

# 'The Moment When it All Comes Together'

## Embodied Experiences in Ballet

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**ABSTRACT** This article is both an elaborated critique on the one-sided analysis of the misogynist nature of ballet as a cultural practice, and a contribution to a more embodied feminist theory. Based on empirical material, that was brought together by observing the body practices in ballet and listening to the life stories of dancers, the author explores the contradictions that the body in ballet provokes. In describing the embodied experiences of professional ballet dancers she shows that ballet offers women the possibility to transcend the discontinuity of body, mind and emotions.

**KEY WORDS** aesthetics ♦ ballet ♦ cultural practice ♦ embodiment ♦ female agency ♦ objectification of the body ♦ physicality

When it comes to gender relations, ballet is a fascinating subject. In the 1980s and early 1990s, most feminist scholars considered ballet an oppressive environment for women (Adair, 1992; Hanna, 1988; Klein, 1992). In her feminist introduction to dance history – the first of its kind – dance scholar Christy Adair criticized ballet as a social practice, stating that:

Ballet upholds the dominant ideology, for example by continuing to select dancers on the basis of a classical ideal of beauty, by reinforcing traditional sex roles and by the hierarchical structures of both the training institutions and the ballet companies. (Adair, 1992: 88–9)

Elaborating on this critique, dance scholar Cynthia Novack wrote:

Stereotypes of gender which perpetuate representations of women as fragile creatures supported by powerful men are connected to a training system which is extremely technical and rigorous, and is offered to large numbers of children, mostly girls. (Novack, 1993: 39)

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A few years earlier, dance scholar Ann Daly had initiated the feminist analysis of ballet as a representational practice. Analysing the work of the Russian-American choreographer George Balanchine, who is generally considered to be the greatest ballet maker of the 20th century and a worthy heir to the tradition of the 19th-century Romantic ballet, Daly called ballet 'one of our culture's most powerful models of patriarchal ceremony' (Daly, 1987: 16). Feminists criticized the representational practices in ballet, because 'women do not represent themselves in ballet' (Adair, 1992: 116), and because as an art form ballet is 'rooted in an ideology which denies women their own agency' (Daly, 1987: 17).

Since the late 1990s, some dance scholars have started to present another view on ballet. In relation to my own interest in gender and body practices, the most noticeable work is that of Susan Foster and Sally Banes, who, each in a different way, reject the victimization of women in ballet and offer an analysis that is more complex and sometimes contradictory to the work of earlier feminists (Banes, 1998; Foster, 1996, 1997). But, although the work of Foster and Banes has been an important contribution to the field, it suffers from the same limitation that is present in the earlier feminist scholarship on ballet: too much emphasis on the representations of women in ballet and a lack of attention to the actual material bodies of dancers and their physical sensations and experiences.

Feminist dance scholars are not alone in their neglect of the concrete, material body. In her excellent introduction to *Embodied Practices* (1997), a book on feminist perspectives on the body within social theory and cultural studies, Kathy Davis is both appreciative and critical of the feminist contribution to theories on the body. Davis acknowledges the importance of the feminist corrective to the masculinist character of mainstream body theory, but criticizes the lack of attention to concrete embodied experiences. According to Davis 'recent feminist theory on the body has displayed a marked ambivalence towards the material body and a tendency to privilege the body as metaphor' (Davis, 1997: 15). Instead, Davis proposes to look at bodies not only as symbols or texts, but to include also 'the particularities of embodied experiences and practices' (Davis, 1997: 15). In a similar vein, Susan Foster argues for a 'more meat-and-bones approach to the body' in dance studies, that pays attention to the instructional practices and the daily routines that create a dancer's body (Foster, 1997: 235–6).

It is this hiatus in feminist analyses of ballet that I would like to address in this article. Dance can be considered the most physical of the performing arts. Professional dancers work *with* and *on* their bodies constantly during the years of their training and career. This makes the dance world a rich field for scholars interested in the body, both as a representational and as a material practice. In my study, the main object of research was the construction and representation of gender in social relations and body

practices both on stage and behind the scenes. If I were to visualize the difference between a dance scholar and myself, I would say that the dance scholar sits in the theatre, watching the performance, while an anthropologist like me sits backstage, in the dressing rooms, listening to the dancers and collecting their stories. To do my research I used several different methods. The most important were an analysis of ballet performances, the observation of different body practices, like training methods and daily class, and the collection and analysis of the life stories of female ballet dancers. By studying body practices in ballet in relation to representations of gender, I specifically aimed to 'tackle the relationship between the symbolic and the material, between representations of the body and embodiment as experience or social practice in concrete social, cultural and historical contexts' (Davis, 1997: 15).

In this article I attempt to address two issues. Using the material from my observations of the body practices in ballet and from the stories of the dancers, I elaborate the critique on the one-sided analysis of the misogynist nature of ballet as a cultural practice and I attribute it to a more embodied theory. My starting point is the embodied practices and experiences of professional ballet dancers. Following Davis, my aim is not theoretical closure, but a further exploration of the contradictions that the body provokes.

## A BODY-OF-IDEAS

It is 9:30 in the morning. The main studio of the Amsterdam Muziektheater is filled with dancers who are preparing for their daily class. Some dancers are sitting or lying on the ground, doing stretching exercises, others are chatting or checking their appearance in the mirrors that surround them. Old sweaters are taken off or put on, loose hairs are pinned back and ribbons of *pointe* shoes are tied and tucked in. When the ballet master enters the studio, all dancers find a place at the *barre*, the pianist starts to play and class begins.

The first exercise is always a *plié*. Feet are positioned with the toes turned out in a 180° angle; one hand is placed on the barre. Very slowly the knees start to bend. The upper body is straight and the abdominal muscles are tightened. While the body goes down, the back stays completely straight and the buttocks are pulled under to prevent them from sticking out. The knees are bending, bending, bending, while the shoulders stay straight above them. The knees have to be turned completely outward while they are bending, following the direction of the feet. While the body goes down, the body weight is divided equally between both legs. The heels of the feet stay on the ground, stretching the Achilles' tendons as far as possible. The exercise consists of a whole series

of pliés, starting in the first position, when the feet are close together, going on to the second position, with the feet placed slightly apart, and from there to the fourth and the fifth position. After finishing one series, the dancer turns, puts the other hand on the barre, and starts again. During the bending of the legs, the free arm makes elegant opening and closing movements. The position of the head also varies. Every position of the feet calls for a prescribed position of the arms and head.

After the pliés come the *battements tendus*. Dancers place themselves in the fifth position, with both legs and feet completely turned out and one hand on the barre. Then one leg starts to move forward. While all the body weight is now on the leg that remains standing, the dancer has to find a new equilibrium. In the leg that moves forward, all the muscles are tightening. Both legs are turned outward from the hips, making it feel as if the inside of the upper leg is being drawn forward. The knee is stretched and all the muscles in the ankle and foot are tightened to stretch the foot and toes elegantly. Then the leg moves down and is placed carefully back in the fifth position. The whole movement is repeated, first sideways and then to the back. While the leg moves, the arm copies its movement and the head is placed in the prescribed position. Again the upper body is kept upward and still. The back is straight and all the muscles in the abdomen and buttocks are tightened. The legs are working, but the rest of the body is kept still. The movements in the lower parts may not be seen in the upper part.

Next come the *glissés*, where the same movement is made, but now the foot leaves the ground and goes up towards a specific point in the air. After the *glissés* come the *fondus*. Here the bending and stretching movements of the pliés and *battements* come together. The dancers place themselves in the second position; feet turned out in a 180° angle and slightly apart. The standing leg bends, while the other leg is pulled inward and the foot is placed in front of the standing leg, touching the ankle. The standing leg is stretched, while the other leg moves forward in a controlled movement, stretching the knee and the foot completely until the toes touches the ground. The whole movement is repeated, but this time the leg does not move forward but sideways. In the next repetition the leg goes to the back. Then the dancers turn around, put their other hand on the barre, and repeat the whole series with the other leg. *Fondus* are slow, highly controlled movements, that make dancers conscious of the differences between bending and stretching. Both legs are bending and stretching intermittently, and in these movements many different muscles are tightened and released. Because of the differences in the movements the body learns which muscles are necessary to make a complete stretch. *Fondus* are also instructive for the coordination skills of the body, because both legs are moving at the same time.

These exercises are only the first of a whole series that together take

one-and-a-half hours to complete. At 11 o'clock the class finishes. The pianist leaves the studio, while the dancers pick up their bags and walk to the corridor to check their schedules. Rehearsals begin right after class, and dancers need to know where they are supposed to be for the next few hours. It is just another working day for them; a day that has started with the usual morning class, one of the hundreds, maybe thousands of morning classes that a dancer has to do during her professional life.

Academic dance, or ballet as it is usually called, is based on a meticulously described technique that puts specific demands on dancers. To be a professional ballet dancer, one has to master the technique. Dance talent, musicality and the motivation to dance are not enough. Without a good turnout, fast and precise footwork and a beautiful clear line, a career in ballet will be nothing but a dream. Without the necessary technique, there is no ballet. But ballet is not just a technique. With the technique, dancers are given a whole body of ideas and opinions about aesthetics, which they will, literally, embody. Or as Susan Foster puts it: 'The daily practical participation of a body in [ballet] makes of it a body-of-ideas' (Foster, 1997: 236). Dancers have bodies with particular skills, but they are also the embodiment of particular aesthetic ideas and ideals.

Openness, verticality and stylization are the basic aesthetic principles of ballet. The beauty of ballet is created by the straight lines of the extended human body going outward and upward and by the artificiality of the movements. Ballet dancers produce a spectacle in which upward-aspiring straight lines and an illusion of weightlessness are central elements. But human bodies do not consist of straight lines and they are inevitably subjected to the law of gravity. This means that there is always a huge gap between the body-of-ideas of ballet and the material body of a dancer. Every individual dancer has to work hard to bridge this gap. This is precisely what happens in the daily class. This is where dancers work at diminishing the distance between the material body of the dancer that does not fit the ideal and the dancer's body that can create the aesthetic of lines and lightness. Years of training are needed to create a dancer's body. The endless repetition of the same exercises moulds the body into the requested form. Foster states:

Both the exercises themselves and any directives offered by the teachers are usually highly repetitive. Drilling is necessary because the aim is nothing less than *creating the body*. With repetition, the images used to describe the body and its actions *become* the body. (Foster, 1997: 239; emphasis in the original)

From the ways in which the dancer's body is created, ambivalence towards the body becomes apparent. On the one hand the body is seen as concrete and material, on the other hand it is considered to be an ideal that can be strived for. This ambivalence is strengthened by the experiences

that dancers themselves have with their bodies. They know that their feet are not naturally turned out in a 180° angle, but they also know that if they put their minds to it they can make them stand in this position. This is true for most of the other demands that the body-of-ideas puts to their material bodies. The aesthetic ideals of lines and lightness are within reach of human bodies, as long as one is willing to dedicate the time and energy that is necessary to create a dancer's body. The clear, long lines, the careful balance and the apparent ease at lifting legs, feet and even whole bodies high into the air are the result of a long and intensive training. Girls who aspire to a ballet career usually start their professional training before they are 10 years old. As professionals they will be doing their daily class, six days a week, for as long as their careers last. The difficulty of the technique and the need to mould the body in a particular form make the daily training process necessary.

To the untrained eye the technical and aesthetic demands in ballet seem to be gender neutral. During the major part of the daily class male and female dancers do the same exercises. The bodies of both male and female dancers have to be well proportioned and slim, with supple joints, straight legs and a good turnout. But at a closer look it becomes apparent that there are differences. Although both men and women are expected to show lines and lightness, the lines of the female dancer have to be longer and her weightlessness has to be more convincing. The result is a greater pressure on female dancers to force their material bodies into the requested form. The strictly defined aesthetic ideals for female dancers have been the subject of serious scrutinizing and critique (Daly, 1987/8; Gordon, 1983; Sayers, 1993; Vincent, 1979, 1998).

During their education and professional training dancers develop an instrumental attitude towards their bodies. The American journalist Joseph Mazo, who spent a season with the New York City Ballet and wrote an insightful book about his experiences, describes the dancers' relationship with their body as follows:

Dancers know their bodies in the sense that they know what their muscles can do; they feel the pulls and stretches, they are aware of pains and warning signs; they sense balance and the actions of movement, but they know their bodies as outside observers, not as integrated beings. Most humans have the misfortune to think of themselves as compartmentalized trinities – mind, body and emotions. Few people can think, feel and act spontaneously and all at once function as a complete organism. Their training makes dancers even more divided than most of us. Dancers are body-aware, but the majority subconsciously see their bodies as tools. They live in their bodies, not with them. (Mazo, 1974: 106)

Working with their bodies day in and day out for so many years makes dancers aware of all its imperfections and weak points. All the same, many

dancers have a rather limited body consciousness. For a dancer, the body is a tool, an object that exists in part separately from herself. She watches her body in the mirror all day long, and works to perfect it. The leg that has to go higher, the foot that has to stretch more, the stomach that has to be pulled in and the back that has to be straightened. Such an instrumental, objectifying attitude towards the body fits perfectly within the dominant view of the body in western culture (Bordo, 1993; Shilling, 1993).

Feminist scholars have pointed out how the objectification of the body is a daily reality for most women in western culture. According to philosopher Iris Marion Young

... the woman lives her body as object as well as subject. The source of this is that patriarchal society defines woman as object, as a mere body, and that in sexist society women are in fact frequently regarded by others as objects and mere bodies. An essential part of being a woman is that of living the ever present possibility that one will be gazed upon as a mere body, as shape and flesh that presents itself as the potential object of another subject's intentions and manifestations, rather than as living manifestation of action and intention. (Young, 1989: 66)

Because women live their own bodies as both subject and object, they often experience their bodies as something outside themselves. In describing this experience, Young speaks of the 'discontinuous unity' of feminine bodily existence (Young, 1989: 60). It is easy to see how their dance training will exacerbate the experience of discontinuous unity for female dancers.

## EMBODYING FEMININITY

In the beginning of this article I pointed out that feminist scholars have been highly critical of the representations of women in ballet. In reaction to the unanimous depiction of ballet as degrading, Susan Foster presented, rather provokingly, a view of the ballerina as 'a phallic pointe' (Foster, 1996: 23). Although Foster sets out by agreeing with the view of the ballerina as a stereotypical representation of femininity, with its emphasis on virginity and dependency, she then states that:

... there is also a promise in the naughtiness of the ballerina-phallus, the promise that all monsters afford, to forge from the cataclysmic energy of their aberrant parts a new identity that meets the political and aesthetic exigencies of the moment. The ballerina is, after all, gulp, magnetically magical. An object of revulsion while under feminist scrutiny, she nonetheless enchants us. Perhaps, via the ballerina-as-phallus, her power can reconfigure so as to sustain her charisma even as she begins to determine her own fate. (Foster, 1996: 3)

Obviously, Foster exchanges here the woman-as-victim for the power girl. But ironically, this ballerina-phallus needs to go to her colleagues in the modern dance world and learn from them to fulfil her potential (Foster, 1996: 14).

In a similar attempt to break away from the victimization of women in ballet, Sally Banes proposes an interpretative approach that leaves room for ambiguities and paradoxes. According to Banes,

... if one starts neither with an assumption that all women are victims nor with the idea that they are all heroines, and neither with the idea that images of women are all negative nor that they are all positive, but rather, looks closely at the evidence of the works themselves, one actually finds a much more complex range of representations than has previously been presented. (Banes, 1998: 2–3)

Banes's point is convincingly illustrated by her analysis of the well-known 19th-century classic, *The Sleeping Beauty*. In this ballet, based on the famous fairytale by Perrault, the main role is for Princess Aurora, who is destined to sleep for a hundred years before she is wakened by the kiss of a prince. Banes shows how the ballet has Aurora representing many different femininities by way of her movement vocabulary: aristocratic womanhood, gracefulness, modesty, but also strength, independence and control (Banes, 1998: 42–59).

Foster, Banes and others (Garafola, 1997) have opened up the feminist interpretations of ballet, but they have limited their analyses to imagery and representational practices. In my research I was specifically interested in the bodily aspects of the art form. My objects of study were the instructional practices that were part of the professional education and training. I studied health-related issues, like the dancers' attitude towards pain and injuries. And I asked dancers about their physical sensations and experiences.

At first, what I saw and heard behind the scenes was a confirmation of the feminist analyses that pictured the ballet as a world where stereotypical images of women abound. The masculinity and femininity that is enacted through the bodies of male and female dancers can be seen as a reiteration and reproduction of cultural norms that assign strength and independence to men and weightlessness and passivity to women. Although male and female dancers are both subjected to aesthetic and technical demands, the beauty norms are much stricter and more imperative for the female dancers. Body ideals are more repressive for women and are often the cause of serious health problems, like eating disorders (Aalten, 2002).

But just as in the representational practices, there are ambiguities and paradoxes. In my interviews with female dancers I heard horrifying stories about the long hours of rigorous training, the severe dieting, the

ever present pain and the injuries that were the result of the attempts by female dancers to fit their own material bodies to the aesthetic ideals of the ballet. But within the confines of these ideals, there were other stories. In these stories the distance between the material and the ideal body was not only a source of frustration, but also a challenge and a reason to work even harder. In these other stories the body of the female dancer was not only the clay that was necessary to mould a dancer's body, but also a source of worthy experiences and possibilities.

Body control is one of the key elements in ballet. As we have seen in the description of the exercises in daily class, there are strict technical rules for body posture, placement and movement. Professional dancers are expected to move their bodies within these regulations. While the choice for a professional career in ballet means a choice for constraints, most of the dancers I interviewed considered these a challenge rather than a straightjacket. When I asked Esther Protzman, who used to dance as a soloist with the National Ballet, what she liked about ballet, she answered: 'There are rules and to me these rules always offered a challenge. In ballet I was able to test my own boundaries.' Other dancers had similar stories. Mariët Andringa, a dancer with Introdans, spoke of the importance of ambition and the chance to excel. 'I always dreamed that I could jump over the school. It was great to work so hard with your body and to realize that you had become better. That is a great feeling, really addictive.' Jeanette den Blijker, who was a corps de ballet dancer with the National Ballet, remembered how much she loved it when the exercises at the conservatory became more difficult. Modern dance came natural to her, but the ballet classes always provided much more of a challenge. 'I liked the effort. I loved it when I really had to try hard, to do the exercises over and over again. To be completely out of breath, that was really satisfying.' Diana Matla, who danced with the Netherlands Dance Theatre and with Introdans, told me:

I always loved to move. As a child I was totally into sports. I was very ambitious, always wanted to be the best. Practising at home and things like that. When I came to the conservatory for my professional dance training as a child, I discovered that I really had to be good or else they would kick me out. It is only now that I realize how much discipline I must have had to keep going. That is something that you don't see as a child. The only thing that you are thinking about is how to become as good as possible. Someday a specific exercise will be too difficult, but then you discover that if you practise real hard it becomes easier. That is really stimulating. To discover that the things that you could not do yesterday are suddenly possible today.

Physical challenge and the intense feeling of satisfaction when a difficult pirouette goes finally well, when a balance is mastered after a long period of trying and when an especially complicated combination of steps

can be executed without mistakes, are present in all the stories of the female dancers.

In western culture, physical strength and femininity are believed to be incompatible. The body and femininity are closely related, but bodily control and physical strength are not considered feminine. Physical achievements are associated with masculinity (Choi, 2000). The history of sport, for example, shows us how competitive sports were not considered appropriate for women until far into the 20th century (Hargreaves, 1994). For a long time it was believed that physical effort would be detrimental for women's reproductive powers. But even when this idea was abandoned, women and sports continued to be a problematic combination (Choi, 2000). It is obvious from the stories of the dancers that ballet offers women an opportunity to excel physically in ways that are comparable to sports. In ballet, women can find an opportunity to excel physically, but without the association with masculinity. Ballet presents them with a place where ambition and a drive to achieve are valued, even for women. The British sociologist Angela McRobbie, while doing research on youth culture, was surprised to find that books and movies on ballet were the ones where young girls could see 'an active and energetic femininity' (McRobbie, 1997: 229). In contrast with its girly and 'pink' image, 'there are few other places in popular cultures where girls will find such active role models and such incentives to achieve' (McRobbie, 1997: 230).

In ballet, the emphasis placed on technical prowess and virtuosity of the ballerina counteracts the stereotyped images of gender. Female dancers know from experience that the 'feminine' grace that ballet connotes goes together with a feeling of strength and stretch in the muscles. In their dancing they perceive a level of bodily control that is not (only) metaphorical, but definitely physical. Or, as the American dancer and choreographer Agnes de Mille once put it: 'The very physical stresses, the strengthening and bracing and tautening of [the female dancer's] back and leg supply such a sense of driving power as to give her the illusion of male potency' (de Mille, 1951: 60). From the stories of the female dancers it becomes apparent that the experience of bodily control and the combination of so-called feminine beauty with so-called masculine strength are important elements that draw them to their profession and keep them there.

## THE BODY AS A MATERIALIZING OF POSSIBILITIES

I would like to take this re-evaluation of ballet one step further and integrate one more sensation that the female dancers described to me into the analysis. Admiration, social prestige and physical challenges are valid reasons to pursue a career in ballet, despite its obvious misogynist

aspects. But in the words of the female dancers I heard still another element, something that seemed to be related to a conjunction of bodily and emotional well-being. Listening to the dancers' stories, I found that one statement was repeated by most of them. In answer to my question why they danced, they would say something like: 'I do it for that moment when it all comes together.' At first I thought this statement was nothing more than the confirmation of the sensation that dancers experience when their own material bodies finally fit the ideal. That with these words dancers described the feeling of improvement and progress, when one's knowledge of the ballet body matches one's physical capacity, and the sensation of 'mastery of the body' that is obviously gratifying.

But gradually I came to understand that there was more. Listen to Kim van Savooyen, who danced with Introdans for 11 years and suffered from several serious injuries during her career:

I have had doubts about my dancing career for a very long time. Often I thought: maybe this profession is just physically too demanding for me. But I had to dance. I did it for those moments when you are in complete harmony, with the music, with your body. That moment when it all comes together. Even if that experience comes only three times a year. That moment when you can be completely emotional, when you dance with pain in your heart. And for the challenge, of course.

Other dancers made similar statements. Tessa Cook was a dancer with the Netherlands Dance Theatre. In school she had problems with the discipline and the rigour of the technique, but she made it into the profession and stayed with the company for 11 years. When I interviewed her, she had just decided to quit dancing, because it did not leave her enough room to do other things she loved. But after explaining to me why she was going to stop dancing, she said:

Through dancing I have experienced how fantastic it is to give. You are full of love and then you are given something, music, dance, and you are able to give that to other people. In dance you can express all your emotions. When I danced, I felt always relieved. I never needed to express myself with words.

In a similar vein, Alegra Kent, who was a dancer in the New York City Ballet for a very long time, wrote in her autobiography: 'For me dancing was a way to experience physical and emotional freedom' (Kent, 1997: 77).

How can I relate these words to my earlier statement that the belief in the separation of mind, body and emotions is even stronger in dancers than in most of us? What about my conclusion that the instrumental attitude towards their bodies that is part of their training intensifies the experience of discontinuous unity? When we listen to the words of the dancers and take them seriously – and it will be clear that I propose to do

so – their stories present us with an interesting contradiction. Most body practices in ballet – the training, the attitudes towards pain and injuries – work from the assumption that body and mind can be separated and the mind controls the body. But dance, even ballet with its technical rules and regulations, also offers women the possibility to exceed the discontinuity of body, mind and emotions. Dance, maybe more than any other art form, links physical movement with expression, both physical and emotional. In ballet women learn to control their bodies, but they also experience, even for a moment, the synchronizing of physicality, willpower and emotionality.

In an earlier article on gender issues in ballet (Aalten, 1997), I looked to Judith Butler's work for useful tools to study gender and the body. Although Butler may not be the best choice for scholars who are trying to integrate actual material bodies into their analyses, several of her concepts adapted themselves perfectly to my needs when I was studying ballet dancers. While I was preparing my research questions, I found inspiration in Butler's declaration that 'gender is instituted through the stylisation of the body' (Butler, 1990: 270). Her notion of gender as a performative act seemed especially fitted for research in the dance world. The idea that performativity could be understood 'as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect that it names' (Butler, 1993: 2) was of particular assistance while I was enquiring into the daily classes and other routines that create a dancer's body. In the last paragraph of that article I expressed my hope that the stories of female ballet dancers 'may make us aware of the challenging and power-generating aspects that ballet has to offer women in channelling their agency towards achieving perfection' (Aalten, 1997: 56).

In my present analysis, based on the dancers' stories, of the concrete bodily practices in ballet, I have demonstrated the need for feminist scholarship on dance to address these practices, when analysing ballet as a cultural practice. There are many elements in ballet that are degrading or unhealthy for women. But ballet also presents women with a place where ambitions can be realized and physical excellence is valued. The physical-emotional sensation that is described by the dancers as 'the moment when it all comes together' adds another aspect to the analysis. Here the dancers relate to an experience of their bodies as not just matter, but as 'a materializing of possibilities' (Butler, 1990: 272). Once again I make use of one of Butler's notions to put this specific experience into words. But the concurring of physicality, willpower and emotionality is not a textual event. It is a deeply embodied experience that has to be taken seriously by feminist scholars when theorizing about femininity in ballet.

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