

A Critical Analysis

of Nicola Elliott's *Run!* (2013)

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PART 2

To begin an analysis of a contemporary performance work such as *Run!*, it is perhaps useful to first identify why such an analysis might occur – to ask the question “why do we analyse performance?” What value is there in pulling apart, interrogating and interpreting something that is essentially made to be enjoyed in the moment of its’ watching? For surely when one watches live performance one is not pulling apart each and every aspect of the work, critiquing what everything ‘means’ and assessing the effectiveness of the individual parts in relation to the whole. If the spectator were to apply this degree of evaluation while watching a live performance they would surely miss the most important part, the experience of the event itself. Experiencing a performance is not only an interpretive exercise of the mind, but one that engages multiple senses and intelligences. As viewers we garner meaning and sensation from more than just a cognitive interpretation of a work and from what we think it ‘means’. Performance is also visceral – the audience feels as much as they see and the experience of watching appeals to more than just the visual sense. So what is to be gained from an analytical process after a performance? Why bother to interpret and posit potential readings after the event itself, once the experience has already been had?

The answer is twofold and concerns the complexity of contemporary choreography in the 21st century as well as the learning potential and value in taking something apart in order to see how it works. Choreography as an art form has, over the last hundred years or so, shifted substantially into a much more complex and layered practice. Historical conceptions of the body, of performance and of the boundaries that separate different art forms have, through shifts in modern and postmodern thinking, burst open the world of choreography, resulting in a practice that extends beyond the patterning of movement to music, and as Lepecki (2008) argues, has exploded the conception of what it means to ‘dance’. Contemporary choreography is more than ‘bodies dancing’ but rather a creative art that includes, draws from and combines a plethora of artistic and theatrical elements including, but not limited to, the body, space and time as well as aural, visual, digital and corporeal texts. Creating and crafting the movement of the body is only one part of what a choreographer does when making a work, and the movement of the body forms only one text in a network of many texts that together create the viewer’s holistic experience. To choreograph a performance is to create an intricate web of signs and signifiers. Often when experiencing a live performance the viewers are not consciously aware of the network of connections, links and nuances at work on the stage. They may experience the effect of these artistic choices, but it is often only through reflection after the experience has been had that these connections become visible. Through an analysis of the performance event, its complexity can be revealed and its many layers made perceivable.

Just as a student doctor might dissect a body in order to see how it works, the analysis of a performance provides invaluable insight into the inner workings of choreography for the young choreographer. Choreography is not a skill or practice that can be easily taught. There is no definitive ‘how to’ manual and there is no singular choreographic technique. Similarly, choreography is not an innate talent that one is born with and can do instinctively or intuitively.

While it does often require intuition, it is still a skill that needs practice and can be honed. One can teach students creative tools and choreographic devices that might be useful to the choreographer and one can certainly theorise and debate its various practices, approaches and philosophies, but it is ultimately through *choreographing* that choreographers learn choreography. Young choreographers experiment and explore within their own creative practice, and through this, develop, discover and grow. By analysing performance and taking it apart to consider the intricacies of its design, young choreographers are able to gain invaluable insight into the possibilities involved in creating a performance. Each performance analysed provides an example of how this specific choreographer, in this particular instance, used these elements to create a certain kind of experience. By understanding the inner workings of a performance, the young choreographer is able to understand the intricacies of their own choreographic practices as well.

It is with these intentions that this analysis of *Run!* is provided here. The discussion that follows seeks to unpack and consider some of the concepts, theatrical elements, artistic choices, and performance strategies within the work as a way to perceive the work on a micro-level and to offer insight into the choreographic structures within the work. It is important to note here that a work such as *Run!* does not have a single definitive interpretation, nor a clearly articulable story to convey. This is not the intention of the work, and so the intention of this analysis cannot be to provide any kind of authorial reading of the work either. Performance is invariably subjective, and each viewer brings their own subjectivity to their experience of the work. Different people see and interpret different potential meanings and *Run!* is created with an awareness of this openness of interpretation. In this way, the choreographer may construct connections and nuances within the work that encourage or point to a particular reading or experience for the spectator, but it is ultimately the spectator who decides how (and if) these nuances are read or felt.¹ In short, the interpretation of the individual spectator is more 'important' and has more value than the specific intention of the choreographer. For this reason, the analysis here is predominantly concerned with those specific strategies that can be seen to encourage particular potential interpretations; interpretations which are by no means 'right' or exclusive of other subjective interpretations. Similarly, this analysis, while emerging from a (somewhat futile) attempted objectivity on the part of the researcher, does inevitably contain speculations, arguments and readings that are subjective to a personal experience of the work. The intention of this analysis is not, therefore, to uncover definitive meaning in the work nor to position personal readings and observations as infallible fact, but rather to isolate and interrogate the formal qualities of the work as a way to perceive and understand its construction by the choreographer.

It is important to acknowledge as well that this analysis is informed by more than a singular viewing of the live performance. I first watched *Run!* in May 2013 as a work-in-progress, while Elliott was mid-way through creating the work, and then again at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown during its first public run. In February 2015 I viewed the restaging of the work three more times under both rehearsal and public performance conditions. In formulating the analysis I have also viewed the DVD recording of the work numerous times. I am thus deeply familiar with the work and its structures and have had many opportunities to closely consider its form and its performance. The observations and interpretations articulated here are also underpinned by a strong familiarity with Elliott as an artist and with the greater body of her work. Elliott and I share a similar choreographic lineage, having both studied MA Degrees in Choreography under Professor Gary Gordon at Rhodes University. We have also worked together many times in the past, in varying capacities and roles, and I thus have personal experience and an embodied understanding of her creative processes. My impressions of the work and of Elliott's choreographic aesthetic and approach are thus the result of intimate personal knowledge formed over many years and this deeply informs my experience and viewing of her work. For this reason especially, the readings articulated here would probably differ from those of a more 'unfamiliar' audience member.

¹ See Jacques Rancière's *The Emancipated Spectator* (2009) for more information.

The structure of the following analysis has been compartmentalised into specific choreographic elements, so as to consider the work in its various components. These components are sourced from Blom and Chaplin's instructional book *The Intimate Act of Choreography* (1989). In this book, the authors identify and explain several aspects of choreography that the student choreographer will encounter, from conception to staging, when making a dance work. In creating this 'choreographic checklist', Blom and Chaplin also provide useful perspectives from which to analyse a performance work, with each aspect addressing a particular area of choreographic investigation. This analysis will consider several of these elements in relation to *Run!*, specifically, essentials (themes), the speaking body, space and time, sound and silence and theatrical elements. By first defining and then considering each component separately as well as the interconnections and resonances formed between them, a holistic and detailed framework of *Run!* can be discerned, revealing the multiple layers involved in choreography and locating the work within a broader scope of 21st century choreography.

CONTEXT AND STYLE

When analysing a performance it is important to understand from the beginning what kind of work it is and to try and locate the work in relation to a broader artistic context of other artists working in similar styles. Different kinds of performance result from different ways of working, and certain styles often connect with different modes of thinking about performance. Having an understanding of the particular way in which a choreographer goes about making a work can reveal a lot about the work itself and how it functions. It is unlikely, however, that the researcher will be able to perceive exactly what kind of process the choreographer explored within the work itself so additional research into the specific choreographer's body of work and their working processes would be helpful here.² However, there are often indications in the work itself that may allude to certain fundamental aspects informing the choreographer's style and the particular performance context in which they are working.

When looking at *Run!* certain aspects of the work give one a sense of some of the main proponents of Elliott's style. The dance language is possibly the first indication of a stylistic lineage because it cannot be easily categorised into a particular dance lexicon or technique. The language is a mixture of various stylistic influences and ways of moving, including pedestrian movement (such as running and walking), image and tableaux, contact improvisation and release-based contemporary techniques. This is a language of movement particular to this work and to the dancers within the work. Similarly, the dancers seem to be intermittently involved in unspecified games or tasks. At times they slowly walk across the stage, or move in pairs to touch specific places on the floor and walls. In these instances the actual activity of completing the task appears un-fabricated, as if the performers are improvising in the moment and making individual decisions before our eyes. The dancers in these instances appear 'absorbed in the process', continually making choices, engaged as 'real people' doing real things. On the level of dance language, it thus becomes difficult to box or label the work definitively because it draws from many styles and seems to straddle the spaces between styles, existing somewhere between dance, theatre, dance-theatre and performance art.

Similarly, the performers in *Run!* are not overtly expressive when they perform, but nor are they completely detached from the audience, existing in a 'world of their own'. They perform with a perceptible consciousness and presence. They are present in every sense of the word – their bodies and minds are physically there, in the physical performance space. They do not

² It can be greatly beneficial to both the researcher and the student choreographer to observe rehearsal processes, for example, if there is opportunity to do so. Observing a process can provide significant insight into the approach of a choreographer and the correlation between the process of a work and the completed work itself. For more information on Elliott's process see the paper "Choreographic processes and the performer-creator" included in this compilation.

'perform', but they are 'performative'. The performers display an open awareness of being watched by the audience and an awareness that their actions are communicable with the audience. The four performers are vulnerably conscious of the exchange occurring between themselves and those watching them. They see and acknowledge the real and physical presence of the audience. This is a treatment of the body and of the performance that is devoid of ego. The performers do not show off. They do not dazzle or strive to entertain and amaze the audience. They seem to perform with the knowledge that the work is not about them and their actions, but rather about the experience shared with the viewer.

This treatment of the performing body (through performance quality and dance language) allows the viewer or researcher to draw potential connections to a lineage of other contemporary choreographers and artists who work from a similar vantage point. This framing of performance as a sharing of experience and the positioning of the performer as a 'real' person in 'real time', are characteristic of a stream of 20th and 21st century choreographers, particularly prominent in Europe and America, working in contemporary styles and in the meeting point between dance, theatre and performance art. These choreographers include Ana Teresa de Keersmaeker, Jonathon Burrows, La Ribot, Jerome Bel, Xavier le Roy, Meg Stuart, Vera Mantero and many more, who were themselves influenced by the early postmodern dance of American choreographers in the 1960s and '70s (such as the Judson Dance Theatre's Yvonne Rainer, Steve Paxton and Trisha Brown) and German Tanztheater choreographer, Pina Bausch, in the same period (Lepecki, 2004). Performance in this conception is often typified by the treatment of the performing body as real and authentic (as opposed to fabricated or abstract) and a critical awareness of the politics of representation (where the body becomes a signifier for things other than itself, being simultaneously present and absent³ in the moment of performance). This interrogation of what it means to perform also, typically, coincides with a critical challenge, rejection or re-evaluation of the inherent structures, ideologies, discourses and politics intrinsic to individual art forms, asking, 'what does it mean to dance/paint/sculpt/compose/write?' This is performance that is both conscious and critical of its own construction as a 'performance'.

Run!, as with many of Elliott's works, can be seen to engage with similar conceptions of performance and the questioning of 'conventional' performance constructs. As Elswit (2008, p.63) notes, dance in this vein is fundamentally about research and the practical exploration of concepts, ideas or questions through the medium of performance. Elliott's work can be argued to operate within this terrain, where the space of choreography is positioned as a space in which to ask questions and to challenge convention or tradition. This is an important aspect of Elliott's style to distinguish in order to adequately analyse the work. *Run!*, on a stylistic level, is not intended to entertain an audience only, but also to ask questions, probe concepts and discover the 'new' by challenging the structures of convention.

ESSENTIALS (THEMES AND CONCEPTS)

What do we mean by essentials?

"There isn't always a clear intention; there is only an inner drive, a restless energy, vague and undirected, a need to create. And sometimes for a while that vague nudge has no clearly defined, identifiable intent or theme. Often the choreographic process itself includes discovering and defining the theme and intention. The choreographer goes to the studio and begins to work, and in the working, in the moving, something happens, something connects, something becomes important, and almost on their own, the theme and intention self-clarify."

(Blom & Chaplin, 1989, p.9)

³ This idea of the body being 'absent' in performance concerns the metaphorical disappearance of the body (as itself) when it becomes a signifier for something else. In this sense the performer 'disappears' or is 'absent' when the performing body is used to represent something else.

Blom and Chaplin describe here the choreographer's process in making a work. The term 'essentials', in this sense, refers to the ideas, concepts and/or themes that either inform the starting point for the choreographic process or those that emerge from the process itself and eventually guide its creation. While many contemporary works are often open in their interpretation and accepting of the viewer's subjective reading of signs and signifiers in the work, the artist still creates the work with a particular theme, idea, concept or sensation to be read or interpreted by the audience. In analysing a work it is useful to understand the themes and ideas explored by the choreographer in order to adequately unpack the ways in which these manifest in the various elements of the work.

How does knowledge of the essentials assist in analysing a performance work like *Run!*?

An awareness of the key concepts or ideas informing the creation of a work, provides the researcher with an initial lens or perspective from which to consider each aspect of the work. Dance is of the body and as such often deals with concepts or sensations that cannot easily be described or reduced into words. German choreographer Pina Bausch, for example, often described her work as dancing that which cannot be said (Sanchez-Colberg, 1996). A work such as *Run!* does not explain itself and provide 'answers' to the audience during the performance so that they leave the theatre satiated and knowing. Instead, it communicates ideas and sensations that may be ambiguous at first, but that have the potential to stay in the thoughts of the audience once they have left the performance, like a riddle that needs time to reveal its answer. This is not necessarily intentional obscurity (although it can be intentional), but often an attempt to either propose a question that may not have an easy answer, or communicate something that is perhaps 'unspeakable' and would be reduced or tamed by being stated simply and directly. The choreographer might also intentionally bypass cognition, electing not to 'explain' or 'tell' an idea to audience in favour of creating a sensation or feeling of that idea in the bodies of the audience.⁴ Therefore the researcher needs to read all elements of the presentation as part of the work.

In Elliott's *Run!* there are certain key identifiers that point towards the concepts and ideas explored in the work and that aid the viewer in experiencing the texts within work:

i. The title

The title is often the first encounter the audience has with a work and with the ideas explored within. This is, therefore, not an insignificant aspect of the choreography, but rather the first indication of what is to follow. A good title can create curiosity for the spectator, providing a sense of what will come but without reducing the experience. A good title can be a clue, a setting up of expectations that will either be upheld, challenged or critiqued.

The title *Run!*, despite its simplicity, gives the audience a great deal of information (and sets up certain expectations) without actually explaining what the work is about. It describes a physical action, specifically an everyday action, of which most people are familiar. One runs to escape danger, to exercise, or to give chase. The inclusion of the exclamation point provides a sense of urgency to the action behind the word, further emphasising the word as a verb and as a means to either flee or pursue. The title evokes a physical activity, which seems appropriate for a performance of a physical nature (such as dance), but at the same time there is disjuncture, as the type of physical activity the title describes is not one that would traditionally

⁴ The creation of corporeal feeling rather than cognitive meaning is often called 'kinaesthesia' and refers to the physical bodily sensations experienced by the audience through stimuli of multiple sense organs. In this sense the audience *feels* sensation in the body in addition to *reading* the visual texts in the work. Refer to the paper *Seeing and Being Seen*, which is included in this research compilation, for more information on the kinaesthetic modalities in *Run!*.

be associated with dance. Running is an everyday, pedestrian action, separate from the realm of theatrical dancing.

The action of running is also a locomotive activity. Unlike 'jumping' or 'falling', running implies a spatial progression over time. Generally when one runs, one leaves one place and arrives in another. There is also a distinct engagement with durational time, where one begins running at one point in time, progresses and journeys over more time and subsequently arrives at a later time. To run, therefore, is also an *experiential* activity, over time and space. Of the five basic body actions noted by Laban (namely locomotion, gesture, jumping, transference of weight, and turning), only locomotion (running, walking, crawling, etc.) engages with substantial travel and trajectory through space.

The title in this case functions in numerous ways. It implies to the audience that the work explores (in some sense) the act of running and the experience of movement through time and space. It also sets up an expectation in the mind of the audience to witness the act of running. In the naming of the work, Elliott positions a simple and familiar action as a starting point for a much deeper, and more complicated, spatial and temporal journey. The title is effective because it creates interest and expectation without explaining (or giving away) the experience.

ii. Programme note or publicity materials

Choreographers will often provide a short statement in the programme, or through publicity materials leading up to the performance, to help the audience access the work or to encourage a specific spectatorship (or way of viewing). The programme note can suggest certain ideas and concepts that may inform the audience's experience of the work. It places thoughts and ideas in their minds that may or may not influence how the various signifiers are interpreted. The publicity material for *Run!* reads:

With a simmering undercurrent of feminist politics, meticulous performance crafting and bold visual statements, *Run!* subverts the notion of women as (only) soft and fragile and, in both a concrete and abstract way, engages the complex relationship between the female performer and the space and place of the stage. (Elliott, 2015)

Certain key ideas are articulated here and assist the audience in their reading and experiencing of the work. In this single sentence, Elliott expresses a clear concept firmly focused on the experience of the female body, from a perspective that is critical and conscious of the politics of the body and of the body in the theatre space. The choreographer's description here of the concerns of the work also acknowledges the questioning nature of the performance. The work is described as "engaging the complex relationship between the female performer and the space and place of the stage". It is implied here that the work does not offer definitive answers about the body in the theatre space, but rather asks questions and proposes challenges and subversions.

iii. Initial visual and aural signifiers

The beginning moments of a work can also provide a lot of insight when placed in relation to the ideas or themes expressed in the title. The first instances of activity in a work are vitally important as they establish the origin and departure point for the rest of the work. Bodies, in many ways similar to pictures and written texts, are signifiers of meaning, and interpretations are made the moment the body is visible to the audience. Similarly, objects and sounds in the performance space become texts that the audience can interpret and read from the very beginning. Bodies, objects and sounds can be interpreted in numerous ways, and it is the framing provided by the title and the ideas expressed in the choreographer's note that guide and direct this initial interpretation.

The opening section of *Run!* strongly alludes to the questions and concerns at the foundation of the work. The performance begins in complete darkness. The pianist on stage begins to play and the audience hears the sound emanating from the stage. The music is repetitive and pounding and it bellows, like wind, out from the stage. There is a sense of motion in the music she plays, reminiscent of many feet pounding the ground, but it is also imbued with perceivable emotion and feeling. The darkness subsides to reveal a pianist sitting behind a baby grand piano in the upstage left corner of the stage. Once the pianist stops playing, the four dancers enter the stage running in a line, one behind the other. They begin to run in a circle, equally spaced, and with a common tempo, audible to the audience through the sound of their shoes on the floor. The tempo changes to a slow pace and then back to a run. The four women run in perfect unison, with equal strides, common breathing, and with the same calm, focused intention. Eventually the four women settle in a line in the centre of the stage. At regular intervals the performers rearrange themselves and then pose, creating a particular shape in their individual bodies that directs the spectator's focus to a particular part of their body, as if they are openly displaying this part to the audience (see Figure 1). The pianist is silent as they rearrange and re-pattern themselves and only plays again once the dancers have settled in their poses. The poses are confident and subtly seductive and alluring. The performers are not timid in their display of the body but instead confident and accepting of their conscious desire for the audience to look where they desire to be looked at. As they stand they also consider the audience, their eyes scanning the faces of the audience seated in front of them and returning their gaze.



Figure 1 Photo by aMan Bloom. (Left to right) Jori Snell, Joy Millar, Adriana Jamisse and Thalia Laric

The combination of the performers' bodies, their movement and the aural text provided by the pianist on stage, point towards particular ideas that are further explored as the work progresses. The music played in this first section of the work, in many ways satiates the expectations of a dance audience. The music is live, it exists in the same space as the dance (the stage) and it is of a mood and style that is complementary to dance, having both motion and emotion. However, the music ceases once the dancers enter the stage – their only accompaniment is the very real sound of their feet on the floor as they run. The initial expectation of a traditional marriage between the dance and the music has been upended. This is the first instance, of many, in the work where the traditional relationship between the body, dance and music is questioned. Here the music and the dance exist separately, but in the same space.

The performers themselves also provide indications of what the work will explore. The first thing, perhaps, to strike the viewer is that all of the performers (including the pianist) are women. This is, potentially, another fulfilment of the traditional dance audience's expectation. Western theatrical dance is often strongly associated with the female gendered performer. Classical ballet, early modern dance, cabaret and vaudeville are all predominantly performed by women. The fact that all of the performers are female provides a particular historical context and precedent that informs the viewing of the work. Historically in dance, the female body has been subjected to a particular kind of spectatorship and display, governed and framed by a patriarchal, heteronormative gaze. In classical ballet the female dancer has long been presented as a highly desirable, ethereal, elegant and graceful creature, in contrast to male dancers who perform with ferocity, athleticism and visible strength. Although this was severely questioned and challenged in early modern dance, the framing of the female dancing body as graceful, soft, beautiful and desirable and its differentiation from the male dancing body, has nonetheless carried through into many contemporary dance styles. By using only female dancers in the work, Elliott sets up the potential for another layer of expectation in the work. The spectator might expect these female bodies to perform a certain way, the way in which female bodies 'usually' perform. This expectation is challenged from the first viewing of the performers, however. The dancers enter the stage running. These women are athletic and completely involved in the action of running. Their short skirts and dresses reveal muscular, athletic legs, highlighted through soft sculptural side lighting. They are not overtly displayed or framed as desirable or sexually alluring. They simply run, just as a man or any other person might run. However, as the dancers group together centre stage and begin to pose and display parts of their body, Elliott is also acknowledging this expectation to view the female dancer on display. The performers in *Run!* acknowledge their display and become complicit in it. Their first action as an ensemble, after coming together centre-stage, is to courtesy and bow, gestures that acknowledge the audience and are conventionally used only at the end of a performance. Something that is usually a subtle and unspoken contract between performer and spectator suddenly becomes overt and 'out in the open'.

From this opening section, and its framing by the title and programme note, two dominant choreographic concerns are implied to the audience. Firstly, that the work is meta-theatrical – that is, it is consciously aware and critical of the artistic space in which it operates. It is a dance that is also about dance and the movement of the body in space. Secondly, the work has at its core the female body, specifically the dancing female body. It is a dance, performed by women, that is also about women, performing dance.

THE SPEAKING BODY

What is the speaking body?

"What a glorious, subtle instrument choreographers have to work with. Yes, 'a dancer's instrument is her body' – but the choreographer's added concern is, 'in how many ways can this body be moved, be shaped, speak, so as to produce the desired effect?'"

(Blom & Chaplin, 1989, p.16)

The body in performance is a primary communicator of multiple meanings through a multitude of ways. The way in which a body moves creates different potential effects or sensations for the viewer. In addition to the actual movement possibilities of the body, the body itself is able to speak through its treatment in a performance context. The 'speaking body' therefore is a combination of the movement vocabulary or dance language created for a work, the performance quality of the performers in executing that language, as well as the framing and contextualising of the body in the performance space.

How do the bodies in *Run!* further the themes of the work?

The dance language in *Run!*, as well as the particular performance quality of the dancers, continuously collude to both emphasise and problematise conventional assumptions about theatrical dance and about the female dancer. This collusion in the body of the performer, creates a subtle ambiguity around the nature of the work and its intentions, as expectations are simultaneously reinforced and questioned. Elliott creates a liminal space on the stage and within the body of the performer.⁵ They are both real and theatrical, authentic and fabricated, subject and object. It is from this in-between space that questions about dance and about the female body can be asked, since the performance locates itself in the ambiguous space between the two, claiming a dual identity of 'theatre' and 'reality'.

The dance language in *Run!* continually propagates this liminal duality. Elliott's choreography with the dancers includes references to a plethora of movement lexicons, both those located in the context of conventional 'theatre dance' and those more readily associated with everyday 'real' activities such as sport, play and exercise. It is impossible to find a single adjective to describe the movement in the work, as it is constantly changing and shifting. At times the dancers move gracefully and elegantly, at other times playfully, and in some moments the movement seems animalistic and feral. The dancers shift from careful precision and nonchalance to aggressive, erratic attack. The language is sometimes pedestrian, sometimes athletic, sometimes distilled and sometimes energetic. It is equally impossible to clearly categorise the dancers in the work. They are not emotive, but nor are they detached. They do not appear as characters or emotive creatures but they do not seem to be wholly 'themselves' either due to the performativity of their presence in the space. This subtle performance quality adds further ambiguity to the interpretation of the dancing body.

When the performers enter the stage running, they do not run like dancers (in the traditional Western sense), they run like people. However, this simple action of running, or in a later section of the work, slowly walking across the stage, is treated in the same way that conventional dance movement would be treated. Time and space are delicately crafted and considered. The walk has texture and atmosphere and a precise spatial orientation just as any dance phrase or combination could have. It is an action from everyday life positioned and treated as 'dance'. Similarly, when the performers do dance in a more conventional sense, encountering each other through a series of weight exchanges and collisions, these activities, while less referential to everyday movement, maintain a sense of the pedestrian in the way in which time and space are engaged. When one dancer runs towards another and uses their partner's body as a point from which to leap into the air, the audience might recognise this action as suited to the context of dance performance. It is a duet between two bodies, using their combined momentum, weight and flow to find lightness as the body soars into and through the air. Elliott, however, subverts these encounters, adding to the ambiguity within the work. As the dancers collide with each other in preparation for the lift, Elliott emphasises the weight of each of the dancers' bodies and alters the spatial direction of the airborne journey. Conventionally in contemporary dance partnering and styles such as contact improvisation, the dancers negotiate the force, momentum and spatial trajectory of the physical encounter to create smoothness, effortlessness and weightlessness in the propulsion or lift. Similarly, in partnered lifts, the vertical plane is often emphasised, allowing the body to find height, suspension and visibility as it becomes airborne, creating the spectacle of flight for the audience. In *Run!* the dancers use time and space differently. The weight is kept low as they approach each other, emphasising the heaviness and force in their initial encounter. The lifts and propulsions from each other's bodies are also angled lower in space on the horizontal or sagittal planes, emphasising the distance of the propulsion through space rather than its height. The lifts and partnered encounters therefore do not infer spectacle, virtuosity or delight

⁵ Liminal spaces are understood as areas of ambiguity that exist between two binary opposites, where aspects of both oppositions are subscribed to and thus clear categorisation as one or the other is rejected, creating a "third space" between them (Bhabha, 1996). Liminality in theatre can occur when the boundaries between theatre/fabrication and reality/authenticity blur. See Broadhurst (1999) for more on 'Liminal Theatre'.

for the audience, but instead appear forceful or combative, even though the actions themselves do not denote a literal or everyday 'battle'. It is as if the performers are exploring space for their own benefit and experience in these moments, rather than for the visual benefit of the spectator (see Figure 2).



Figure 2 Photo by aMan Bloom. (Left to right) Jori Snell, Thalia Laric and Joy Millar

The reframing of conventional 'dance' language as pedestrian on a choreographic level also occurs through Elliott's use of deconstruction as a tool in crafting the language. The dancers in *Run!* often appear to perform recognisable or familiar dance 'moves', but in a way that renders the movement unfamiliar or uncanny. Again, time and space are inverted in such a way as to create a sense of the pedestrian in movement that might otherwise evoke dancerly associations. This is most apparent in the final section of the work where the dancers group together in a square formation and traverse the space. At various intervals the dancers renegotiate their patterning to face a new front, either towards the audience, the piano or the back curtain, and either bow or courtesy in a way that is similar to the bow/courtesy a dancer might do at the end of a dance performance. This movement, which is understood as a communicable gesture towards the audience as a means of accepting applause and praise and signalling the end of the performance, is deconstructed to become something else. In *Run!* the performance has not ended, and this series of bows and courtesies does not seem to be in acceptance of any praise. The dancers bow to the back, and the side and the front of the space, treating the action of the movement as though distanced from its conventional connotation. There is nothing in the performance of the movement that implies ego or pride or feigned humility. It is performed as any other movement of the body, with concentrated group focus and functionality. By removing the ego of the performer in the action the bow becomes instead an acknowledging and a 'thanking' of the space *by* the performers. They do not accept praise for their performance but seem to offer humble thanks to the space of the stage in which the performance happened.

By engaging with the 'pedestrian' in the dance language, Elliott is able to heighten and thereby critique the experience of watching the female dancer. As Dempster (2008, p.23) argues, dance is conventionally "defined by its difference from the ordinary movement and action of daily life". By including everyday action (crafted as dance) and dance (performed as everyday action), the movement of the four female performers is constantly confronting the gaze of the spectator. Pedestrian movement, as Dempster (2008, p.23) defines it, is 'other', characterised by its liminality as "non-specialized, residual and taken-for-granted background... that which connects and co-ordinates diverse activities, movements and actions". By casting the female

dancing body, seeped in gendered expectation, tradition and the politics of display, into the realm of the everyday, Elliott renders the dancing body uncanny, mysterious and unfamiliar in the space and place of the stage. As Dempster (2008, p.27) explains,

Theatre may intensify the experience of being produced as an object and as a representation, but the figure of the pedestrian is a point of resistance to this process of objectification. The choreography of the pedestrian thus makes an issue of the audience; the work is not, or not only, in the body of the performer; the work and its effects, be they perceptions of beauty, interest, aversion etc., are activated and produced between spectator and actor.

By eschewing the spectator's expectations of the dancing body, Elliott uses the dance language to highlight and emphasise these expectations and assumptions of the audience regarding the female performer.

The liminal space of the dance language is also emphasised by a similar treatment of the performers themselves. Elliott crafts a particular performance quality in the work that can be seen to exist in a space between reality and representation. Boenisch (2003) uses the term 'ElectrONic Bodies' to describe a similar performance quality in the work of choreographer Ana Teresa De Keersmaeker. In this conception, the performers are both involved in a kind of theatrical fabrication but are also themselves, as real sentient people. They are simultaneously 'in' the world of the performance but also outside and critical of it. While performing, the dancers are completely engaged in the action or activity on stage - what Steve Paxton would call "absorption in the process" (in Gardner, 2008, p.57). They move as an ensemble, following a logic that is particular to the world of the performance but that is not wholly apparent to the audience. There is a subtle distinction between the 'imagined' world of the performance and the real world of the theatre from which the audience watches. They are 'performing' in the simplest sense of the word. However, various moments in the work present a different temporal engagement and render the rigidity of the performer-spectator split incongruent. At one point in the work the dancers run along the circumference of the stage, touching the fabric barriers of the back curtain and the two side wings, navigating lights, ballet booms and cables that are visible to the audience. When the dancers cross downstage they come in close proximity to the audience. The performers acknowledge and touch the audience in the front row. This simple action successfully breaks any kind of separation between the world of the performer and the world of the spectator, they exist ultimately in the same space. The artifice of the theatre space is acknowledged and in so doing its 'realness', in real time, is revealed. A similar experience occurs during a moment where, amidst activity on stage, the dancers come together and silence the music by placing their hands on the strings inside the piano. There is no showing of meaning or expression by the performers in this action and there is no fabricated reaction by the pianist. The simplicity of the action, of stopping the music, has the effect of suddenly bringing the experience of the work back into the present reality, the here-and-now, for the audience. It is an abrupt change, and a sudden act of will by the dancers, and any metaphysical experience or transportation by the performance is quite starkly rendered realistic and mundane.

Another key moment in the work involves the four performers entering to centre stage from the side. They follow one after the other and stand in a line facing away from the audience. In canon they slowly bend over while keeping their legs straight and insert both hands between their thighs so that their hands are visible to the audience behind them. The performers then open their fingers like a flower on the other side (see Figure 3). The action of bending over reveals the red underwear worn by each performer, and the open hands between the thighs create a floral/vaginal shape, directed toward the audience. This powerful image evokes many sensations for the viewer. The action is seductively theatrical, but it is not performed in a theatrical manner. The dancers create the image with the same nonchalance that informed their running and posing. The image is unsettling as it is both a simple hand gesture and a potential reference to the vagina. The image of the vagina exists in the audience's mind for the duration that the hands innocently maintain their splayed shape. This reference to the dancers' gender is obvious, didactic and functional, even though the image itself is a metaphor. The

dancers' nonchalance implies a certain degree of acceptance and complicity in the action, as if to say, 'this is what you really want to see' or 'yes, we are all women'. As soon as the image is complete it is abandoned as the performers continue with other activities. It is a brief but effective moment in the work where the liminal nature of the performer is starkly apparent. A powerful but ambiguous statement about representation, femininity and dance is made. The gesture itself is artifice and fabrication, as the displayed image of the vagina exists only in the audience's minds and not actually on the stage, thereby emphasising the 'reality' of the audience's own spectatorship.



Figure 3 Photo by aMan Bloom. (Left to right) Joy Millar, Adriana Jamisse, Jori Snell and Thalia Laric

Through the careful consideration of a liminal performance quality and the creation of a complex, multifaceted movement language, Elliott is able to utilise and layer the body and the movement of the performers to further expose and explore the politics of watching women dance. The 'speaking body' in *Run!* is both a real body and a represented body, encouraging an awareness of the connections between the politics of the female dancer in the theatre space and the moving body experiencing real space.

SPACE AND TIME

What do we mean by space?

"A body exists in space... moves in space... is contained by space. A dancer's place and design in space, the direction and level she moves in, and her attitude toward the space, all help define the image she is creating... Space can be considered as an active participant, an abstract partner."

(Blom & Chaplin, 1989, p.31)

What do we mean by time?

"Time as an ordering force provides a matrix within which things can be coordinated, measured, and calculated. When allowed to, it can dictate and control in an arbitrary, predetermined, nonresponsive way."

(Blom & Chaplin, 1989, p.58)

Live performance, by its very nature, occurs in space and time. For the dancer and the choreographer, space and time influence, inform and shape every action and interaction. All movement (even stillness) happens in space and occurs within time. For the choreographer, space is more than the physical dimensions of the stage. Space is a three dimensional void and every movement, trajectory or activity engages and communicates with space in some way. Space, even without the body and its movement, has the potential to 'speak' and can have meanings and sensations of its own creation.

Similarly, time for the choreographer is more than the duration of a movement, phrase or completed work. Time, like space, is fluid and extends beyond the tempo of the music or the rhythm of the dancer. Time can move quickly or slowly, depending on how it is used. It informs the rhythm and dynamic of movement, but it can also affect mood and atmosphere and the creation of meaning according to its own kind of logic. The audience experiences time watching, just as the performer experiences time doing, and these experiences may differ completely or be one-and-the-same. The choreographer can 'transport' the audience, encouraging them to forget about time, or they can nurture the audience's sensitivity to time's duration.

How do space and time inform the creation of meaning in *Run!*?

As noted in the discussion of choreographic themes, in many ways *Run!* is a dance about space and about being in space. Just as the action of running is also a journey through and with space, so the work can be viewed as an experience in, with and through space, and of the body's relationship with and inside of space. Throughout the performance, space in its many conceptions is continually questioned, revealed and explored.

Elliott's treatment of space in the work operates on three planes: the metaphysical (or the imagined space of the performance), the realistic (the literal space of the theatre building) and the liminal space between both of these conceptions. The choreographic elements of the body, the movement and the sound dialogue to create and subvert shifting manifestations of space. Elliott conceives of space in many ways in the work, from the macro level of the performance space itself to the micro level of the spatial interactions of the body's movement. The way that space is engaged within the work can be seen to further the creation of ambiguity and liminality through dialogue with the bodies of the performers and their actions in space.

Elliott's use of the performance space as both a metaphysical realm and an authentic theatre space, contributes significantly to the experience of the work and creates a spectatorship that is 'activated'. In this sense, by repeatedly challenging the space in which the performance occurs, the spectator is never really allowed the opportunity to 'sit back and enjoy' the performance, or to be 'transported' into a 'magical world of performance'. The audience is constantly unsettled through changing conceptions of space. They are, at times, briefly transported out of the real only to be thrown back into the present, reminded that this performance is not 'for them' but 'with them', that they are complicit and part of its action. The audience is not a consumer of performance but a participant within it.

The work begins in a metaphysical realm. The stage is dark and only the sound of the piano can be heard. Gently the space is transformed, through subtle and soft lighting revealing the pianist on the stage. There is poetry to this beginning, and the audience is somewhat lulled. A similar sensation occurs as the dancers walk slowly across the length of the stage in silence. They move in unison, carefully traversing the space, every now and then leaving one dancer behind, paused mid-step, who then re-joins the group in their considered migration through space. In this instance the silence, the calm focus of the performers and the pristine clarity of their spatial journey, draw the audience into a liminal world of performance. The quiet and the concentration act like magnets to the attention of the spectator. However, just as the performers draw the audience inwards, they also push the audience back. Their pathways, often mostly linear, literally chart and trace the very real boundaries of the stage space. At times they leave the stage space completely and, still visible to the audience, encounter the tangible barriers of the physical world of the stage. They transgress the fourth wall, treading beyond the limits of the dance mat, infiltrating the world of the audience. Similarly, they bash on the back curtain, revealing its fabric composition and artificial function. These moments break the magic and make-believe of the metaphysical realm of performance, and firmly locate both performer and spectator in the same space – and subsequently in the same time.

The real space of the theatre is constantly referenced on the micro level of the choreography as well as the dancers emphasise and replicate the architecture and physical construction of the space through their individual movements, their proximities to each other and the audience and their grouping and patterning on the stage. The dancers exhaust the spatial possibilities of the stage, while at the same time, subtly reinforcing its literal structure. Elliott's use of linear pathways, in the patterning of the dancers in the space and within their individual movements, frequently reinforce the linear, box-like construction of the intimate theatre space. The dancers explore the space in its three dimensions, predominantly through its lines. The dancers stand in lines, they travel in lines, and they wait against the walls in lines. There is a subtle but palpable correlation between the spatial architecture of the space and the lines and angles replicated in the bodies. Even in the third section, where the performers attack space with less care and more abandon, the linear relationship between the performers is emphasised. The performers charge at each other from across the stage, in direct pathways, collide and then gallop together in a close embrace on a common trajectory. The sound of their feet on the floor and the weight of their bodies moving downwards emphasise the low spatial plane, the ground, and the reality of the stage. In many instances the performers touch the ground with their hands and stomp on it with their feet, affirming its real presence. Similarly, they often look up or reach upwards, and seem to consciously consider the height of the theatre roof and the vastness of this space.

Time is used in the work in a similar way. Just as space is conceived as a liminal entity, so too is time framed as an element in the work that is both other-worldly and starkly real. The performers and the audience experience a duality of time as Elliott continues the push and pull of the audience's experience within the work. Certain moments 'transport' the audience and encourage a different experience of time. Time slows down as the audience travels with the performers into a metaphysical dream-time. At other moments in the work, time is brought back to the present, to real-time, and to the actual time of watching. Time in *Run!* is fluid, interchangeable and unpredictable.

Like space, time also operates on macro and micro levels. Time shapes the overall experience, just as it informs and textures the individual movements of the performers. Often in conventional or traditional theatre dance the music and time share a common relationship where the music provides the structure of time. It gives the work its shape over time (according to its composition) and inspires the dynamic and rhythm of the dancing. Elliott's use of time to shape the work is not dictated by the music, but rather uses music to create a shifting structure within time. The passing of time in *Run!* is not linear – there is no rational logic or chronological progression in the work. The dancers do not use time to tell the audience a story but rather operate within and around time to create an experience of the liminal. Elliott's use of time in the structure and form of the work follows an ambiguous logic. It is not a clear progression from A to B to C. Elliott's structure of the work follows an irrational logic, or a time that is more akin to the liminal space of the dream or memory than it is a clearly countable, thinking time. It is the feeling and texture of time passing, more than it is a temporal and cognitive passing of time. Bausch refers to this conception of time as "female time" (in Sanchez-Colberg, 1993, p.158), inferring here its binary opposition to 'real' (regimented and metered) 'male time'. *Run!* is fragmented and episodic in its structure, occurring over multiple conceptions of time and connected as a whole in a logic that is not easily identifiable. Time for the performers, and for the audience, slows down and quickens according to its own logic, separate from the music. The music, just like the performers, often operates separately to this passing of time. A clear instance of this can be seen in the first section of the work. Once the dancers have entered running, they settle in a group in the middle of the stage. The dancers arrange themselves, moving in close proximity to each other, sliding between each other and around each other. All the audience hears is the sound of their shoes on the floor as they move. The pianist is silent. The performers then settle in a tableaux, looking out assertively at the audience, one presenting their bum, another their hand, and another the broken line of an arm, for the audience to look at. In their stillness the music, softly and gently, almost melancholic, begins to emerge from the piano. The dancers are in the real-time present, still and unmoving, consciously aware of the audience and of the contract between them. They are being looked

at but they are also actively looking at the audience. The tone and mood of the music, however, provides a different engagement with time. There is sadness and nostalgia in the sound the audience hears, and the music recalls a slower, less immediate, more emotional experience of time.

The interplay between the time of the body and the time of the music recurs throughout the work. For a large portion of the work, the dancers exist in time separate from the time of the music. In these quiet moments the dream-logic of the dancers' movement is most apparent. Their rhythms and dynamics change often and quickly. They traverse space delicately and slowly, as if sensing each minute transference of weight, and then suddenly spring into action, like an elastic band that has been pulled too far. The dancers in these instances move as a close-knit ensemble, all part of the same organism. There is no musical impulse for this change in time, nor is there any identifiable cue from the dancers themselves. The logic of time is not discernable, but its presence is made sentient by the existence of the dancers within it.

Even when the bodies and music overlap in the performance space, where the performers move and interact to the accompaniment of the pianist, the two signifiers mostly engage with time differently. Elliott's phrasing of the dancers' movement does not emphasise a close correlation with the music as a structural force. The phrasing of the movement is not musical in the same way that the music is musical. The phrasing is often inorganic, in that it does not use weight, momentum or unbound flow to texture the dynamic of the movement. Elliott phrases movement with a different time-logic, changing rhythm often, starkly and in unpredictable, sometimes awkward, ways. This engagement with time in the phrasing of the movement prevents the movement of the dancers from ever really lulling the audience or from drawing them into some kind of netherworld of the body. The dance is playful and often humorous, but it is also bizarre and thus somewhat unsettling.

Elliott's use of time and space, both in framing the work as whole and in the intricacies of the bodies in relation to the sound score, continue and augment the constant tug-of-war with the experience of the audience. The spectator is transported, through both space and time, while at the same time, remaining firmly present in the here-and-now of real time and space.

SOUND AND SILENCE

What do we mean by sound and silence in the context of choreography?

"Many dancers think that choreography is simply a matter of putting movement to music, which makes music the starting point... While dance should never be subservient to music, music can have tremendous power in determining images and resultant movement for the dancer."

(Blom & Chaplin, 1989, p.161)

Music and sound, and the absence thereof, play a significant role in the interpretation and creation of meaning in performance. In traditional choreography, music and dance often share a symbiotic relationship, where the music guides, supports and holds the dance. In some conceptions dance becomes the physical embodiment and interpretation (or translation) of music. In contemporary choreography, and in certain contemporary styles such as dance theatre and physical theatre, the relationship between music and dance is conceived of differently. Music, like the visual image and the written word, can be viewed as a text that is able to be read or interpreted in different ways. In contemporary choreography music is often used as one of many texts, where meaning is created through its dialogue with the body, movement and visual signifiers. In this conception, music and aural texts offer the opportunity

for choreographers to create meaning through the correlation of music with the body, through their opposition to each other or through their contrast with each other.

Contemporary choreography, through its interdisciplinary potential, has also expanded the idea of what aural texts can be in live performance. In addition to music, choreographers can also engage with a variety of other sounds, such as the spoken word, the sound of the body, the breath or sonic texts (vocal sounds that are not necessarily words) to be used in conjunction with the moving body. In this instance, the aural text, whether music or otherwise, adds to and colludes with other texts to create meaning and interpretation, existing as one signifier in amongst many others.

How do the aural texts function in the work?

This analysis has already considered in some detail the ways in which music and sound are used within the work to establish a sense of liminality with regards to both space and time. The particular musical choices by the choreographer, used in conjunction with the sound of the dancers moving, or with silence, work together to engage the audience in an experience of space and time in the context of the theatre.

Elliott's use of an unconventional relationship between the music and the dance also further emphasises the work as meta-theatrical – that it is a performance that is openly aware of, and critical of, its own form as a performance – and this in turn contributes to the creation of a liminal experience in watching the work. Acocella (1997) and Banes & Carroll (2006) have noted this in the work of Merce Cunningham who famously in the 1950s and 1960s challenged the conventional relationship between music and dance by either reversing the relationship (such as in *Variations V* (1965) where, through the use of technology, the movement of the body dictates the electronic sound score) or by separation (where the music and dance are created separately and only coexist in the moment of performance). By severing or subverting the traditional relationship between the two art forms, Cunningham draws attention to the act of watching and subsequently to the real, present moment. Acocella (1997) proposes that because audiences are accustomed to a clear correlation between music and dance, when there is not one, this is often jarring and compels the audience to be cognisant of the reality of the fabricated theatrical experience – that they are not in an 'other' realm of performance but in a real space, in real time, engaged in the very real action of watching a performance.

Elliott's use of music in *Run!* can be seen as similar in its effect, although the relationship between the body and the music is never quite severed completely, but rather revealed to be playfully independent of each other. This is most apparent towards the end of the work where the four dancers literally silence the music by placing their hands inside the piano. This action is later reaffirmed as the dancers surround the pianist, physically removing her hands from the keys. They playfully touch the keyboard, creating sound of their own making. In this moment subtle sensations of the performers' individual personalities become apparent. They are affirmed as real people, engaged in real action within a real space. Towards the end of the work the dancers also group together in the darkness and hum, adding their own voices to the musical score of the work.

While much of the score, composed by Braam Du Toit, is of a lyrical and deeply emotional nature, the music in the work does also engage with real time. Midway through the performance the audience watch as the pianist inserts various objects (including screws, marbles and insulation tape) inside the piano, stunting the resonance of the strings and altering the sound of the piano. This action is visible to the audience and framed by the choreographer to be seen. There is no magic or wonder in the changing of the piano or the music. The audience sees and is aware of the reality of the sound as it changes. When the pianist sits down to begin to play again, the sound is clipped and metallic, physically changed. The sound is rendered strange and unfamiliar, but this is a practical alteration. It does not add to the ambiguity within the work, instead it affirms its functionality in the real world of the performance and urges the audience to acknowledge this too.

Elliott's playful subversion of the role of music in the dance theatre context draws attention to the assumed rules and regulations of the form. There is a subtle correlation affirmed in the work between the rule-breaking actions of the female performing body, and the rule-breaking inherent in the form of the work.

THEATRICAL ELEMENTS

What are theatrical elements?

“Dance as a performing art is bigger than life. It is presentational. As such, the world of theatricality is a part of it, granting access to the use of props, costuming and make-up, lights and sets... Ideally, theatrical elements are an integral part of the dance.”

(Blom & Chaplin, 1989, p.193)

As the definition by Blom and Chaplin explains, theatrical elements in a live performance work are an integral part of the meaning-making process. Just as the body, its movement, the music and the ways in which space and time are utilised, create a network of signs and signifiers to be read and experienced by the spectator, the visual elements in a work also emerge as texts that further express the ideas and themes within a work. What the performers wear, the objects they interact with and the tangible elements of the theatre space (such as set, lighting and digital projection), all influence the way in which a spectator engages with the work.

How do the theatrical elements in *Run!* affect the interpretation of the work?

While *Run!* is not laden with many theatrical elements, those that are utilised in the work contribute significantly to the creation of ambiguity and liminality in the work. The meta-theatrical nature of the work is emphasised by the very real theatrical elements of the performance space, and the performers' bodies themselves, which are central to the work, are quite literally written upon by the visual texts of costuming and make-up that adorn them.

Theatrically, *Run!* could be described as minimalist or stark. There are no elaborate sets, complicated props, digital projections or spectacular lighting effects. The work is stripped and distilled in its theatricality, which is appropriate to its aim of creating a liminal space for the performance. Elaborate sets and visual designs often obscure the theatrical space, transforming the real space of the theatre to appear other than what it is. As *Run!* interrogates the politics of the female performer in the theatre space, there is no attempt to transform or hide the reality of this space. Instead Elliott emphasises the theatrical nature of the space, by including its reality as a theatrical element in the work. The wings are removed, revealing the ballet booms and side lights, cables are visible and need to be negotiated by the performers. The mechanics and architecture of the space are embraced as the theatrical space in which the work occurs. Elliott, in conjunction with lighting designer Alex Farmer, uses the theatre lighting instead to create subtle changes of space and of the performance world. Lighting is used carefully and with restraint. The lighting is predominantly shades of white light, with no perceivable changes in colour, and it is used to create mood and atmosphere where necessary. The beginning of *Run!* occurs in darkness. The audience sees nothing when they initially hear the pianist start to play. A soft light highlights the pianist, isolating her in a mostly dark void. When the dancers enter the stage running, they are also mostly in darkness, with light only just illuminating their legs as they run. As the performers begin to pose, the lights reveal the rest of the stage. The lights are visible and the audience sees them operate. So while the soft lighting creates atmosphere and mood, the 'magic' of the theatre space is debunked and the mechanics of its magic are revealed.

The prominent placement of the piano is another theatrical choice by the choreographer that subtly influences the interpretation of the world of the work. Often in dance performance there is a clear spatial separation between the musicians and the performers. In classical ballet, the orchestra sits in a pit, at the foot of the stage. The audience hears the music coming from the stage, but their presence in the pit requests that the spectator not look at them and not include them in the visual experience of the performance. In other instances musicians are often separated spatially, either occupying a back corner, a balcony above the stage, or they are visible in the space but circumnavigated by the performers, as if their performance space ends where the musicians' space begins. This is not the case in *Run!*. The piano and pianist are always visible and prominent in the space. The audience not only hears the sound created by the musician but are constantly aware of her presence in the work. The performers dance all around the piano, conscious and aware of its presence and of the presence of the fifth performer who sits behind it. The constant visual presence of the piano adds to the ambiguous sense of time and space in the work. When the audience hear the music, they are also conscious of its making and its origin in real time. The spectators (and the dancers) see the music being made, and when the sound is altered by the inclusion of objects within the piano, they are also privy to the mechanics of this alteration. The audience is never fully allowed to leave the reality of the theatre space.

The ambiguity of the dancers and their performance quality is also influenced by the visual design of their costumes and make-up. Perhaps the most striking aspect is the fact that the performers wear shoes, and specifically, trainers. The trainer is appropriate footwear for the runner, but for the dancer, it is a dystopian signifier. While female ballet dancers typically wear pointe shoes, modern and contemporary dancers, historically, dance barefoot. For a dance literate audience, the trainer will most likely reference the postmodern choreographers of the 1960s, such as the Judson Dance Theatre in New York and of choreographers such as Yvonne Rainer and Trisha Brown, who typically performed in sneakers. The experiments with dance by these choreographers in the 1960s are not unrelated to the kind of movement used by Elliott in *Run!* and the choreographic intentions in the work. As Banes (1993) has noted, the Judson Dance Theatre became infamous for their playful questioning of the politics and classification of dance and choreography and their assertion that pedestrian activities, such as walking and running, were as worthy of being included in the world of dance as any other kind of movement. In many ways, the kinds of choreographic questions Elliott is proposing in *Run!* have their roots in the experimental and anarchic choreography of the 1960s. The fact that the performers wear trainers in *Run!* creates a potential connection to this history and to these artists for the viewer, and in many ways provide a historical context from which to view the work. The inclusion of running shoes in the visual design of the work is also effective in further emphasising the real-time existence of the performers, of the work and of the act of running.

In addition to the shoes, the performers' costumes also emphasise the duality of the dancers and their simultaneous existence as real and not real. The performers all wear short, white dresses. At first glance these dresses appear to belong to the realm of sport, referencing in colour and in cut, tennis dresses. One performer wears a tulle skirt, similar in appearance to a ballet tutu, but combined with a white golf shirt. The costumes reference the 'everyday' – they are dresses that any active sportswomen or athlete could conceivably wear. On closer inspection however, one realises that these costumes also include certain ambiguous details that contradict this interpretation. One of the tennis dresses has subtle white stripes (similar to those of a tiger) over the front and back. Another has a length of white fur down the spine, while another has a large patch of white fur on the left shoulder blade. The costumes, through their design, present what is at first a simplistic reading, that the performers are athletes or sportswomen. However, over time this reading of the performers in the work becomes less clear. The animal details on the costumes imply perhaps that these women are some kind of hybrid between human, animal, and tennis-player. Similarly, the performers all have dark, thick eyebrows drawn on their faces. Again, this visual addition to the body of the performers renders them strange and other than what they initially appear to be. They are dressed as everyday people, but at the same time appear as bodies representative of something 'other',

or something 'primitive' or pre-human. This is complementary to, and incongruent with, the ambiguous movement language the performers dance.

Underneath their dresses and skirts the four women all wear red underwear. This is in stark contrast to the pale white and off-white costumes and as such is particularly visible when they perform. As the women dance, as they roll on the floor, bend over and run, the audience is always somewhat visually aware of what lies beneath the skirt through the prominence of the red underwear. In this way, even though the female performers do not dance in a conventionally feminine way by eschewing softness and fragility, the viewer is constantly reminded that these performers, and these bodies, are female. When the women line up on stage and bend over, their skirts lift to reveal the red of their underwear to the audience. This moment is another restating of an aspect of the performers' bodies that the audience have been unable to ignore, that the very real bodies they are watching are female.

CONCLUSION

An analysis of *Run!* reveals a complex and layered construction where each choreographic element is carefully utilised by the choreographer to create a holistic, multisensory experience of the work for the audience. What becomes most apparent through the analysis of the individual parts is the way in which meaning and experience are engaged through the form (or formalist qualities) of the work. Elliott facilitates a multisensory experience of the content, of what the work is 'about', by creating a theatrical journey through time, space and the body that is not only cognitive and conceptual but one that is also corporeal and sensory. Elliott's consideration of the female performer and her place and experience in both real and theatrical spaces becomes, through the formal elements of the work (its construction), something that is felt, sensed and absorbed by the audience. Elliott uses form as a way in which to interrogate the relationship between the work, the performers and the audience. As much as *Run!* is a treatise on the female performer, the presence and complicity of the audience is inseparable from this conception and thus forms a significant aspect of the performance. By creating a liminal experience through the formal elements of body, time, space and theatricality, Elliott nurtures connection, conversation and a sense of commonality between the performing bodies on the stage and the bodies of the spectators. The work acknowledges, and requires, the equal, active presence of both in the here-and-now moment of the performance.

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