

## Moving beyond boundaries: writing on the body

The book is written by many bodies who danced and inscribed their worlds upon the intersections between dance and politics. The argument is a three-dimensional space bounded by three axes; in this chapter I elaborate, explore and problematise the three axes which demarcate the space of the argument. The ontology upon which the argument acts is twofold. On the one hand the argument is grounded in the dancing bodies of those subjects whose political intervention has written upon the argument. On the other hand the argument unfolds on a stage – not necessarily a theatrical stage, but rather the space allowing for the meeting of two dancing subjects in embodied conversation. This chapter outlines the framework upon which the argument of the book is grounded.

### **Contraction and release**

The first axis setting the boundaries for the choreographic outline of the argument is the tension between contraction and release. The tension between contraction and release has been problematised by Martha Graham, and her prism and interpretation will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this book. At this point, however, I outline this tension more broadly within my own choreographic-conceptual interpretation.

The argument examining political dance is placed within the motion between contraction and release and expounds on the physical significance of reflection on this conceptualisation. History is never experienced in a void; thinking about political dance entails listening to voices articulated through moving bodies that are asking us, as readers–spectators, to be heard. The argument is never metaphorical and always revisits a phenomenological moment. It is always thinking with and through

bodies who have danced and who have registered their motion upon other bodies and upon this argument. At the same time the body of the argument dances, too, between contraction into the framework set forth by this book and release into the sources with which it converses; between affirming its own textual spatiality and relating itself to the interlocutors in the philosophical, choreographic, political and phenomenological locations it inhabits.

In the argument I explore the multi-dimensional self, entrenched in multiple symbolic webs expanding out to its embodied surroundings. This metaphor – which is never merely a metaphor – is entrenched in a normative assumption. Reading against the grain of textual analysis in political theory, I work to reposition dancing bodies that have written upon the pages of history but not always been carefully attended to. I contract into history in order to release the bodies that have been dancing on its margins. I hone the ears of the readers–spectators to listen more carefully to those voices that have been articulated and heard beyond words. Every dancing subject who speaks to me shows that for political conjunctions, human beings find manifold methods of self-expression. Further, subjects who are deemed marginal in politics in and through verbal language find creative and inspiring ways to show that they are never unequal to those who marginalise them. At times the most dire and seemingly hopeless situations give rise to novel and inventive ways of mobilising the human body. Thus contraction and release posit boundaries that are always expansive; boundaries that allow the body to transgress the space to which it had been assigned.

*Contraction.* The body watches within. It explores the registers of its own physicality. The body as a physical space is never one-dimensional; when contracting, the body expands into itself, unravelling new layers of meaning and new structures of signification. Contraction is a process of exploration within the body's spatiality; it is the marking of the dancer's physicality upon itself. Through contractions the dancing body reveals moments of equilibrium within the body that can be sustained. At the same time it also explores critical tensions within different levels of signification, which in turn push it towards another contraction. Contraction is a constant shift within, towards further moments of making sense to the embodied self through movement. In the contraction the dancer defines the boundaries of their choreographed world; but those boundaries within the body as a space shift with every new motion, with every further contraction, which goes deeper.

Identity is in flux, seeking moments of balance but always with the potential to shift towards new political gravitating forces. Those may be

forces leading the body into moments of intervention, or rather, taking the body away towards quiet pause within.<sup>1</sup> This political-choreographic reading of contraction requires both motion and stillness; fall and recover; shifting and rest. Contractions allow the body to explore its own density; to investigate boundaries between inner and outer; and to investigate its relationality to other subjects, themselves undergoing the same motion. A danced contraction can never be repeated; there is a singular quality to the embodied investigation of the multifaceted body in a moment that cannot be repeated, as that body will not be the same in the next contraction. At the same time, the term 'contraction' affirms the rootedness of the body within its environment and its own embodied space. The body is first and foremost flesh, though it can appear weightless, fleshless. This process of the body making sense by unfolding into itself through acts of contraction necessarily relates to other bodies, as the body is part of a cobweb of signification. This shifts me into the second part of the first axis of the argument.

*Release.* Moments of release shift dancers from unravelling symbolic structures to themselves by shifting the single body towards other bodies in with which their bodies are in relationships. That relationality expands through instances of release. The spine unravels to the world around it; vertebra after vertebra, like a precious string of pearls, it opens up the body – as a space – to the space it inhabits. The body looks out, examining the inscriptions that are marked without, after shifting from within. When it is engaging those worlds the dancer inhabits, with a newfound physicality, marked by new systems of inscription, the dancer's body becomes a changed space by a multitude of contractions. The process of release constructs a world in the phenomenological space outside the body of the dancer. The body is always on stage, inhabiting worlds with others and moving towards them. Release is the process by which the dancer inhabits the phenomenological space around them and affirms that space as their world. However, the boundaries of this space are never stable; with every new moment of release the dancer shifts the boundaries of their bodies in space. They can expand the space their body takes in the world or reduce it; in either case the constitution of the world is a process of renegotiating boundaries in every movement.

Thus the first axis upon which the argument moves is the tension between contraction and release, an exploration of the politics of the moving body as an inscribed space and its relationality towards other bodies that it moves. The second axis, corresponding directly to the first axis and yet inhabiting a different register of my argument, is the political axis, which creates a distinction between two forms of danced

politics: the weak reading of political dance and the strong reading of political dance. I move to explore this axis next.

### **The strong and weak readings of political dance**

Throughout the book I trace moments in which dance interrupts words. To do so I cast the spotlight upon clashes between the strong reading of political dance and the weak reading of political dance.

I use the term ‘weak reading of political dance’ to refer to the use of dance to reiterate politics as articulated in words. This reading is termed ‘weak’ as it relies upon a different form of human expression to construct its logic; it cannot construct a world independently. Many of the studies which have inspired and galvanised this argument are grounded in this position. The edited collection *Dance and Politics* introduces itself as examining ‘crises such as wars and revolutions as choreographic subject matter’ (Kolb 2011: xiii) and explores diverse subject matter from Kurt Jooss’s famous anti-war statement *The Green Table* (1932) through choreographic responses to anti-state terrorism (*Ulrike Meinhof* by Johann Kresnik), dance during the Second World War, and dance and rights (focusing on works such as Victoria Marks’s *Not About Iraq* (2007)). All these analyses tackle choreographic works that have sought to elaborate and problematise issues discussed in words; very often, this is stated in the title of the piece. Kolb also states that the analyses in the book focus on twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Western stage dance (though she does leave some space for developments beyond it) (Kolb 2011: xiv). Randy Martin’s *Performance as Political Act* is exemplary in its problematisation of the body in performance. His book *Critical Moves* has been groundbreaking in its approach to politics within dance studies. I discuss my conceptual relationship to his work under the next axis but here I note that his case studies are all from the context of American dance, from the Judson Church to his own participation in dance performances, *Last Supper in Uncle Tom’s Cabin/The Promised Land* by Bill T. Jones (1990), multiculturalism and race within the United States, and a phenomenological study of a dance class. Again, whereas at times Martin (especially in the study of performance and rehearsal) allows for a reading of politics not iterated in words, the focus is even narrower than Kolb’s book; it mostly looks at dance within New York City. Mark Franko’s *Dancing Modernism/Performing Politics* as well as *Work of Labour* have been transformative for the approach I take, especially for my reading of the work of Martha Graham. At the same time, Franko focuses on dance for stage, too. As does André Lepecki, who rejuvenates the field

substantially in his *Exhausting Dance*. All these texts will be discussed in the next axis of the argument. The edited collection *Dance, Human Rights, and Social Justice* diverges from the above sources in its wider international focus, and yet it limits its conceptual focus to issues around rights and right-claims rather than politics more broadly. Nevertheless, it has substantially inspired the last chapter of this book.

Set against the understanding of dance and politics that I term the weak reading of political dance is the strong reading of political dance, an interpretation of dance as a system of signification that sees its interlocutors as equal to speaking beings who use words; consequently dance is understood to be an independent system of signification that is enunciated and received without the need to be mediated by words. Bodies exploring their inner space unravel new possibilities for action through new symbolic configurations. Agents open up new worlds in motion, unravel crossroads between words and movement written on their bodies. Thus this distinction between the weak and strong reading of political dance is an epistemological one; the commitment towards the strong reading of political dance assumes that dance is a world that exists without requiring other forms of knowledge and being. For the subjects of this book, whose interventions in history have been written upon the argument, dance is a method of communicating; for those people who dance, moving in front of other bodies that are moved gives them a particular and unique mode of being, a singular moment of being alive, independent of other worlds they may inhabit. They require no other forms of communication to convey that unique mode of being.

At the same time, all human beings inhabit many worlds; thus the clash between these two readings of dance, of worlds independent of words and worlds in which words intersect with movement, allows us a unique glimpse into political dance. Hence throughout the book I examine moments of intersections between the weak and strong readings of political dance; moments in which dance acts independently of the words used to describe it. Dancers' bodies are also the pens with which they write upon other bodies. Reading dance as a language and a way of knowing means that the body is both the instrument of writing and the surface upon which it writes. Throughout the book I argue that the strong reading of political dance is intimately intertwined with the understanding of dance as an embodied language, a method of inscription independent of words. The third axis demarcating the argument is sic-sensuous, a concept which I utilise in order to focus upon acts of writing performed by manifold bodies who have written upon the argument; the argument in turn turns the spotlight on moments of shared sensation.

**Sic-sensuous**

The term 'sic' is used to refer to an apparent error of transcription; to indicate that a quote is recorded exactly as it is in the original. At the same time, dancers around the world are educated to fear the sickled foot, the unpointed foot turned in, perceived as the least beautiful use of the feet in classical ballet. The argument starts in the moment in which Isadora Duncan says 'no' to her ballet teacher; she refuses to stand on her toes. The refusal to abide by the rules of what is beautiful for Duncan is the catalyst for the unfolding of my argument. Throughout the book sic has a triple referent. First, I read sic as a refusal to abide by the rules of the beautiful or the aesthetically acceptable. Second, the term sic is always an act of writing: one body writing upon another body, and bodies writing upon their space. Third, the term sic refers to slippage of meaning, interventions and revolutions. The concept that may seem an error to one speaking being is another speaking being's method of expression. I am aided here by Anna Tsing's argument that global connection implies that 'words mean something different across a divide even when people agree to speak' (Tsing 2005: xi). Looking at connections between bodies across borders does not entail cohesive meaning; rather the focus is on those moments when signification is being negotiated in moments of slippage. The concept sic sheds conceptual light upon the body writing upon itself and other bodies in moments of aesthetic and political dissent between equal subjects. Thinking of dance through writing demands further investigation into deeper registers of the term sic and its use throughout the book, while releasing/turning towards other dance and political theorists who have considered the relationship between dance and writing.

Two books in particular have discussed inscription within the discipline of political theory and embodiment theory. Carrie Noland's *Agency and Embodiment: Performing Gestures/Producing Culture* discusses the communicative power of gesture and reinstates embodied discourses in a performative setting. She argues that gesture is a phenomenologically independent world constructed according to its own underlying principles (Noland 2009). Noland utilises the concept of inscription to understand gesture as a world: 'gestures are types of inscription, parsing of the body into signifying or operational units: they can thereby be seen to reveal the submission of a shared human anatomy to a set of bodily practices specific to one culture' (Noland 2009: 2). This account of inscription opens up the possibility of the body as an agency, actively writing upon another body and leaving its marks, which are always intertwined in its cultural symbolic web of signification. Noland concludes her book: 'I am

suggesting that the gestural routines of inscription yield a kinaesthetic experience that is a resource in its own right, a resource of sensation capable of subverting the institutions of inscription by promising new, unmarked material to the world. ... the introspection provided by movement can be productive of new cultural meanings' (Noland 2009: 215). According to this reading, inscription allows for the creation of a symbolic world shared between bodies sharing sensation in movement when they create methods of being together. When thinking of inscription as a method of creating a shared sensation that does not correspond to institutionalised systems of power, we are presented with a new way of interpreting embodied practices – as providing alternative ways of being together through creating shared sensations. Noland's focus is on the independence of gesture and embodiment as a self-disclosing world. In that world created by inscription people interact with each other without requiring other systems of communication. It may be true that bodies interact without words; but it is also widely accepted that human communication is mainly effected through words. The challenge of my own framework is to understand inscription as enabling the creation of a world of shared sensation but also to show that it has interrupted political discourse occurring in words.

Erin Manning in *Politics of Touch* uses tango as an example throughout her analysis. Indeed, the tango becomes much more than an example; it becomes a prism through which she inquires about the possibilities of a sensed body in movement (Manning 2007). She sees tango as opening up the way for engaging a cultural phenomenon which is both nationalistic and inventive. She finds that dance allows the creation of two worlds in parallel. At the same time, she writes, 'the body cannot be reduced to language' (Manning 2007: 58). Manning understands language here as necessarily reductive and in a tension between invention and political structure (in this quotation, nationalism).

Eminent dance theorist Randy Martin has provided a beautifully articulated definition of dance:

dance is best understood as a kind of embodied practice that makes manifest how movement comes to be by momentarily concentrating and elaborating in one place forces drawn from beyond a performance setting. The constituent features of any given dance work include technical proclivities and aesthetic sensibilities that elaborate and depend on aspects of physical culture and prevailing ideologies. (Martin 1998: 5)

This conceptualisation shifts between moments of concertation of energy and its release. The body is inscribed within the space it inhabits and at

the same time the body as a space corresponds to the space it inhabits. Moreover, dance has a continuous element within it even when it is rapturous and disturbing. Dance as a world inscribes upon the bodies of its participants – audience members and spectators alike – and changes their embodied spatiality after they leave the theatre.

Martin argues that taking dance seriously aids us in going beyond the despair of an arrested present towards thinking about an enriched social life. Further, ‘if one grants that along with dance, politics cannot have a solitary form or a unitary object, if neither can be one thing or about one thing, it becomes possible to notice a proliferation of political activity throughout the social fabric and not simply confined to what are formally considered to be political institutions’ (Martin 1998: 2). Inspired by Martin, I argue that dance is a source of possibility in opening new futures and creating new disagreements within our existing political present. Dance enables its participants to unravel a new world, offering new opportunities for its participants. Those opportunities may be inhibited in other political worlds they occupy.

Martin reads technique as a site in which mastery of the body in other sites in society becomes manifest. This is a very severe and dark reading of technique. At the same time he acknowledges that technique is an essential part of dance. He writes: ‘at the most general level, technique brings together the practical accomplishment of a given activity with the means to regulate what is considered appropriate to that activity’ (Martin 1998: 20). Technique, in this reading, is a space in which the body is mastered and disciplined. Technique cannot be utilised towards possibilities of further subversion. It belongs to an arrested present, not to an unfolding future. There is no space for error and intervention; for slippage of meaning and reinterpretation by the recipient body. The discourse only works on the body inwards; the body does not write back on its own spatiality or on other bodies. However, other scholars who engage in technique move us from this severe reading of technique towards a less grim interpretation of its use in allowing repetition of performance to occur.

One such scholar, Jill Green, writes: ‘while dance educators may be attempting to “free” students through an arts education based on the techniques of modern dance pioneers such as Martha Graham and Merce Cunningham, whose techniques offer an expressive means to communicate art, they may not be aware of how power actually plays out in the dance classroom’ (Green 2002–3: 120). Green places Graham and Cunningham outside of her otherwise grim reading of technique as repressive. She reads their technique as a way to bring the inner subjectivity towards a communal, shared space. This critique enables us to

challenge the dichotomies of technique/expression and power/communication. Green's reading of Martha Graham's contribution to the world of dance simultaneously includes all of the above and is different from reading dance technique as purely disciplinary. Dance technique can be perceived, in her own words, as an expressive means to communicate art. At the same time this reading unravels another way to think about dance and inscription more broadly, utilising this interpretation without privileging Graham and Cunningham. I interpret dance as entrenched in technique, which allows it to occur beyond a single performance in a more egalitarian way and utilise the analytic structure beyond Graham's privileged bodies.

Mark Franko's work on the politics of the choreography of Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham is of great importance to my reading of these choreographers' work. In his analysis of neo-classical choreographer William Forsythe, Franko discusses the 'reflexivity built into dance that is more complex than the phenomenon of inscription that usually dominates discussions of power and agency with respect to the body in his work' (Franko 2011: 105). He suggests another way to understand embodiment in dance, drawing on Foucault, when he reads embodiment as 'the performance of a discursive practice with and through the body rather than as the effect of that discourse's inscription on the same body or on two bodies as equals' (Franko 2011: 103). Franko's reading of discourse enables a re-evaluation of the concept of inscription, one that accounts for a body's ability to write on other bodies, thereby creating an inscribed dialogue through the equality of those two bodies. The use of both 'with and through' here suggests a multitude of ways to engage one's body within the practice of dance. I push this reading further by turning to Susan Leigh Foster's argument regarding the body as writing and written upon. She argues that this reading of complexity within embodiment enables agency or resistance in forms of cultural production (Foster 1995). The idea of dance as a discursive practice opens the possibility of another reading of inscription, as one body acting upon another equal body, rather than a reading of the body as a docile materiality written upon by networks by which it has been disciplined. This reading of egalitarian inscription allows for a reading of a dancing body creating a world sustained beyond one singular performance and intervening in configurations of power rather than being controlled by them. The body as a space can intervene in the phenomenological space it occupies and not just inhabit it.

André Lepecki, whose book *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement* develops a unique approach, writes, 'body and

language fuse one into the other to display modes of subjectivization' (Lepecki 2006: 55). Language and embodiment are no longer orthogonal to each other, and the dialogue between them produces a concept of embodied language. Lepecki invokes here Foucault's famous 'the body is the inscribed surface of events' (Lepecki 2006: 55). Thus Lepecki brings the conception of dance as an embodied language together with the concept of inscription. This approach is elaborated further in a close reading of contemporary French choreographer Jerome Bel: 'the body, in its most visceral activation, is not only a surface of inscription, as Foucault noted, but an instrument of writing, an inassimilable agent that constantly writes history back' (Lepecki 2006: 57). Inscription is understood as a multi-dimensional body responding to another multi-dimensional body grounded in these bodies' equality. Most profoundly, this lesson is learned from the work of a choreographer rather than any textual interpretation. It is Bel's work that teaches Lepecki the power of inscription; it is Bel's body inscribing upon Lepecki that in turn inscribes upon his book. The body is a pen that can write on another body serving as paper. But they are always first and foremost equal spaces.

When Lepecki discusses technique he writes:

for it's precisely dance's self-depiction as a lamentably ephemeral art form, the melancholic drive at its core, that generates systems and performances of high reproducibility: strict techniques named after dead masters applied to carefully selected bodies, continuous modelling of bodies through endless repetition of exercises, dieting, surgeries, the perpetuation of systems of racial exclusion for the sake of 'proper' visibility, an endemic eruption of archival fevers, the international and transcultural spreading of national ballets performing nineteenth century steps for the sake of dancing their status as modern nations. (Lepecki 2006: 126)

Here we see Lepecki departing from his three-dimensional notion of inscription and revisiting the idea of dead masters controlling docile bodies. At the same time, shifting an ethical position yields a different conceptual interpretation of inscription. If we consider technique in a more egalitarian way, as Lepecki suggested earlier, and regard inscription as one body writing on another in the act of dance, understanding all bodies as equal tools for writing, we gain new insights into the interpretation of inscription discussed throughout the book.

Dance intervenes in other systems of signification and affirms the equality of its interlocutors. Thus it creates a *sic-sensuous* between communication through the body and communication in words; a world in which the former is received as equal to verbal language and a world in

which it is not. I see all dancing bodies as equal; Martha Graham equal to the dancer in a flash mob. This interpretation is intimately related to the tension between contraction and release. The body is part of a cobweb of signification. Dancers shift from unravelling symbolic structures to themselves, to revealing those networks of signification to other bodies in which they occupy relational spaces, never alone. That relationality expands through instances of release. The process of release constructs a world in the phenomenological space outside the body of the dancer. It is the process by which the dancer inhabits the phenomenological space around them and affirms that space as their world. However, the boundaries of this space are never stable; with every new moment of release the dancer shifts the boundaries of their bodies in space towards the physical world and their fellow dancers and spectators. They can expand the space their body takes in the world or reduce it; in either case the constitution of the world is a process of renegotiating boundaries in every movement. This leads me from the concept of *sic*, writing on the body by the body, to the concept of *sensuous*.

The body in my reading of dance is both sensual and sensed; it creates meaning for itself as well as for others. My reading of Carrie Noland's *Agency and Embodiment* gives the theoretical framework an important register. Noland analyses gesture, which she sees as affording an opportunity for kinaesthetic introspective experience as well as influencing cultural practice (Noland 2009). She discusses gestures as creating kinaesthetic experiences while being performed. For Noland, gestures enable a moment of kinaesthetic embodied reflection in movement. At the same time, revisiting Manning's work on tango yields a relational aspect to this part of the argument: focusing on touch, Manning argues that it is both the creation of a world but also always relational: 'I reach out to touch you in order to invent a relation that will, in turn, invent me' (Noland 2009: xv). This interpretation considers an embodied experience which is self-reflexive and simultaneously relational, influencing other bodies with which the body interacts. The relationship between reflexivity and relationality as an essential part of the body in movement shifts the argument towards the concept of kinaesthetic empathy, which has been central in dance studies throughout the twentieth century.

Influential dance critic John Martin, whose comments on the work of Martha Graham will be discussed in Chapter 3 of this book, writes:

when we see a human body moving, we see movement which is potentially produced by any human body, and therefore by our own ... through kinaesthetic sympathy we actually reproduce it vicariously in our present muscular

experience and awaken such associational connotations as might have been ours if the original movement had been of our own making. (Foster 2011: 117)

This conception of two bodies mirroring each other's movement has stirred much discussion in dance studies. Dee Reynolds and Matthew Reason understand kinaesthetic empathy in its strongest form to include imagining the substitution of one agent for another; 'for a fleeting moment, perhaps, I simulate your action, and in so doing I imagine I occupy your place' (Reynolds and Reason 2012: 125). Embodied empathy is understood here as a moment in which the boundary between two bodies becomes transcendent: one subject is able to physically imagine itself as another. One body is able to displace the boundaries of its own sensed body. They note that 'the dance spectator can be invested as both subject and object in a shared materiality and flow of choreographed movement across dancers' bodies ... and that certain techniques and choreographic approaches are particularly conducive to this experience' (Reynolds and Reason 2012: 129). The emphasis here is on sharing and the transitivity of sensation from one moving body to another rather than mirroring motion as discussed by Martin. Further, Reynolds notes that there are some choreographic techniques that are able to induce this experience more than others.

Susan Leigh Foster criticises John Martin's interpretation of kinaesthetic empathy, especially from a political-normative perspective that exposes its biases. Martin saw African-American artist Peal Primus as 'true to herself both individually and as an individual artist' (Foster 2011: 161). At the same time, Martha Graham was perceived by him to be able to absorb rhythms of Native Americans. Leigh Foster argues that the white, and for Martin racially unmarked, body of Graham could feel free to absorb and draw from the rhythms specific to racially marked people, whereas the black body struggled under dual responsibilities to art and race. Leigh Foster goes on to conclude that Martin's theory reiterated the exclusions and double standards that placed the white body as unmarked, and repositioned the white, middle-class body as the universal body that could feel into and for all of the other bodies with which it was in relationships. Leigh Foster then offers her own interpretation of the concept of kinaesthetic empathy. She argues that empathetic connections demonstrate the many ways in which the kinaesthetic body in its particularity appeals to viewers who apprehend the dance. Consequently this interpretation of kinaesthetic empathy illuminates what is at the heart of shared embodied experience. At the same time she writes that 'by inviting viewers into a specific experience of what the body is, they also enable us

to contemplate how the body is grounded, its function in remembering, its affinity with cultural values, its participation in the construction of gender and sexuality, and the ways in which it is assimilating technologies so as to change the very definition of the human' (Foster 2011: 218). Leigh Foster's reading exposes both the particularity of the bodies which are creating a discursive act and the shared essence that allows that discursive act to take place. This reading, then, through its conception of kinaesthetic empathy, brings into conceptual focus both difference and similarity, and allows for a more egalitarian conception of kinaesthetic empathy, as distinct from one universal, privileged body which creates the conditions for sharing. This reading also notes the various categories that deem some bodies to be unequal and the way these inequalities may be reproduced under the guise of universality. It asks us to be attentive to the body's situatedness within the cultural-symbolic framework and at the same time draws upon a shared conception of embodiment that allows those differences to appear.

In her seminal work *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt writes:

If men were not equal, they could neither understand each other and those who came before them nor plan for the future and foresee the needs of those who will come after them. If men were not distinct, each human being distinguished from any other who is, or ever will be, they would need neither speech nor action to make themselves understood. (Arendt 1998: 176)

I draw on Arendt's formulation to move my own reading of shared embodied space a step further within the concept of sic-sensuous. Using Arendt's formulation regarding language, I read dance as an embodied language. I see moments of empathy in dance performance enabling the transgression of boundaries between the self and other; I see these moments of shared sensation as enabling the experience of both that which is shared communally and that which constructs each body in its unique symbolic space. Thus those moments of shared sensation through the sensuous body illuminate the dissimilarities between human bodies sharing those spaces; but this process is enabled because of the underlying equality between all bodies. In this conception the shared sensuous is a space in which bodies experience a contradiction between their equality and their difference; between their presentation as equal and conditions of life outside of theatre that render them as unequal. This conception of shared sensation, in turn, allows us also to understand better those conditions that render the white, middle-class, heteronormative body as universal; at the same time it seeks moments in which other bodies have responded to that claim and showed their difference.

In that moment, I argue that they have showed that they are equal after all. Thus the emphasis is always on the sensuous body that is able to share sensation with another sensuous body. At the same time this moment of sharing, just like the linguistic conjuncture problematised by Arendt, illuminates the uniqueness and particularity of both those bodies, each engraved by different symbolic inscriptions, inscribed by different worlds that sometimes do not intersect in verbal language. This moves me to contract further, into the conceptual framework with which I work throughout the book.

### **Conceptual framework**

1. The plurality and difference between human beings manifests itself in the fact that different people find different methods for self-expression. Not all political issues are manifested or articulated through verbal language: seeking objects of study outside of verbal language enhances our understanding of what can be termed political and thus gives a clearer picture of the pluralism underlying human life. There are more languages than just verbal language; human beings have found manifold ways to communicate with each other.
2. Dance is an embodied language, a form of communication between bodies in motion. As such, it adheres to different rules and structures than those of verbal language. Understanding dance as a method of communication brings into the political conversations between those subjects who, through an embodied method of self-expression, were not listened to when politics is understood solely through verbal language. Dance is the way those subjects perform their equality to those expressing themselves through verbal language.
3. There are some instances in which some human beings are marginalised by depriving them of access to spoken language. Some people have been – and indeed still are – deemed unequal by placing them outside of a verbally constructed public sphere.
4. There are clashes between verbal and non-verbal languages. In the meeting point between dance and verbal languages we see the collision between the different symbolic and political frameworks underscoring those two forms of languages. At the same time those clashes outline the different positions subjects may occupy in those different worlds; they may be deemed equal in one world and marginal in another.

5. Hence, the conceptual focus in the book is on clashes between what I term the weak reading of political dance – the use of dance to rearticulate the meaning of ideas discussed in verbal language – and the strong reading of political dance – dance expressing the meaning of political ideas independently of verbal language.
6. The strong reading of political dance, or the constitution of dance as a world that does not require language, provides a moment of shared embodied space between the dancer and the spectator. That is a moment in which two bodies, one on stage and one in the audience, share an embodied space. This moment does not mean the dancer and spectator share the same sensation but rather the shared sensation illuminates the fact that the body of the dancer is equal to that of the spectator; hence it is able to generate sensation in that moved body.
7. That shared moment is a meeting point between equality and plurality; it is the equality of bodies that allows them to speak with each other, unmediated by words; and at the same time it is the plurality of human beings that pushes them to express themselves through their bodies. The argument steers away from the affirmation of sameness or universality in those moments of shared sensation. Thus the strong reading of political dance allows for the possibility of the performance of a clash between equality and difference.
8. Dance as a world allows itself to be repeated beyond a singular performance through inscription. In the moment of performance the embodied act inscribes upon the body of the speaker as well as upon the body of the recipient. This conception of inscription is understood through an egalitarian prism. Inscription in dance is utilised by celebrated choreographers and untrained dancers alike. This interpretation of inscription includes both the intentional messages conveyed by dancers and choreographers and slippages of meaning occurring through misinterpretations and aesthetic ruptures.
9. Dance inscribes upon the body. Because the body can be altered by new methods of inscription it allows the subject to know about their communities and possibilities. In its ability to open up new worlds of meaning the body can open up new possibilities of being in the world, new spaces in which the subject can partake.
10. A dancing body is never alone; it is always conversing with an Other. The tension between contraction and release is the tension between the world of the dancer within her own body and her relationships with other dancing bodies.

11. The first axis upon which the argument is constructed is the tension between contraction and release.
12. The second axis upon which the argument is constructed is the tension between the strong reading of political dance – moments in which dance communicates through bodies messages that were not articulated in words uttered about that dance – and their clashes with dance reinterpreted in words.
13. The third axis upon which the argument is constructed is the axis of sic-sensuous – the process of inscription by which one sensed body writes upon another. That movement that is considered not-beautiful may be the method by which its creators unfold a world in which they perform their equality to those who see them as marginal. The sickled foot may be the way a dancer performs their subjectivity and articulates their equality to those dead masters who have told her ‘it is not beautiful’.
14. In its constant motion between contraction and release, in moments of sic-sensuous and clashes between the strong and weak readings, dance enables performers and spectators to transcend their embodied boundaries qua subjects. Thus the definition of a dancing subject is never a stable one. The body is a space in and of itself that in the process of inscribing upon itself in dance realises its open-endedness. The subject never arrives at a stable destination; it keeps contesting its own embodied boundaries. This shifting position stands in sharp contrast to the fact that the subject may be forcefully grounded in small demarcated spaces in other symbolic systems. Thus there is possibility for interruption and rupture in a world that is always in becoming. This becomes particularly significant when subjects inhabiting that world are constituted as stable – and marginal – within other worlds they inhabit.
15. Dancing subjects can transcend the boundaries of their communities.
- 15a. Dancing subjects can live in more than one world – they can be subjects in both the world constituted by dance as a method of communication and the world constituted by words as a method of expression.
- 15b. As their bodies are never stable and their bodies are spaces that can become changed by various methods of inscription, dancing bodies can occupy a space larger than the one assigned to them in politics which is carried out in words.
16. As a practice that goes beyond boundaries, dance can challenge boundaries that demarcate communities through verbal language. The space created by dance may transcend spaces created by words.

Within the moment in which dancers belong to a community larger than the one they were assigned to and prove that they are equal despite not being interpreted as such, dance has the potential to transcend boundaries of communities demarcated in and through verbal language.

17. Constructing the argument between these three axes (weak-strong political dance; sic-sensuous relationality of bodies; and contraction – challenging the boundaries of bodies inwards – and release – challenging the boundaries of bodies outward) gives it a three-dimensional space. The argument is never without a space; it unfolds first and foremost in the dancing body; then on the stage, either literally or metaphorically, upon which that dancing body performs in front of another body. The first body from which the argument unfolds is that of modern dance pioneer, Isadora Duncan. I allow her to take her position centre stage first.

## Note

- 1 Here I am inspired by T. S. Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which will be revisited in my analysis of Martha Graham:

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor fleshless;  
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance is,