conversation take its course. I tape record the conversations and write them up later. Your son or daughter will always be quoted anonymously, and only in academic contexts, and they are under no obligation to answer any questions or enter into discussion.

I would be grateful if you would allow me to talk to your son or daughter. I would like to be able to talk informally with them during the day, so I would be very grateful therefore if you could find time to sign this form and return it with your child on Tuesday morning. Giving your permission will not place them under any obligation to talk to me if they do not feel like it!

I would also like to hold more focussed sessions on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday evenings. For this I need to ask if you would be kind enough to pick up your child at 5 p.m. rather than 4 p.m. Therefore: if your child is a boy, is it possible for him to stay on TUESDAY until 5pm? This suggestion is purely for ease of administration, and of course it may not be convenient for you, but I hope it will work. If you have a daughter aged 8, 9 or 10, I would be grateful if you could specify if she can stay on Wednesday and/or Thursday. I will check the forms and send information back with your daughter at the end of Tuesday classes. Thank you very much for your help.

Yours sincerely,
Virginia Taylor MA(Cantab) MA(Staffordshire)

I agree that.....(name of dancer)

.....(date of birth) may take part in the study into Attitudes to Ballet.

I understand that my daughter/son has the right to withdraw at any time and will be quoted anonymously.

My son can stay on Tuesday until 5 p.m. YES/NO

My daughter can stay on Wednesday/ Thursday/ Both nights.

Signed.....(parent or guardian)

Name of
Student...VIRGINIA TAYLOR.....

RESEARCH ETHICS

Form 1: Taught courses related to professional training

The Ethics Committee is concerned not to put bureaucratic obstacles in the way of the small scale research which forms a part of many students' courses, nor to intervene in established patterns of professional development. In the case of teaching, social work or nursing, for example, the 'reflective practitioner' model necessarily involves a degree of action research upon one's own practice as a means of professional development, and it would be beyond the brief of the Committee to seek to comment on this. Supervisors and students should, however, be prepared to seek Committee approval when a proposed research study goes beyond the student's usual professional role, even though it may be part of a taught course. Some of the following questions are designed to clarify this. The issue of 'harm' aside, the key point in such cases is whether the study could be described as being part of a student's usual professional role and therefore not requiring any special consideration or scrutiny.

1. Title or focus of study:
Girls' experience of classical ballet : contemporary feminine subjectivity, engaging with women's art practice and stereotypical social role.

supervisor's/ethics committee comment

2. Brief description of methods/procedures/measurements to be taken:
Discussions with and interviews of 9-11 year old girls, from an action research perspective. Some sessions will be recorded in video or sound only. The sessions will be with individuals or small groups, initially as suggested by the teacher and discussions with parents and teachers will be undertaken before ^{interview} meeting the girls, and permission sought to ask the questions & quote their ^{girls'} testimony.

the teacher and preferred by the girls.

3. Location of study and details of any special facilities to be used there beyond the setting itself (ie classrooms are not special facilities in this sense, specialised measuring apparatus may be):
At the girls' dancing schools, ^{or mutually agreed other venue.} first instance. No special facilities except recording (see 2).

4. Basis for selection of respondents of study:
 Age (9-11). I would hope to interview every willing person in the age group at, initially, two schools, one in rural Cumbria and should there be boys at the school, or girls/boys of colour, then ~~it~~ I would ~~like~~ hope ~~to~~ to include them in the study

one in rural Cumbria and one in inner-city Merseyside.

5a. If respondents are your pupils/students/patients/clients, is either the process of the study and/or its results likely to produce distress or anxiety in the respondents beyond what they would normally experience as your pupils/students/patients/clients etc.?

no
 yes

5b. If respondents are not covered in 5a is either the process of the study and/or its results likely to produce distress or anxiety in the respondents?

no
 yes

6. If you answered 'yes' in qu.5, please elaborate if you think this may not be clear to us from previous answers:

What steps will you take to deal with any distress or anxiety produced?

7. What risks do you think there are of your study causing harm to the respondents?

none
 minimal
 some

8. Please justify this risk I cannot guarantee that children's considering what they think about dancing may not cause a shift in their attitudes. I will make every effort not to influence the children's positions. I do not consider they will be "harmed", in fact, but cannot pretend that they may not be affected by their discussions.

9. Is insurance beyond the Institute's usual liability required? (see note 1)

no
 yes

10. Does the study involve respondents you would not normally interact with very much?

no
 yes

11. Is it necessary to obtain the consent of the subjects of the study? (see note 2) <p style="text-align: center;">yes</p>	consent obtained: date oral/written copy attached? yes no	consent to be obtained in course of study; ✓ form attached? yes no
12. Will any payment, gifts, rewards or inducements be offered to respondents to take part in the study? Please give brief details:		no yes
13. Will they have the right/facility to withdraw from the study?		no yes
14. In formal/legal terms, is there anyone whose permission has to be sought in order to conduct your study?	no yes	permission obtained: date oral/written copy attached?
15. Do you think you need to seek the permission of any other individuals or groups (eg parents, carers?) <i>Parents</i> <i>Dance teachers</i> Please specify if 'yes':	no yes	permission obtained: date oral/written copy attached?
16. Will your results be available in the public arena? (please specify <i>initial</i> intention, e.g. dissertation in the library, journal article, etc). <i>Conference presentation of interim research</i>		no yes
17. Is it necessary to guarantee and ensure confidentiality for the respondents? <i>yes in immediate and social terms, permission will be asked for conference presentations.</i>		no yes
18. Is it necessary to guarantee and ensure anonymity for the respondents? <i>Yes in written text ^{presentations} I will ask permission to use girls' speaking on tape, and will not give any clues as to their identity.</i>		no yes
19. Will the respondents have any right of comment or veto on the material you produce about them? Elaborate if you wish. <i>I think it would be inadvisable for the children to see how their thoughts may be analysed and theorised until they are (young) adults, but their parents' and teachers' comments will be welcome.</i>		no yes

20. Do you or any sponsors have any financial or other 'interest' in the study? Elaborate if you wish.	<input checked="" type="radio"/> no
	yes
21. Do you intend to use the name of the Institute in order to gain or to legitimise access?	<input checked="" type="radio"/> no
	yes
22. Can the study be described as being part of your usual professional role and therefore not requiring any special consideration or scrutiny?	yes
	<input checked="" type="radio"/> no
23. Is there any additional comment or information you consider relevant?	

Name of student: VIRGINIA TAYLOR Signature of student: Virginia Taylor

Programme MPhil/PhD Module

Supervisors' section:

In your view, does the proposed study potentially contravene any aspects of established codes of practice in your discipline? (The codes of practice of the British Sociological Association, British Psychological Association and British Education Research Association have been circulated by the Ethics Committee to Heads of School and are available in a file in the library).	no
Please give details if 'yes' and if you wish the Research Ethics Committee to resolve the issue:	yes

Name of supervisor:..... Signature of supervisor:.....
 Name of 2nd supervisor:..... Signature of 2nd supervisor:.....

APPENDIX 3

Summer School 1999 model of questionnaire with breakdown of answers

[All spellings, upper and lower case, are as in original.]

The Questionnaire

I would appreciate it if you spend a few minutes completing this. Do not worry about 'right' answers - just put down the first thing that comes into your head. Also- please fill it in by yourself, don't compare notes till afterwards! If you have a long answer, write it on the back or just anywhere.

First - your date of birth! is Thanks

<i>d.o.b.</i>	<i>Age at time</i>
10.2.86	13
3.4.86	13
1.7.86	13
10.8.86	12
31.10.86	12
4.11.86	12
28.11.86	12
18.12.86	12
17.4.87	12
25.5.87	12
27.5.87	12
9.6.87	12
25.8.87	11
29.2.88	11
21.3.88	11
30.1.89	10
17.3.89	10
18.10.89	9
20.4.90	9

1. When did you start dancing?

<i>age 2</i>	17.4.87 (numbers 1)
<i>age 2½</i>	10.8.86, 21.3.88, 18.10.89 (numbers 3)
<i>age 3</i>	10.2.86, 3.4.86, 31.10.86, 4.11.86, 18.12.86, 26.5.87, 27.5.87, 25.8.87, 20.4.90 (numbers 9)

<i>age 3½</i>	9.2.88 (numbers 1)
<i>age 4</i>	30.1.89 (numbers 1)
<i>age 6½</i>	1.7.86 (numbers 1: respondent actually gave historical date)
<i>age 7</i>	28.11.86 (numbers 1)
<i>age 9</i>	9.6.87 (numbers 1)
<i>no answer</i>	(numbers 1) (10 girls at mode age of 3)

2a. Can you remember whose idea it was?

<i>mum alone:</i>	10.8.86, 31.10.86, 4.11.86, 17.4.87, 26.5.87, 9.6.87, 25.8.87, 29.2.88 'It was my mum's idea because my mum did it when she was young,' 21.3.88, 30.1.89, 17.3.89, 18.10.89 (numbers 13)
<i>mum and other female family member:</i>	10.2.86 'mums and sister'(numbers 1)
<i>mum and non-family members:</i>	27.5.87 'my mums and my mums friends idea' (numbers 1)
<i>other family members:</i>	20.4.90 'It was my grandma's idea' (numbers 1)
<i>non-family members:</i>	1.7.86 'My friend Rachel because I had an interest in dancing' (numbers 1)
<i>involvement of self:</i>	13.4.86 'mine and my mums and nans', 28.11.86 'mum + me', 18.12.86 'my cousins were dancing so I wanted to start but all 3 have quit now but I am going to stay forever.' (numbers 3)

(Only one girl (the 6½ start) had no involvement of family: no male family members mentioned, but 'mum' in 16 of 19)

2b. Can you remember why you started?

1.7.86	I had an interest in dancing [6½ start]
18.12.86	my cousins were dancing so I wanted to start
29.2.88	my mum did it when young
27.5.87	for fun
21.3.88	because I used to start dancing to the adverts
20.4.90	because I always danced around the house
no answer	3.4.86, 4.11.86, 10.2.86, 10.8.86, 31.10.86, 28.11.86, 17.4.87, 26.5.87, 9.6.87, 25.8.87, 17.3.89, 30.11.89

3. Is there anyone else in your family who dances?

10.2.86	yes sisters (2), mum
3.4.86	Yes, my cousin + nan
1.7.86	yes my sister Tracy
10.8.86	mum, younger sister
31.10.86	yes my sister dances
4.11.86	Siblings mentioned by name - 3 sisters and 2 brothers: also 'mum'.
28.11.86	mum, adult tap

- 18.12.86 My brother + also my auntie still dances since she was young
- 17.4.87 Yes my mum used to dance she won medals and trophies and danced at [the major theatre in nearby city] and all around the country
- 26.5.87 All my family 2 brothers mum + dad 2 sisters
- 27.5.87 No
- 9.6.87 my mum
- 25.8.87 my mum + dad
- 29.2.88 left blank
- 21.3.88 Not that I know off
- 30.1.89 No
- 17.3.89 my mum
- 18.10.89 My Mum (Harriet)
- 20.4.90 My grandma tap dances

(Family relationships mentioned: cousins, Nan/grandma, sister(s), Mum, Dad, Brother(s), Aunt)

4. What do you want to do when you leave school?

- 2 non-dancing gender specific air hostess, beautician
- 2 non-dancing gender associated PEteacher/drama teacher
- 4 non-dancing non-gender specific lawyer, interior designer, doctor, police officer
- 8 dancing
- 4 other performing
- 2 'realist' [or fantasist...] doctor and dance in spare time / air hostess with dancing as a hobby
- 3 educational 'go to college' 1, dancing school/college 2
- 10.2.86 Go to a dancing college, where you do (tap ballet modern, Jazz, Drama, singing)
First I have to learn to sing.
- 3.4.86 be in musicals, or performances, or go to a dancing school.
- 1.7.86 Go to college.
- 10.8.86 Dance
- 31.10.86 Not sure
- 4.11.86 PE teacher/Drama teacher
- 28.11.86 Singer/Dancer/Work as a vet
- 18.12.86 An ice-scater or a dancer but I want to performe in some way
- 17.4.87 I want to be an interia designer
- 26.5.87 Be a Ballet Dancer
- 27.5.87 Be a ballet dancer or be in musicals.
- 9.6.87 be a doctor and dance in spear time.
- 25.8.87 be a dancer.
- 29.2.88 when I leave school I want to be a lawyer

29.2.89	21.3.88	Be a famous dancer or actress.
30.1.89		Be a police officer.
17.3.89		I want to be a butch.
18.10.89		either be a popstar or a ballet dancer.
20.4.90		I want to be an air hostess and have dancing as a hobby.

5. Did you (if you don't now) ever want to be a dancer?

no not really 17.3.89, 29.2.88

yes 3.4.86, 1.7.86, 10.8.86, 18.12.86, 9.6.87, 25.8.87, 21.3.88, 01.1.89, 18.10.89

no 4.11.86 (NO), 17.4.87

Yes I used to want to be a dancer: 31.10.86

I didn't really know: 28.11.86

I always wanted to be a dancer: 20.4.90

no, yes, yes: 10.2.86 *yes, no, yes:* 26.5.87 *no, yes:* 27.5.87

(yes 14, no or not really 5)

6. What does 'being a dancer' mean to you?

10.2.86 hard work, performing

3.4.86 happiness and peaceful

1.7.86 [no response]

10.8.86 expressing my feelings in a different way to everybody else.

31.10.86 having fun and learning

25.8.87 happiness and pleasure

4.11.86 exercise and hard work

28.11.86 working really hard

18.12.86 It's a great privilege to be a dancer

17.4.87 nothing' (!) [this is the respondent who reports that her mother was a dancer]

26.5.87 life + hard work + happiness

27.5.87 it means hard work

9.6.87 having fun and hard work

29.2.88 performing

21.3.88 It means that I can do things no ordinary person can

30.1.89 strong lower abdominals' [this could be answer to next question as the phrase is stranded between the two: this is Jo, who wishes to be a police officer.]

17.3.89 a hobby

18.10.89 It means a lot because I love dancing [this is Elizabeth]

20.4.90 I feel like I have more attention than at home

7. What do you think you get out of dancing?

10.2.86	enjoyment, discipline
3.4.86	keeping fit, more confidence, meeting friends and learning to dance properly
1.7.86	enjoyment and exercise
10.8.86	happiness
31.10.86	satisfaction when I pass exams
4.11.86	exercise
28.11.86	enjoyment and exercise
18.12.86	a good figure and a lot of fun
17.4.87	nothing (same nothing person as above, with dancer mother)
26.5.87	pleasure
27.5.87	discipline
9.6.87	discipline
25.8.87	being strong and building up my self confidence
29.2.88	exercise
21.3.88	I get fun and happiness
30.1.89	[abdominals]
17.3.89	a hobby
18.10.89	A lot, because it makes me happy inside
20.4.90	it makes me feel very happy and excited

8. What dancers have you heard of?

Darcey Bussell: 11 mentions

Linda May Brewer: 11 mentions

Michael Flatley: 6 mentions (one respondent spells as Michael Flattery)

Wayne Sleep: 5 mentions

Miss Davis (Owner of school): 4 mentions

Deborah Bull: 4 mentions

Margot Fonteyn: 3 mentions

Christopher Bruce: 2 mentions

Viviana Durante, Ruthie Henshall, Omah, Gene Kelly, Frank Sinatra, Fred Astaire and Ginger

Rogers, Torvill and Dean: 1 mention each

One girl has all-male list, one has no entries.

Dancers mentioned by each respondent

10.2.86	Bussell, Bull, Brewer, Miss Davis
3.4.86	Bussell, Brewer, Miss Davis

1.7.86 Omah, Brewer, Margo Fontaine, Micheal Flattery
 10.8.86 Bussell, Brewer, Margot Fontayne
 31.10.86 Flateley, Bussell, Sleep
 4.11.86 Bussell, Bull, Brewer, Henshall
 28.11.86 Brewer
 18.12.86 Brewer, Jene Kelly, Frank Sanaratra, M.Flaterley, Fred Astair + Ginger Rodges +
 aslo J.Torville + C. Dean who did dance + Ice-Dance
 17.4.87 Flatley, Margret Fontain, Sleep, Bruce.
 26.5.87 Bussell, Bull, Brewer
 27.5.87 Bussell, Bull, Brewer, Miss Davis
 9.6.87 [blank]
 25.8.87 Bussell, Brewer
 29.2.88 Sleep, Bussell, Flatley
 21.3.88 Bucel, Sleep.
 30.1.89 Brewer, Miss Davis
 17.3.89 Bussle
 18.10.89 Viviana Durante and some others who I can't remember
 20.4.90 Bruce, Flately, Sleep.

9. Do you make up dances by yourself? / Do you show them to anyone?

10.2.86 yes/yes
 3.4.86 yes all the time
 1.7.86 yes/yes
 10.8.86 yes/yes
 31.10.86 I make up dances I used to show them to people
 4.11.86 Yes/NO
 28.11.86 Yes/ Sometimes
 18.12.86 yes/Sometimes to my mum
 17.4.87 I make up dances when I'am bored but I don't show anyone. (dancer's daughter)
 26.5.87 yes/yes
 27.5.87 yes/yes
 9.6.87 yes/NO!
 25.8.87 yes/yes
 29.2.88 Yes I make up dances/ Yes I show them to my friends
 21.3.88 Yes I do make some up/ But don't show them
 30.1.89 No [written across both]
 17.3.89 At home I have a go [written across both]
 18.10.89 Yes/Yes

20.4.90 I do it at school and people watch me.

(yes 30, no 8)

10. What do you think about when you dance?

10.2.86 Performing on stage (magical)

3.4.86 How good it would be to be a professional dancer on stage

1.7.86 different things

10.8.86 Being on stage

31.10.86 concentrating on the steps

4.11.86 ~~grace~~ peace

28.11.86 All the moves that I have to!

18.12.86 I think that I am in the theatre and the Queen is watching in the box +also my lower abdominals + tondues+ stuff like that

17.4.87 [no answer]

25.5.87 beautiful things

27.5.87 Getting it right and performing

9.6.87 fairies

25.8.87 beautiful thoughts

29.2.88 [no answer]

21.3.88 a performer

30.1.89 concentrating and trying my best

17.3.89 I concentrate on pointing my toes

18.10.89 About what I feel like when I'm dancing (a bird or a fairy perhaps) and maybe someday I could be a great dancer

20.4.90 I picture what I will be like in ten years

11. What does it feel like when you dance?

10.2.86 Relaxed, happy

3.4.86 Calming, wonderful and peaceful

1.7.86 Wonderful

10.8.86 Exciting

31.10.86 I Feel Happy

4.11.86 graceful

28.11.86 Cool, exciting, good

18.12.86 relaxing

17.4.87 I am I doing it right? [no answer given under 'thinking about' question]

25.5.87 on top of world

27.5.87 peaceful

9.6.87	happiness
25.8.87	peaceful + exciting
29.2.88	sore and aches
21.3.88	It feels nice and fun
30.1.89	It feels good
17.3.89	relaxing
18.10.89	It feels lovely
20.4.90	it makes me feel relaxed

12. Do you think you get treated differently at school and at dancing?

10.2.86	No
3.4.86	No
1.7.86	Yes: don't get any bullying
10.8.86	No
31.10.86	No
4.11.86	Yes: I am not so loud at dancing so its different
28.11.86	Yes: I have to be quiet and that's well hard
18.12.86	sort of [neither yes nor no] called by full name at dancing, abbreviation at school
17.4.87	Yes: we learn different things!
25.5.87	Yes: [no explanation]
27.5.87	No
9.6.87	No
25.8.87	Yes: I get told off less
29.2.88	No
21.3.88	no not really only that dancing is fun!
30.1.89	Yes: At school the teachers shouts at us if we get something wrong at dancing the teacher just corrects it.
17.3.89	no sr
18.10.89	I don't really know
20.4.90	Yes: I get treated better at dancing because Miss Clark can correct you personally as a teacher just corrects you in your book.

(yes 8, no 8, ambivalent 3)

13. What do you think about 'girl power'?

10.2.86	It's Great
3.4.86	It's Great
1.7.86	nothing
10.8.86	It's a good idea, although it shouldn't be taken too far

31.10.86 don't know
 4.11.86 cool
 28.1.86 Something that the Spice Girls made up
 18.12.86 Boys + Girls should be treated the same especially in dance
 17.4.87 Nothing
 25.5.87 I think we should be the same as boys
 27.5.87 It's great
 9.6.87 it's great
 25.8.87 girls should be the same as boys
 29.2.88 I think its groovy ('sad' written first - well scribbled out)
 21.3.88 It's wicked!!!
 30.1.89 Pass (interview proved this a disingenuous position)
 17.3.89 I think you should be independent'
 18.10.89 I think it's good but its gone out of fashion
 20.4.90 [no answer]

14. Do you remember any fairytales, and do you think they had any effect on you?

10.2.86 yes
 3.4.86 yes
 1.7.86 Yes. I sometimes use story/character in my made up dance
 10.8.86 Sleeping Beauty, because of the ballet
 31.10.86 Yes I do remember fairy tales but they haven't had an effect on me.
 4.11.86 NO
 28.11.86 C [?]
 18.12.86 Yes. Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty
 17.4.87 I remember fairy tales but they didn't have any effect on me.
 25.5.87 yes
 27.5.87 Yes
 9.6.87 No
 25.8.87 Yes
 21.3.88 No not much
 29.3.88 [no answer]
 30.1.89 yes
 17.3.89 I know lots of fairy tales but I just like listening to them
 18.10.89 I remember fairy tales and I once tried to talk like a princess but it didn't really
 work
 20.4.90 Beauty and The Beast because although the beast was ugly bell still fell in love with
 him

15. Is there anything else you think I should know???

- 3.4.86 I am in a lower grade now because I left when I was 7 and then rejoined
- 25.5.86 I love dancing
- 28.11.86 I don't enjoy ballet that much sometimes
- 18.12.86 I ice-skate with my brother and I love dancing
- 10.8.86 I live in Germany (if it helps).
- 25.5.87 I Love to Dance
- 18.10.89 I can't think of anything else

[Others either blank or 'no'.]

APPENDIX 4

Extracts from Key Stage 2 'League Tables' 1998

Ballet is reputed to be a middle-class activity, so the people who participate in it should be middle-class. As considered in Chapter 4, leaving to one side for the moment the uncertainty of making a stable definition of 'middle-class', there were no unproblematic ways I could access such information from the girls. Their class position, at this stage in their lives, is dependent on their family's. It was hardly appropriate to ask for information about their families' employment, income, and educational attainment, to make the sort of demographic assessment that is habitually thought to have statistical validity. It occurred to me that it was not inappropriate to ask where they went to school, since that was in the public domain, and to use published statistics from the Key Stage 2 'League Tables' to see if any correlation would emerge between the girls' political thought style, and the assumption that girls who go to ballet are middleclass, through a generalised discourse that educational attainment is congruent with social class. Only the girls' school lives could properly be thought to be their own, outside their family environment. Even then which school they attend is not their choice, and they are quite conscious of this. In the case of my principal informants, the primary school they attend is dictated by the family's religion – six of the eight are Catholic, which reflects the demography of an area with a high population of Irish ancestry. Although it would be possible (if laborious, and if someone had a mind to do it) to use this information to discover the names of the schools the girls attended, I do not think their personal anonymity is compromised by this.

The figures represent percentages of tests taken by pupils of 11 which achieve the expected 'Level 4' or above in English, Science, and Maths. 74.7% of tests taken by pupils at the school attended by most of summer school interviewees attained this level. The Catholic primary schools attended by 6 of my 8 principal informants scored 78.0% and 79.3%, and the secular primary schools by the other two, 65.0%. I include for comparison a primary school in a sparsely populated rural area attended by all children living in its area, (approx. 10 miles by 4), including by my own son: 62.0%. My own son is included within that statistic, as are Helen and Karen in the statistics for their school. The other girls were younger than the tested group represented in these statistics. The two older girls, Jane and Anna, had attended one of these schools and were now at the same Catholic secondary school. I did not have enough information to pursue this exercise with the girls from the southern school.

EXTRACTS FROM KEY STAGE 2 'LEAGUE TABLES' 1998

published in *The Guardian*, Feb 23 1999.

	1	2	3	4	5	6
School (i) Primary	53	81	62	81	2.0	74.7
School (ii) Catholic	59	80	76	78	5.0	78.0
School (iii) Catholic	47	87	79	72	4.0	79.3
School (iv) Primary	120	77	72	78	1.3	75.7
School (v) Primary	70	70	61	64	6.0	65.0
School (vi) Comparison	34	65	47	74	7.0	62.0

1 = numbers of children eligible in the school
 2 = English % of children gaining level 4 or above
 3 = Maths % gaining level 4 or above
 4 = Science % gaining level 4 or above
 5 = Average % absent or disapplied
 6 = Average % score for School

School (i) is attended by most of summer school interviewees. Schools (ii) and (iii) are the Catholic primary schools attended by all principal informants, except two secular primary schools, (iv) attended by Elizabeth and (v) by Susanne. School (vi) is included for comparison; a primary school in a sparsely populated rural area attended by all children living in its area, (approx. 10 miles by 4), including by my own son. In this area there is little choice and competition between schools, and children with 'special needs' are integrated into mainstream education, unlike in the LEAs where the dancing schools are located. Clues to the social fabric of schools may be hidden in column 5, the children absent or 'disallowed', that is, not required to be tested. In my son's school, this 7% represents two children with 'special needs'; in schools where children with 'special needs' are not present, this column could represent children somewhat outside school authority, or could of course simply represent children who are unwell on the day of the test. None of these schools can be said to demonstrate any significant social or educational difficulties, read via column 5 or in the test scores. My own son is included within the following statistics, as are Helen and Karen in the statistics for their school. The other girls were younger than the tested group represented in these statistics. The two older girls, Jane and Anna, had attended one of these schools and were now at the same Catholic secondary school. Column 6 represents the average % test score for the school.

This detail may be illuminating in comparison with the results for schools in their area. Are the girls attending 'good' schools in relation to their area, and is that area itself more or less successful than other areas in the country? Here LEA A is my son's Local Education Authority, included for comparison, LEA B is the southern dance school's LEA, and LEA C the northern dance school's LEA.

	Average National rank of LEA	
LEA A (comparison)	67.1%	39/149
LEA B (southern)	67.0%	41/149
LEA C (northern)	64.9%	61/149
Highest: City of London	90.1%	1/149
Lowest: Nottingham	46.1%	149/149
National average	63.5%	
(Statistics for 1998 from www.dfes.gov.uk)		

LEAs A, B, and C are all above average in the country; all schools attended by the dancers are above the average for their LEA. Schools in Northtown were obviously highly motivated to achieve good results, in an area with some social problems and a tradition of unemployment. Having said that, the area has the reputation of being a desirable location in relation to the nearby city, which is at 128/149 in the national LEA rankings. This city has suffered serious economic problems leading to – and in circular fashion resulting from – significant population loss, including many, able to afford it and looking for a better life, moving to the area of the study. The only school below both its LEA's and indeed below national average is my son's former school. The inclusion of my son's school is intended as some kind of triangulation – but I suggest the results imply that correlating the social and educational background of an individual child's family with the school's results, and to the place of that school within either its own LEA or nationally, is not guaranteed to produce a useful result. My son did well and both of his parents have fistfuls of higher degrees, and by any benchmark (except perhaps birth) would register emphatically as middle class. Other primary schools within the northern dancers' LEA could only achieve averages of 33.0 and 32.3, suggesting but not proving social deprivation, but still unable to offer any certain information about any individual child within that school. The Catholic schools attended by the dancers in the main dancing school of the study do better than the secular primary schools attended, while the primary school attended by most summer school respondents, in a more prosperous residential area of Northtown, does less well academically.

These statistics do not produce clear enough results to shed light on the girls' social background, to correlate with attitudes the girls may have to the political situation they find themselves in to school, or to speculate on the relationship between their class fraction and such views. All this is under consideration, it is to be remembered, to test the idea that ballet is 'middle-class', and to see whether a whole package of *Thought Styles* and political views inevitably accompany its practice. One might say

that there may be a degree of social aspiration, in the girls' being sent to ambitious schools and, indeed, going to dancing. Perhaps aspiration could be considered a unitarily middle class phenomenon, but I suggest that this is a circular argument in that social and economic attainments are viewed as defining the middle class, leaving 'working class' as defined by an absence of such ambition. Historically the field is more differentiated. *Wanting* to be middle-class appears very differently, to different class fractions, and to different political standpoints; for some, it may be aspiring to a better standard of living in economic terms, while for others, it may suggest adopting a set of values read as the dead hand of the bourgeoisie.

I suggest that trying to correlate the received view of ballet as 'middle-class' against the 'demographic variables' of those who engage in it, is equally inconclusive. In terms of Elizabeth, Cassandra and the others, my son, dance, and me (as a parent) these statistics do not define us. They are however a source of 'scientific' information, and provide food for thought, and in that respect they are referred to here.

Appendix 5

Statistics from 1999 CDET Directory of Registered Dance Teachers

	Region	total	multi	male	ballet only	Greek
Bath and NE Somerset	SW	9	8	0	1	0
Beds	E.Mids	26	21	0	5	5
Berks	SE	32	27	0	5	5
Bristol	SW	12	11	0	1	1
Bucks	SE	14	12	0	2	2
Cambs	E	15	13	1	2	1
Cheshire	NW	30	24	1	6	0
Co.Durham	NE	6	6	0	0	1
Cornwall	SW	16	15	0	1	1
Cumbria	N	6	5	1	1	1
Darlington	NE	2	2	0	0	0
Derbys	E.Mids	10	8	0	2	2
Devon	SW	10	7	0	3	0
Dorset	SW	16	12	0	4	0
E.Riding	N	1	1	0	0	0
East Sussex	S	30	24	0	6	3
Essex	Gtr.London	60	50	1	10	6
Glos	W.Mids	9	9	0	0	0
Gtr.Manchester	NW	26	25	0	1	3
Hants.	S	44	35	0	9	4
Hereford	W.Mids	2	1	0	1	0
Herts	Gtr.London	27	25	1	2	1
Kent	Gtr.London	32	26	0	6	1
Lancs.	NW	12	12	0	0	4
Leics	E.Mids	23	22	0	1	4
Lincs.	E.Mids	9	9	0	0	5
London	Gtr.London	36	22	0	14	4
Merseyside	NW	3	2	0	1	0
Middlesbrough	NE	3	3	0	0	1
N.Yorks	N	21	15	1	6	3
Norfolk	E	7	6	0	1	0
Northants	E.Mids	4	3	0	1	1
Northumberland	N	2	2	0	0	0
Notts.	E.Mids	3	2	0	1	0
Oxon.	W.Mids	5	4	0	1	0
Salop.	W.Mids	4	3	0	1	1
Somerset	SW	3	3	0	0	0
South Yorks	N	4	3	0	1	0
Staffs	W.Mids	4	3	0	1	0
Suffolk	E	1	0	0	1	0
Surrey	Gtr.London	15	10	0	5	2
Tyne&Wear	NE	1	1	0	0	0
Warwicks	W.Mids	15	11	0	4	4
West Mids	W.Mids	2	1	0	1	1
West Sussex	S	3	2	0	1	1
West Yorks	N	5	3	0	2	0
Wilts.	S	6	6	0	0	0
Channel Islands		2	1	0	1	0
Isle of Man		2	1	0	1	0
N.Ireland		7	4	0	3	0
Scotland		29	21	0	8	1
Wales		13	8	0	5	0
Totals		679	550	6	129	69

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