

# anarchic **dance**

edited by liz aggiss and billy cowie  
with ian bramley

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# anarchic **dance**

Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie, known collectively as Divas Dance Theatre, are renowned for their highly visual, interdisciplinary brand of dance performance that incorporates elements of theatre, film, opera, poetry and vaudevillian humour. They have created dance theatre, cabaret, live art, single and multiple screen dance installations, and live performance installations.

Available in one package for the first time, *Anarchic Dance*, consisting of a book and DVD-ROM, is a visual and textual record of the work of Divas Dance Theatre. The DVD-ROM features extracts from Aggiss and Cowie's work, including the highly acclaimed dance film *Motion Control* (premiered on BBC2 in 2002), rare video footage of their punk-comic live performances as The Wild Wigglers and reconstructions of Aggiss's solo performance in *Grotesque Dancer*.

These films are cross-referenced in the book, allowing readers to match performance and commentary as Aggiss and Cowie invite a broad range of writers to examine their live performance and dance screen practice through analysis, theory, discussion and personal response. As much as their practice is hybrid, maverick and hard to define, the various theories presented are equally challenging, lively and fresh.

Extensively illustrated with black and white and colour photographs, this beautiful multi-media package is a celebration of Divas' boundary-shattering performance work. *Anarchic Dance* provides a comprehensive investigation into Cowie and Aggiss's collaborative partnership and demonstrates a range of exciting approaches through which dance performance can be engaged critically.



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This book is dedicated to us, Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie,  
to mark our long-term collaboration and friendship.



# contents

List of illustrations	ix
Notes on contributors	xi
Foreword	xvi
<i>Donald Hutera</i>	
Acknowledgements	xxi
<b>1 Introduction: Navigating the known</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie</i>	
<b>2 The aesthetics of smash and grab</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Carol Brown</i>	
<b>3 Writing dance</b>	<b>15</b>
<i>Deborah Levy</i>	
<b>4 Liz Aggiss and ‘Authentick’ grotesque expressionism</b>	<b>22</b>
<i>Marion Kant</i>	
<b>5 Choreographic vocabulary 1: Visual metaphor</b>	<b>37</b>
<i>Billy Cowie</i>	
<b>6 Outsider performance: A raw vision: Dance and learning difficulties</b>	<b>48</b>
<i>Liz Aggiss</i>	
<b>7 Deconstruction in <i>Die Orchidee</i>: Mischievous plays in the spaces between language and meanings</b>	<b>61</b>
<i>Valerie A. Brigginshaw</i>	
<b>8 Hilde Holger, spirit and maracas</b>	<b>72</b>
<i>Liz Aggiss and Claudia Kappenberg</i>	

<b>9 Choreographic vocabulary 2: Time and rhythm</b> <i>Billy Cowie</i>	85
<b>10 The impossibility of the review in the mind of the critic</b> <i>Ian Bramley</i>	95
<b>11 Deconstructing Heidi</b> <i>Sondra Fraleigh</i>	106
<b>12 Choreographic vocabulary 3: Space</b> <i>Billy Cowie</i>	118
<b>13 Screen Divas: A filmic expression of the grotesque aesthetic</b> <i>Sherril Dodds</i>	127
<b>14 Reconstruction: Or why you can never step into the same river twice</b> <i>Liz Aggiss</i>	142
<b>15 Anarchic dance</b> <i>Billy Cowie</i>	156
Afterword <i>Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie</i>	170
List of works	173
Bibliography	185
Index	191

## list of illustrations

### Cover photographs

#### Front cover

'Red Dress' – Liz Aggiss in *Motion Control*

#### Inside cover

'Variation 3' – Liz Aggiss in *Anarchic Variations*

#### Back cover

'Variation 1' – Liz Aggiss in *Anarchic Variations*

### Plates

- 1 'Solo tu Corazón Caliente' – Liz Aggiss in *El Puñal entra en el Corazón*
- 2 'Kissing Dance' – Liesje Cole and Nusura Mai-Ngarm in *No Man's Land*
- 3 'Golem' – Liz Aggiss in Hilde Holger's *Vier Tänze* reconstructions
- 4 'Offspring are Sprung' – Liz Aggiss and Naomi Itami in *Falling Apart at the Seams*
- 5 'Who Wants Soup?' – Divas and Carousel in *La Soupe*, Royal Pavilion, Brighton
- 6 'Period Costume' – Liz Aggiss, Sebastian Gonzalez and Richard Knight in *Divagate*
- 7 'Film Shoot' – Liz Aggiss in *Motion Control*
- 8 'Solea' – Jeddi Bassan, Sebastian Gonzalez, Scott Smith and Thomas Kampe in *Men in the Wall* installed at the New Art Gallery, Walsall

### Figures

- |     |   |    |
|-----|---|----|
| 2.1 | 'Wedding March' – Liz Aggiss in <i>The Fetching Bride</i>                                   | 8  |
| 3.1 | 'Falling Apart' – Liz Aggiss in <i>Falling Apart at the Seams</i>                           | 18 |
| 4.1 | 'Overture' – Liz Aggiss in <i>Grotesque Dancer</i>  | 27 |
| 5.1 | 'Dorothy sabotages the Electronic Music Machine' – Maria Burton in <i>Dorothy and Klaus</i> | 41 |
| 5.2 | 'Narciso' – Liz Aggiss in <i>El Puñal entra en el Corazón</i>                               | 44 |

6.1 'Kakarella Ka Diva!' – Rachel Chaplin, Ellie Curtis, Virginia Farman, Kay Lynn, Louise Rennison and Amanda Tuke in <i>Torei en Veran Veta Arnold!</i>	49
7.1 'Die Orchidee' – students of the University College, Chichester in <i>Die Orchidee im Plastik Karton</i>	62
8.1 'Camden Dance Class' – Liz Aggiss and Hilde Holger	79
9.1 'Hoop' – Liz Aggiss in <i>Absurditties</i>	90
10.1 'Sea is a Lover 1' – Wei-Ying Hsu and Rachael Read in <i>Bird in a Ribcage</i>	95
10.2 'Sea is a Lover 2' – Wei-Ying Hsu and Rachael Read in <i>Bird in a Ribcage</i>	96
10.3 'Shaved Head' – Liz Aggiss in the original version of <i>Grotesque Dancer</i>	104
11.1 'Lei, Lui e L'altro' – Heidi Dzinkowska in <i>Hi Jinx</i>	115
14.1 'Hop on Pops' – Liz Aggiss, Ian Smith and Eva Zambicki in <i>The Wild Wigglers</i>	144
14.2 'Pantomime' – Liz Aggiss in <i>Grotesque Dancer</i>	149
14.3 'Oh Rosen' – Liz Aggiss, Maria Burton, Ellie Curtis, Virginia Farman and Sian Thomas in <i>Die Orchidee im Plastik Karton</i>	150
15.1 'Fall in Love!' – Rachel Chaplin, Ellie Curtis, Virginia Farman, Kim Glass, Kay Lynn and Amanda Tuke in <i>Dva Sa Momimomuvali</i>	157
15.2 'Lulu and the Strongman' – Maria Burton and Sian Thomas in <i>Eleven Executions</i>	158
15.3 'Five Thatchers' – Liz Aggiss, Jane Bassett, Virginia Farman, Ralf Higgins and Sian Thomas in <i>Drool and Drivel They Care!</i>	161
Afterword.1 'Station One' – Liz Aggiss in <i>Stations of the Angry</i>	170

## notes on contributors

**Liz Aggiss** is a performer/choreographer/film-maker. She works principally with Billy Cowie in the area of dance/theatre/live art performance, screen dance and installation. They have made over thirty live performance pieces for their company Divas, have toured Europe extensively and completed five major dance screen projects (two BBC Dance for Camera commissions and three Arts Council England Capture projects). They have created commissioned work for Extemporary Dance Theatre, Mantis, Transitions, Intoto, Carousel and High Spin. Liz Aggiss has written for *Dance Theatre Journal* and *animated*.

Liz Aggiss has received numerous awards including: Bonnie Bird Choreography Award (1994), Arts Council Dance Fellowship Award (2003). Aggiss/Cowie's dance screen work has received numerous international awards including: Czech Crystal, Prague Golden Film Festival (2002); Special Jury Golden Award, Houston (2003); Best Female Film, Mediawaves Hungary (2003); and the Romanian National Office of Cinematography Award (2003). Liz Aggiss is currently Professor of Visual Performance at the University of Brighton. [www.lizaggiss.com](http://www.lizaggiss.com), [www.anarchicdance.com](http://www.anarchicdance.com).

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**Valerie A. Briginshaw Ph.D.** is Professor of Dance Studies at University College Chichester. Her book, *Dance, Space and Subjectivity* (2001), which includes an analysis of Aggiss and Cowie's *Grotesque Dancer*, is a collection of readings of postmodern dances informed by poststructuralist theory.

Other publications include chapters in *Analysing Performance* (1996), *Dance in the City* (1997), *Preservation Politics* (2001) and *Performing Nature* (2005). Having just completed research exploring interfaces between writing and performance-making in a three-year AHRB funded project with the choreographer Emilyn Claid, she is currently working on a

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**Carol Brown Ph.D.** is a choreographer, performer and writer. Originally from New Zealand, her company, Carol Brown Dances, is based in London and tours nationally and internationally. Formed in 1996, the company is renowned for its cross-art form collaborations with visual artists, photographers, digital artists, film-makers, architects and sound designers. Carol Brown has received numerous awards including: Jerwood Award for Choreography (1999), an AHRB Research Fellowship in the Creative and Performing Arts (2002–04), the Ludwig Forum International Prize for Innovation (2004) and a NESTA Dream Time (2004–05). She has a doctorate in choreography from the University of Surrey and is a Researcher in the School of Arts, Roehampton University. Her company receives regular support from the Arts Council England and tours with the British Council. [www.carolbrowndances.com](http://www.carolbrowndances.com).

**Billy Cowie** is a Scottish composer/choreographer/film-maker. He works principally with Liz Aggiss in the area of dance/theatre/live art performance, screen dance and installation. They have made over thirty live performance pieces for their company Divas, have toured Europe extensively and completed five major dance/screen projects (two BBC Dance for Camera commissions and three Arts Council England Capture projects). They have created commissioned work for Extemporary Dance Theatre, Mantis, Transitions, Intoto, Carousel and High Spin.

Billy Cowie has composed music performed by Marie McLaughlin, Nicola Hall, Gerard McChrystal, Daphne Scott-Sawyer, Juliet Russell, Rowan Godel, Parmjit Pammi and Naomi Itami. He has released 12 CDs of his music on the Divas Records label. He has recently composed music for three BBC Radio projects: Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (both directed by David Hunter) and *Thinking Earth* (directed by Pam Marshall). He has also composed music for film directors Tony Palmer, Chris Rodley, Stephen Frears and Bob Bentley. He is currently a Principal Research Fellow at the University of Brighton. [www.billycowie.com](http://www.billycowie.com), [www.anarchicdance.com](http://www.anarchicdance.com).

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**Sondra Fraleigh**, Professor Emeritus of Dance and Somatic Studies at the State University of New York at Brockport, is the author of *Dancing Identity: Metaphysics in Motion* (2004); *Dancing into Darkness: Butoh, Zen, and Japan* (1999); *Researching Dance: Evolving Modes of Inquiry* (1998); and *Dance and the Lived Body* (1987). She has been Chair of Dance at Brockport and a Faculty Exchange Scholar for the State University of New York. Her innovative choreography has been seen in New York, Germany and Japan, and she is often a guest lecturer in Europe, America and Asia. Fraleigh is the Founding Director of Eastwest Somatics Institute for the study of dance and movement therapy, where she brings her study of Western somatic practices (Feldenkrais, Alexander, Breathwork and CranioSacral Therapy) together with her use of gentle yoga and Japanese Butoh techniques. She teaches her Eastwest Somatics Certification workshops through the International Somatic Education and Therapy Association (ISMETA) in the USA, Japan and the UK. She also continues to write – most recently, a forthcoming book for Routledge on the founders of Japanese Butoh, dancers Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo. For more information on Fraleigh and her work see her website: [www.brockport.edu/~dance/somatics](http://www.brockport.edu/~dance/somatics).

**Donald Hutera** has been writing and speaking about dance, theatre and the arts since 1977, first in his native America and latterly in the UK and Europe. Publications include *The Times of London*, the *New York* and *Los Angeles Times*, *Time Out*, *Evening Standard*, *The Scotsman*, *Glasgow Herald*, *Dance Europe*, *Dance Now*, *Dance Theatre Journal*, *Dance Umbrella News*, *The List*, *animated*, *The Doubt Guardian* and many others. He co-authored (with Allen Robertson) *The Dance Handbook* (1988) and has since contributed to the *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (1997), the *Larousse Encyclopaedia* (Latin American edition), *Fifty Contemporary Choreographers* (1996), the *International Dictionary of Modern Dance* (1998) and *The Rough Guide to Choreography* (2004), of which he was also the editor.

In 2003 Hutera made *Scary Grant*, a choreographic research commission from the presenters' consortium Guardians of Doubt (GoD); worked with Anjali Dance Company's education unit; was artistic consultant for *Stacked Wonky's* production *401 Pieces*; curated the Jerwood-commissioned *Wapping Project*, *Six White Chairs*; and began co-editing the Dance Consortium's [worldwidedanceuk.com](http://worldwidedanceuk.com) website. *Choreographus Interruptus*, an audience development project sponsored by

GoD and created with h2dance (Hanna Gillgren and Heidi Rustgaard), was presented at Nottdance 2004 and subsequently toured to Swindon's Taking Risks festival, the Youngblood season at Yorkshire Dance, Leeds and York St John's College.

**Marion Kant D.Phil.** is a musicologist and dance historian. She earned her Ph.D. in musicology in 1986 at Humboldt University in Berlin on the subject of 'Romantic Ballet: An Inquiry into Gender'. She has taught in Germany (Berlin, Leipzig) and the UK (University of Cambridge, Surrey University) and is presently employed at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA where she teaches courses in dance/theatre history, performance criticism and cultural theory.

She has been a Senior Research Fellow ('Surrey Scholar') in Dance History at the School of Performing Arts, University of Surrey (1998–2000), and a Fellow at the Centre of Advanced Judaic Studies at the University of Pennsylvania (2000/2001).

Her publications, among others, include: *Auf der großen Straße: Jean Weidts Erinnerung* (1984), *Tanz unterm Hakenkreuz* (1996, second edition 1999), *Hitler's Dancers: German Modern Dance and the Third Reich* (2003) and *Giselle* (2001, commissioned by the State Opera, Berlin).

Her main research and subsequent publications focus on the problems of exile, on dance and music history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and on dance aesthetics. Together with musicians Marshall Taylor and Samuel Hsu, she has organized and presented a series of concerts commemorating *Entartete Musik*, music forbidden by the Nazis.

**Claudia Kappenberg** trained in modern dance, Butoh and movement analysis, and danced professionally in Europe and New Zealand before moving to London in 1991. She studied Fine Art and completed an MA at Central St Martin's School of Art and Design in 1988, teaching on the BA Fine Art until 2002. She is now Lecturer on the Dance and Visual Arts Course at Brighton University.

Claudia worked with the Austrian expressionist dance choreographer, Hilde Holger, for many years and reconstructed and performed a number of her choreographies in London (South Bank Centre, 1996; Riverside Studios, 1998; and Lilian Baylis Theatre, 2000) and the Odeon Theater, Vienna, 1998.

She has exhibited and performed her work internationally, including 'Flush', performance installation, The White Space, London, 2004; *Flush*, as site-specific performance, Centre d'Art en Ile, Switzerland, 2002; *Aeolus*, film/video installation, Aldwych Underground Station, London, 2002; *Umbracadabra*, performance, Hazira Performing Arts, Jerusalem, Israel,

2001; *Zim-Zum in taffeta*, performance and video installation, Gallery Piano Noble, Geneva, Switzerland, 2000.

Commissions include: *Shingle Street*, dance video with Rosemary Lee/Simon Whitehead, 2003; *Journeys*, video project with members of the deaf community, Camden Arts Centre, London, 2000 and multi-media projects with the Educational Departments of the Royal Opera House and the English National Opera in 1996/1997.

**Deborah Levy** has always written across the art forms. Her fiction includes *Beautiful Mutants* (1989), *Swallowing Geography* (1993), *The Unloved* (1994), *Billy and Girl* (1996). Her recent collection of short stories, *Pillow Talk In Europe And In Other Places* (2003), is published in the USA by Dalkey Archives Press. Five of these stories were broadcast on BBC Radio 4, as was her ten-part adaptation of Carol Shields' novel *Unless*. Plays written between 1987 and 2000 are published by Methuen in *Levy: Plays 1* (2000). Deborah has written about performance and contemporary culture for a number of anthologies and media, including texts for Forced Entertainment's *Marathon Lexicon of Performance* (2003), texts for *Changing States: Contemporary Art and Ideas in an Era of Globalisation* (2004), *Small Acts: Performance, the Millennium and the Marking of Time* (2000), an essay on the work of Rose English in *A Split Second Of Paradise* (1998) and she edited *Enhanced Performance* by Richard Layzell (1998). She is currently collaborating with German sculptor Asta Grotting on a script for a ventriloquist and dummy *The Inner Voice/I am Big* for Theater Der Welt, Stuttgart, and the Museum of Modern Art, Oslo. Deborah is a visiting lecturer in Writing at the Royal College of Art. [www.deborahlevy.co.uk](http://www.deborahlevy.co.uk).

**Hybrid** n. Offspring of two animals or plants of different species or varieties; person of mixed nationality; (fig.) thing, word, composed of incongruous element  
~ adj. crossbred, mongrel; heterogeneous.

*(The Reader's Digest Great Encyclopaedic Dictionary 1964, Volume One: 4)*

Using expressionist movement vocabulary, and incorporating elements of cabaret, opera, dance theatre and vaudevillian humour, the work of Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie is 'cross-genre – integrating film, text and music – and blurs the boundaries between high art and popular culture' (British Council, 2005).

Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie are creative creatures – artmongers, auteurs, arch entertainers. Billy is the shy-seeming one, the quietly knowing composer-plus, anxious, perhaps, to be understood. Or to go his own way, with Liz prowling beside. She is the public face of Divas, a performer of ravenous and eccentric charm with a long, defiant jaw and a gimlet glint in the eye. Sleek and stealthy as a fox onstage and yet, like her and Billy's work itself, somehow direct, unhidden. Off-stage, Liz exudes a mix of almost maternal warmth and mischief, as if she could happily function as both instigatory colleague and role model/art-auntie to a generation of younger artists. Someone with a ready laugh and, like Billy, an invariably smart slant on a situation and its possibilities.

This is a thumbnail take on the Liz and Billy I have known – not deeply and, largely, if intermittently, through their work – since the mid to late 1980s. They are people about whom I feel I may be permitted to conjecture with first-name familiarity and, as a UK-based dance/performance journalist, about whose work I care.

As the company policy quoted above might suggest, that work can be hard to place. The diversification practised by Divas could be particularly disconcerting for spectators who like their cultural identifiers to be cut and dried, or who prefer the demarcation lines between genres and styles to be drawn in bold. I refer too to tut-tutting purists who are thrown by unpredictability or who wax squeamish at the sight of blood. Not literal

gore, but rather the vital metaphorical fluid that may be spilled when the likes of Liz and Billy are operating in full flow.

In an essay in this book, the brainy dancer-choreographer Carol Brown dubs the pair 'smash and grab artists'. The phrase implies a violence born out of creative necessity, and predicated on the notion that you take what you need to make the work, no matter what the source. Yet whatever art forms they pillage, there is never a sense of the arbitrary in Liz and Billy's choices, nor any indiscriminate faffing about. Whether fashioning pieces for stage and screen, eye or ear, they seem to know exactly what they're after and how to go about getting it. That clarity of purpose tends to endow their work with a diamond hard ambiguity.

Take *Grotesque Dancer* (1986), an unforgettable chunk of transcendental Teutonic camp in which the style and atmosphere of the Weimar Republic is turned on its head and tickled. At the same time, its old, cold spirit is sucked up and spat out into the soup of post-feminist aesthetics. Dr Marion Kant examines this solo, and its acutely funny postmodern afterthought, *Hi Jinx* (1995), in a chapter that underlines Divas' status in the lineage of German expressionist Tanztheater. Set up as a mock lecture and featuring film clips, *Hi Jinx* has a built-in appeal for academics. Professor Sondra Fraleigh uses it as a springboard for her own essay, 'Deconstructing Heidi'.

Liz and Billy are as plainly adept at turning their hands to group pieces as they are at tailoring one-person shows to Liz's unique gifts. On the heels of *Grotesque Dancer* came such dazzling, distorted ensemble pieces as *Eleven Executions* (1988) and *Dorothy and Klaus* (1989), a lip-synced and highly gender-conscious dance-opera in which the mechanics of seduction and inspiration, exile and corruption were given the full Divas whack.

I finally caught up with the solo *Absurdities* a decade after its 1994 premiere. Better late than never. Cooing English and barking German in a short, snug silver dress, Liz makes a knowing spectacle of herself on a stage shared with a miniature stuffed monkey and a few phallic baguettes. The magnetic attraction of her precision exhibitionism resides in the contrasts between the naughty but nice, silly yet sophisticated. This book slips Deborah Levy's appreciation of Liz and Billy's exacting yet accommodating art, including *Absurdities*, in amongst the more scholarly musings.

Skipping ahead into another medium, there is the deceptively manic Gothic gorgeousness of the film *Motion Control* (2002). Read about it in Sherril Dodds' chapter 'Screen Divas'. Energetically pitched somewhere between dreams and nightmares, Liz and Billy's film work in general

leans towards the weird, wacky and wonderful. Assembled in 2003, *Capture 3* was a touring collection of screen-based installations, more conventional single-screen films and new media works commissioned and funded by Arts Council England. *Men in the Wall* (2003) was one of the hits of the package. 3-D glasses enhanced this four-screen, stereoscopic dance-on-film installation. Situated against various backdrops (day, night, urban, coastal, etc.), each male – a mixed batch of builds, temperaments and nationalities – dwells in his own walled square. They talk, sing, play music and move in a fashion stamped with Liz and Billy's signature blend of quirky-humoured poetry and askew beauty.

Only the most onanistic artists function in a communication-free void. Most want to inspire and/or provoke both audiences and debate. Consider the implications of this publication and the accompanying DVD, a double-barrelled document that signals Liz and Billy's recognition of their place in (British) dance/theatre/performance/live-art history. Together, they proclaim the right of Divas' finely crafted amalgam of what could be called posh and pop culture to be taken seriously, or to be included at all.

The opposite seems to have happened with some regularity to a company that, on home turf, is located not very far south of centre (i.e. London) in Brighton. Yet despite Divas' proximity to the UK's dance capital, Liz and Billy have not always been invited to sit at the table, let alone received sufficient credit for their contribution to the feast. Small but perhaps significant examples of neglect are two Dance Books publications dating from 1992: Judith Mackrell's *Out of Line*, subtitled 'The Story of British New Dance'; and Stephanie Jordan's *Striding Out*, with 'Aspects of Contemporary and New Dance in Britain' as its titular appendage.

Starting in the 1960s, the label 'new dance' gained currency on both sides of the Atlantic, but particularly in Britain, as postmodernism's even more amorphous younger cousin. Unlike the durable if somewhat antiquated modern dance, today it is a term that is all but forgotten. In any case, neither Mackrell's nor Jordan's studies of it mention Aggiss, Cowie or Divas, even in the wake of about a dozen works made up to that time, including the seminal *Grotesque Dancer*. There are further sins of omission. When Debra Craine and Mackrell revamped the *Oxford Dictionary of Dance* for a 2000 publication date, again Aggiss, Cowie and Divas were absent. Not that I mean to point fingers, for they would need to be self-directed: the original edition of *The Dance Handbook*, which I co-authored with Allen Robertson in 1988, is likewise minus any Liz and Billy references.

That some of the freshest, most valuable examples of artistic expression materialize on the socio-cultural fringes is a potentially frustrating truism, because there is always the risk that they may be overlooked by the wider public. While I would hardly characterize Liz and Billy's work as mainstream, neither would I deem it inaccessible. It is simply its own animal, roaming through a territory it has staked out and claimed for itself. Is that why the work of Divas has sometimes fallen through the cracks and been unfairly marginalized, or altogether ignored?

I have no idea how Liz or Billy feel about this state of affairs or, indeed, whether or not they would even agree with my assessment of their situation. To expand on an earlier statement, they appear perfectly willing and able to get on with the business of Divas in their own indefatigable way. But, assuming my words contain even a nugget of truth, this book ought to go some way towards rectifying a sizeable and ongoing oversight. It's not that the depth, breadth and sheer longevity of the work needs to be legitimized. Rather, it is simply the case of giving credit where credit is due.

One of the publication's most salutary aspects is how well Liz and Billy's output stands up to close inspection and step-by-step analysis, without being either robbed of its import or drained of complex or cheeky life. For a dance/theatre hack like me, such reductivity is a primary danger when academia meets art. It has turned out to be eminently readable, whether via Dr Valerie Briginshaw's perspective on spoken and physical language in *Die Orchidee im Plastik Karton* (1989), or co-editor Ian Bramley's self-questioning look at the often divided critical response to the company. Liz herself deals with some of the chequered critique she, Billy and Divas have received in her chapters on reconstruction and what she calls 'Outsider Performance'. The book is further punctuated by her and Billy's methodically detailed thoughts on their own use of time and rhythm, space and visual metaphor.

Move beyond Britain again and even a glance at just a few of the countless possible contemporary artists whose work might be considered hybrid is enough to send me, at any rate, into an associative tail-spin. There's America's Meredith Monk flirting among the worlds of music, dance and film for the past four decades; Spanish-born dance artist La Ribot treating her own body like an installation site; Saburo Teshigawara choreographing, designing and compiling soundtracks for performances by his company Karas; and Israeli duo Inbal Pinto and Avshalom Pollak manipulating dancers and actors almost like puppeteers via live stagings that reference modern, classical, street and show dance, plus acrobatics, theatre, music hall, circus, movies and cartoons. Oh no,

another double act. And yet another, José Montalvo and Dominique Hervieu, whose French-based Compagnie is known by their hyphenated surnames. The pair's productions toss together ballet, hip hop, African dance, flamenco and film. The many movement languages they plunder lend their shows a physically polyglot fizz in which everything is up for grabs. It is the skill with which they select and interweave the different styles wherein lies the true art.

Conclusions? I'm not sure I have any, other than the continued value of thinking outside the box, the idea that all good dance is good theatre, and the need for an artistic integrity that is greater than the sum of a work's parts. All of which speaks the word Divas.

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Further information on Liz Aggiss and Billy Cowie can be found at: <http://www.anarchicdance.com>; <http://www.lizaggiss.com>; <http://www.billycowie.com>.

## introduction

navigating the known

*liz aggiss and billy cowie*

Welcome to our world. We have been creatively joined at the hip since 1980. We met in Brighton on a piano stool, fielding a heated debate with an unwieldy group of visual and performing arts students who wanted to deconstruct 'Funky Town' and give it a 'make-over'. Enough said. After 25 collaborative years, we are still debating what, why, where, when, who-with, what-for, which-way and how. We started to collaborate because we knew no better. We carried on because there was no reason not to. We continue because we have a tried and tested working method that supports our individual strengths. We will continue because we share a common artistic vision with room for debate.

We have been comfortable in being 'maverick hybrids', and have over the years devised dance theatre, cabaret, live art, single and multiple screen dance installation and live performance installation. Our work is presented under our names, Aggiss and Cowie, but also under the umbrella title Divas Dance Theatre. Since one of our primary artistic concerns focuses on the choreographed body, we are most often located within the British dance environment. The shifting hierarchies we employ, whether we use the live or screen space, are as much about being able to work in hybrid practices as they are about being fascinated by the friction between and the reconciliation of distinct aesthetics and disciplines. Our work is driven by content, explores body politics and the performer as subject, and makes commentaries on language, word-play, age, death, love, power, Thatcher, diversity and difference. The physicality of the work is dominated by a trademark grotesque, stylized, dance-performance vocabulary. The choreography is collaged, cut and sited within dramatic visuality. We aim to entertain, provoke, challenge and inspire, and blur the boundaries between high art and popular culture. Our need is not to resist classification but to re(de)fine our own.

Our practice has in no small way been informed by our working as tutors of visual performance within an art school environment at the University of Brighton.<sup>1</sup> There we have attracted those students who fall between the floorboards of dance and art, and have taught them within

the 'creative mess' of a visual art environment. The courses we led strove to establish a performance identity informed by appropriate visual media, suitably installed or located, and underpinned by a contextual theoretical research. The student body, at the inception of these particular courses, was a political animal and was instrumental in challenging the prevailing structures and institutional attitudes – in the process spawning some fascinating independent artists.<sup>2</sup> Their insistent creative and energetic ebb and flow provoked discussions that impacted on our own research and development. The question of whether we were being deliberately anarchic was not the issue. We were, and are, artists and, like the students we taught, we are making and defining our world.

In developing the structure of this book, we invited a range of contributors: academics, theoreticians, writers, performers and critics, all of whom were familiar with our work, to hone in on specific pieces from our repertoire. Inasmuch as our practice has been broad, the collection of essays in this book similarly identify 'other' ways of writing about dance, and nestle alongside current debates on what constitutes practice-based research. We invited the contributors to brand their discussions with their various writing expertises – historical, theoretical, academic, critical, analytical, performative – and we gave them *carte blanche* to maintain their individual voices. In fact we insisted on it. Indeed, we hope you will feel feverishly excited by some of the more maverick texts that punctuate and inform the more academic contributions. In this spirit of difference and diversity we urge you to read the writers' biographies, which go some way towards explaining the diversity of function and form, and the peculiarities and anomalies that jostle for space with each other in this publication. We have also given ourselves a voice by contributing eight essays. The house style of this book is that there is no house style.

Throughout the book there are many instances of cross-referencing and some repetition of facts. This enables the reader to sample any essay independently of the others and saves them from experiencing a sense of inadequacy and failure by not cantering through the whole book in one fell swoop. Additionally, the reader can sometimes experience the same work from a variety of different perspectives (not always in agreement), and be enriched and enchanted by the plethora of methodologies, 'languages' and voices.

Scattered throughout the essays are DVD references. They look like this – (DVD 3:4) – and refer directly to the issues being discussed. This provides an unparalleled opportunity for the reader to match words to movement. Some of the essays have multiple references to different

works and consequently each has a page on the DVD that contains all the information for that essay in a numbered sequence.

The filmed documentation of our live works ranges from the non-existent in the early years through to the frankly shabby, adequate and finally brilliant. This is partly due to the increase in availability, and fall in expense, of video equipment over this period, but also due to a change in our perspective. Initially, we were so knackered by producing the work that documentation was the last thing on our minds – years later we would realize that not a scrap of a piece remained, and was in effect lost forever.

So of the early works, *Kakarella Ka Diva* (1986) and *Dva Sa Momimomuvuli* (1986), nothing remains. *Grotesque Dancer* (1986) and *Dorothy and Klaus* (1989), on the other hand, were filmed in studios using several cameras, while most of the others are single-camera documentations of live performances. Our dance work made specifically for screen is, of course, not documentation but a genre in its own right, and a whole other marvellous ball game. In compiling the DVD we have been principally concerned with illustrating the essays, so we have on occasion included work that is not of the highest quality in filmic terms. We hope that as you look through the haze of second-generation VHS copies you will be so intrigued by the content that you will forgive us.

As for the ‘who did what’ question, we should say that, from the outset, all our work is truly collaborative, from the ground up. Inhabiting the dance world, however, by default rather than choice, the question of choreographer most often arises in the minds of critics. Aggiss, being the one who physically fronts the outfit, nearly always gets the blame (or sometimes praise) for the movement. However, the fact is that, after the first few productions, whichever of us was feeling most inspired would take up the choreographic baton and run with it until we were floored by the other’s barbed, critical and caustic comments. Latterly we pragmatically sliced up the works into manageable chunks and negotiated who would do which aspects of the ‘steps’ as we like to call them. Strangely the Yin/Yang combination of Aggiss, the ‘stand-up dancer’ who can actually perform the movements, and Cowie the ‘armchair choreographer’ who can only dream them, works surprisingly well. Ironically, or is it tragically, both of us could bring dancers to tears by asking them to do things they couldn’t do – Cowie by demanding the truly impossible and Aggiss by demanding the possible (but only by herself). Similarly the texts and music, while seeming more Cowie’s department, arise organically from the nature and construction of the works and are once again truly collaborative. As an example, when

presented with the first two pages of the script of *Absurdities* (1994) which contained only the word ‘my’ 79 times, Aggiss was heard to sigh, ‘Is that it?’ To Cowie’s challenge, ‘It’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it’, she rose magnificently, though she says it herself (DVD 1:1).

## Notes

- 1 From approximately 1980 to 2000, after which we moved to the relatively calmer waters of research at the same institution.
- 2 Among the many passing through our sticky fingers were: Anne Seagrave, Fiona Wright, Silke Mansholt, Miriam King, Ian Smith, Michael Pinsky, Louise Rennison, Marisa Carnesky, George Chakravarthi, Magali Charrier and Alison Murray.

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