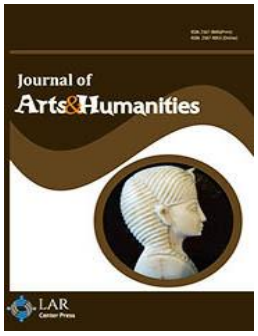

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Negotiating boundaries: *Tanztheater*, DV8 and the politics of embodied risk in Physical Theatre

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the legacy of Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater* in shaping DV8 Physical Theatre and argues that DV8 developed a politics of embodied risk that has been central to the development of physical theatre in the United Kingdom. The establishment of DV8 in 1986 brought public recognition to the form and defined it as a distinctive practice within contemporary performance. Methodologically, the study combines historiographic research into *Ausdruckstanz* and *Tanztheater*, performance analysis of works such as *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988), *Enter Achilles* (1995), and *MSM* (*Men who have Sex with Men*) (1993), and practice-based reflection on rehearsal processes and improvisation. The analysis shows how DV8 inherited and extended Bausch's innovations: risk-taking in both physical expression and thematic content, the conception of the performer as a thinking and feeling subject, and the integration of spoken language with movement. By redefining choreography around individuality, everyday gesture and socially engaged themes, DV8 advanced physical theatre as an intellectually provocative and politically resonant form that clarifies the term's genealogical and aesthetic stakes.

Keywords: *Tanztheater*; DV8 Physical Theatre; physical theatre; Pina Bausch; Lloyd Newson.

1. Introduction

Physical theatre, as its name suggests, is a body-centred form of theatre. In *Mime into Physical Theatre: A UK Cultural History 1970–2000*, Evans and Murray define it as a practice in which movement remains central, but is increasingly integrated with text, voice and sound rather than positioned in opposition to them; they also stress the importance of imaginative scenography that enables and shapes movement (Evans & Murray, 2023, p. 3). In Britain, the term gained particular prominence with the foundation of DV8 Physical Theatre in 1986, after which it was widely used to describe a range of experimental performance practices (Murray & Keefe, 2007, p. 14).

Yet "physical theatre" often functions as a loose, catch-all category in both critical and popular discourse, applied to companies whose work may differ substantially in aesthetic, method and politics.

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The label frequently signals a hybrid of dance and theatre without explaining how these media relate, or what histories and power relations are at stake in their combination. This article responds to that problem by approaching physical theatre genealogically: rather than treating it as a vague contemporary style, it traces DV8's work back to the German *Ausdruckstanz* and *Tanztheater* tradition and, in particular, to the legacy of Pina Bausch.

Conceptually, the article draws on the politics of embodiment to examine how Bausch and Lloyd Newson construct the performer's body as a site where social forces become visible and negotiable. It also engages with scholarship on devised and verbatim theatre to analyse DV8's use of interview material, improvisation and testimonial speech as choreographic processes. These frameworks allow me to argue that physical theatre is not simply a stylistic hybrid but a practice that continually renegotiates the boundaries between lived experience, representation, and risk.

The central question guiding this discussion is: How does DV8's work transform Bausch's *Tanztheater* legacy into a politically charged form of physical theatre that unsettles the boundary between dance and theatre in the UK? I argue that DV8 does not simply inherit *Tanztheater's* expressive, socially engaged body; it reworks Bausch's model of embodied subjectivity into a politics of risk and verbatim embodiment, in which everyday gesture and testimonial speech become central choreographic materials. By placing Bausch and Newson in the same genealogical frame, the article shows how physical theatre emerges not as a vague hybrid genre but as a distinct practice that fuses movement and language to interrogate sexuality, masculinity and social identity.

The article proceeds in five stages. Section 2 sketches a genealogy from *Ausdruckstanz* to *Tanztheater*, outlining how Laban, Wigman, Jooss and Bausch collectively develop a conception of the performer as a subjective, socially situated body. Section 3 focuses on Bausch's *Tanztheater*, examining how her rehearsal methods and aesthetics negotiate boundaries between gender roles, theatrical representation and lived experience. Section 4 turns to DV8, analysing how Newson extends this legacy into a politics of embodied risk through improvisation, collaboration and the demand for individuality. Section 5 offers case studies of *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men, Enter Achilles, MSM, To Be Straight with You, John and Can We Talk About This?* arguing that DV8 develops a form of verbatim choreography that reconfigures *Tanztheater's* embodied subjectivity. The conclusion reflects on DV8's place within wider British physical theatre and considers how this genealogy might inform readings of companies such as Frantic Assembly and Theatre O.

2. From *Ausdruckstanz* to *Tanztheater*: A genealogy of embodied subjectivity

The genealogy of DV8's physical theatre can be traced back to the German *Ausdruckstanz* movement of the early twentieth century. Rudolf Laban (1879–1958) used the term *Tanztheater* to describe some of his choric dance rituals, positioning dance as an independent art form grounded in relationships between dynamic movement and spatial design (Partsch-Bergsohn, 1987, p. 36). For Laban, there were no strict boundaries between dance and theatre: his fascination with puppet theatre fed an ideal of performers who could move fluidly across disciplines—actors able to dance and dancers unafraid of the spoken word (Newlove, 1993, p. 118). His choreographies integrated everyday gesture with abstract movement, adopting narrative, comic and experimental forms, and suggesting that movement could articulate social as well as aesthetic meanings (Fernandes, 2001, p. 3).

Among Laban's most significant students was Mary Wigman (1886–1973), founder of *Ausdruckstanz*, or German expressionist dance. Wigman famously insisted that she had to "find the form for dance out of the time in which we live" (Climenhaga, 2013, p. 13). While she inherited Laban's emphasis on expressive movement, her work was more explicitly political and socially engaged. Rejecting the self-referential aestheticism of classical ballet, Wigman's choreography addressed contemporary social issues and reformist ideals, insisting on dance as a mode of cultural critique. In her practice, the dancing body became a medium through which subjective experience and historical crisis were made visible.

Kurt Jooss, another of Laban's pupils, was the first to use the term *Tanztheater* consistently. His seminal anti-war work *The Green Table* (1933) exemplified his conception of dance-theatre as dramatic group action (Climenhaga, 2013, p. 14). Seeking to distinguish his work from the conventional story ballets dominant in Germany at the time, Jooss fused classical ballet with expressive dance while

embedding socio-political content within rigorously structured productions (Manning, 1993, p. 246). In Jooss's work, it is the ensemble of bodies—rather than an abstract choreographic design—that carries ethical and political weight.

Later generations consolidated this tradition. Choreographers such as Gerhard Bohner, Reinhild Hoffmann and, most prominently, Pina Bausch developed company-based *Tanztheater* that combined expressionist movement vocabularies with theatrical devices like scenographic metaphor, character work and fragmented narrative. As Norbert Servos observes, under Bausch the Wuppertal company established *Tanztheater* as the name for "a new and independent genre", a mixture of dance and theatre that opened up "a new dimension for both genres" (Servos, 1984, p. 19).

Taken together, these experiments articulate a model of the dancer as a subjective, socially situated body. From Laban's collapsing of boundaries between acting and dancing, through Wigman's politically charged solos, to Jooss's ensemble critiques of war, *Tanztheater* emerges as a practice in which movement expresses not only individual emotion but also the pressures of history and ideology. This conception of embodied subjectivity—and its attendant politics of embodiment—provides the foundation on which Bausch builds her own *Tanztheater*, a foundation that DV8 will later inherit and transform.

3. Pina Bausch: Risk, subjectivity and social critique in *Tanztheater*

DV8's work was strongly influenced by the *Tanztheater* tradition of Pina Bausch, whose company, *Tanztheater* Wuppertal, emerged from the German expressionist dance movement of the 1920s and 1930s and its commitment to movement as a vehicle for social, political, and moral inquiry.

According to McCormack, DV8 was the first UK-based company to extend this lineage by combining choreographed and pedestrian movement with spoken language, recorded sound, moving image, music, props, and scenography, thereby enlarging the expressive potential of dance performance (McCormack, 2018, p. 64). This practice rested on the understanding that movement could be comprehended and 'read' by audiences (McCormack, 2018, p. 73).

In an interview, Pina Bausch acknowledged that her creative process begins with fear:

> I find it incredibly difficult to take the first step because … I know they, the dancers, are then going to expect me to tell them what I want. And then I panic. I'm scared of having to tell them because what I have is often so vague. It's true, I know I can always say, "Here I am – there are one or two particular things in my head at the moment," and I might even find some kind of word to describe it and then I'll say, "Right. Well, here's where we start from. Let's see where it takes us" (Servos, 1981, p. 309).

Bausch frames beginnings as a state of openness shadowed by doubt and loss of control. These range from doubts about realising her intentions to anxieties over losing control and facing insecurity (Climenhaga, 2009, p. 45). DV8 Physical Theatre demonstrates a comparable embrace of indeterminacy through its commitment to risk-taking. Developing Bausch's insights, Newson cites the Canadian choreographer Edouard Lock: "Risk stimulates hope, which in turn creates passion" (Newson, 1992, p. 18). For Newson, risk provokes fear and, in turn, desire—evident both in DV8's physical daring (e.g., ladder catches, walking on glass, illusions of flight) and in its thematically contentious subjects, which address contentious issues including identity, homosexuality, race, masculinity, and violence. In an interview, Newson described risk as central to extending the boundaries of dance, framing it through questions of how dangerous physical experimentation can redefine the dancer's body, challenge the limits of professional performance, and sustain complex emotional narratives. Risk-taking thus constitutes the driving force of DV8's creative process, serving as a perpetual source of inspiration (Newson, 1992, p. 19). This methodology has also informed other British physical theatre companies, notably Frantic Assembly, who, influenced by DV8, have developed their own practices of physical and creative risk (Graham & Hoggett, 2014, p. 24).

Newson's performers can be understood in relation to Pina Bausch's, as both choreographers emphasise the body as a subjective presence rather than a purely formal medium. Bausch's approach foregrounded the individual's connection to society, expressed through culturally shaped images and attitudes, resisting the reduction of dance to 'dry' technique in which performers function as mechanical executors of movement rather than as embodied expressions of emotion. Building on this notion, Newson insists that every dancer is a thinking, feeling subject with a 'living body' shaped by

personal experience. He identifies this position as a reaction against his own professional background, recalling choreographers who treated dancers as 'nothing more than a bit of pigment for them to paint with' (Newson, 1992). DV8's work, by contrast, reflects a commitment to empowering performers to contribute actively to the creative process, drawing on their individual differences, interests, and skills. This emphasis on the creative and imaginative presence of the body resonates with Evans and Murray's conception of physical theatre as a mode that privileges inventive physical expression. For Newson, valuing the individuality of each performer establishes a collaborative environment in which personal contribution becomes integral to the work.

> I am very frustrated by the lack of individuality and character that is being presented in dance. I am so bored with work where everybody has to be the same- like the same person, which is often the choreographer. I want to see individuality, I want to see characters on stage, and I want to see people experience things (Newson, 1993, p. 10).

Newson consistently employs improvisation as a means of accessing the imagination and creativity of dancers, treating it as raw material that can be shaped into performance. In the studio, as Jess McCormack observes, Newson and his performers engage in a collaborative process of questioning, exploration, and challenge, seeking to establish connections between the personal and wider political or social debates (McCormack, 2018, p. 66). Improvisation, structured around a guiding theme, enables dancers to draw on their own experiences, emotions, and memories, thereby generating material that informs and clarifies the eventual performance structure.

This approach is exemplified in *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988), a work inspired by Brian Masters' *Killing for Company* (1985), which examines the case of homosexual serial killer Dennis Nilsen. In the production, the four male performers alternately embody both Nilsen and his victims, creating a shifting interplay of roles that echoes the book's narrative. Rather than a literal retelling, the piece offers an abstract, non-linear meditation on male identity and sexuality, encompassing a spectrum of emotions from vulnerability to aggression. The result is a powerful interrogation of the experiences and struggles of gay men in contemporary society. Reflecting on the rehearsal process, performer Russell Maliphant recalls that:

> We did a lot of improvisation with 'dead' bodies, like, 'You can do whatever you want with this "corpse" of another dancer for forty minutes and then we'd discuss what worked and what didn't (Maliphant, 1992, p. 25).

The creative process allows dancers to integrate their personal emotions and experiences into both rehearsal and performance. Improvisational movements and expressions are frequently documented, enabling performers to recall specific sequences and identify material of value for further development. This practice serves both as an archive of improvisational discoveries and as a mechanism for refinement, ensuring that movements which lack relevance to the emerging work can be discarded. By embedding their own experiences within this process, dancers cultivate performances that are both distinctive and authentic.

From Pina Bausch to DV8, the concept of "choreography" has undergone a significant shift, moving beyond technical virtuosity towards an emphasis on movement as an expressive arrangement in itself. Bausch, trained under Rudolf Laban, absorbed his understanding of movement as a fundamental principle of dance. While many of her ensemble members have substantial training in classical ballet and other dance techniques, the audition process for her works has consistently prioritised movement qualities over technical display. As Bausch herself explained: "*I am not interested in how people move, but in what moves them*" (quoted in Servos, 1981, p. 24). This statement encapsulates her conviction that choreography is not a matter of codified technique, but rather of revealing the emotional, psychological, and social resonances that lie within movement.

A comparable approach is evident in DV8. As choreographer, Newson requires his dancers to undergo rigorous technical training while simultaneously encouraging them to move in their own way. He argues that conventional professional training often suppresses individuality, producing dancers who resemble "machines," yet acknowledges that such training develops a high level of technical ability and bodily awareness. What distinguishes DV8, however, is Newson's determination to move beyond technique, using it as a foundation rather than an endpoint (Shank, 1993, p. 13). His choreography aims to highlight the individuality of each performer, ensuring that movement functions

as a personal and expressive act. While movement remains central to DV8's storytelling, Newson also integrates other theatrical elements. The company frequently incorporates spoken and recorded language, alongside music and projection, to enrich their performance vocabulary and deepen the work's artistic resonance (McCormack, 2018, p. 65).

Both DV8 and Pina Bausch place strong emphasis on everyday movement. In examining their work, one frequently encounters moments that appear to reflect a "lack of dance." This tendency is particularly evident in DV8, whose choreography often relies on pure physical language rather than codified technique. Bausch's *The Rite of Spring* (1975) illustrates this approach through its narrative of a ritualistic community in which a young woman is chosen as a sacrificial victim who must dance herself to death. Performed on a stage covered in earth, the work merges elements of ballet with quotidian gestures, thereby blurring the boundaries between formal dance vocabulary and ordinary action. Similarly, *Kontakthof* (1978) exemplifies Bausch's integration of dialogue with movement to explore the complexities of human interaction. Performed in different versions—by younger and older casts drawn from diverse backgrounds—the piece underscores the social and emotional dimensions of interpersonal relationships rather than privileging technical virtuosity.

Newson adopts a comparable approach by exploring the choreographic potential of everyday actions and gestures. His work *MSM* (*Men who have Sex with Men*, 1993), developed from sociological research revealing that many men who engage in same-sex encounters do not identify as gay or bisexual, centres on meetings in public lavatories. This production marked the company's first use of interview transcripts as a basis for choreography. The piece incorporated numerous quotidian movements, foregrounding lived experience over formal dance technique. However, when performed in London in 1993, it provoked criticism for what some perceived as a lack of "dance."

> Its world première was presented as a big event of this year's Festival International de Nouvelle Danse in Montreal, before its British performances; but it defies you to call it dance. Instead, it is text-based theatre, with clambering about and movement images, but not a ghost of a step demanding dancers […] But I found it gripping, illuminating, and human (Meisner, 1993).

Such responses demonstrate how DV8's interrogation of everyday action and social experience troubles conventional expectations of what counts as "dance," making the contested boundary between dance and theatre itself a central theme of the work.

In interviews, Newson has reflected on the interplay between movement and language in DV8's work, emphasising how their combination deepens storytelling and enriches the communication of ideas, emotions, and narratives. By integrating spoken language with physical expression, DV8 creates a multi-layered theatrical experience that engages both the body's physicality and the expressive force of words. Newson himself acknowledged that this approach was influenced by Pina Bausch, noting:

> Pina Bausch is one of the few director-choreographers in the world who can create pieces where she gets what she wants and the individuals in the company are not oppressed through movement. She now incorporates a lot of language in her work (Newson, 1993, p. 16).

Bausch's *Kontakthof* (1978) demonstrates this integration of spoken dialogue within performance. In this piece, performers from diverse backgrounds employ different languages—including German, English, and Japanese—highlighting the complexity of human communication and the cultural multiplicity of modern society. The spoken elements operate alongside physical action, adding layers of meaning while foregrounding the intricacies of interpersonal relationships.

While acknowledging the value of language, Newson regards movement and imagery as possessing a "pre-language" quality with a resonance that surpasses words. He argues that audiences retain the visual and kinaesthetic impressions of performance more vividly than verbal details (Shank, 1993, p. 17). This perspective underpins his emphasis on movement as a primary mode of expression, capable of evoking powerful emotions and meanings beyond linguistic articulation.

This principle is exemplified in *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988), inspired by Brian Masters' *Killing for Company* (1985). The opening scene, set in a gay disco, appears to derive its mood from a quotation by Nilsen included in the programme: "*I was left with an endless search through the soul-destroying pub scene and its resulting one-night stands…. Passing faces and bodies, the unfulfilled tokens of an empty life. A house is not a home and sex is not a relationship. We would only lend each other our bodies in a vain search for inner peace*" (Masters, 1985, p. 104). The four male performers—Lloyd Newson, Nigel Charnock, Russell Maliphant, and Douglas Wright—stand against a wall, watching the

dance floor, gazing and exchanging glances as though seeking connection. Their silent interactions, charged with erotic tension, capture desire, lust, and fleeting intimacy without the need for speech. For Newson, such moments reveal how movement alone can communicate emotional depth and social critique more effectively than words, underscoring the centrality of embodied expression in DV8's aesthetic. In the terms of this article, the sequence demonstrates how DV8 radicalises *Tanztheater's* legacy: the male body is not only expressive but also rendered precarious, exposed to violence and erasure. The club becomes a space where the promise of contact is constantly shadowed by the possibility of disappearance, so that embodiment itself becomes a political boundary under pressure.

4. DV8 Physical Theatre: Extending *Tanztheater* into a politics of embodied risk

Bausch's works frequently engage with themes of intense emotion, gender, and relational dynamics. In *Kontakthof* (1978), women are objectified, scrutinised, and commodified, while *Bluebeard* (1977) portrays women as victims of sexual violence. Other works destabilise conventional gender boundaries: in *Don't Be Afraid* (1976), men abandon their suits for gowns identical to those worn by women; in *The Seven Deadly Sins* (1976), women adopt men's suits. Such cross-dressing extends beyond transvestism to destabilise fixed gender signifiers—the suit ceases to function as a purely masculine marker, and the dress as exclusively feminine. In this way, Bausch challenges the binary construction of gender, presenting it instead as fluid and contingent, and pushing against the boundary between socially coded gender roles and individual experience.

Nevertheless, Bausch resisted the categorisation of her work as feminist. During audience discussions at the Brooklyn Academy of Music's Next Wave Series in 1985, she became frustrated when her productions were labelled as feminist (Thomas, 1993, p. 152), insisting instead on a broader human focus. Reflecting on gender, she remarked: "*Certainly, there are different qualities in men and women. It is different for each person. There are various possible masculine or feminine qualities and areas where they blend. However, ultimately, I have always thought more about the person*" (Climenhaga, 2009, p.70). This perspective underscores her concern with individual experience rather than with ideological categorisation.

A parallel focus on personal expression is evident in DV8 Physical Theatre. In a 2008 interview, Newson articulated his aspiration to use theatre as a vehicle for urgent and impactful communication, stressing the necessity of questioning the relevance and impact of dance itself (Newson, 2008). DV8's repertoire consistently engages with pressing social issues, particularly masculinity, sexuality, and identity. *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988) interrogates the experiences of gay men in contemporary society, while *Enter Achilles* (1995) explores masculinity, power dynamics, and social hierarchies within male relationships. Reflecting on the motivation for creating *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, Newson explained:

> I was concerned about my sense of isolation, loneliness, and oppression, as a gay man. Someone had lent me, incidentally, the book *Killing for Company* by Brian Masters, which was about a man who is a closeted homosexual who had killed 14 young men. Of these 14 men who went missing, only two were reported to the police as missing. Several things struck me: why had no one pursued these other 12 men: their lack of familiar contact: and the whole idea that men emotionally will look after themselves (Shank, 1993, p. 14)

Lloyd Newson's creative motivation is driven by a desire to address and give voice to particular experiences and social groups. In *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men*, for instance, he sought to illuminate the lives of gay men in contemporary society. At the same time, he emphasizes that his work should not be confined solely to the realm of sexual politics; while his pieces interrogate societal norms surrounding sexuality, they extend beyond political commentary, reflecting his belief that life encompasses more than considerations of political correctness.

Newson's conception of physical theatre is rooted in the ambition to create work of significance and depth (Murray & Keefe, 2007, p. 81). He aims to explore and communicate profound aspects of human experience through performance, a commitment that underpins the meaningful storytelling evident in his oeuvre. *Enter Achilles* (1995) exemplifies this approach: inspired by Newson's personal experience of snapping his Achilles tendon, the piece emerged during his hospital recovery, where he observed differing emotional responses from male and female friends who visited him. These

reflections particularly highlighted the challenges some of his gay friends faced in expressing emotion within this context, forming a conceptual foundation for the work (Murray & Keefe, 2007, p. 83).

Enter Achilles, originally staged in 1995 and reperformed in 2020, is set in a typical British pub, its smoky atmosphere framing scenes of male social interaction. On the surface, the men appear to be enjoying themselves, yet their jokes teeter on a knife-edge, revealing the latent tension in their behaviour. The patrons exhibit collective, often threatening, dynamics, reflecting stereotypical notions of male aggression and pub culture. Amid these generalised traits, the piece also highlights individual differences: a homosexual man dressed as Superman, a sorrowful man longing for a partner, and another man who shows greater affection for an inflatable sex doll than some men demonstrate towards women.

Through these portrayals, the work interrogates stereotypes, constructions of masculinity, and social cruelty. Rather than delivering prescriptive moral judgements, the director, choreographer, and performers present open-ended questions that encourage audiences to reflect critically and imaginatively. In the 2020 reperformance, Newson re-choreographed the piece to suit the performers' abilities while retaining the integrity of key movements. The physical risks embedded in the choreography enhance the work's intensity and emotional impact. Despite the passage of twenty-five years, the idealised male stereotype remains central; however, it is now juxtaposed with contemporary social realities, creating a dialogue between enduring cultural images and the present moment. By staging masculinity as a choreography of conformity and rupture, *Enter Achilles* extends Bausch's interest in gendered behaviour into a specifically British social space. The work treats "lad culture" as a danced script that can be both inhabited and destabilised, revealing how physical theatre can expose the fragility of hegemonic masculinity rather than simply represent it.

5. Verbatim choreography and the politics of embodiment: DV8 case studies

The early productions of DV8 were rooted in personal experiences, including *My Sex, Our Dance* (1986), *My Body, Your Body* (1987), and *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988). These works combined minimal spoken text with movement, reflecting the company's interest in exploring individual and social experiences through embodied expression. In 1993, DV8 undertook the project MSM, which sought to expand the company's use of language in relation to movement. For the first time, they collected and transcribed interviews to serve as the foundation for choreography, examining male sexuality beyond normative societal frameworks (McCormack, 2018, p. 67). This methodological approach positions DV8 within the tradition of Verbatim theatre, employing archival material and first-hand testimonies to investigate the themes of their work across the UK and Europe (Minns, 2017, p. 52).

In his persistent exploration of the relationship between movement and language, Newson has consistently pushed the boundaries of "dance theatre." Reflecting on his creative process, he stated:

> We find movement to express the meaning or idea we're presenting moment by moment, and if movement can't do it and words or song can, then we'll use those. Most dance companies, I feel, have restricted what they can speak about because they have accepted a limited definition of what movement constitutes 'dance' (Newson, 1998, p. 115).

This perspective underscores Newson's commitment to a flexible, idea-driven integration of movement and language, challenging conventional definitions of dance and expanding the expressive potential of physical theatre. In DV8's later works, the company increasingly embraced interviews and true stories, moving away from traditional dance theatre. These productions incorporate quotidian movement and recorded language to explore social issues from a grounded, human perspective.

A prominent example is *To Be Straight with You* (2008), which revisited the interview methodology first employed in *MSM* (1993). In this work, Newson sought to give voice to individuals from Black, Asian, and white Christian communities who had experiences related to homosexuality and religion. Over six months, Newson and a former BBC researcher collected interviews through newspaper advertisements, gay clubs, and religious organisations—both gay-friendly and not. The project ultimately involved 85 interviews and a series of Vox pops in London, with all spoken material presented verbatim on stage, projected onto the set to create a direct link between the interviewees' words and the performance (McCormack, 2018, p. 86). The piece addresses themes of tolerance, intolerance, religion, and homosexuality in the UK, reflecting DV8's commitment to socially engaged theatre.

Can We Talk About This? (2011) similarly employs verbatim testimony, focusing on the theme of free speech and Islam. The work collects perspectives from individuals who have experienced death threats due to their views, as well as those inclined to issue such threats, exploring the complex dynamics surrounding discussions of Islam and freedom of expression. Like Newson's previous verbatim works, *John* (2014) also begins with interview material, which the company listens to on iPods while devising choreography. Unlike the earlier productions, *John* centres on a singular, extraordinary character rather than presenting a documentary collage of wider social issues.

McCormack explains that in DV8's verbatim process, the collected spoken material is first edited and structured; movement is then created in direct response to this language, functioning as a physical translation of the text (McCormack, 2018, p. 71). Reflecting on *To Be Straight with You*, Newson acknowledged that devising suitable movement was particularly challenging due to the sensitivity of the subject matter and the commitment to preserve the interviewees' words (Newson, 2008). When asked by a reporter about combining stylised movement with verbatim text, he responded:

> I didn't want to demean the interviewees' stories, which were often harrowing, with "nice" movement phrases. One method of finding appropriate movement was to ask performers to listen to edited interviews on an iPod while simultaneously repeating the interviewee's words out loud. I would then give the performers different physical instructions whilst doing this exercise. Gradually, through this process and many more, I began to see flashes of movement ideas that could be developed for different characters (Newson, 2008).

According to Newson, movement and verbatim language function as primary modes of communication between performers and audiences. Rather than simply responding to the source material, performers engage in a creative process that draws upon their personal bodily experience and interpretation, allowing them to explore multiple and divergent ways of embodying the narratives.

DV8's approach to verbatim theatre can thus be understood as a distinctive form of adaptation, in which choreography operates as a "translation" of recorded or spoken language. This process may also be framed as adaptation, interpretation, or intersemiotic transfer (Bassnett, 2000, p. 96). The adaptation emerges both through the dancers' embodied interpretations and through the evolution of the storyline and choreography, resulting in a synthesis of personal artistic expression and narrative development.

A notable example of this method is *John* (2014). The devising process began with interviews conducted by Newson with fifty men regarding their experiences of love and sex. Among these accounts, *John's* story stood out as particularly compelling. His biography is marked by profound adversity: he witnessed his mother's death from a heroin overdose at age ten, grew up in care, experienced a brief marriage, and subsequently became entangled in cycles of drug addiction and petty crime. After years of homelessness, he was sentenced to five years in prison for a violent offence he did not recall committing. Recognising the narrative and emotional potential of John's experiences, Newson centred the production on his life story, transforming the interview material into a deeply personal, physically mediated theatrical work.

However, Newson later expressed some reservations, feeling a responsibility to represent the lives and experiences of the other forty-nine interviewees. This concern is evident in the inclusion of the sauna section and the chorus of voices in *John*, which serve to incorporate and reflect the collective experiences of the participants (Prior, 2015). This approach illustrates a careful balance between foregrounding the narrative of a single individual while simultaneously acknowledging the broader social context and the multiplicity of voices gathered through the verbatim process. Following Evans and Murray's emphasis on inventive physical expression as central to physical theatre (2023), DV8 can be seen as testing how far such invention can be stretched when the body is tasked with carrying literal testimony and lived trauma.

It is important to recognise that Newson's approach prioritises representation over judgement or commentary. This ethos is evident in works such as *Enter Achilles*, where the focus lies on portraying lived experiences rather than evaluating them. In John, Newson deliberately refrains from soliciting reviews and stresses that the production offers an edited, carefully considered portrayal of *John*'s experiences (Prior, 2015). This approach underscores his commitment to presenting narratives with

fidelity and sensitivity, allowing audiences to engage with the material without being directed toward specific moral conclusions.

In the performance of *Can We Talk About This?* (2011), the performers' bodies are in a constant state of flux, alternating between fluid, flowing movements and abrupt, forceful gestures across the stage. The piece's dynamism and topicality prevent the audience from pausing to reflect on their own perspectives. Jack Orr suggests that this deliberate lack of pause serves a critical purpose. He argues that contemporary society and politics often deny individuals the opportunity for thoughtful consideration before they are labelled or categorised according to specific beliefs, whether desired or imposed. In this sense, *Can We Talk About This?* communicates a paradox: the audience is invited to engage, yet the entrenched cultural and ideological convictions of others make open dialogue difficult, if not impossible (Orr, 2012). Although Newson stresses representation over judgement, the editing of material in John and *Can We Talk About This?* inevitably shapes audience sympathies and affects, raising questions about curatorial power that exceed his stated ethical position. By doing so, the performance stimulates conversation and provokes critical thought, encouraging viewers to examine the societal and political barriers that impede meaningful dialogue.

6. Conclusion

This study has traced the continuities and departures between Pina Bausch's *Tanztheater* and Lloyd Newson's DV8 Physical Theatre, situating DV8 within a broader genealogy of *Ausdruckstanz* while highlighting its distinct contribution to the development of physical theatre in Britain. Bausch's influence is visible in DV8's embrace of risk, its privileging of the performer as a thinking and feeling subject, and its insistence that movement emerge from lived experience rather than codified technique. Yet DV8 did more than inherit: it redefined choreography by fusing everyday gesture with spoken text, improvisation, and verbatim testimony, thereby expanding the expressive and political scope of contemporary performance.

Through works such as *Dead Dreams of Monochrome Men* (1988), *Enter Achilles* (1995), and *MSM* (*Men who have Sex with Men*, 1993), DV8 exemplified how physical theatre could interrogate issues of sexuality, masculinity, and social identity without sacrificing formal innovation. The company's methodology foregrounded individuality and collaboration, empowering performers to contribute personal experience as creative material. In doing so, DV8 offered a model of physical theatre that was at once rigorous and open-ended, capable of provoking both intellectual reflection and visceral response.

Although the company concluded with Newson's retirement in 2022, its legacy persists in the practices of subsequent ensembles such as Frantic Assembly and in the wider field of devised and socially engaged performance. More importantly, DV8's body of work demonstrates how the boundaries between dance and theatre can be productively unsettled, yielding a form that resists narrow categorisation. Physical theatre, as shaped by DV8, emerges not as a hybrid compromise but as a distinct artistic practice that joins risk, thought, and embodiment to reimagine what performance can communicate.

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