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Hybrid Sites and Fluid Bodies

Video dance and hybridity

Video dance is a creative exploration of the relationship between dance and television. It is a fusion or amalgamation of two distinct sites in which the codes and conventions of each medium are inextricably linked. Yet this duality often fails to be taken into account. It is suggested in Chapter 1 that a particular body of critical writing has either dismissed or overlooked the televisual aspect of video dance and thus completely disregards an intrinsic component. Meanwhile, it is noted in Chapter 2 that, with certain genres of screen dance, the interception of the film and televisual apparatus is underplayed or kept to a minimum, or that creative innovation has given way to commercial appeal. Thus, in recognition of the merging of dance and televisual practices in video dance, the concept of ‘hybridity’ is a useful characterization. The proposition that video dance constitutes a hybrid site both acknowledges and reiterates the innovative interrelationship between dance and television.

It is significant, however, that the fusion of dance and televisual practices in video dance is far from straightforward. The findings of Chapters 3 and 4 highlight a dialectic contest between the codes and conventions of each medium through which a creative tension occurs and, consequently, boundaries are challenged and displaced. Televisual devices act on dance in such a way that bodies are constructed that transcend the capabilities of the live dancing body and that can only exist within the television context: in turn, formal strategies from the postmodern stage dance tradition, out of which video dance has emerged, act upon the television medium to resist and subvert established realist practices and to create striking aesthetic images not
normally associated with conventional television texts. This hybridization clearly has an impact on choreographic practices, spectatorship positions, the role of the performer and the television medium as a context for dance. Thus video dance is marked by a disruption of symbolic boundaries.

It appears that the blurring and displacement of boundaries in video dance is not solely in relation to dance and televisual practices. It could be argued that video dance slips into other aesthetic sites and theoretical frameworks. Therefore the focus of Chapter 5 is to consider two areas that are particularly pertinent to the interdisciplinary character of video dance. The first is the consumer imagery of television advertising and music video and its network of promotion, and the second is in relation to discourses of technology. The way in which the video dance body traverses these different material sites and theoretical disciplines suggests a certain fluidity. Hence the concept of a ‘fluid body’ is a significant theme for Chapter 5.

Video dance, television advertising and music video

A number of dance critics have drawn comparisons between video dance and both the commercial advertisements that are screened on television and the promotional videos that accompany many popular music singles (Bayston, 1992; Maletic, 1987–88; Bozzini, 1991; Meisner, 1993; Jordan, 1992). Yet there has been no sustained or in-depth analysis that rigorously seeks to address this comparison and any examination that does take place is somewhat superficially dealt with in the space of a few lines. For instance, Meisner (1991) refers to the ‘upbeat, contemporary presentation’ of video dance, which ‘should surely appeal to our trendy youth, fed on pop videos’ (p. 17) and Bayston (1987) notes, in his analysis of the Dancelines project, that ‘many of the technical tricks are used in commercials and pop promotional videos’ (p. 707). Similarly, Rosiny (1994) states that video dance ‘paralleled the MTV boom from the middle to the end of the eighties’ with ‘the video-specific possibilities of electronic image modification, fast cutting and effects’ (p. 82).

It is perhaps not surprising that there are apparent similarities among the three forms, in that video dance and music video largely evolved during the 1980s, and television advertising, although it has a considerably longer history, underwent several major changes in the late 1980s during which it became less ‘routine’ and far more ambiguous (Goldman, 1992). All three are characterized by eye-catching visual