

Dramaturgies of Love in *Romeo and Juliet* Word, Music, and Dance

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4 Choreographing Love

Balletic Contact in Sasha Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*

4.1. Dancing *Romeo and Juliet*

Mon théâtre n'est pas narratif, mais émotionnel et abstrait.
(Waltz, "Symphonie" 66)

The paradox of the choreographic Shakespeare is that it silences Shakespeare in order to speak.
(Campana 156)

The preceding chapters have juxtaposed two vastly different renditions of the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative. While both follow similar dramaturgical trajectories, envisioning the protagonists' affective relationship as a gradual removal away from their surrounding environments, they employ distinct medial strategies to do so. While Shakespeare's early modern play stages the lovers' tragedy predominantly as a transformation of Petrarchan discourse, that is, verbal language, Berlioz's dramatic symphony shifts the lovers' emotions from opera into the domain of symphonic, that is, instrumental, music. The heightened lyricism that informs the dramatisation of love in Shakespeare is thus rendered "speechless" by Berlioz. In musically silencing Shakespeare's famously poetic lovers, Berlioz unintentionally anticipated a tendency that was to become even more prevalent in the reception of *Romeo and Juliet* across the arts in the 20th and 21st centuries: the adaptation of the play in the non-verbal art form of dance. Particularly in the classical form of concert dance, ballet, the *Romeo and Juliet* sujet has become a staple piece of company repertoires around the world due mostly to the unwavering popularity of Sergei Prokofiev's ballet score from 1935 and its now canonical interpretations by acclaimed choreographers like John Cranko for the Stuttgart Ballet (1962), Kenneth MacMillan for the Royal Ballet (1965), and Rudolf Nureyev for the English National Ballet (1977) – then called the London Festival Ballet (Fuller 66–72; Campana). Even though Berlioz did not compose his own *Roméo et Juliette* with the intention of

choreographic staging in mind, the piece has been adapted for the balletic stage multiple times too, for example by Maurice Béjart for the Ballet du XX^e Siècle in Brussels (1966) or more recently by Davide Bombana for Volksoper Wien (2017).

In contrast to these more classical examples, this chapter instead focuses on the contemporary interpretation from 2007 by German choreographer Sasha Waltz for the Ballet de l'Opéra national de Paris, or Paris Opera Ballet,¹ a production that broke new ground in several ways. For one, despite Berlioz's standing as a quintessential figurehead of French romanticism, it was the first-ever staging of his *Roméo et Juliette* in the history of one of the most prestigious and oldest ballet companies in the world. The production made Waltz only the third German female choreographer ever to work with the Paris Opera Ballet, following *Tanztheater* pioneers Pina Bausch and Susanne Linke (Luzina, "Roméo"). Most significantly, the commissioned production marked the first ever full-length creation by Waltz for a classically trained ballet ensemble. Aside from the 20-minute piece *Fantasie* for Opéra de Lyon (2006), the contemporary choreographer had only worked with her own Berlin-based company Sasha Waltz & Guests previously. The production also displayed monumental proportions, featuring a large-scale set piece designed by Pia Maier Schriever, Thomas Schenk, and Waltz herself for the spacious stage at Opéra Bastille, and assembling more than 100 performers which included not only the *Corps de Ballet* and the three *Étoiles* – or "star dancers" – Hervé Moreau (Roméo), Aurélie Dupont (Juliette), and Wilfried Romoli (Frère Laurent) but also the Paris Opera choir and orchestra in addition to vocal soloists Ekaterina Gubanova, Yann Beuron, and Mikhail Petrenko. Following its premiere in 2007, Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* was also staged at Teatro alla Scala in Milan (2012), Deutsche Oper Berlin (2015), and De Nationale Opera in Amsterdam (2016) and was revived in both Paris (2012 and 2018) and Berlin (2015, 2016, and 2018).

Waltz's production can be called hybridised in a twofold sense. Not only did it bring together the antithetical aesthetics and principles of classical and contemporary dance but it also combined the altogether different art forms of dance and opera. As I elaborate in the following, this generic hybridity is typical of Waltz's so-called choreographic operas – productions that blend the art forms of musical theatre and dance and suspend the artistic boundaries thereof (Sasha Waltz & Guests, "Oper"). Because of this very hybridity, Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* marks a choreographic continuation of the affective and dramaturgical trajectories identified in Shakespeare and Berlioz earlier. I argue that just like their renditions, Waltz conceptualises love as a site of affective and generic transformation. In particular, the *Pas de deux* as a formal emblem of romantic love in classical ballet is revised through the infusion of the aesthetics of Contact Improvisation (CI) – a dance form that emerged

as part of the post-modern dance movement in the United States in the 1960s and 70s. Breaking with the strict academic conventions of classical ballet, CI envisions duet dances as physical dialogues between two equal partners, who support and carry one another through ongoing movement and shared physical contact. Integrating these premises into the classical formula of the *Pas de deux*, Waltz creates a choreographic code for amorous emotion which – like Shakespeare – highlights the duological reciprocity between the two lovers and – like Berlioz – conveys its semiotic meanings through processes of formal abstraction.

This chapter explores the dramaturgical and adaptational implications of this choreographic code by offering a five-part discussion of *Roméo et Juliette*. Firstly, I place the production within the wider contexts of Waltz's oeuvre and her concept of the choreographic opera – including her first opera creation *Dido & Aeneas* (2005) and her most recent one, *L'Orfeo* (2014) – as well as within the aesthetic history of classical and non-classical dance. This contextualisation highlights not only stylistic differences of the latter in terms of conceptualising movement, body, and gender but also underlying divergent ideas on emotionality, especially regarding the more conventional emotionalism in classical dance and the more affect-driven impulses in non-classical dance. The main part of this chapter consists of an in-depth analysis of Sasha Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*, specifically her use of “balletic contact” as an intermedial equivalent to Shakespeare's amorous community and Berlioz's topical fields and gestures, divided into three segments: the ensemble scenes in the first movement preceding the “Scène d'amour”, the “Scène d'amour” itself, and a selection of scenes following the “Scène d'amour”, including Roméo's “silent” solo and the “Finale”. Following this structure, I argue that while the *Pas de deux* between Roméo and Juliette constitutes the most elaborate crystallisation of balletic contact in the piece overall, this code is already hinted at in the group scenes prior to the duet and also echoes back in the *Corps de Ballet* following the families' reconciliation during the “Finale”. Waltz's choreography thus signifies a hopeful and humanist prospect that is denied in the renditions of both Shakespeare and Berlioz, namely, the survival and continuation post-mortem of the lovers' amorous ideal, even past their own premature deaths.

4.2. Bodies and Spaces in Dialogue: The Works of Sasha Waltz

Even though the oeuvre of Sasha Waltz, one of the most significant European choreographers in contemporary dance in the last 25 years, has been noted for its wide-ranging generic diversity (Hardt, “Waltz” 673–674), one of its underlying commonalities is Waltz's interest in spatiality and the relation between the human body and different spaces – be these performative, architectural, or social spaces. In a series of interviews

with journalist Michaela Schlagenwerth, Waltz states that “I think of the space, even before I think of movement. For me, the space has to bear in itself the essence of the piece. It is the starting point, the carrier of atmosphere” (Schlagenwerth 13, my own translation).² This interest in distinct spaces as settings for choreographic action is already on display in her early creations, including her breakthrough work *Allee der Kosmonauten* (1996). The piece opened her first independently created performance space in Berlin, Sophiensäle, and centres its action on a living-room sofa in a prefabricated high-rise building. In preparation of the production, Waltz had interviewed multiple families living in suchlike apartments in the district Berlin-Marzahn. *Allee der Kosmonauten* continued the strategy of her previous *Travelogue* trilogy, all three pieces of which were set in recognisable everyday-life spaces (Schlagenwerth 9–11): a kitchen within a flat-sharing community (*Twenty to Eight*, 1993), a bathroom and a bar (*Tears Break Fast*, 1994), and a hotel room (*All Ways Six Steps*, 1995). Aside from the spaces depicted within the works themselves, Waltz’s interest in spatiality also became manifest by staging performances in locations not designed as sites of theatrical performances or dance. In 2009, for example, the choreographic installation *Dialogue 09 – Neues Museum* inaugurated the then still empty Neues Museum in Berlin, following its 10-year-long reconstruction by architect David Chipperfield. Other spaces performatively inaugurated prior to their official opening were MAXXI, the newly constructed museum for contemporary art in Rome in 2009 (*Dialogue 09 – MAXXI*), and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg (*Figure Humaine*) in 2017. The different creative phases in Waltz’s career thus notably correspond to the performance spaces of the works in question.

Given that correspondence, I focus in the following on a selection of Waltz’s works which are the most relevant for contextualising the generic idiosyncrasies of *Roméo et Juliette*. These include her three-piece cycle on the human body at Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz in Berlin – *Körper* (2000), *S* (2000), and *noBody* (2002) – as well as her first so-called choreographic opera, Henry Purcell’s *Dido & Aeneas*, which premiered at Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg in January 2005 and opened at Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin the following month. I chose these works with regards to the significance that they hold in Waltz’s diverse oeuvre overall and for the analysis of *Roméo et Juliette* in particular, from both a chronological and a creative perspective. The following section therefore aims at identifying in these productions a number of artistic patterns that also distinguish Waltz’s development of the choreographic opera and her idiosyncratic staging of Berlioz’s dramatic symphony.

Körper (2000) marked a turning point in Sasha Waltz’s career, opening the 1999/2000 season of the renowned Schaubühne in Berlin. Waltz had previously taken over the creative directorship of the theatre alongside director Thomas Ostermeier and dramaturgs Jens Hillje and her husband

and co-founder of Sasha Waltz & Guests, Jochen Sandig. The production marked the beginning of a new era of the theatre, which had predominantly staged spoken-word drama in the past, as a “Zweipartienhaus” with both dramatic and choreographic repertoire. *Körper* had been preceded by two small-scale *Dialoge* projects at distinct locations the previous year: *Dialoge '99/I – Sophiensæle* and *Dialoge '99/II – Jüdisches Museum*. Both projects had served as research and preparation for *Körper* which proved an enormous success, earning Waltz her second invitation to the prestigious Berliner Theatertreffen after *Allee der Kosmonauten* and becoming the most frequently performed piece in the repertoire of her company with more than 200 performances worldwide as of 2018 (Hardt, “Waltz” 674; Sasha Waltz & Guests, *Körper*). *Körper*, conceptualised as a performative analysis and dissection of human anatomy, was followed by *S* in the same year and *noBody* in 2002. The two later pieces formed a trilogy together with *Körper*, expanding the exploration of the human body begun in the earlier piece into further thematic fields. While *S* engaged with ideas of *eros*, desire, and sensuality – aspects which Waltz had deliberately excluded from *Körper – noBody*, following the passing of Waltz’s mother, examined metaphysical facets of human existence, particularly the separation of body and soul in and after the moment of death. Aside from their shared thematic interest in the human body, the three pieces also exhibited several stylistic features that differed considerably from Waltz’s earlier works and would anticipate future developments in the choreographic opera, specifically the increasing degree of thematic and narrative abstraction and the use of large-scale set pieces as means of spatial dramaturgy.

Waltz’s works preceding her era at Schaubühne were not only all set in spatially distinct scenery but also shared a recognisable thematic and choreographic tone (Schlagenwerth 9–11). Particularly in the *Travelogue* trilogy, Waltz engaged critically with more socially realist issues, like the dynamics of three family generations living together in a small space in *Allee der Kosmonauten*, through playful, often slapstick-esque choreographies which frequently made elaborate and humorous use of everyday material objects, including a wooden plank, a kitchen window, or the aforementioned living-room sofa (Vaghi 298). The social playfulness of her early works gave way to a considerably more abstract, sombre, and existential tone in the *Körper* cycle. Individual segments, particularly in *Körper*, maintained stylistic remnants of Waltz’s previous works, like physical comedy when a dancer “shakes” the water out of a fellow dancer’s body or the use of fictional narrative references when several dancers individually tell alleged life stories of their mislabelled body parts to the audience. In general, however, the three pieces lack the more concrete narrative through-lines of Waltz’s earlier productions, instead presenting collages of abstract, performative approaches through movement towards overarching thematic focal points: anatomy, sex, and death.

This tendency towards formal abstraction re-echoes strongly in *Roméo et Juliette*, in which one of the main creative incentives for Waltz was Berlioz's abstraction of Shakespeare's narrative into a musically fragmented form that leaves a number of important story points in the play, including the deaths of Tybalt and Mercutio as well as Romeo's subsequent banishment from Verona, untold (Waltz, "Symphonie" 65).

The thematic and choreographic abstractions in her Schaubühne productions correspond to the spatial dimensions offered by the new performance site. After the smaller capacities of her previous stages, Künstlerhaus Bethanien and Sophiensäle, Schaubühne, designed by Erich Mendelsohn in the 1920s, contains a massive half-round concrete structure, the walls of which Waltz laid bare in both *Körper* and *noBody* by removing the black cloth covering the stage walls. Furthermore, the spatial capacities at Schaubühne allowed Waltz to create large-scale set pieces that would have been impossible previously. Capable of exploring the relation between bodies and spaces in greater proportions, all works within the *Körper* cycle feature set elements that inform the dramaturgy and choreography of each piece in significant ways (Vaghi 298–299). In *Körper*, the central element is a massive black wall, which crashes down to thunderous effect halfway through the performance (Figure 4.1). The first lengthy scene takes place behind a smaller transparent surface integrated into the lower centre of the



Figure 4.1 Sasha Waltz's *Körper*

Source: Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (2000), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

black wall, exhibiting like a display case several dancers, dressed only in underpants and moving in slow motion on top of and next to each other. The almost voyeuristic exposure of the dancers' raw physicality to the gaze of the audience within the small cabinet-like space, emphasising "the beauty of the body itself and its vulnerability to objectification" (McJannet 546), sets the aesthetic tone of the performance to come, once the dancers leave the cabinet and the performance expands to include the entire stage area. Even after the opening scene, the wall continues to inform the action of the piece, with the dancers using the wall repeatedly as a blackboard to write and draw upon with chalk and appropriating it as a platform to dance upon after its fall. Such spatial dramaturgies can be seen in *S* and *noBody* too.

S, while not as overt in its use of large-scale set pieces as *Körper*, nevertheless features two large video walls. Initially displaying projections of waves and oceanic imagery, the visuals in the last third of the piece change to allude to Hieronymus Bosch's painting *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (see *Garten der Lüste* 31:02–47 min), displaying a wooded glade seemingly inhabited by naked human bodies, animals, and human-animal hybrids. The two-dimensional visual allusions on the video screens then carry over into the costumes and props of the dancers as well as into their slow and sensual movements, which include a couple of dancers lying down on stage in a white, milk-like liquid, reminiscent of the more idle naked figures in Bosch's triptych and the video projection in the background. The painting, which served as inspiration of the piece, is thus evoked as an aesthetic frame of reference through the video projections and then embodied physically in the choreography. In contrast to *S*, the aesthetics in the final piece of the cycle, *noBody*, appear more in line with *Körper*. Like the latter, *noBody* again exposes the bare concrete walls of Schaubühne without adding any decorative scenery. More importantly, the work also features another large-scale set piece comparable to the wall in *Körper*, namely, a voluminous white balloon-like piece of cloth shaped as a cube (Figure 4.2) – also referred to as "cloud" (*Sasha Waltz: Installationen* 10–11).

The use of the balloon fulfils several functions in the performance. On the one hand, given the thematic engagement of *noBody* with questions of death, its appearance in the otherwise empty concrete structure of Schaubühne atmospherically speaks to various metaphysical associations, including heaven, transcendence, and the afterlife. It also becomes an object of interaction for the dancers. In a scene towards the end of the performance, a female dancer – seemingly unconscious – is laid down on the stage floor in a funeral-like procession by the other dancers, who take off their clothes and bury the woman underneath them. She later reappears, now dressed in a white gown, and starts to interact with the balloon, at first hesitantly touching it, then jumping into and being carried by the cloud, or rather by the other dancers hiding

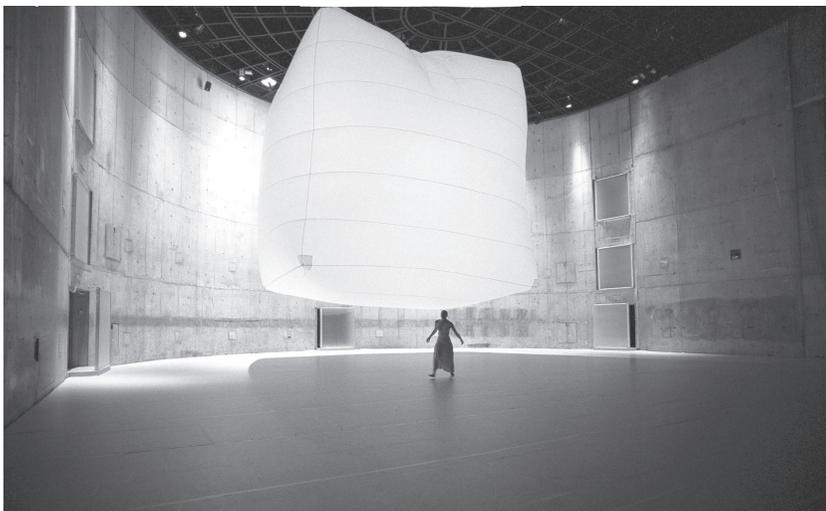


Figure 4.2 Sasha Waltz's *noBody*

Source: Schaubühne am Lehniner Platz (2002), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

beneath the fabric. Eventually she is swallowed by the balloon, at which point the other dancers re-emerge from underneath it and collectively deflate the balloon, leaving behind only a small heap of white material which appears to cover the curled form of an unmoving human body. The human physicality of the dancer's body is absorbed and eventually reduced to the non-human physicality of the balloon. The ending of *noBody* suggests a death-like transition from a living human body as extensively examined in *Körper* to a non-living "no-body", the shape of which can no longer be distinguished from the non-human piece of cloth, thereby "choreographically debat[ing]", as Bradon Shaw argues, "the neat separations between the living and dead, the animate and inanimate, and self and other" (42). While the stark immovability of the cabinet wall in *Körper* highlights the physicality of human movement in minute detail, the dynamic movability of the balloon in *noBody* draws attention to the cessation of human movement in the transition from life to death.

In all three cases, the set pieces used in the performances exceed the function of ornamental spectacle. Instead, they inform not only the overall aesthetics but also the choreographic action itself and the dramaturgy of each production, challenging the conventional dualism of the active human subject and the passive non-human object in choreographic practice (Fenger). The set pieces thus reinforce the more critical performative

use of scenography in contemporary dance in opposition to more conventional pictorial stages in classical dance:

The scenic environment had therefore to become part of “real depth”, that which is carved and anchored in the bodies themselves as they respond to space through rhythm and density. . . . [T]he pictorial stage dissolves in order to reinvent the horizon of its own emergence elsewhere. Thenceforth the visual context is no longer contextual: it becomes part of the *écriture* and will maintain with the danced movement this dialectical (and neither illustrative nor fusalional) aspect which founds and furnishes the very keys to the *écriture*.

(Louppe 214)

Waltz’s choreographic operas are likewise – or in the case of *Roméo et Juliette* even more so – defined by an affectively dialectical relationship between the performers’ bodies and the material space of the performance (Vaghi 299–300), a dialectic which constitutes the dramaturgical signature – or *écriture* – of each Schaubühne production. *Körper*, *S*, and *noBody* thus exemplify an emergent tendency within Waltz’s work towards choreographic, narrative, and scenographic abstraction and fragmentation and as such mark not only chronological but also aesthetic precursors to her operatic phase yet to come.

Waltz and Sandig left Schaubühne in 2004 after artistic and financial conflicts within the creative directorship of the theatre. Following the completion of the *Körper* cycle with *noBody*, Waltz created two further pieces prior to her departure, *insideout* (2003) and *Impromptus* (2004). The latter marked Waltz’s first work using not only live music, but specifically classical music by Franz Schubert, after working with pre-recorded music and soundscapes previously. *Impromptus* served as a preliminary study to her first full-length production outside of Schaubühne in 2005: Henry Purcell’s baroque opera *Dido & Aeneas*. Similar to *Körper* five years earlier, *Dido & Aeneas* marked another turning point for Waltz. Not only was it the first creation for her reinvented company Sasha Waltz & Guests as an independent ensemble outside of Schaubühne but it also started what would be a long-term engagement with musical theatre, a new domain for the choreographer at the time. Defying creative and financial odds, *Dido & Aeneas* – a co-production by Sasha Waltz & Guests, Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, Staatsoper Unter den Linden Berlin, Grand Théâtre Luxembourg, and Opéra de Montpellier – repeated the landmark success of *Körper* and became another staple piece for the company.³ This spurred a series of generically diverse opera productions which – apart from *Roméo et Juliette* – includes Pascal Dusapin’s contemporary operas *Medea* (Grand Théâtre de Luxembourg, 2007) and *Passion* (Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris, 2010), Toshio

Hosokawa's *Matsukaze* (Théâtre Royal de la Monnaie, Brussels 2011), Richard Wagner's *Tannhäuser* (Staatsoper im Schiller Theater, Berlin, 2014), and most recently a return to Baroque opera with Claudio Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (De Nationale Opera, Amsterdam, 2014).

Sasha Waltz is far from the first choreographer to have ventured into opera. The illustrious names that have transitioned from choreographic to musical theatre include neo-classicists like George Balanchine and Maurice Béjart as well as contemporary choreographers like Anne Teresa de Keersmaecker (Brug 199–212). Another prominent example is Pina Bausch to whom Waltz is often compared given the former's significance for the development of *Tanztheater* and contemporary dance at large (Hardt, "Traversée" 30). Bausch first worked in musical theatre with Christoph Willibald Gluck's operas *Iphigenie auf Tauris* and *Orpheus und Eurydike*, which premiered in Wuppertal in 1974 and 1975, respectively. After guest performances of the two pieces by Tanztheater Wuppertal at Palais Garnier in 1991 and 1993, Brigitte Lefèvre – the director of the Paris Opera Ballet from 1995 to 2014 – initiated the inclusion of *Orpheus und Eurydike* into the repertoire of the company in 2005, two years prior to Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*, which was also commissioned by Lefèvre. *Orpheus und Eurydike* anticipated the same strategy that Waltz would employ later in *Dido & Aeneas*, the simultaneous twofold representation of the main characters by both a singer and a dancer. Both Bausch's *Orpheus und Eurydike* and Waltz's *Dido & Aeneas* use multiple singers and dancers to represent the two title characters, respectively. The doubling of performers for one role, rather than the conventional use of either one singer or a dancer per role in balletic or operatic performance, not only attests to the choreographers' intentions of blending music and dance but also opens new potential for representing intense (amorous) emotions like those experienced by the protagonists in both pieces, as Clemens Risi has argued in the case of Waltz's *Dido*, who is represented by one singer and two dancers: "The subjective eruption of affect, sworn in the sung text, is reshaped into movement in the choreography, contrasting the vocal eruptions with a newly established set of rules in the choreography" (99–100). The characters' conflicting emotions, like Aeneas' struggle between his desire to stay with Dido and his obligation to leave Carthage and fulfil his divine mission, are portrayed by actually having multiple medially distinct representations of each protagonist on stage. This multiplication thus creates a "tension between formalisation on the one hand and eruption on the other, between the physiologically founded mechanisms of control and action on the one hand and the transgression through each individual body and voice in performance on the other" (Risi 100; see also Weir 17).

This fragmented tension in the representation of emotion, which in Bausch's staging only pertains to Orpheus, Eurydike and Amor, is expanded onto all performers in Waltz's production. In *Orpheus und*

Eurydike, only the singers and dancers representing the three lead characters interact scenically with one another; the choir is situated in the orchestra pit and is thus spatially separated from the *Corps de Ballet* on stage. In *Dido & Aeneas*, this separation is not only suspended; its suspension becomes the very credo of Waltz's choreographic operas – a self-coined genre in which the staging focuses:

on the choreographic production and on expanding the possibilities of musical theater with the help of theatrical approaches to dance – a new kind of fusion of dance, song and music in opera. The soloists and choir members formed part of an overall choreography which dissociated them from their original functions.

(Sasha Waltz & Guests, “Oper”)

Singers and dancers are no longer separate, but move in the same space, interact with one another, even blend in with the other group so that audience members may at times have difficulties differentiating them from afar. This blending is taken even further in Waltz's most recent staging of Monteverdi's *L'Orfeo* (2014). Not only are both singers and dancers interacting simultaneously on stage but they appropriate the art form of the respective other: the singers can be seen dancing, although not as elaborately as the dancers and the dancers can be heard singing, although not as loudly as the singers. Both directions add to the spectator's confusion as to whether any given performer that they are perceiving on stage “belongs” to the singers or dancers. Furthermore, the musicians, who are located at the left and right front edge of the stage throughout the performance rather than the orchestra pit, move towards the centre of the stage in the final scene to join the singers and dancers in a large collective celebration. Like fluid generic streams flowing into the other, music and dance come together to form a “choreomusical” *Gesamtkunstwerk*, while at the same time highlighting the distinct materialities of singing voices and dancing bodies in the process (Risi 97; Vaghi 299).

The concept of fluidity as a metaphor for the fusion of music and dance is also visualised in the reconstructed prologue to *Dido & Aeneas*, which tells of the dawn of a new day with Phoebus rising in his chariot, while Nereids and Tritons ascend from the water to pay homage to the descending Venus.⁴ Dancers jump in and out of an enormous aquarium on the otherwise bare stage, partly swimming fish-like from one end to the other, partly engaging one another in intimate embraces, partly dancing ballet-like *en pointe* (Figure 4.3). The soft lighting heightens the fluidity of the dancing and adds a golden shimmer to the dancers, emphasising allusions towards a new day. The use of the aquarium as the opening visual of the opera achieves both thematic and stylistic effects. Thematically, it creates an abstract image of the Nereids and Tritons ascending from the sea and refers more indirectly to the sunken city of Carthage as

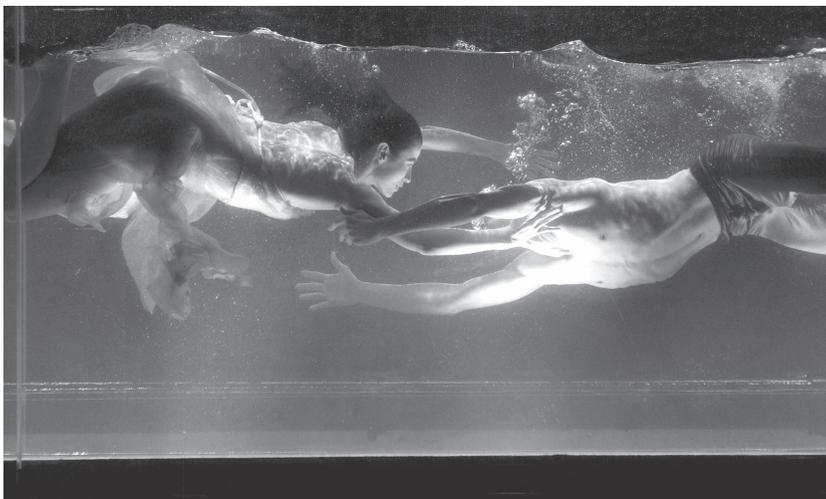


Figure 4.3 Clémentine Deluy and Manuel Alfonso Pérez Torres in Sasha Waltz's *Dido & Aeneas*

Source: Grand Théâtre de la Ville de Luxembourg (2005), copyright: Sebastian Bolesch

the setting of the opera – a setting from which Aeneas and his men will have to eventually depart again via the sea to fulfil the gods' will and found Rome. Formally, the fluidity shown in the underwater movements anticipates the aesthetic fluidity of the performance to come, not only in the dancers' flowing choreography in later scenes – in which the water as a symbol is visualised multiple times in wave-like group formations – but also in the decided porosity between music and dance in the staging as a whole. The aquarium in *Dido & Aeneas* thus fulfils a similar function to the cabinet in the wall in *Körper*. In both cases, the performance opens with a large-scale set piece which, more than simply providing decorative ornamentation, establishes performatively the narrative and stylistic framework of the respective production – stark, unembellished human physicality in one case, seemingly weightless fluidity in the other.

Considering the definition of choreographic opera, *Roméo et Juliette* marks a somewhat unorthodox example of the genre on closer inspection. Even though it features many of the salient aspects that typify Waltz's preceding works, including a large-scale set that informs dramaturgy and choreography of the piece through its sloped angle or the combination of choir and dancers on stage, it is Waltz's only choreographic opera in which the main characters do not appear as vocal parts. Roméo and Juliette are only danced as balletic roles. The only character to be represented by both a dancer and a singer is Frère Laurent in the "Finale". Due to the lack of singing in movements two to four of Berlioz's dramatic symphony,

Waltz's staging of *Roméo et Juliette* puts an even stronger emphasis on dance than her other choreographic operas, as for the majority of the piece there simply are no singers on stage. In spite of its overall narrative abstraction, this formal uniqueness places *Roméo et Juliette* considerably closer to a conventional *ballet d'action* – or story ballet – than Waltz's other operatic productions by comparison. For that reason, a thorough analysis of the piece cannot only rely on the definitional framework of the choreographic opera but also has to consider the aesthetics of classical and non-classical theatre dance to grasp how Shakespearean love re-materialises in Waltz's production.

4.3. Emotion in Motion: Contrasting Classical and Non-Classical Theatre Dance

Even though Waltz's blending of opera and dance was considered novel at the time,⁵ the two art forms were not nearly as distinct from one another when they originated as they are considered today, but instead “emerged in human history in tandem” (Carroll and Moore 414). This observation holds particularly true for ballet, which developed in Italy and France during the 15th and 16th centuries as aristocratic court entertainments known as *balli* or *balletti*, and *ballets* or *ballets de cour*, respectively (see Homans 3–48). Not unlike Waltz's choreographic opera, the court ballet was characterised by an intentional combination of different performative art forms. The Académie de Musique et de la Poésie, founded in 1570 and considerably influential for the development of the court ballet in France, promoted a “concept of an art form that would fuse all arts [and that] was to some extent realized by the composite form of the court ballet which united poetry, music, dance” (Au 12). As a consequence, it was not until the 18th century that ballet fully evolved into an independent, *sui generis* art form that had emancipated itself from other forms like spoken drama or opera.

This emancipation was the result of two important developments in the history of theatre dance. One of them was the gradual professionalisation of ballet in France throughout the 17th and 18th centuries and its transition from a social dance performed by aristocratic amateurs into a theatrical dance form performed by trained professionals. Significant events in this transition include the founding of the Académie Royale de Danse in 1661, the Académie d'Opéra – the eventual Opéra national de Paris – in 1669, and the Ballet Conservatoire – the eventual École de danse de l'Opéra national de Paris – in 1713, as well as the establishment of the academic vocabulary of classical ballet, specifically the codification of the five positions of the feet by Pierre Beauchamp, still taught and trained in ballet classes today. After the professionalisation in the 17th century, the 18th century saw a number of striking innovations that have been retrospectively coined the “ballet reform”. At the heart of this agenda – most famously exemplified by Jean-Georges Noverre's

Lettres sur la danse et les ballets (1760) – was the establishment of ballet as its own emotionally expressive and dramatic art form, independently from opera, and the promotion of the *ballet en action* or *ballet d'action* – a full-length plotted, story- and character-driven dance performance equivalent to an evening-long performance of a dramatic play in spoken-word theatre or a full-length opera.⁶

Even though hardly any ballet creations from the 18th century are still regularly performed today, the aesthetic concerns underlying the ballet reform laid the foundation for the emergence of the romantic ballet throughout the 19th century, particularly in France and Russia. The form and stylistics of the romantic ballet arguably still dominate current perceptions of the art form today thanks to the ongoing popularity of canonical classics like *Giselle*, *The Nutcracker*, or *Swan Lake*, which all premiered in the 19th century. As a foil from which to deviate, the ballet reform and its specific claims regarding the emotional expressiveness of ballet also precluded 20th-century debates among modern and post-modern dancers as to what extent dance should (or even can) be considered emotionally expressive in the first place, and if so, how this expressiveness manifests itself physically. These diverse aesthetic notions – of both the classical story ballet and its non-classical counter movements – are reflected in the stylistic hybridity of Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*. The following brief overview of the opposing spectrums of classical ballet as established in the 18th and 19th centuries and the main non-classical dance styles emergent in the 20th century therefore sheds particular light on the respective stances in the different dance styles towards the emotional expressiveness of dance – as well as their fusion in the “contemporary ballet” – a term Waltz herself has used in describing *Roméo et Juliette* (see Teatro alla Scala 15:16–20 min).

As mentioned earlier, our current understanding of classical ballet – both as a style of theatrical movement and as a category of performance in the form of the story ballet – was significantly shaped by the ballet reform of the 18th century. No longer was ballet to serve as mere decorative supplement or *divertissement* to other “serious” art forms, predominantly opera, but instead was to be taken seriously in its own right by conveying and emotionally expressing dramatic storylines and characters through the medium of movement. As such, the emergence of the story ballet was embedded within contemporaneous discourses concerning the twofold movement of dance, that is, the idea that a dancer's external physical movement as a choreographic representation of emotion would correlate directly with and evoke the internal, emotional movement of the watching spectator. In this context, Noverre speaks of a “langage des passions” (Thurner 112):

In order to stage an effective representation of feeling, theatre dance of the 18th century achieves an affectation of the corporeal-choreographic

space of representation. Choreographic practice and its aesthetic theory tread a path that chooses human emotion as its artistic motive and medial interface of communication. Generally speaking, the emotional becomes the aesthetic core of choreographic stage art.

(Huschka 108, my own translation)

Dance thus assumed the status of an *eloquentia corpis* that represents human characters as defined by their profound emotionality. This emotionality is conveyed from the performer to the spectator purely through the choreographed movement, irrespective of either the performer's or the spectator's linguistic capabilities (Huschka 112).

The emphasis placed by Noverre and other ballet reformers on the representation and the transmission of emotion through the twofold movement of dance resembles expressionist theories of emotion which, as shown in the previous chapter, characterised 18th- and 19th-century discourses on the emotionality of music. In both music and dance, emotion was conceived as a *signifié* that could be semiotically represented and expressed through the artistic medium in question. Yet, while in the case of music, these discourses conceptualised emotion primarily psychologically along the lines of the Cartesian dualism of body and soul as an internal state in need of outward expression, the emotional expressivity of dance as proclaimed by ballet reformers operates at the very intersection of both corporeal and mental capacities of the human body. As Christina Thurner states, "in Noverres's concept of new dance, body and spirit enter a new connection that outpaces the Cartesian dualism of 'res extensa' and 'res cogitans'" (92, my own translation). The histories of music and dance also differ with regard to the continuation of the principles of romantic expressionism beyond the 19th century. As seen in Chapter 3, in music, the principles came under fire from both artists and critics in the 20th century following their heyday in the 19th century. In dance, by contrast, the concept proved surprisingly persistent. Modern dance critic John Martin postulated a 20th-century equivalent to the aforementioned twofold movement of dance in his influential concept of kinaesthetic empathy, which operates from the similar premise that a performer's physical movement on stage may evoke a kinaesthetic sensation of movement in the motionless spectator off-stage (Reynolds). Furthermore, dance practitioners have been continuously advocating the notion of dance being a universally comprehensible, trans-verbal "language" well into the 21st century, even though the concept has been challenged within the academy (see Thurner 33–47; Leigh Foster, *Empathy* 2).

However, this alleged universality, or naturalness, of dance was believed to be dependent on certain performative conditions. Rather paradoxically, according to ballet reformers like Noverre, the representation

of emotion through choreographic movement could only succeed if that process was not in any way obscured by distracting emphases on the dancer's own physicality:

With the expressionist aesthetic of the late 18th century, the paradox emerges to attribute to the body a mediality that presents its aestheticised form as natural, which – retroactively – creates an aestheticising body praxis operating on the border between materiality and signification. It is this very border that choreographic-theatrical rules seek to blur and cover up, in order to make it disappear as it were.

(Huschka 109, my own translation)⁷

The dancer's phenomenal body was supposed to represent a dramatic character through physical movement, while at the same time having to utterly disappear, however so, "within" that act of representation. Any self-referentiality – whether intentional or not – that could distract attention away from the object of representation towards the means of representation was to be avoided. While the preference of semiosis over materiality was typical of literary theatre at the time (Fischer-Lichte 77–79), the prominence of bodily movement itself as the sole medium of representation in dance made the tension between the two "bodies" even more problematic in this specific art form. This paradoxical theorisation of the dancing body in the 18th century may in part explain some of the later artistic developments in 19th-century ballet, specifically what Marion Kant describes as the "separation of technique from narrative" in the romantic story ballet (283). As stated earlier, the romantic ballet was responsible for introducing many of the elements that still define the practice and expectation of classical ballet today – most importantly the pointe shoes, the tutu skirts, and the concepts of grace and weightlessness as aesthetic ideals (particularly for the prima ballerina). Furthermore, it also solidified the overall choreographic priority of "formal values such as clarity, harmony, symmetry and order" (Au 62) over narrative in the sense that "[a] *plié*, an *attitude*, an *arabesque*, a *développé*, a *battement* or any other element of the ballet method was beautiful in itself; it meant nothing" (Kant 283, see also Marcsek-Fuchs, *Literature* 35). Given the increasing demands for plot-driven drama on the balletic stage, the story ballet thus gradually succumbed to the tension between semiosis and materiality by exposing an ever-growing divide between virtuosic, but essentially "meaningless" dancing on the one hand and pantomimic acting – to compensate the lack of "meaningful" dancing – on the other. By the end of the 19th century, as Susan Leigh Foster's study of desire in the romantic story ballet has shown, "[a]ny sense of physicality as a discourse, and of dance as an endeavor that investigated and then celebrated that physicality, had vanished" (*Narrative* 254). It was this sterilisation of classical ballet and its depletion of dramatic meaning, among others,

which provided a point of departure for the radical renewal of theatre dance in the 20th century.

After the prominence of romantic ballet in the 19th century, theatre dance in the 20th century saw a variety of reactions against the classical form. These reactions ranged from internal revisions and innovations within ballet itself to the external emergence of completely new “non-balletic” forms of theatre dance as aesthetic competitors to classical ballet. The internal revisions of classical ballet particularly pertained to choices of topic, music, and choreographic practices. As Stephanie Jordan has detailed in her seminal study *Moving Music*, the 20th century saw rising theoretical and practical challenges to the assumed structural equivalence – if not even “marriage” – between music and dance in classical ballet, particular by non-classical artists:

Equivalence between the arts became an irrelevance, the modern dance pioneers after Duncan and Denishawn considering it reactionary to hold on to the principle of music leading dance. Whereas music was once considered a liberating mechanism, it was later viewed with suspicion: it could limit the development of a choreography. Autonomy for dance was sought, alongside new structural relationships between music and dance.

(19)

As a result, Jordan, argues, “new ideas about conversation and counterpoint between the two strands of music and dance began to emerge” (21). This emergence could be seen particularly well in the productions of the Ballets Russes. The Ballets Russes, a Russian ballet company performing in Paris between 1909 and 1928, progressively challenged many of the aesthetic principles of the romantic ballet – among them the illusion of flowing weightlessness and grace through minimal floor contact, the dominance of highly romanticised music like Tchaikovsky’s, or the degradation of male dancers in preference of the ballerina (Au 61–85). This rethinking of classically balletic conventions was exemplified most radically and famously by the Ballets Russes production *Le sacre du printemps*, which premiered on 29 May 1913 at Théâtre des Champs-Élysées with music by Igor Stravinsky and choreography by Vaslav Nijinsky. The riotously raging audience response to the premiere, which broke with practically all choreographic, musical, and narrative conventions inherited from the romantic period, earned the production the infamous title of “crime against grace” (Hudson vii). Gradually, this reputation gave way in subsequent decades to reassessments of *Sacre* as the quintessential signature piece of dance modernity due to acclaimed productions like Pina Bausch’s iconic interpretation for Tanztheater Wuppertal in 1975. Further innovations throughout the 20th century included the increasing use of non-balletic music for dance performances by choreographers like

George Balanchine, Maurice Béjart, and John Neumeier (Woitas 564–566). Choreographers also turned to literary works as narrative source material for ballet creations, establishing a tradition that Iris Julia Bührlé has called the “literature ballet” (202–207). These works departed from the fairy-tale-esque ballets of the 19th century in their more critical and self-reflective engagement with character psychology and narrative realism, dramaturgically bridging the romantic trenches between pantomimic acting and abstract movement (Bührlé 194). Choreography became the foundation, not the obstacle, of narrative communication and dramatic expression as choreographers appropriated literature and non-balletic music to recover the discursive complexity that had been lost in the late 19th century (see also Kellermann, “Tale” 168–169).

The aesthetic innovations within ballet as exemplified by the original production of Nijinsky’s *Sacre* coincided with the emergence of new forms of theatre dance as alternatives to and counter-movements against classical ballet. The main movements among these new forms can be summarised under the terms “modern dance”, “post-modern dance”, and “contemporary dance” (Lampert 107). According to Laurence Louppe, their common denominator was the rejection of academic ballet vocabulary as a transmitted movement language, that is, a style of movement that been originally codified centuries ago and was then transmitted to subsequent generations of dancers by continuous adherence to these codes in ballet classes. Instead, these dance styles developed their own non-codified techniques and rules of movements which had not been transmitted down from previous generations.

The individualisation of the body and original movement expressing a non-transferable identity or project; the production, and not reproduction, of movement (from out of the sensible sphere of each person- or from a deep and willing commitment to the another’s choices); work on the matter/ material of the body, of the self (in a subjective way or, by contrast, through working on alterity); the non-anticipation of form. . . ; the importance of gravity as a spring for movement (whether through playing with it or giving oneself up to it).

(Louppe 17)

Johannes Odenthal has charted a similar trajectory throughout 20th-century European dance:

[T]he 20th century forms a unique continuum of a new art form, which had emancipated itself not only from the aesthetic and bourgeois constraints of classical dance, but also from traditional theatre. Modern dance has – from today’s perspective – introduced into art

history the body as the existential starting point of artistic expression, and has wielded an enormous influence on other arts.

(11)

While the newly emergent dance styles in the 20th century, regardless of terminological denotation, shared a common rejection of the classical paradigms of ballet, they also differed from one another in a number of aspects, one of which is often cited as a distinction between modern and post-modern dance: the question of emotionality in non-classical dance. Conventionally, modern dance – a movement generally identified with American dance between the 1920s and 50s and exemplified most prominently by the works of Martha Graham – attributed an inherently emotional self-expressionism which post-modern dance then countered with its distinct non-referentiality and rejection of emotion and narrative. This avant-garde movement in American dance emerged during the 1960s and 70s and was defined, among others, by the works of Merce Cunningham and the Judson Dance Theatre collective (see Banes, *Terpsichore*).

The idea which constituted modern dance in the first decades of the twentieth century is the synthesis between the body and movement under two operations: subjectivation of the dancer through (emotive) self-expression, and objectivation of movement through the physical expression of the dancing body.

(Cvejić 17)

This synthesis was then subsequently disrupted by responses in post-modern dance, including the abandoning of narratives, silent and musicless performances, and the integration of everyday, non-aestheticised movements into choreographies. Yet the widely held conception of modern dance as defined by emotional expressiveness has not remained uncontested, with critics considering accounts that simply differentiate between modern and post-modern dance along the dividing line of emotional versus non-emotional as reductive. Such accounts, Yvonne Hardt claims, wilfully ignore both the overt degree of expressive abstraction in modern dance works and the profound affectiveness of post-modern dance works in spite of their stylistic minimalism (“Emotions” 139–155). Furthermore, Paul Atkinson and Michelle Duffy argue that the emotionalist differentiation between modern and post-modern dance should not be based on the expressionist theory of emotion as internal, psychological states, but on more recent ideas on embodied intensities in the wake of affect theorists like Brian Massumi:

For modernist dance, the breadth of the theory of affect means that it is able to explain the radical shift from the sentimentality of the

nineteenth century to the depersonalised abstract intensities of the avant-garde without arguing that this is based on the removal or suppression of feeling. Contours of feeling are always present but their modality changes depending on the structure of presentation style and the particular manifestations of the gestural and intensive movements of the body.

(94)

Affect thus no longer marks an internally felt state which is then expressed externally, but an intensity that operates in the very border zone between the inner and the outer, between the mental and the corporeal. As Atkinson and Duffy show, such reconception also reconfigures the relationship between modern and post-modern dance (98–99), highlighting not their allegedly incompatible epistemological discrepancies, but rather their similarities as aesthetically different manifestations of the same underlying phenomenon. The degree to which post-modern dance can and in fact must be considered as affectively charged becomes even more apparent when applying Atkinson’s and Duffy’s concept onto a specific dance form that not only exemplifies post-modern dance at large but also informs the stylistic hybridity of Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*: CI.

CI evolved during the 1970s out of works by post-modernists Steve Paxton, Nancy Stark Smith, and Trisha Brown and denotes a dance form in which usually two people perform together in improvised, unchoreographed movements that are governed by mutually shared physical contact between the two partners. Through physical points of contact and the sensual impulses that such contact produces, the dancers give and receive body weight and momentum between one another and thus engage in “an energetic dialogue that continuously loops between the partner” and allows them to “pour weight, like water, into another’s body” (Cooper Albright, “Feeling” 270). This pouring relies not only on the dancers’ mutuality and reciprocity but also on their utmost equality: a female dancer is just as much allowed and expected to carry and physically support a male dancer and vice versa – unlike the classically balletic *Pas de deux* in which it is almost exclusively the man lifting and displaying the seemingly ethereal woman (Kaltenbrunner 36). Given the intrinsic interrelatedness and interdependence of their bodies, Contact Improvisers are required to execute a heightened degree of empathetic awareness towards their partner in order to ensure a physically safe and harmless performance and to create a bond of trust between the self, which may be experienced afresh in the process, and the other:

[T]his need to tune in to the nuances of our partner – and ourselves as well – distinguishes CI. We not only discover what is possible with our partner, but also uncover possibilities we may not have known existed within ourselves. The dance serves as . . . a laboratory for

understanding the functions and physics of the body, a telescope for viewing the mind, a performance staging a relationship.

(Pallant 42)

This performative exploration of the self and the other is based upon physical contact or more specifically touch which has to be maintained – in some way or another – at all times throughout the duet:

A nonverbal signal, an event that is both solitary and shared, touch directs attention. The contact points provide the stable yet mobile foundation upon which the dance is based. Dancers communicate through this elemental tie, a sensate act dependant on the tangible presence of another.

(Pallant 102)

Given this sensate dimension of touch and its role in the performance of CI, post-modern dance, as exemplified by CI, can be very much considered a highly affect-driven dance form, if we do not define affectivity as an outward expression of an internal state, but along the lines of Cheryl Pallant and Gerko Egert as a processual intensity emerging in and from the very in-betweenness of two embodied entities (Egert 36–40).

In that regard, modern and post-modern dance are more closely entangled than their opposing names suggest. The intricate and at times difficult categorisation of dance styles into modern and post-modern is problematised further by the aforementioned third option of contemporary dance. This terminological abundance begs the question how the respective terms and choreographic styles relate to one another. How do “modern”, “post-modern”, and “contemporary” differ from each other, chronologically, stylistically, and affectively? Or may they simply, as Louppe suggests, be combined under the umbrella term of “contemporary dance” (17)? The latter has itself been questioned for its potentially devaluing implication towards allegedly “non-contemporary” forms of dance (Cvejić 5). Consequently, some critics approach contemporary dance less as its own uniform category of dance, and more as an umbrella term for choreographic practices – particularly since the 1980s – that hybridise distinct pre-existent dance styles including ballet, modern dance, post-modern dance, or *Tanztheater*. Contemporary dance is therefore less defined by any homogenous aesthetic or technique, but rather by its inherent heterogeneity and stylistic fragmentation.⁸ The growing number of contemporary choreographers who have worked with classically trained ballet companies in recent years reflects this distinct openness towards divergent art forms and aesthetics.⁹ Such works do not speak to the irresolvable tension between classical and non-classical dance, but rather to Susan Au’s observation that “as categories of dance . . . grow less strictly defined, dancers and choreographers more frequently cross

the once fiercely guarded boundary between ballet and modern dance” (210) and to the creative potential that such crossings may bring forth.

Expanding on the hybridity of contemporary dance as a whole, Waltz has described her production of *Roméo et Juliette* as a “contemporary ballet” (see Teatro alla Scala 15:16–20 min) – an inherently ambivalent and multifaceted term, as suggested by a *Dance Magazine* article in 2014 (Perron; see also Farrugia-Kriel and Nunes Jensen). It may be defined chronologically as any balletic production – including canonical classics like *Swan Lake* – being staged and performed in the present day. Yet it may also be defined stylistically as a ballet production using distinctly contemporary, that is, non-classical, movement vocabulary:

Innovative concepts are added to the classical form and style with the use of regular ballet vocabulary. The difference is that in contemporary ballet form there are influences of modern dance and modification in the strict adherence to classical form. It permits a greater range of movements that may not look like the strict body lines of the schools of ballet technique. Many of its concepts come from the ideas and innovations of 20th century modern dance, including floor work and turn of the leg.

(Scheff et al. 42)

The contemporary ballet thus blends classical and non-classical attitudes towards theatre dance, appropriating the non-balletic forms and aesthetics of contemporary dance to rewrite the template of the classical narrative ballet in the novel template of the contemporary ballet (see also Kellermann, “Silence” 44–45). In the case of *Roméo et Juliette*, we can extend this definition: contemporary ballets display influences not only from modern dance but also from post-modern and other non-classical dance forms; it is this very heterogeneity that makes the ballet contemporary to begin with. The predominant choreographic influence in the case of Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette* is CI, a form in which the choreographer was trained herself early on in her career and which she has since cited as the aesthetic groundwork of her oeuvre (Schlagenwerth 34–41). Conceiving the love between Roméo and Juliette, specifically their *Pas des deux* in the “Scène d’amour”, as a balletic contact dance allows Waltz to tell their affective story in a way that is at once deeply intimate and critically engaging with conventional gender norms in classical ballet. On a larger scale, the production follows the principle of the *ballet d’action* as a full length-performance that conveys a dramatic plot through choreographed movement, yet it does so – echoing the more experimental premises of the literature ballet – by appropriating more unconventional premises from non-classical dance: abstraction, hybridisation, and fragmentation. Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette* thus operates in a strikingly similar way to its musical material: just as Hector Berlioz conveys amorous emotion

by abstracting his operatic narrative into symphonic music, so too does aesthetic abstraction work not as an impediment, but instead as the very foundation of emotional expression in the contemporary ballet.

4.4. Establishing Balletic Contact in *Roméo et Juliette*

One of the prerequisites to the analysis of any dance performance is the question of “newness” (Balme 162): is the piece performed a newly or recently created work, or is it rather the revival of an older piece created decades ago – as is often the case with canonical works in classical ballet like *Swan Lake*? Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette* falls into the former group: “The choreography is completely new. The choreographer chooses the music, which has usually been composed for other purposes, and creates a new series of moves for the dancers. This is the norm in contemporary dance practices” (Balme 162). The categorisation of the performance in terms of its newness has further analytical consequences: “If a completely new work is to be analysed, the approach will be largely intrinsic. Points of departure might include other works by the same choreographer or other treatments of the same subject matter” (Balme 163). As stated earlier, a distinguishing feature of this treatment of the *Romeo and Juliet* sujet – and Waltz’s later works overall – is its emphasis on abstraction, not only choreographically but also scenically. The only set piece on stage consists of two massive, sloped, white platforms lying on top of each other at the beginning of the performance. The degree to which a choreographic production like *Roméo et Juliette* uses expressive abstraction as means of representation also informs the manners in and extent to which we may infer meaning from that production, for which Christopher Balme lists four distinct categories: the imitative mode, the representative mode, the metaphoric mode, and the reflexive mode. These four categories denote different degrees on an aesthetic spectrum between mimesis and abstraction. On that spectrum, the imitative mode marks the most overtly mimetic mode, constituting movement as “an iconic representation of the action danced or performed by the character”. At the other end, the reflexive mode denotes abstract, self-referential means of representation in which “movements are themselves the point of reference in the performance” (Balme 165). As indicated by the tension between “meaningful” and “meaningless” dancing mentioned earlier, story ballets, particularly from the 19th century, frequently juxtapose the iconic and the reflexive mode. In that juxtaposition, iconic scenes usually progress the dramatic plot, often through pantomimic enactment, whereas reflexive scenes, like the *ballet blanc* acts, provide opportunities for choreographic and performative virtuosity, specifically for the lead dancers (Leigh Foster, *Reading* 68–69).

Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette* combines the different modes of mimetic and abstract representation, and with them their various ramifications

towards emotional expressiveness. Rather than distributing them into separate scenes, her ballet establishes a mode of representation – or rather, a choreographic code – that reconciles these opposing concepts: iconicity and reflexivity, mimesis and abstraction, and referentiality and self-referentiality. In the following, I refer to this idiosyncratic conceptualisation of expression *through*, rather than in spite of, abstraction as “balletic contact”: the performative bringing forth of what Susanne Langer calls “balletic emotion” (183) – the representation and expression of emotion within the diegetic story world of the ballet – through the post-modern and abstract practices of CI. Subsequently, Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette* advances the tendency in contemporary dance to deconstruct the aesthetic dichotomies that had produced the aforementioned tensions between classical and non-classical dance.

Contemporary dance and performance question anew where the conventional oppositions conceptual/emotional, minimalistic/affective come from and let them crumble by exploring them. Instead of rehabilitating affects or juxtaposing emotions with concepts, dance and performance today seek to de- and re-construct the inherently emotive structure of the choreography in the wake of the minimal.

(Kruschkova 81, my own translation)

Roméo et Juliette and its use of balletic contact stem from the same reconciliatory premise. Rather than perpetuating the oppositions listed by Kruschkova, the production appropriates the choreographic ideas of a dance form that in its original conception was void of (and opposed to) any dramatic or emotional content – CI – and explores the potential of these very ideas as means of emotive expressivity within the narrative scope of a story ballet. The innately relational principles of CI with its insistence on emphatic interdependence between two dancers thus make manifest in purely physical terms the diverse communal dynamics of emotion in Shakespeare’s play – nowhere more so than in the choreographic rendering of the “Scène d’amour” as an intimate *Pas de deux* between Roméo and Juliette. Even aside from the two protagonists and their extensive duet, however, the concept of balletic contact is already discernible and established prior to the “Scène d’amour” in the first movement during the group scenes of the *Corps de Ballet*, to whom Waltz attributes considerable dramaturgic significance (see Teatro alla Scala 10:27–11:30 min). This section elucidates that significance, arguing that the function of the *Corps de Ballet* in the first movement is to establish the choreographic principles of CI and their emotive expressivity in the distinct, but related modes of “antagonistic contact”, “supportive contact”, and “amorous contact”. In all three modes, the last of which crystallises most thoroughly in the protagonists’ *Pas de deux*, the affective and corporeal relationality of Contact dance is employed to bring

forth the emotional dynamics of Shakespeare's affective communities, ranging from the antagonising and rejecting of the other to the amorous seeking of oneness with the other.

Two male dancers run towards one another along the front of the stage. They are both dressed in suits – one in black and the other in white – and barefoot. Preventing a direct collision, they assume flexed lateral poses and forcefully extend their right arms, connecting at the upper arms and pointing with their tensed hands towards the other's legs. The white-suited dancer quickly lifts his right arm, thus shaking off the arm of the black-suited dancer, who then performs a quick strike with his left arm and kick with his left leg, both of which the white-suited dancer avoids by assuming a kneeling position on the floor. The white-suited dancer quickly rises again, before both dancers strike out again with their arms, thus entangling their upper bodies with their backs to each other. They eventually disentangle themselves again, running off towards opposite ends of the two platforms.

The first action in Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* emblematically establishes many of the defining aesthetic elements in the first movement¹⁰ of the contemporary ballet. Accompanied by the frantic crescendo of Berlioz's opening fugal theme, the dancers move fast, with the moment described earlier lasting only a few seconds. They introduce a dichotomous colour pattern of black and white, which also extends into the stage design with the white platforms (starkly contoured through stage lighting) on an otherwise empty black stage. Most importantly, they evoke associative connections between dance and martial arts. The dancers do not bear prop weapons, neither do their movements iconically resemble punches or kicks, yet their quick extensions and contractions of their arms and legs convey their seeming intention to physically harm the other: extremities appear as corporeal weapons. Notably, early Contact Improvisers like Steve Paxton appropriated principles from Eastern martial arts like Aikido or Tai Chi to conceive a responsive body whose interactions with the surrounding environment are based primarily on one's sensual awareness of that environment (see Novack 184–185; Paxton 181–183). In the opening action of *Roméo et Juliette*, each of the dancers' movements is directed in response and relation to the other. One dancer performs a fast swing of the leg, and the other dancer ducks away to avoid it. One dancer aggressively extends his arm towards the other, and the other counters by doing the same. The entire choreographic action is grounded in the relationality of the two dancers towards one another. The brief episode begins with the two dancers connecting at their extended upper arms and ends with them loosening the entanglement of their upper bodies; physical contact between two moving bodies dictates the movement. Even when there is no direct physical contact between the two dancers, their postures leave open a negative space that clearly suggests their relational connectedness as one of attack and defence, reinforcing Gerko Egert's observation that

touch in contemporary dance performatively constitutes an affective relationality between dancers that lingers even when they do not physically touch one another (12–13). From the very first moment in *Roméo et Juliette*, the defining CI concept of dance as a physical, relational dialogue between the self and the other is present and evident on stage.

This opening clash of two individual dancers is succeeded by a clash of collectives as two groups of dancers run onto the stage to stand off against each other (Figure 4.4), before dissolving into smaller clusters. The principles introduced by the opening couple are now modulated and elaborated further. The dancers' costuming – one group dressed in black and the other dressed in white – indicates a collective divide that on first glance seems to symbolise allegiances to the feuding households. This idea, however, is subverted by repeatedly emerging constellations of multiple dancers who perform similarly fast-paced and aggressive movements towards one another while wearing the same, not contradictory, colours. Rather than signalling a clear, visual dividing line, the black-and-white aesthetic suggests the harsh reality of a space governed by unilateralism, in which any intermediary grey zones appear inconceivable – on both sides of the colour and social divide. Later scenes, particularly Juliette's funeral procession and the "Finale", reinstitute the implicit alignment between colours and family allegiances – white representing Capulet,



Figure 4.4 The *Corps de Ballet* performing the “Introduction” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2007), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

black representing Montague. Yet, this early display of antagonistic movements even between apparent representatives of the same household invites an alternate reading of the familiar story. Rather than being trivially “bred of an airy word” (1.1.85) long ago, the opening scene suggests that social hostility in Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette* runs deeper than the affiliation with antagonistic familial names and costume colours.¹¹

Furthermore, a comparison between multiple performances of the ballet reveals that a considerable amount of the action in the opening scene is improvised. While the majority of the piece is minutely choreographed, some scenes still contain what Waltz calls fragments of structured improvisation (“Symphonie” 68). Certain moments, including the clash of the opening couple or the stand-off between the collectives, follow the same choreography in every performance, whereas moments, like some of the smaller clusters into which the larger collectives dissolve, do not. The number and positioning of dancers across the stage appear planned, whereas the movements themselves are different in each performance and thus appear improvised. Dancers jump against each other, lean their upper body into the arms of another, or are carried on another dancer’s shoulders. Whether improvised or choreographed, these different constellations share inherently relational premises: they do not showcase individual dancers all performing the same movement in synchronisation – as is often the case in the group scenes of classical story ballets – but an ever-changing sea of clusters consisting of multiple dancers who act and react physically in seemingly unforeseeable patterns towards their partners.

Another commonality among these interactions is their lack of direct narrative connection to the Shakespearean play. Arguably, the speed, style, and intensity of the dancers’ movements echo the opening brawl between the Capulets and Montagues in *Romeo and Juliet* – thus matching the likewise interpretation of Berlioz’s opening fugue in Chapter 3. Yet, none of the dancers represent any one character from the play in particular or could be singled out as, for example, representing Tybalt or Benvolio;¹² Juliette, as the first of only three named characters in the programme overall, appears on stage two minutes into the opening scene. Furthermore, the *Corps de Ballet* does not perform movements that qualify as iconic representations. None of the movements iconically resemble distinct actions from the play, such as the biting of a thumb or a sword fight. Instead, the dancers perform non-referential movements which gain their dramatic readability from the relational dynamics between the respective partners. A quick, horizontal extension of a leg by one dancer becomes readable as a physical attack because of the defence-like evasion of that movement by another dancer – the “attacker” becomes perceivable as the “attacker” because of his relational affiliation with the “attacked” and vice versa. Connecting this description to Egert’s model of touch, it is the affective dynamics of the relational, corporeal constellations across

the scene from which the semiotic potential and readability of the scene opens up – its readability as an intentionally disordered representation of hostility and antagonism.

While in the opening scene, relationality and interdependence serve to create an abstract representation of antagonism, another moment in the *Corps de Ballet* only a few minutes later suggests that those same principles may also be employed for the representation of different emotional dynamics. The moment in question begins antagonistically enough. Two male dancers, both dressed in black, slowly approach each other in the centre of the two platforms. The right dancer suddenly moves close towards the left dancer's upper body, slowly manoeuvring his nose from the other dancer's navel towards his chest, before returning into an upright position. The left dancer then performs the same movement directed towards the right dancer. Following this mutual act – strongly reminiscent of the biting of the thumb as a form of physical provocation in Shakespeare's play – the two dancers lean into each other, "hooking into" the other's body through a shared contact point between their necks and shoulders. By using this contact as a somatic anchor point, the dancers then move around each other while holding each other in their arms, before one of the two dancers pushes his partner to the floor. They repeat the same movement, this time with a third dancer joining into the leaning of the shoulders, yet with the same result of one dancer being thrown onto the stage by another. In their second reprisal, the movement becomes a group constellation of ten dancers (Figure 4.5). Five dancers on each side lean into one another, letting their heads rest on the shoulders of the person in front of them.

Having established this formation, both halves slowly lean backwards in opposite directions, creating a V-formed open space between them in the middle, before returning to the initial leaning constellation. The formation is noteworthy not only because of its size – displaying the largest number yet of dancers in immediate physical contact with one another – but also because the slow leaning forward and backward differs from previous group constellations in its softer and more gentle quality. Even though individual dancers momentarily break out of the constellation during the leaning by performing quick angular arm movements, the basic formation – a collective of bodies mutually leaning into and being carried by other bodies – is maintained.

The leaning formation is significant for the concept of balletic contact in a number of ways. For one, it develops further the ideas of relationality and interdependence displayed in the group constellations earlier in the scene. While those constellations similarly operate by creating a relational dynamic between multiple dancing bodies based upon points of physical contact, they mainly result in the effectively antagonistic rejection of the other's body, as seen only seconds earlier by one dancer throwing another onto the floor. Unlike those constellations, however, the leaning

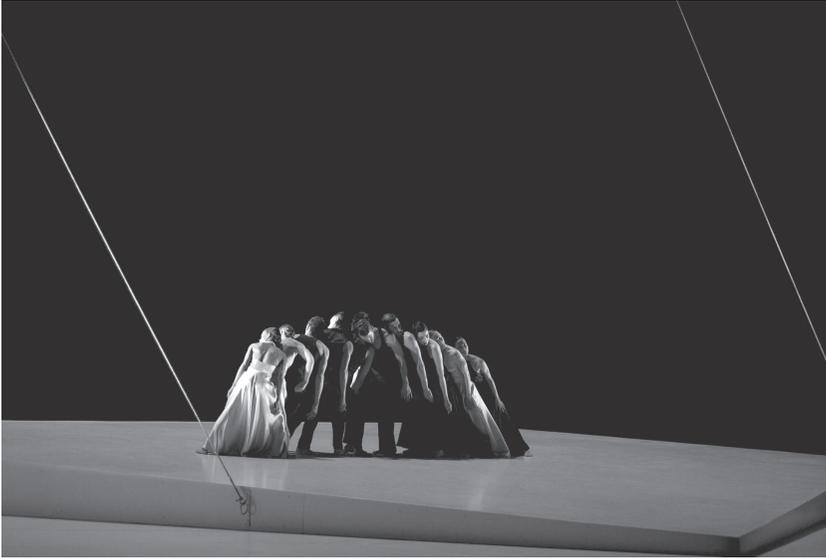


Figure 4.5 Sasha Waltz & Guests performing the “Prologue” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Deutsche Oper Berlin (2015), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

formation marks a cluster of relational bodies accepting and embracing, rather than rejecting and pushing away, the presence of the other’s body. The dancers’ bodies, specifically their upper bodies and torsos, complement each other as mutual pillars of physical support – the quintessential idea of CI.

The bodies’ supportive interconnectedness mirrors the affective communities in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet*. As described in Chapter 2, affective communities denote individuals whose affective movements share a common orientation of towardness and awayness regarding a certain person, object, or idea. In the leaning constellation, we can see the dynamic of such shared affective movements physicalised in the choreographic movement, without having to programmatically label that dynamic as representative of the Capulets or the Montagues. The dancers are clustered together through their shared orientation both in physical support of and reliance on the others, creating an abstract, choreographic representation of human connection. Both modes of balletic contact discussed thus far, antagonistic and supportive contact, rest upon the same premise, namely, upon a physical dialogue and negotiation between two or more bodies as envisioned within CI. Even in the antagonistic mode, the dancers need to performatively create a relational bond between one another in order to break that bond and reject the other. The emotional

dynamics on display might be antagonistic, but their choreographic foundation nevertheless relies on the relational principles of CI, establishing even hostility as depicted at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet* as a form of contact. Yet, predominantly the supportive mode with its embracing (and not repudiating) of the other also lays the groundwork for the mode of balletic contact that is to emerge and evolve with the meeting of the titular lovers: amorous contact.

Despite the extent to which the lovers' duologues in Shakespeare's play emphasise both their spatial and social estrangement from their environment, Waltz follows the tradition of preceding *Romeo and Juliet* ballets in embedding the lovers' first interaction in her adaption within a *Corps de Ballet* scene. Thus, Waltz's otherwise idiosyncratic staging of that meeting nevertheless points towards the protagonists' ordinariness as an amorous couple, rather than their extraordinariness. On cue with Berlioz's introduction of the festive ball theme, 20 dancers begin to fill the stage, aligning themselves in ten male-female couples across the two white platforms. Admittedly, Roméo and Juliette do take the central, frontal position on the upper white platform. Furthermore, they stand out from their fellow couples through their costumes: while the other male dancers are dressed in all black, Roméo is wearing black trousers and a white shirt – an early symbolic combination of the Capulet and Montague colours – whereas Juliette's dress displays a richer bronze tone than those of the other female dancers. Choreographically, however, the scene makes no distinction between the couples, with all of them performing the same lifts and hugging movements and holding onto their partner's arms while turning around one another. The idea that Roméo and Juliette might differ from their peers in any way only comes forth when the ten couples dissolve to form a new constellation which now overtly distinguishes between the protagonists and the *Corps de Ballet*.

Roméo and Juliette move to the opposite ends of the two platforms – Juliette to the front right corner and Roméo to the back left corner. Meanwhile, the ensemble dancers create a wall of bodies in the centre of the platforms, with two lines of nine bodies each lying on top of each other in contracted poses (Figure 4.6). This formation, although simplistic in its physical arrangement on stage, offers several possible interpretations. The most explicit one suggests that the body wall in the centre symbolises both the lovers' spatial and social separation and the obstacles that their relationship will have to overcome – a reading also supported by the musical accompaniment of the scene. As the formation is created, a choir laments Roméo's premature departure from Juliette at the Capulet ball – “Hélas! et Roméo soupire, Car il a dû quitter Juliette” (Berlioz, *Roméo* 34–35). One by one, the ensemble dancers rise and dissolve the body wall, allowing Roméo to slowly move through them, yet before he is able to reach Juliette, she has exited the stage.

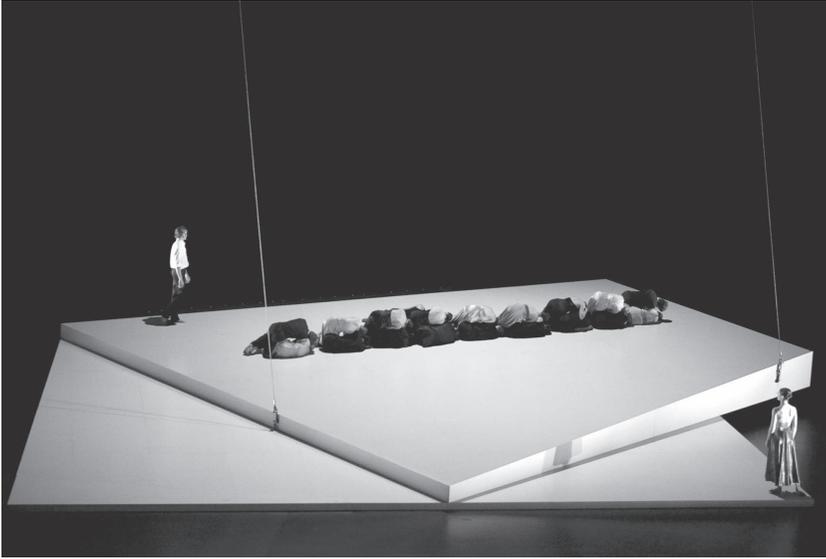


Figure 4.6 Aurélie Dupont, Hervé Moreau, and *Corps de Ballet* performing the “Prologue” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2007), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

Another interpretative option opens up by placing the scene within the larger context of Waltz’s oeuvre. A strikingly similar formation to the body wall in *Roméo et Juliette* is featured in her earlier creations *Körper* and *Dialoge ’99/II – Jüdisches Museum*, the latter of which had served as a preparatory study to the former. *Dialoge* had marked a performative installation of the newly built, still empty Jewish Museum in Berlin and thus an engagement with the architectural building as a hallmark of Jewish history in Germany through the dancers’ physical bodies. Considering the legacy of the Holocaust as a connecting thread between German and Jewish history, the alignment of multiple bodies lying on top of each other – barely clad and thus exposed in their vulnerable physicality – is highly evocative of photographs showing corpse piles in concentration camps during the Second World War (McJannet 546). Bridging this context to Waltz’s overall interpretation of the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative as that of two lovers whose sacrificial deaths effect the end of their families’ war, we may read the body wall not only as separating but also as uniting the lovers in pointing towards the dead bodies that the bloody feud between the Capulets and Montagues has already cost – and whose number the lovers will inevitably join by the end of the performance. The *Corps de Ballet* symbolise the victims of the feud that have gone

before, whereas Roméo and Juliette represent the victims that are yet to come. The scene thus establishes the choreographically paradoxical simultaneity of separateness and unity in CI as dramatically inherent to the amorous pairing of Roméo and Juliette – separated from another through the feud, yet united in their shared sense of separateness (see Stark Smith 155). In an essay on the ontological implications of touch and contact, Jean-Luc Nancy sees this simultaneity as constituent of any form of physical dialogue, not just dance.

Far from seeking a return into immanence and immersion, on the contrary [a body's] gestures assert his distinction, a separation that is neither a privation nor an amputation of anything at all. The separation is the opening of the intercourse. The intercourse is not seeking to restore a lack of distinction: it celebrates the distinction; it announces a meeting, which precisely is contact.

(“Rühren” 14–15)

The physical dialogue, or intercourse, as envisioned by Nancy is not defined by two bodies fusing seamlessly together into one, but instead by the very condition of them remaining separate and distinguishable, aligning with the philosophical conceptions of love by Tzvetan Todorov and Vilém Flusser in the preceding chapters. While Nancy does not refer to dance in particular, the relational intercourse that he attributes to moments of touch very much forms the premise of CI and thereby Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette*. More specifically, the paradoxical establishing of relationality through separation is heightened in the mode of amorous contact as it is introduced by the lovers' first lone encounter following the *Corps de Ballet* scene.

After the wall scene, all but one of the ensemble dancers – who lies down motionlessly on the upper platform – leave Roméo alone on stage, before he is re-joined by a quickly emerging Juliette, as the orchestra and choir burst into the first full proclamation of the love theme reporting of Roméo's amorous reveal to Juliette. The lovers run into each other's arms and as the love theme resounds, the two engage in an intricately rotating lift. Juliette extends and arches her left leg while grabbing the ankle of her leg with her left hand. Romeo's head enters the circular negative space created by Juliette's extremities, effectively lifting her upper body with his through a contact point between his right shoulder and her left shoulder. Balancing Juliette's upper body with his right hand, Roméo executes several rotating steps, turning around himself twice while carrying Juliette with his own upper body. He then places Juliette back on the platform. While she maintains the contact between her hand and ankle, Roméo repositions himself with his back directed towards Juliette and extends his right arm into the circular space between Juliette's extremities, creating a new contact point between their arms that allows him to perform

another rotating lift. After this, Roméo enters Juliette's arm-leg-circle with his whole upper body, letting Juliette lean backwards and being carried by Roméo's hands. As the love theme comes to a close, Juliette dissolves the connection between her hand and ankle. She lets herself fall backwards against Roméo behind her, extending her arms and clasping her hands around the back of his neck. Roméo rotates a couple of times, swinging Juliette with him in the process, before she loses her hold onto his neck and the two walk off the stage.

This brief episode is emblematic of the concept of balletic contact in that it showcases Waltz's choreographic representation of love as a blending of classical and non-classical principles. On one side Juliette's leaning motions towards Roméo is reminiscent of the "swoon", "a swift shifting of gears from solo standing to supported leaning, with an-ever-so picturesque flirtation with gravity in between" (Fisher 137), which stereotypically depicts moments of romantic love in classical story ballets such as *Romeo and Juliet*. The moment also complies with the conventional heteronormative gendering of the balletic swoon in which it is usually the woman who is swooning, while the man is supporting her. While this episode in Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* fulfils the definition of the swoon as a moment of supported leaning, it uses Contact techniques to establish a physical relationship between the two aspects, leaning and supporting. Rather than having Roméo simply hold Juliette's upper body around her waist in order to support and lift her, the two jointly create points of physical between themselves – particularly through their shoulders and upper arms – that allow their individual body momentums to blend together to create a shared movement. The lovers' encounter thus develops further the technique previously seen in the leaning formation of the *Corps de Ballet* as bodies harmoniously supporting and being supported by one another, rather than using physical contact as an opportunity to antagonistically reject the other.

In doing so, this encounter also anticipates the lovers' more extensive meeting in their later *Pas de deux* in two significant ways. For one, it evokes the notion of dance as a physical and affective dialogue of action and reaction between two partners. Juliette's circular connection between her arm and leg invite Roméo to use this figure as the basis to create a shared motion, while Juliette trusts Roméo enough to not disconnect her extremities during the motion and allowing herself to be supported by his body momentum. Despite its brevity, the encounter thus exemplifies the concept underlying CI of dance as "the sincere and intimate dialogue of two people through the interaction of their bodies, cooperating with the laws of physics" (Novack 141). Secondly, this cooperation with the laws of physics can be seen in the fact that the choreographic action in the encounter places an equal emphasis on both dancers' extremities and their torsos and upper bodies. As my analysis of the "Scène d'amour" discusses in greater detail, focus on a dancer's internal body sections,

rather than their arms and legs, is typical of CI and its prioritising of weight and gravity. In the lovers' encounter here – as in their *Pas de deux* later on – both corporeal areas, internal and external, work together to create a motion that does not seek to produce an illusion of weightlessness, but instead shows two amorous characters accepting and embracing the weight of and gravitational pull on their bodies. If the classical story ballet promotes the seeming evasion or overcoming of weight, then this particular contemporary ballet oppositely demonstrates an acknowledgement and even celebration of weight.

Subsequently, the form of amorous contact as exemplified by Roméo and Juliette in their encounter becomes a choreographic template that is elaborated and modified further by the *Corps de Ballet* in the following “Strophes” – a scene best described as an amorous counterpoint to the opening brawl scene. As in the earlier scene, *Corps de Ballet* dancers enter the stage, filling it with ever-changing body constellations that range from small duets by two dancers to larger formations encompassing the entire ensemble. Yet while the dancers in the opening scene performed predominantly harsh, fast-paced, straight-lined or angular movements, their interactions in the “Strophes” are decidedly non-aggressive, that is, gentle, fluid, rounded, as a mezzo-soprano sings about the unforgettable and indescribable rush of first love as immortalised by Shakespeare. Instead of duelling one another choreographically, the dancers lean into and support one another, allowing themselves to be carried around, and holding the other as close as possible, so that even female dancers at times lift and hold male dancers. The scene also features a slightly different colour aesthetic than the previous brawl scene. While the male dancers are all dressed in black trousers and shirts, the female dancers wear dresses of varied colours, including bronze, beige, and black. While the harsh black-and-white contrast is still present in the set design, it is less pronounced in the dancers' costumes. The amorous code previously seen in the encounter between the singular pair of Roméo and Juliette is thus transformed into an abstract and elegant dreamscape of romantic love, in which the protagonists themselves, while featured in the choreography, appear as but two random individuals among a larger number of dreamers. Shared among them and displayed in their movements is an attitude that can be described with Contact Improviser Richard Aviles as the sacredness of the other's body:

Contact demands that if you're going to be that intimate with someone who you don't know, you give them the highest degree of respect, so it has that element of sacredness. I'm going to honor you as much as possible and not violate that trust that you're providing me to make yourself vulnerable to this movement.

(qtd. in Pallant 106)

Continuing the simultaneity of unity and separateness, this sacredness is particularly visible in a brief moment without any physical contact between the lovers. Juliette is lying on the floor, while Roméo is kneeling behind her. Seemingly in awe, his hands are hovering several centimetres above the contour of Juliette's body, slowly moving up and down from her head to her legs, as if he were caressing an invisible, metaphysical aura emanating from the still Juliette. The same sequence is performed by another couple of ensemble dancers on stage, again suggesting that this balletic conceptualisation of love, while emblematically represented by the protagonists, is not exclusive to them in the dream-like world of the "Strophes". Notably, each of the couple formations displays the same negative, contactless space between the female dancer's body and the male dancer's hands hovering around it. The very lack of physical contact in this negative space visualises, however briefly, the "third force" (Novack 182) that contact dancers frequently state to emerge in dialogical interactions with their partners. The two bodies may not be in physical contact with one another, yet their relationality to each other nevertheless constitutes a moment of contactless "touch" (see Cooper Albright, "Feeling" 270–271; Kaltenbrunner 28; Novack 189; Pallant 10; Egert 12–13).

Even though CI, as typical of all streams of post-modern dance, evolved as a deliberately abstract, self-referential counterpart to the emotionality of both classical ballet and modern dance, the appropriation of CI principles in the early scenes of *Roméo et Juliette* demonstrates their expressive potential for balletic drama. The presentation of dancing bodies as inherently relational and interdependent allows for a choreographic embodiment of the affective relationships – ranging from hostile to amorous – in Shakespeare play, not only of the lovers themselves but also of collective affectivity at large. In doing so, Waltz's ballet offers new interpretative inflections on the familiar story and thus follows a trend that Susan Jones has identified in non-classical choreographic adaptations of Shakespeare's works, specifically his tragedies:

Experimental dance in the twentieth century frequently focused on formal abstraction, rather than the transmission of narrative, plot, and character. Likewise the treatment of Shakespeare in chamber-length dance works during this period accommodated a modernist aesthetic, where innovative (frequently nonballetic) movement vocabularies expressed the idea of dance as an autonomous form in and of itself.

(287)

These productions, Jones continues, deviate from the template of classically balletic Shakespeare adaptations by:

privileging economy of form, narrative dislocation, invocation of mood and compression of action, an emphasis on formal

choreographic design, and psychological and interior presentation of character, expressed through the medium of stylistically innovative modes of movement.

(287)

Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* – created for a classical ballet company, but later also performed by her own contemporary company Sasha Waltz & Guests – employs similar strategies in its reassessment of the traditional story ballet and the Shakespearean play through a contemporary lens. The emotional dynamics of the drama are physically encoded in the abstract corporeal dynamics of the dancers and the affective intensities that they exchange between one another through physical contact. Yet, just as the motivic introductions in the first movement of Berlioz's dramatic symphony only lay the groundworks for the symphonic transformations of these motifs in movements two to four, so too does the establishment of balletic contact in Waltz's staging of the symphony only prelude, more than anything, the section widely acknowledged as the choreographic and dramatic heart of the ballet: the *Pas de deux* in the "Scène d'amour".¹³

4.5. A Post-Modern *Pas de Deux*: Amorous Contact in the "Scène d'amour"

So far, I have pointed out a variety of aesthetic and ideological discrepancies between classical and non-classical theatre dance. These discrepancies, as seen with the emergence of post-modern dance, pertain in particular to opposing conceptualisations of the dancing body, that is, the tendency "to minimize the actual existence of the body, becoming pure movement, pure expression of a timeless choreography" in ballet and the contradictory focus on "weight, resistance, contingency and actual (as opposed to virtual) singularity of the body" in contemporary dance (Colebrook 12). One form of theatre dance that specifically exemplifies this tension and is therefore of crucial importance to the understanding of balletic, and specifically amorous, contact in *Roméo et Juliette* is the so-called *Pas de deux*, the duet dance between the amorous protagonists in a classical story ballet. As another inheritance from the romantic period and heavily informed by the works of Marius Petipa, the conventional *Pas de deux* adheres to a relatively fixated structure:

[T]he opening adagio for the ballerina and her partner is followed by variations (solo) for each dancer. The two dancers again join in the concluding coda, which is usually a display of pyrotechnics. The ballerina is invariably the focal point of the pas de deux, and the male dancer's function is chiefly to support her and display her beauty.

(Au 62)

As an aesthetic encapsulation of classical ballet, the *Pas de deux* became a point of contention and deviation for post-modern CI. The emergence of the latter signalled a shift away from the external focus in ballet towards a more internal, torso-based style of movement in post-modern dance. Furthermore, CI radically challenged the conventional gendering of duet dances, specifically concerning the providing of physical support towards one's partner:

In a contact improvisation duet, each member, male or female, must be ready to give or take weight, to support, to resist, or to yield, as called for by the interaction. Any kind of male or female body is acceptable, because the form depends on sensing momentum and changing from active to passive weight at the right moments.

(Novack 128)

Any gendering differentiation between the two dancers – whether through certain movement vocabulary or costuming – was to be avoided. Rather than a classical role assignment based on gender as in the classical *Pas de deux* – with the man actively providing support and the woman passively accepting that support – Contact Improvisors are equal participants in a mutually balanced, physical dialogue with the same rights and responsibilities for either dancer, regardless of gender.

Given these overt discrepancies between a *Pas de deux* and CI, Sasha Waltz's choreographing of Berlioz's "Scène d'amour" as a *Pas de deux* between Roméo and Juliette using CI-inspired movement material begs two general questions. Firstly, how and to what extent can these two opposing forms of duet dancing be brought together to create a representation of love within a contemporary ballet? Secondly, how can this specific notion of love be defined, with regards to the poetics of the piece in question as well as its dramatic and musical source materials? In order to answer these questions, I read the "Scène d'amour" in the following as a post-modern *Pas de deux*, arguing that its representation of love may be defined as an interplay between moments of togetherness and separateness in which the lovers – following Paul Kottman – achieve "mutual self-recognition" ("Stars" 5) through physical movement.

Both performers and reviewers of the "Scène d'amour" have stressed the high degree of togetherness between Roméo and Juliette during their *Pas de deux*.¹⁴ For more than 15 minutes, the protagonists fluidly engage, disengage, and re-engage with each other into shared rotations, lifts, and embraces, always entangling their extremities and upper bodies with one another as if they were yearning for the physical presence and closeness of the other. As Waltz has stated, the embrace was a focal point in the improvisational workshop in which large segments of the eventual choreography were created: "I have wished for the dancers in a *Pas de deux* to always be in contact with one another through a body part, whether

it is the foot or the hand, the head, the shoulders” (qtd. in *Programme Roméo und Juliette* 20, my own translation). In the following, I single out a few instances in the duet that emblemise how Waltz employs both classical and non-classical techniques to create physical as well as amorous togetherness.

The beginning of the “Scène”, as the first of the three main orchestral themes emerges, is filled with such moments of togetherness. At one point, Roméo is lifting Juliette, holding her upper body under his left arm, while she is holding on to his torso for additional support with her right arm. The moment demonstrates Waltz’s fusion of classical and non-classical elements. The characters’ costumes clearly signify their different genders, with Roméo wearing pants and Juliette wearing a dress. The pose also complies with traditional gender norms in classical ballet in that Roméo is actively lifting, while Juliette is being lifted. These classical signposts notwithstanding, the pose also signifies its influence through CI. As is often typical in contemporary dance, both Roméo and Juliette are bare-foot, rather than wearing pointe shoes or slippers. Furthermore, there is less overt emphasis on the dancers’ extremities. Even though Juliette appears to be reaching out towards something with her left hand, neither her arms nor her legs are fully stretched; the positions of her legs come across as a rather arbitrary afterthought of Roméo balancing her upper body with his. Most importantly, the pose is created through the reciprocal exchange of internal body mass and momentum. Both dancers mutually hold onto the other’s torso and thus emphasise the trustful mutuality of the moment.¹⁵ Roméo is able to hold and support Juliette because she is allowing him to do so, leaning into him and thus offering up her body to be held. Reversely, Juliette finds a physical anchor point to actively hold onto in the posture of Roméo’s upper body. Both dancers intertwine with one another and offer their respective upper bodies towards the other in order to hold and be held simultaneously. Soon thereafter, Roméo even lifts Juliette solely by creating a contact point between her torso and his shoulder, perfectly embodying the post-modern principles of CI (Figure 4.7). With regards to Rudolf von Laban’s influential concept of the “kinesphere” as the “the space it [the body] creates around himself and in which its bodily actions are possible” (Marcsek-Fuchs, *Literature* 42), the kinespheres of Roméo and Juliette merge together as closely as physically possible. Their interaction thus exemplifies a mode of physical communication known in dance as “listening”:

Listening, according to CI’s metaphorical use of the word, refers to paying attention to all the sensory occurrences arising from touch, from the play of weight as partners move through space, and from the event of one body encountering the presence of another. Listening refers to noticing stimuli not only within oneself but also from another.

(Pallant 31–32)



Figure 4.7 Aurélie Dupont and Hervé Moreau performing a CI-inspired lift during the “Scène d’amour” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2012), copyright: Laurent Philippe

Rather than a form of acoustic perception, “listening” denotes a state of being attuned to the physical presence of one’s partner, therefore enabling “synesthetic and kinesthetic forms of awareness which embrace both conscious and unconscious “subliminal” perceptions” (Brandstetter 165). Even though the motions described earlier are not improvised but choreographed and thereby planned in advance – as is the entirety of the *Pas de deux* – their successful execution nevertheless requires both dancers to be attuned to and in fact listen to the other’s body. This demand for mutual listening is evident for the majority of the *Pas de deux*, including one of its signature motions: Juliette’s backward leaning, or swooning, into Roméo’s chest (Figure 4.8).

Juliette leans backward on her right leg into Roméo, who “catches” her and prevents her from falling by providing his chest as a counterweight pushing against the backward momentum of Juliette’s leaning. The motion, which marks one of the earliest moments of contact between the characters and is repeated several times throughout the *Pas de deux*, illustrates the listening dialogue between the two bodies. Juliette is allowing herself to lean backwards because she can sense the presence of Roméo’s body as a physical “safety net” to receive her. Roméo has to attune his own leaning motion towards Juliette’s in order to ensure the fluidity of



Figure 4.8 Aurélie Dupont and Hervé Moreau performing a leaning movement during the “Scène d’amour” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2007), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

their shared movement and the compatibility of their bodies. Both bodies thus adjust their respective momentum in relation to the other. Such moments of togetherness in the *Pas de deux* choreographically expand upon David Schalkwyk's recent description of Shakespearean love as "a dialogical interplay of . . . sustained action rather than mere affective intensity" (*Language* 8) into a mode of balletic contact. Rather than conceiving sustained action and affective intensity as antitheses, the "Scène d'amour" – in an elongated unfolding of amorous contact as established in the lovers' encounter in the "Introduction" – reveals the interconnect-edness of the two aspects. In fact, the reciprocal exchange of body weight as a sustained choreographic action is made possible through the very exchange of affective, that is, corporeal, intensities between the two lovers as two dancing bodies that move in constant proximity to and support of and with the other.

The lovers' physical closeness and the physical duologism that derives thereof further sheds new light on some of the formal aspects of the *Pas de deux*. For one, the frequent motions of controlled leaning and falling into and with the other exemplify the acceptance of gravity as a constitutive element of – and not an impediment to – movement as is typical in CI. Even beyond the *Pas de deux*, physical disorientation becomes the fundamental condition of movement, given that the sloped surface of the white platform adds a degree of imbalance to any kind of motion – shared or solitary. Furthermore, instead of segmenting the duet into a strict pre-conceived structure such as adagio-solo-coda, the protagonists' closeness is established almost immediately at the beginning of the scene and thus forms a choreographic foundation from which Waltz can deviate at will, such as to correspond to programmatic impulses from the music. For example, during the emergence of the woodwind theme that is often read as Juliette's theme, Roméo is lying on the floor, while Juliette is standing above him, playfully lifting and swirling around his arms with her feet. Juliette is initiating and dominating the motion, while still maintaining a tender, physical connection towards and with her partner. This movement is reprised to poignant effect in the tomb scene when Juliette tries to raise the lifeless hand of the dead Roméo with her foot. At another point, Juliette is even lifting Roméo's entire body upside down, while Roméo is holding onto Juliette's legs for further support (Figure 4.9).

While these moments mark the exception in a duet that predominantly has the male dancer lifting and holding the female dancer instead of the other way around, they nevertheless establish the lovers' relationship as a mutual one in that Juliette is just as capable of taking charge of its direction as Roméo. Just as Shakespeare's poetic conception of love both continues and revises Petrarchan stereotypes, so too is the gender dynamic in Waltz's "Scène d'amour" both embedded within the heteronormative conventions of classical ballet and testifying to non-classical revisions of these conventions at the same time.



Figure 4.9 Aurélie Dupont and Hervé Moreau performing a lift during the “Scène d’amour” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2007), copyright: Laurent Philippe

The extensive phases of physical entanglement between Roméo and Juliette stand out partly because they are interspersed with moments of distance, in which there is no physical contact whatsoever between the lovers. The most obvious examples for this are the very beginning and ending of the *Pas de deux*. The lovers do not begin their duet as an established couple, but as separate individuals who hesitantly approach the other from a slowly decreasing distance. Juliette is reaching out with her right arm towards Roméo who appears to be leaning forward towards her extended reach, but still the lovers stand several metres apart from one another. At the end of the scene, separation is brought upon them through the set design. Juliette is standing on the upper of the two white platforms as it begins to rise, leaving behind the grounded Roméo on the lower platform. As the ascend of the upper platform ends, Juliette once more extends her right leg towards Roméo, who grabs it with his hands, but eventually they let go of one another, with Juliette disappearing towards the back end of the platform and thus becoming out of reach, literally and figuratively, for the solitary Roméo. In spite of its emphasis on physical closeness and togetherness, the *Pas de deux* is framed by moments of distance and separation. Moreover, such moments can also be found within the duet itself. Most significantly perhaps, as Berlioz's third main theme emerges – symbolising the fusion of two aesthetic entities by combining materials from the preceding two main themes – there is no physical contact between the lovers unlike what one might expect, given the programmatic context provided by the score. Instead, the lovers move separately and only re-establish the contact between themselves as the combined theme comes to a close. While shorter and in lower numbers, these brief episodes of separateness thus emphasise the lovers' proximity in the remainder of the duet by contrasting that proximity with a momentary lack thereof.

The moments of physical separateness between the lovers also correspond with the moments of togetherness by highlighting the relationality of their movements towards the other. Whether by mirroring the other's motion or by performing the same motion in synchronisation with the other, the protagonist's separate moments uphold the relational connectedness established in their moments of togetherness despite their lack of physical contact with one another. At the opening of the duet, for example, the lovers' motions as they face each other signal their desire to overcome the lack of physical contact between them. Juliette is reaching out towards Roméo with whom she is out of contact; Roméo is leaning forward with his upper body towards Juliette with whom he is out of contact in return. As Juliette tilts her left arm and shoulder downwards, so does Roméo. As the lovers approach each other, their motions signal a relational directedness towards the respective other before any physical contact between the characters is established. Approaching the other

is shown to be significant with regards to the creation of touch between two individuals because of its very lack of contact. The lovers' tentative approaching of each other aligns with Jean-Luc Nancy's commentary on touch and contact, in which he argues that "'Approaching' rates as the superlative movement of proximity, never cancelled out in an identity since what is 'closest' needs to remain at a distance, an infinitesimal distance, so as to be what it is" (*Thinking* 18). In their moment of approaching, Roméo and Juliette establish proximity between each other because they are physically removed – however insignificantly – from the other. In order to become connected, they have to be separate to begin with.

Considering the dramatic function of the *Pas de deux* as a balletic representation of romantic love, the *Pas de deux* in *Roméo et Juliette* highlights the role of physical distance as a part of that representation. If "Touching begins when two bodies distance themselves and set themselves apart" (Nancy, "Rühren" 13), then the dramatisation of the "meeting of two souls" (Sasha Waltz, qtd. in Blech, my own translation) as an episode of extended choreographic touch cannot be reduced to moments of directly physical, skin-to-skin contact between the two dancing bodies. The reason that Roméo and Juliette can communicate physically with another is that they are not one unit, but two separate physical entities. These moments of separateness thus also add another semantic dimension to the *Pas de deux* and its traditional conception as a balletic representation of romantic love:

In its negative form, un pas de deux would be a dance that paradoxically shows the impossibility of ever being together; a performance that throws us back on our singularity and highlights the failure of any attempt to follow in the footsteps of another. Un pas de deux troubles binary understandings of sexuality and ontology; it exposes the fact that we are always and forever out of step, riven by suspensive difference, tied to the earth.

(Lavery and Whybrow 1)

Refraining from this somewhat negative connotation of the *Pas de deux*, I argue that the suspensive difference that Lavery and Whybrow describe as emblematic of the impossible togetherness in a *Pas de deux* constitutes the foundation of the lovers' choreographic and amorous relationality in *Roméo et Juliette*. They consistently engage and re-engage in different intimate figurations throughout their duet because they can never achieve a finite end point to their agenda of seeking closeness with the other. If it were possible for them to reach this point, then the "Scène d'amour" would not have to end with the lovers separating reluctantly from the other and the inevitably tragic conclusion of the narrative could be avoided. As Nancy notes, "[l]ove does not fulfil itself, it always arrives

in the promise and as the promise” (*Thinking* 265), and it is the striving for fulfilment – not the reaching of it – which manifests its evolvment. Therefore, if, as previously stated, the “Scène d’amour” stages the acceptance of gravity as a constitutive element of – and not an impediment to – the lovers’ movements, then likewise, physical distance and separateness do not constitute opposites to physical contact, but rather the foundation based upon which contact is achieved and maintained.

The “Scène d’amour” as a *Pas de deux* thus employs both moments of togetherness and moments of separateness to create a choreographic representation of the characters’ amorous relationship. Love is not depicted as an internal emotional state which is externalised through expressive gestures; it rather emerges as a dialogical relationality between the dancers that is performatively brought forth through their ongoing exchange of motions and intensities. This synergetic dramatisation of love resembles Gerko Egerts conception of choreographic love in contemporary dance. He argues that love should not be viewed as an emotional state by any one pre-discursively conceived subject. Instead, it arises as a relational configuration from the interplay of closeness and distance between two moving bodies – bodies whose materialities are only brought forth and contoured through the process of moving relationally towards the other. This performative interplay, Egert continues, both complies with and challenges predominant discourses on heteronormative love at the same time:

An opening arises in the distance to the other that allows him/her to be touched, in which affective relations can occur without closing this gap or forming this relation . . . Love – as affective dynamic and emotional configurations – is a movement here. Neither the love relation nor the dance is to be understood as a possibility to evade these heteronormative practices. Nevertheless, these practices are changed, broken open and their social configurations of emotionality displaced.

(48)

Continuing his conception of affect as corporeal a-subjective intensities that are performatively brought forth through movement, the affective core of choreographic love is formless and can potentially break up an amorous relationship while also enabling the latter in the first place. Love takes no fixed, solidified form, but is instead continuously de-formed and re-formed in the in-betweenness of two bodies (Egert 46–48). As a relational configuration, rather than an individualist emotion, this notion of love builds upon and broadens Luce Irigaray’s concept of “I love to you”. The “to” in her formulation signifies an attitude of indirect recognition in which the alterity of the other is recognised not as something to be

conquered, possessed, and homogenised, but instead as the essential relationality between the self and the other:

I recognize you signifies that you are different from me, that I cannot identify myself (with) nor master your becoming. I will never be your master. And it's this negative that enables me to go towards you. . . . Transcendence is thus no longer ecstasy, leaving the self behind toward an inaccessible total-other, beyond sensibility, beyond the earth. It is respect for the other whom I will never be, who is transcendent to me and to whom I am transcendent.

(Irigaray 104)

Love marks a configuration of mutual transcendence between two becoming subjects, with both subjects mutually recognising and embracing the alterity and transcendentness of the other and – returning to Paul Kottman's reading – also recognising themselves in the process. Applied onto dance, and specifically Contact dance, Irigaray's theory opens up the role of touch as a means of physical communication towards “a corporeal discourse of the recognition of mutual embodiment, mutual strength and frailty, a corporeal dialogics attesting to the mutuality of the labour of love” (Hamera 231). Irigaray's “to” signifies an idealised degree of respectful difference inherent to touch between the self and other, in both non-theatrical amorous relationships and choreographic abstractions thereof. Sasha Waltz's fusion of classical and post-modern dance in the “Scène d'amour” thus represents the corporeal dialogics attesting to both the mutuality and relationality of love, using the structural framework of the *Pas de deux*.

In abstracting the corporeal dialogics of love into choreographed movement, Waltz also widens the programmatic readability of the “Scène d'amour” at large. The most overt equivalence to the *Pas de deux* in Shakespeare's tragedy is the balcony scene which is alluded to at the end of the duet when the upper of the two platforms begins to rise and creates a height difference between Roméo and Juliette that is reminiscent of the physical arrangement in 2.2 (Figure 4.10).

Beyond this, however, the *Pas de deux* averts explicit references to Shakespeare. As Waltz comments in an interview for the Berlin premiere in 2015, “I find it incredible, how the love couple spins themselves into a world of their own, for a brief moment. It is a kind of non-space. . . . A love outside of space and time” (qtd. in Blech, my own translation). An interpretative expansion of the “Scène d'amour” beyond the dramatic context of Shakespeare's balcony scene into the escapist, abstract non-reality of love, as suggested by Waltz's comments, is musically substantiated. The “Scène d'amour”, as argued in Chapter 3, can be read as a programmatic amalgamation of all love scenes in Shakespeare's play – not just 2.2 – into a musically abstract movement (Albright 99). Likewise,



Figure 4.10 Aurélie Dupont and Hervé Moreau at the end of the “Scène d’amour” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2007), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

Waltz’s *Pas de deux* could be interpreted as a choreographic abstraction of what Roland Barthes has described as the three stages of the amorous encounter – “instantaneous capture”, “a series of encounters”, and lastly “the threat of a downfall” (*Discourse* 197–198) – into a single duet.

Roméo and Juliette initially approach and capture each other’s attention, then engage in a series of intimate encounters and eventually will themselves to separate from the other. From an abstract perspective, then, the final contact between the lovers in the “Scène d’amour” programmatically harks back not just to the balcony scene, but more indirectly to the other two duologues as well. The physical arrangement, with Juliette on the upper platform and Roméo on the lower, reflects both the conventional set-up between the Petrarchan lover and his distant lady as well the metaphysical alignment between saint and pilgrim as alluded to in 1.4. It also recalls Romeo’s descent from Juliet’s bedroom at the end of the aubade in 3.5 – the last time the two lovers see each other in the play. By retaining the programmatic abstraction of Berlioz’s score in her choreography, Waltz thus transposes the entirety of the relationship of Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet – from the ravishment of their first meeting to the poignancy of their final parting – into the 15-minute centrepiece of the ballet.

4.6. Choreographic Love Post-Mortem in *Roméo et Juliette*

Sasha Waltz's choreographing of the "Scène d'amour" as a post-modern *Pas de deux* reads as an abstract embodiment of the amorous dialogics that constitute the love between Romeo and Juliet in Shakespeare's drama as a form of mutual self-recognition. Yet, just as the duologies of the Shakespearean lovers all end prematurely, so too can the dialogics of love that the "Scène d'amour" brings forth only exist within the framework of the *Pas de deux*. We already see the lovers' brief fear of being discovered in their anxious over-the-shoulder glances towards the end of the "Scène". The liberating intimacy, with which both characters encounter one another in their duet, then utterly vanishes once they abandon the context-less "non-space" of the *Pas de deux*, to use Waltz's terminology, and their love is thrown back into the acute time and space of Waltz's abstract, yet violence-ridden Verona. The next time that both Roméo and Juliette are alone on stage and come face to face, Roméo will have already drunk his fatal poison. In the remainder of this chapter, I therefore examine how the lovers' amorous contact is negotiated in the scenes following the *Pas de deux*, taking into consideration both the perspectives of the protagonists and of their social environment. This twofold discussion reveals that, firstly, the unique relationship between Roméo and Juliette and its choreographic embodiment as balletic contact undergoes a gradual deconstruction, particularly in Roméo's silent solo and the lovers' final encounter during the tomb scene. Secondly, while the lovers themselves perish, their choreographic code of love lives on in its re-appropriation in the "Finale" by the *Corps de Ballet*, suggesting the continuation of the lovers' legacy post-mortem. In interlinking these two perspectives as the successive deconstruction and reconstruction of amorous contact, Waltz's rendition of the *Romeo and Juliet* narrative concludes with a decidedly more hopeful outlook towards the future than either Shakespeare's tragedy or Berlioz's dramatic symphony.

One of the most remarkable scenes in Waltz's ballet features none of Berlioz's sweeping music: a solo danced in silence by a desperate Roméo after he has received word of Juliette's "death".¹⁶ The solo is striking for both its structural placement in the ballet and its programmatic correlation to Shakespeare. Inserted after the end of movement four, the scherzo "La reine Mab", and before Juliette's funeral cortege in movement five, it dramatises a moment that, like several episodes in Shakespeare's play, Berlioz chose to omit in his symphony. The Shakespearean equivalent – Balthasar informing Romeo of Juliet's death in 5.1 – is similarly peculiar considering Romeo's surprisingly pragmatic reaction to Balthasar's news, which lacks the emotional, metaphoric outcry of his previous exuberant

exchanges with Juliet and indicates a maturing from his earlier parading of Petrarchism (see Gajowski 46–47; Pasternak Slater 145).

Is it e'en so? Then I deny you stars! –
Thou knowest my lodging. Get me ink and paper,
And hire post-horses. I will hence tonight.
(5.1.24–26)

Leave me, and do the things I bid thee do.
Hast thou no letters from the Friar?
(5.1.30–31)

Instead of lamenting Juliet's death, Romeo immediately begins to plan his own. His separation from Juliet – not just spatially, but through his very existence – bereaves Romeo of the poetic expertise that had so distinguished him previously. The ability to poeticise and the inspiration behind his expressiveness (Juliet) are simultaneously stripped away. Romeo's quasi-speechlessness regarding Juliet's death mirrors the latter's earlier exclamation that “no words can that woe sound” (3.2.126) regarding Romeo's banishment: both embody the “[s]entiment of absence and withdrawal of reality experienced by the amorous subject, confronting the world” (*Discourse* 87) that Roland Barthes calls the “unreal” and the “disreal”. The difference between the two is the degree of verbal expressibility and conceivability: While the unreal denotes a withdrawal from the world that is still conceivable in words, the disreal is literally unspeakable:

But sometimes, once my bad temper is exhausted, I have no language left at all: the world is not “unreal” (I could then utter it: there are arts of the unreal, among them the greatest arts of all), but disreal: reality has fled from it, is nowhere, so that I no longer have any meaning (any paradigm) available to me.

(Barthes, *Discourse* 89)

In 5.1, Romeo's language borders on the disreal, making no explicit reference to Juliet's death until the very end once he has obtained the poison from the Apothecary: “Come, cordial and not poison, go with me/To Juliet's grave, for there must I use thee” (5.1.85–86). Juliet's death appears utterly unspeakable to Romeo until he has found the means to equate her death with his own. Only when he eventually sees her “corpse” in 5.3, reuniting with her spatially, does the (false) reality of her death become conceivable to him, and his ability to poeticise returns. From his perspective as a bereaved amorous subject, then, “the idea of suicide saves me, for *I can speak it* (and do not fail to do so)” (Barthes,

Discourse 218). In having Romeo immediately switch to the planning of his suicide, Shakespeare creates the impression of a lover who is rendered speechless by the disreal news of his beloved's death, but who regains the capability of speech by focusing on his own death as a means to reunite with his beloved.

Waltz gives Romeo's disreal speechlessness in 5.1 a musicless equivalent in the silent solo after the fourth movement, resulting from the wish to "open up Berlioz's work from within its center" and to "strike a breach of silence into the musical stream" ("Musik" 16, my own translation). Of course, the attribute "silent" necessitates the qualification that "there is no such thing as silence" (Welton 84) in any kind of theatrical environment. Rather, the lack of music in this case accentuates other, potentially smaller sounds, which would otherwise have been "drowned out" by Berlioz's score to grab the spectators' attention. The scene thus heightens the "sensuousness of silence" (Welton 35) inhering to any kind of theatrical performance, not just contemporary dance performances that refrain from using musical accompaniment.

We are . . . "immersed" in sound as a result, and whilst we might discriminate certain kinds of signals from noise on the basis of an education of attention, the very air we breathe resonates with the hum of things. Assailing us from all sides, sound seems to achieve a perceptual completion not granted to any other senses.

(Welton 85)

While the silent solo may be musicless, it certainly is not soundless; instead, sounds that arise from physical contact between the corporeal dancer and the material stage take the place of music, bringing forth the inherent "dynamics of movement" (Welton 85) of the production and reception of sound as well as highlighting the dualism of movement as both a kinetic and affective process. The description of the solo as silent is thus made from a musical-choreographic perspective, acknowledging not only the lack of musical accompaniment of the scene, but more generally that "pure silence is the abstract notion of complete and perfect silence free from any extraneous noise" and that "[w]e have no access to pure silence because consciousness and the noises of life will prevent us from experiencing it" (L. Schwartz 8). The juxtaposition of musical and non-musical sounds thus continues the discourse on verbal and non-verbal signification that I have already identified as dramaturgical hallmarks in both Shakespeare and Berlioz. Just as Shakespeare signifies the affective dimension beyond language by exposing the expressive limitations of language, so does Waltz, by temporarily shedding music altogether, reveal an acoustic level of presence and "the immediacy of the auditory ecology of the here and now" (Welton 94) in a way that (romantic) music cannot.

The solo, which lasts approximately eight minutes in total, can be roughly split into two phases. In the first, Roméo enters stage-left and repeatedly climbs down the rearward, raised platform, only to slide back down once he has reached the edge in the upper left-hand corner. Due to the lack of music, the spectator can perceive thumps when Roméo tries to climb and hold on to the platform with his hands and bare feet, as well as squeaky noises of friction between platform and dancer (who is shirtless underneath his black coat), as he slides down the platform. Roméo then moves to the front platform and begins a frantic solo dance, two repeated elements of which are abrupt falls to the floor as well as quick extension and extractions of the arms as if reaching out for and holding onto something (Figure 4.11). These arm movements, accompanied by seemingly exhausted groans, convey allusions to Roméo stabbing himself: he appears to be reaching for something – or rather someone who is crucially absent – and this absence becomes the source of his pain, both outwardly and inwardly. The choreography also reprises several motions seen earlier in the “Scherzetto” of the first movement, in which a tenor performs a playful homage to Mercutio’s Queen Mab speech. Coming across as a humorous representation of Mab’s effect on lovers in their dreams in the earlier scene, Roméo’s motions now take on a more poignant quality. As Brandon Shaw has described, Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s



Figure 4.11 Hervé Moreau performing the silent solo in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2007), copyright: Bernd Uhlig

conception of grieving denotes that “[t]he bereaved remains bound to a certain world, and with it a certain sense of moving around in that world, and the bond renders her or him incapable of joining the present” (32). The grieving Roméo’s solo embodies this tension between a past world and the present moment through the repetition of choreographic material. The powerful effect of love that was mocked by the tenor in the “Scherzetto” Mercutio-like as an absurdist dream now becomes a grave reality for Roméo. This musicless reprisal of motions that had been previously performed with musical accompaniment functions similarly to the transformation of operatic themes into speaking melodies as discussed in Chapter 3. The motions are discernibly similar and thus provide a choreographic connection between the two scenes, yet the silencing of the score in the later scene extends the motions far beyond their original programmatic context.

While the groans of exhaustion may be part of the mimetic enactment of the semiotic role of Roméo, they also expose and highlight the physical body and non-mimetic presence of the dancer through sonorous means. The dancer’s breathing noises, whether intentionally or not, bring forth his “body as a passage, a porous screen between two states of the world, and not an opaque, full, impenetrable mess” (Louppe 55). Regarding the physical presence of actors in theatrical performances, Erika Fischer-Lichte notes that “through specific processes of embodiment, the actor can bring forth his phenomenal body in a way that enables to command both space and the audience’s attention”. As a result, “the spectators sense that the actor is present in an unusually intense way, granting them in turn an intense sensation of themselves as present” (96).¹⁷ As a non-verbal art form, dance, which uses a performer’s physical body as the primary medium of expression, heightens this dynamic even further. In the case of Roméo’s solo, the semiotic body of the dramatic character is emphasised by bringing forth the physical body of the dancer, attesting to the semiotic “pluridimensionality” of the human body in theatre dance (see Boenisch; Cooper Albright, “Intimacies”) and negating the ballet reformers’ repudiation of non-mimetic self-referentiality. The noises that emanate from the dancer, particularly the friction noises between the surface of the platform and his skin, signal the physical distress that is affecting his body outwardly. Read within the dramatic context of the scene (i.e., Juliette having just drunk the sleeping potion in the preceding scene, and the colour black as a signifier of mourning), the outward affection of the dancer’s physical body becomes readable on a dramatic level as an expression of the semiotic body Roméo and his emotional experience.

Both aspects – the exposure of the dancer’s body by acoustically highlighting his breath and the dynamic integration of the set into that exposure – signal the influence of contemporary dance onto the balletic production. As Laurence Louppe notes, “[d]ramatised, used for its auditory or visual effect, the breath now appears in the raw. The prudishly

hidden breathlessness of the academic dancer who had always had to obscure the workings of her/his body was refused" (61). Instead of trying to conceal any sign of physical exhaustion, contemporary dancers produce "states of breath whose forms escape vision to become pure sensation of the unrepresentable" (Louppe 62) and which thus render the interiority of the human body into an exterior site of communication. The stage set consisting of two white platforms, the upper of which has been raised to an angle of over 90 degrees, does not merely frame this acoustic dramatisation of the body decoratively, but it actively participates in it by producing the acoustic tension between the materiality of the stage and the physicality of the dancer. The dynamic involvement of the scenery into the choreographic action of the solo thus affirms Louppe's argument that "Contemporary dance does not dance on the ground it dances with it" (138):

The ground is not only the functional surface for getting from "a" to "b". In modern dance and in contemporary dance it has an organic and philosophical role: it has an affective role. . . . [I]t also has a cognitive role including as the interface between the force of gravity and the experience of the body.

(137)

The affective implications of the silent solo are notably different from the previously discussed "Scène d'amour". While the *Pas de deux* stages two dancing bodies in affective harmony with one another as their movements thrive in their mutual exchange of corporeal intensities, the silent solo stages a singular dancing body in physical conflict with his environment, the stage. Sound becomes a means to make accessible a dimension of intensity that is neither solely semiotic nor solely corporeal. The silent solo creates an affective soundscape that does not consist either of spoken word, singing, or instrumental music, but solely in the acoustic intensities performatively brought forth by the materialities of the dancer and the set, revealing to the audience what Laurence Louppe calls "the sound of the live" (222). As a contemporary solo, the dance arguably functions as "both a mode of production and an intensive expression of individualist ontology" (Cvejić 184) and thus "invokes the dancer's subjectivation through her body's self-expression, or through the expression of her (psychological) interiority" (Cvejić 191), yet that interiority fuses with the affective context of the narrative events. The individualist idea in question – Roméo's escapism from reality – is conveyed paradoxically through the "silent" production of an "auditory ecology" which emphasises the inescapable "here and now" (Welton 94) of that reality in sonorous means.¹⁸

Equating the poetic sparsity of Romeo's reaction to Balthasar's news in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* with an absence of music in Berlioz's

Roméo et Juliette, the solo transposes Roméo's almost unspeakable disreality of losing his beloved into the wordlessness and "musiclessness" of contemporary dance. The silence presented in Roméo's solo and its dramaturgical function thus complement what Michel Poizat has delineated as the "trajectory in which singing grows more and more detached from speech and tends more and more toward the high notes; and culminates in the pure cry" (40) within operatic theatre:

If the terms "silence," "cry," "singing," and "speech" are arranged in that order . . . , it is not only because there is nothing further from speech than silence, but also because the cry, being the vocal manifestation furthest from verbal articulation, finds itself quite logically closest to silence.

(90)

In Poizat's model, silence marks the form of musical expression that is the furthest removed from the signification of verbal language in operatic theatre. Dancing in silence, Roméo's solo articulates his affective disreality by reaching the utmost semiotic remoteness away from verbal signification. Rather than a mere absence of sound, the lack of music allows for an affective soundscape that encapsulates both the innate corporeality of dance and the tragic speechlessness of Shakespeare's drama. Just as "Music is the silence of words" (Poizat 86), so is dance – in this particular case, but also regarding the wider tendency in contemporary dance to feature silent sequences – the silence of music and the silent deterioration of the dialogics of love in the "Scène d'amour".¹⁹

The contours of these dialogics briefly return to the stage in the penultimate movement "Roméo au tombeau des Capulets". Following Juliette's unexpected awakening and on cue with Berlioz's frantic reprisal of the "Scène d'amour", the protagonists engage in a short-lived duet that consists almost entirely of motions that the two had previously performed in their *Pas de deux*. In reprising these motions, however, the effects of the poison that Roméo had drunk prior to Juliette's awakening grow apparent. His posture and motions become sluggish, and his hold on Juliette weakens. Eventually, as he attempts to lift her over his head, Roméo has to set her back down, before he falls to his knees and finally collapses on the stage floor in front of an unsuspecting Juliette. The duet both echoes the dialogics of their previous duet and in doing so poignantly exposes the fact that those some dialogics can no longer be upheld. The foundation of the lovers' sense of togetherness in the "Scène d'amour" – their physical support of one another – gradually dissolves in the process of performing the same motions that brought forth that togetherness in the first place. Roméo is simply no longer able physically to support his beloved in the manner that he had during their

Pas de deux and thus to enable a mutual, physical dialogue between himself and Juliette. Even though a number of Shakespeare's plot points that lead to the tragic conclusion of the story – particularly the turns of events in 3.1 – are left out in the renditions by both Berlioz and Waltz, the latter nevertheless manages choreographically to follow the same dramaturgical trajectory as her verbal and musical templates: namely the idea that the lovers' relationship cannot survive outside of their own amorous sphere – regardless of whether that sphere manifests itself as a poetic community, a topical field, or a *Pas de deux*. Love as a form of physical dialogue is deconstructed when one of its constituent interlocutors irrevocably falls away; the love silence or “*Liebesstille*” (Calderwood 104) of Shakespeare's poetry gives a way to actual physical stillness in dance.

The conceptualisations of love in Shakespeare's play and Berlioz's symphony, as shown earlier, are absent from the respective reconciliations that conclude their adaptations. Both the amorous discourse of Shakespeare's lovers as well as Berlioz's musical topicalisation of love remain unheard, casting doubtful shadows over the families' reconciliation and begging the question whether the lovers' ideals will have any impactful legacy beyond their days. For a considerable while, the conclusion in Sasha Waltz's production follows the same pattern. The choirs representing the Capulets and Montagues stand at opposite ends of the stage, with the two white platforms – which are now almost fully opened – in between them. The *Corps de Ballet* is positioned on the platform in clusters consisting of multiple dancers. While the dancers of each cluster perform the same motions, there is no direct physical contact between them. As a spatial middle ground between the two choirs, the dancers appear as individuals with little relationality other than synchronicity between one another's motions, while the unmoving bodies of Roméo and Juliette lie next to each other in a bed of stones in the centre of the platforms. In line with Shakespeare and Berlioz, the lack of contact between either the dancers or the choirs suggests that the ideal of unconditional togetherness that the lovers have lived out to its utmost extreme still cannot be comprehended by their environment.

The only connecting element between the disparate groups – aside from the lovers' bodies – is Frère Laurent, the only dramatic character to be performed doubly by a singer and a dancer (both shirtless and in black trousers) not only in this scene but also in the ballet as a whole. His character not only provides a reconciliatory outreach on the dramatic level between the feuding families on either side but also, on a performative level, his twofold representation marks the coming together and reconciliation of the different art forms of music and dance in this moment of utmost crisis. Accordingly, the hostile tension of the scene subsides once Frère Laurent forces a powerful reprimand onto the feuding parties,

infusing the tragic reveal of the lovers' marriage with a spiritual demand for peace:

Grand Dieu, d'un rayon de ta flamme,
 Touche ces cœurs sombres et durs!
 Touche ces cœurs,
 touche ces cœurs sombres et durs!
 Et que ton souffle tutélaire,
 À ma voix sur eux se levant,
 Chasse et dissipe leur colère,
 Comme la paille au gré du ven!

(Berlioz, *Roméo* 326–330)

Subsequently, the choirs begin to bemoan the other family's loss – the Montagues lamenting Juliette as a sweet flower – “douce fleur” (Berlioz, *Roméo* 331), and the Capulets' grieving over Roméo as a young extinct star “jeune astre éteint” (Berlioz, *Roméo* 332) – while singers of both choirs meet and embrace each other halfway in the middle of the stage and the Capulets invite the Montagues over to their side of the stage. The reconciliation is far from complete, yet its beginning has been made as both choirs proclaim themselves to be transformed by the tragic events:

Dieu! quel prodige étrange!
 Plus d'horreur ! plus de fiel!
 Mais des larmes du Ciel !
 Toute notre âme change !

(Berlioz, *Roméo* 335–336)

Parallel to the choirs' reconciliation, a male and female dancer move to the centre of the platform behind the lovers' corpses. They establish physical contact in the same manner as previously seen in the “Introduction” and the “Scène d'amour”. The female dancer leans into the arms and upper body of the male dancer to be held by him while simultaneously holding onto his torso with her right arm for additional support. Shortly afterwards, she reciprocates the support by bowing downward and allowing the male dancer to lean on her shoulder. The display of reciprocal support in this brief duet thus strongly resembles some of the movements seen in both the ensemble scenes and the “Scène d'amour”. The motion also marks a departure from the lack of contact seen thus far in the *Corps de Ballet* during the “Finale” and a return towards the choreographic principles of the protagonists' code of love: contact, support, and interrelatedness shared between two or more moving bodies. Re-introduced initially by a single couple, these principles then manifest in a group formation that encompasses the entire ensemble.

As Frère Laurent demands of the families to swear by the holy symbol and the lovers' dead bodies – “Jurez donc, par l'auguste symbole, Sur le corps de la fille et sur le corps du fils, Par ce bois douloureux qui console” (Berlioz, *Roméo* 337–338) – the dancers come together in the centre of the stage behind the lovers and lean into each other's bodies to create a cross-formed constellation directed towards the lovers' heads (Figure 4.12). Even though the cross eventually dissolves and dancers split off from the group to move individually, they repeatedly re-establish contact and engage in smaller, contact-driven clusters resembling the group constellations of the “Strophes”. Yet, where the earlier scene marked an abstract, dreamlike imagining of amorous ideals that did not only pertain to the titular lovers themselves, the “Finale” situates these ideals choreographically and programmatically within the concrete enactment of the reconciliation. The lovers' amorous contact, virtualised in the voiceless, context-free non-space of the *Pas de deux*, is actualised in the most operatic and narrative-driven scene of the ballet. The choreographic code of love that was constructed in the “Strophes” and the “Scène d'amour” and then de-constructed in the lovers' deaths is thus re-constructed and brought back to life in the motions of the *Corps de Ballet*. The reconciliation of the opposing choirs signals the musical establishment of a peaceful



Figure 4.12 Aurélie Dupont, Hervé Moreau, and *Corps de Ballet* performing the “Finale” in Sasha Waltz’s *Roméo et Juliette*

Source: Opéra Bastille (2012), copyright: Laurent Philippe

fundament, even though the preceding chapter has demonstrated that this musical fundament is void of any of the amorous topics that Berlioz had formulated in the symphonic sections of the score. The dance builds and expands upon this fundament, signalling that the lovers' ideals – while absent in the music – may still receive an afterlife in the *Corps de Ballet* as a representation of the younger generation. It is this young generation from which the amorous ideals in question originated through the individuals of Roméo and Juliette and by which they may potentially be carried on through the collective of the *Corps de Ballet*. Thus, the dancers' bowing positions at the end of the "Finale" with their heads lowered may represent not only a gesture of mourning towards the loss of the protagonists but also as an acknowledgement of their roles as disciples to the amorous icons whose bodies throughout the entire "Finale" lie in the middle of the stage as the still, yet unavoidable epicentre of the action.

The reconciliation that is implicated textually by Shakespeare and musicalised operatically by Berlioz is embodied by Waltz choreographically in a way that takes not only the public dimension of the families but also the private dimension of the lovers into consideration. The lovers' amorous community that is exclusively accessible to the protagonists themselves in *Romeo and Juliet* is shown to be extendable beyond those two in Waltz's choreography. As a balletic duologue, the lovers' *Pas de deux* may mark the most thorough and choreographically elaborate realisation of amorous contact in the piece, yet its framing through the group scenes of the *Corps de Ballet* likewise suggests that the protagonists are not the only ones capable of appropriating and embodying that code. Roméo's and Juliette's ideals of love may be experienced beyond the lovers themselves and actually bridge the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the private and public spheres in the renditions by Shakespeare and Berlioz.

Waltz's *Roméo et Juliette* thus presents a reading of the Shakespearean tragedy that complies with many interpretative conventions of the sujet, while at the same shedding new light on those very conventions. At its centre, the ballet portrays the choreographic iconicity of two unique individuals, while also suggesting that this iconicity is not an exclusive attribute accessible only to them. From the very opening, the production features a highly dichotomous aesthetic of black and white that remains unchanging throughout the piece. Even though this aesthetic is obviously reminiscent of the two feuding households, particular in the "Finale", Waltz's choreography also creates smaller moments implying that the cause of violence in Shakespeare's Verona may be too deep and complex to fit into any simplistic colour scheme. Reversely, the healing reconciliation that Shakespeare and Berlioz to varying degrees only hint at in their works becomes a choreographic reality in the *Corps de Ballet*. Waltz's formal combination of classical and non-classical stylistic elements allows for both more traditional and more novel interpretations of the drama

to coexist in the abstract framework of her contemporary ballet. Just like Berlioz's dramatic symphony offered a "(re)interpretation" which "altered our reading of a literary text in a lasting way" (Straumann 251) – in this case reinterpreting *Romeo and Juliet* from a decidedly romantic perspective – so too does Waltz offer her own reinterpretation not just of Shakespeare's literary text, but also Berlioz's musical text through the perspective of the 21st-century contemporary dance.

This dramatic insistence on the reconciliatory potential of romantic love can be linked to its performative medium and its stance towards the representation of emotion. In this rendition, love is neither a poetic discourse that needs to be spoken in order to be felt nor a form of sublime interiority that transcends the expressive reach of the operative voice. Instead, it is a corporeal act of deeply emphatic engagement between the self and the other that can be experienced by any two bodies that establish a relation of contact between themselves. In this conceptualisation, as little as two hands touching each other – just as Romeo's hand touches Juliet's in the pilgrim sonnet – suffices to establish a sensual intersubjective connection that has the potential to evolve into an elaborate exploration of togetherness as seen in the *Pas de deux*. Love becomes a configuration of relational bodily intensities that can be potentially felt by anybody, not just its most emblematic representatives, Roméo and Juliette. For that reason, the phenomenological focus on the physical materiality of the dancing body in conjunction with gravity that inheres to contemporary dance at large and to Sasha Waltz's works in particular is not a stylistic obstruction, but in fact a vital resource in balletically narrating this distinct love story. As Paul Atkinson and Michelle Duffy remark, "[d]espite the abstract and largely non-narrative basis for much contemporary dance, there remains a coherence in the way it communicates affectually through the body" (108–109), and it is this very coherence that Waltz appropriates for her narrative purposes in *Roméo et Juliette*. It might be true that her theatre is not narrative in the traditional sense of a romantic story ballet, but rather abstract in its emotional expressivity and hybridity as a contemporary ballet, as her quotation at the beginning of this chapter states. Yet through that very evading and revising of classical means of narration, Waltz has managed to find a choreographic response to the poetic and amorous revisionism of Shakespeare's lovers after all.

Notes

1. The terms "classical" and "contemporary" are used in the following as stylistic, rather than chronological, denominators, referring to the choreographic style and technique on display in a given production, not to the time of its creation.
2. On Sasha Waltz's oeuvre, see also Brigitte Kramer's two films *Garten der Lüste: Die Choreographin Sasha Waltz* (2006) and *Sasha Waltz: Ein Portrait* (2014) as well as Vaghi.

3. In 2011, *Dido & Aeneas* was even performed at Waldbühne Berlin to an audience of more than 11,500 people (see Luzina).
4. On water as a metaphor for the generic fluidity of the production, see the online collection by the Collaborative Research Center 626 on Aesthetic Experience and the Dissolution of Artistic Limits, *Grenzgänge der Kunst(wissenschaften): Sasha Waltz' Choreographie Dido & Aeneas* (Berlin: 2006), therein specifically the entries by Rentsch and Maar.
5. In her review of the Berlin production of *Dido & Aeneas*, Katrin Bettina Müller deemed the piece a “new way of reading [‘Lesart’] operatic material” (see Müller).
6. See Thurner, particularly 49–132, as well as Schroedter on the transition from the court ballet to the story ballet.
7. In juxtaposing materiality and signification suchlike, the 18th-century discourses effectively differentiated between what Erika Fischer-Lichte later coined a performer’s phenomenal, material body and the semiotic body of their dramatic role (88–89).
8. In its inherent heterogeneity, contemporary dance also differs from preceding non-classical dance styles which also developed defining teachings and techniques of their own as exemplified by their main practitioners, including Martha Graham’s Contraction-Release-Technique in modern dance (see Lampert 117; Rosiny 12–15).
9. We can see this tendency not only in the inclusion of Waltz’s *Romeo et Juliette* along with Bausch’s *Orpheus und Eurydike* and *Le sacre du printemps* in the repertoire of the Paris Opera Ballet but also in recent acclaimed works by contemporary choreographers like Akram Khan’s re-imagined *Giselle* for the English National Ballet or Crystal Pite’s *The Season’s Canon* for the Paris Opera Ballet, both from 2016.
10. “Movement” in this case does not denote the dancers’ physical movement, but instead the first section of Berlioz’s score, encompassing the “Prologue”, the “Strophes”, and the “Scherzetto”.
11. Waltz had initially considered to re-contextualise the feud between the Capulets and Montagues within the conflict between Israel and Palestine, but eventually opted for a more abstract, context-free setting (“Musik” 17; see also Teatro alla Scala 13:52–14:29 min). Remnants of this premise are still discernible in the piece, particularly in the funeral rite of covering of Juliette’s body with small stones.
12. While throughout the performance one can identify individual dancers whose costumes and choreographic actions allude to certain Shakespearean roles like the Prince, the Nurse, or Juliet’s parents, none of these are listed in the programme as dramatic characters.
13. Waltz focused particularly on the “Scène d’amour” during the creation process of the piece, describing the *Pas de deux* as the beating heart at the centre of the work. She had invited the three *Étoiles* performing in the original production – Aurélie Dupont (Juliette), Hervé Moreau (Roméo), and Wilfried Romoli (Frère Laurent) – to Berlin to participate in the improvisational workshops in which a considerable amount of the eventual choreographic material was created (“Symphonie” 68).
14. Paris Opera Ballet *Étoiles* Hugo Marchand and Amandine Albisson, who performed the title roles during the 2018 run of *Romeo et Juliette*, have pointed out the degree of closeness during the *Pas de deux* in a rehearsal interview (see Opéra national de Paris). Reviewing the Berlin premiere of *Romeo et Juliette* in 2015, Felix Stephan commented on the “Scène d’amour”: “What a Pas de deux: Romeo and Juliet, united in weightless desire, embraced in

- unending beauty. A quarter-hour of pure devotion to love, full of erotic frictions and tender touches” (my own translation).
15. Trust in itself can be considered an affective constellation between two or more individuals in that it is “transactional, becoming both a demand and a gift to the one entrusted with a duty or task, who in turn must disclose herself as trustworthy through her actions and comportment” and “involves a marked bodily and situational dimension that assembles intuitions, gestures, and outlook in a psychosomatic ensemble” (Reinhard Lupton 157–158). Considering the physical demands in classical and contemporary duet dancing, the choreographic construction of amorous mutuality thus considerably relies on the emergence of trust between the two dancing bodies, both performatively and narratively.
 16. The present discussion of the silent solo is a revised version of my earlier account in *Cahiers Élisabéthains* (see Kellermann, “Silence”).
 17. Fischer-Lichte’s theory of the performative – “Ästhetik des Performativen” in German – is grounded in a dualism of perception between presence and representation, specifically between an actor’s physical body (“phänomenaler Leib”) and semiotic body (“semiotischer Körper”): “To perceive the actor’s body in his bodily being-in-the-world establishes one order of perception, while understanding the actor as signifying a character establishes another. The first order generates meaning around the perceived’s phenomenal being that might trigger chains of association while the second order produces meaning which, in its entirety, constitutes the dramatic character. Building on the weak concept of presence we can identify them as, first, the order of presence, and second, the order of representation” (148).
 18. The silent solo thus expands upon Waltz’s aforementioned depiction of grief in *noBody* which, as Brandon Shaw argues, “infect[s] spectators with an aesthetic that cues them into the affect of grieving – the sense of persisting weightedness, of an abiding presence, of moving for two – that blurs boundaries between existing/nonexisting, animate/inanimate, alive/dead, past/present, subject/object, performer/spectator, and even practice/theory” (42). With regards to *Roméo et Juliette*, we can add further binaries to this affective aesthetics of grief: sound and silence, role and body, as well as inward and outward.
 19. The inversion of Waltz’s use of silence can have a similar theatrical effect. In the tomb scene of Christian Spuck’s *Romeo and Juliet* adaptation (2012) for Ballet Zürich, Romeo lets out a primal scream as he cradles Juliet’s lifeless body in his arms, thus breaking with the non-vocal tradition of classical ballet. Rather than exposing human physicality through a shedding of music, human physicality – as articulated sonorously through the scream – exposes itself by “piercing” through the music. Similarly to the affective soundscape in Waltz’s silent solo, Romeo’s scream in Spuck’s ballet signifies performatively that the character’s pain exceeds even the intensity of Sergei Prokofiev’s musical score, which is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5.