

HOW DOES  
NICOLE BEUTLER  
DEAL WITH THE LEGACY OF  
POSTMODERN DANCE  
IN HER  
CONTEMPORARY  
WORK

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# FOREWORD

This dance theory thesis is part of my bachelor program at the Amsterdam School of the Arts. As a student at the contemporary dance department (Modern Theatre Dance) I encountered Nicole Beutler as a guest choreographer in 2013. I took part in a creative process of about two months in length, which resulted in the piece "One on One". It is rooted in the history of ballroom dancing and deals with the question of individuality in a synchronised group. Since then I follow her work and got fascinated by the way she creates new pieces with a great knowledge about and a strong link to (dance) history. In her career she took hands on the legacy of Lucinda Childs, the history of Ballett with a special fascination about "Les Sylphides", the German Bauhaus movement and most recently on Koert Stuyf, Ellen Edinoff and Bianca van Dillen's work at Stichting Dansproductie.

The core of this research shall be the contrasting juxtaposition of Nicole Beutler's contemporary creations "2: Dialogue with Lucinda" and "5: Echo" versus the originals by Lucinda Childs and Bianca van Dillen. Childs represents the era of postmodern dance in the United States canalised in the Judson Church Dance Theater. Bianca van Dillen influenced the development of modern dance in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 70s with her collaborative production house "Stichting Dansproductie". I am curious how Beutler deals with the legacy of dance history in her contemporary work. I want to find out which principles and tools are still visible in her work and where she is opposing ideas to the originals.

The aim of this paper is not only to analyse Beutler's dance pieces, but also to gain knowledge about the figures and movements that resonate with them. Therefore, I preprend general information about the Judson Church Movement, the development of dance in the Netherlands in the 1960s and 70s as well as the vita of Nicole Beutler, Lucinda Childs and Bianca van Dillen.

This research took me on a great journey to the roots of contemporary dance and even the shaping of my own dance department (MTD), as it exists today. I attended a lecture of Lucinda Childs in 2012, talked to Bianca van Dillen while I was sitting in on rehearsals of Beutler's "5: Echo" and I encountered Pauline de Groot (figure of Dutch postmodern dance and founder of the Modern Dance department at de Theaterschool) at the "Live Legacy Project". The "Live Legacy Project" researches correspondences between German contemporary dance and the Judson Church Dance Theater movement. While attending this symposium in July '14 in Düsseldorf I could gather great information. I also highly acknowledge Nicole Beutler and her assistant Josta Obbink for giving me free access to the archive of NBprojects.

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# 1. VITA OF NICOLE BEUTLER



Anja Beutler. *Nicole Beutler Portrait 2*. 2010. 14 August 2014.  
<http://www.ickamsterdam.com/images/prmedia/3/c2/NicoleBeutler2@AnjaBeutler.de.jpg>

*I love dance, I have done all sorts of dance [...]: African, Ballet, Release-Technique, Contact Improvisation, and Improvisation. I have done the SNDO education (School for New Dance Development, Bachelor in choreography at the*

*Amsterdam School of the Arts). I call the SNDO an arts academy for the dance, because before that I was in arts academy for two years, but I was always busy with performance. And before I was in arts academy I did for two years very extreme physical theatre, so it was always about going beyond your limits [...]. So, that's my background, pretty mixed. So, I'm pretty wide, I don't have one dance technique that is at the base. I'm a human being in this world and I deal with dance as my artistic expression in relation to story, to image, to sound, to who I am at this moment. [...] Dance theatre always is about life and death, it has to matter now, it's never a representation of something (else). It's always now. [...] It's not looking back in time through a mirror.*

Interview with Nicole Beutler in: *Echo – Video documentary*. Dir. Bertha Bermúdez Pascual. ICK Amsterdam, 2014

Nicole Beutler (\*1969, Munich) writes in her vita on [www.nbprojects.com](http://www.nbprojects.com) that she did study fine arts in Münster and Munich and German literature at the university of Münster before she chose for the bachelor in choreography (SNDO) at the Amsterdam School of the Arts in 1993. The education was founded in 1975 as a modern dance education through the affiliation of the dance studios of Koert Stuyf and Pauline de Groot to de Theaterschool. The importance of this institute for researching "New Dance" respectively postmodern dance in the Netherlands in the 1970s can not be estimated high enough and will be discussed further in chapter 2.2. After graduating, Nicole Beutler among other SNDO graduates formed the association LISA and one of the things they were concerned with was the "performing body". "One of the main issues is the performing mind, what Paxton calls "a kind of witness" (1999). According to him the conscious mind is involved but not "doing active duty." The exercise then becomes to turn the action over to other, in Paxton's word "true" parts."<sup>1</sup>

The collective LISA existed for roughly five years and in 2009 Beutler started her own organization with NBprojects.<sup>2</sup> Since then the interest in her work faced constant growth. "In 2010 Nicole Beutler received the prestigious vscd-Mimeprice for *1: Songs*. The piece was also selected by the jury of the Flemish Theaterfestival as one of the best performances of the season 2009/2010 and was performed during the Dutch Theaterfestival in 2010" (<sup>2</sup>). She works with the medium dance in the broader context of theatre. She does see herself more as a composer of space including other disciplines like music, video, text and light than a choreographer.<sup>3</sup> She is regular guest at the festival Nederlandse Dansdagen, at the Frascati theatre and her work tours the Netherlands as well as Europe. With the performance *Les Sylphides* in 2009 she started a series of work that would stand in direct link to history and the history of dance. In the Echo - Video documentary she compares her approach as a choreographer to the work of a DJ. She is remixing existing pieces and by adding or deleting content, muting some aspects and highlighting others she is filtering what she finds important and transmits this to the spectator. For her there is

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<sup>1</sup> Rethorst, Susan. "That Stranger the Unmade Dance." TALK/SNDO 1982-2006.

<sup>2</sup> Cricoteka. Centre for the Documentation of the Art of Tadeusz Kantor – Cricoteka. 2011. 14. August 2014. [www.news.cricoteka.pl/nicole-beutler-2/](http://www.news.cricoteka.pl/nicole-beutler-2/)

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Nicole Beutler in: Echo – Video documentary. Dir. Bertha Bermúdez Pascual. ICK Amsterdam, 2014

nothing that hasn't been done yet, what is new and different is the way one individual sees and experiences the world and as a choreographer she finds pleasure in presenting her perspectives on stage. It is crucial to her to work with collective knowledge that everybody can relate to whereas at the same time she likes that in theatre the clear decision taking allows the audience to enter the composer's mind. Besides the remake on works of Lucinda Childs, Koert Stuyf, Ellen Edinoff and Bianca van Dillen that will be discussed in this thesis she took hands on the classical ballet *Les Sylphides* and the German movement in architecture Bauhaus. She created her first dance film "Diamond Dancers" in 2010 which was featured at the Cinedans Festival in Amsterdam's Eye Museum.

„Nicole continuously engages and initiates projects that enable reflection and encounter. With that ambition she co-curates various events: the yearly event WE LIVE HERE: An Academy, BACK TO NATURE, in 2014 COME TOGETHER: Beauty, Bauhaus & The Beast, in 2011 GARDENING #1 in collaboration with the Goethe-Institute Amsterdam. She co-curated the lecture series THE OLD BRAND NEW in collaboration with a team of curators from the visual arts field. This took place in the Stadsschouwburg Amsterdam from January till September 2009. As Dance and Performance curator at Frascati Theatre (2008 till 2010), she signed a.o. for the programming of the SOMETHING RAW FESTIVAL for innovative dance and performance-makers (2009 and 2010). Nicole has been a permanent cast member of THE SHOW MUST GO ON by Jérôme Bel since 1999. She is a regular guest teacher at the School for New Dance Development, the department for Modern Theaterdance and the Mimeschool, all of which are departments of the Theatre School of the AHK. Nicole is also the mother of one child.“<sup>(4)</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> NBprojects. Nicole Beutler. 2014. 14.08.14.  
[www.nbprojects.nl/en/wie\\_we\\_zijn](http://www.nbprojects.nl/en/wie_we_zijn)

# 2. MOVEMENTS IN DANCE HISTORY

In order for the contrasting juxtaposition to be more accessible the following chapters will provide basic background knowledge about the roots of modern and postmodern dance. I don't have in any way the aim to create an all-encompassing summary but more a rough introduction.

The roots of modern dance lie in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Susan Au describes in her publication "Ballet and Modern Dance" (3<sup>rd</sup> edition, London, 2012) that ballet had come to a climax in virtuosity and spectacular performativity including stage design, music and light. The expressional content and depth of it had gone lost in its extravaganza; it was nothing but enjoyable and undemanding entertainment. The lack of alternatives for dancers encouraged Loie Fuller (1862-1928), Isadora Duncan (1877-1927) and Ruth St Denis (1879-1968) to become pioneers of a movement that would soon be called modern dance. They searched for dance forms that were artistically more challenging and fulfilling.

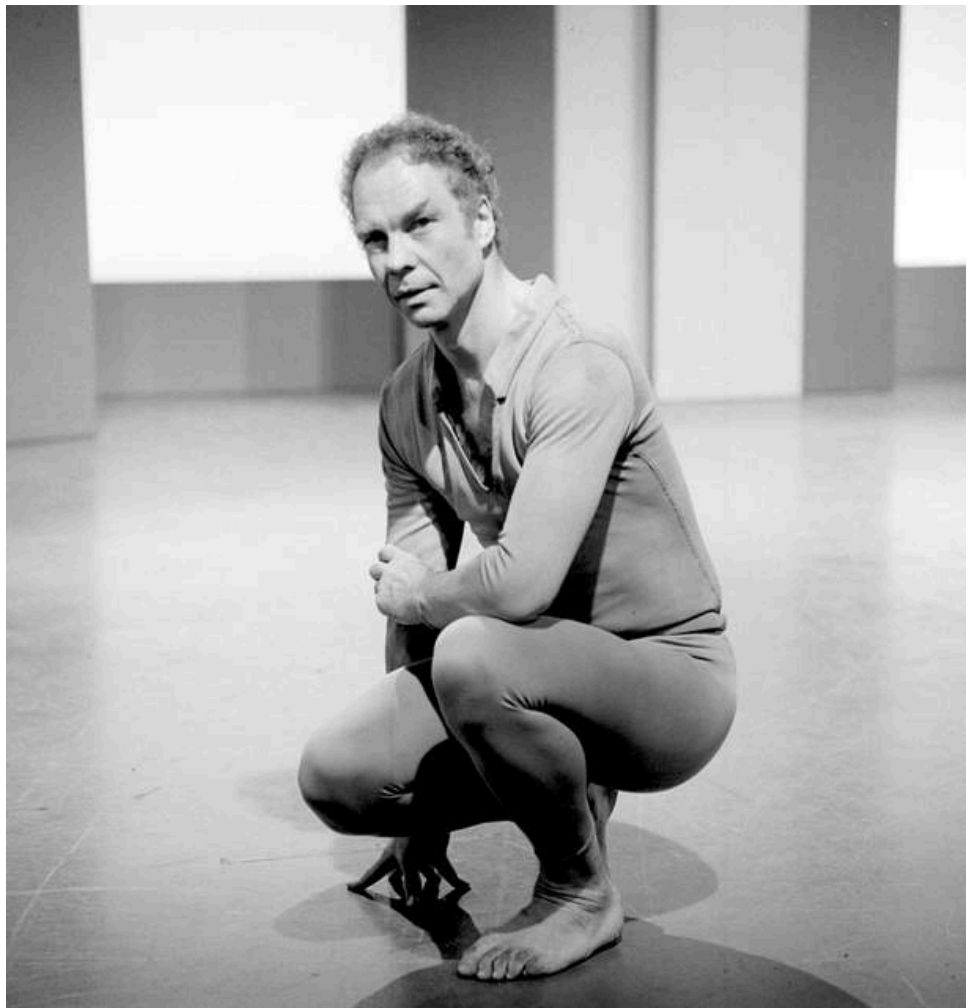
Each one of them discovered different aspects: Fuller focused on the shifting play of lights and colours, Duncan researched what it men to be a woman and dealt with emancipation whereas St Denis experimented with oriental personages and later established a school with her partner Ted Shawn. The Denishawn School and company provided a platform for what shall become the next generation in American modern dance namely Martha Graham (1894-1991), Doris Humphrey (1895-1958) and Charles Weidman (1901 - 1975). "Graham's works usually explored the individual psyche, while Humphrey was



*Martha Graham Portrait*  
[http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01373/Martha\\_Graham\\_1373799f.jpg](http://i.telegraph.co.uk/multimedia/archive/01373/Martha_Graham_1373799f.jpg)



fascinated by the interactions of the individual and the group. Weidman is best remembered for his use of humour and satire to point out human foibles." (p.119) Martha Graham widened and influenced the dance field to such extends that Susan Rethorst is talking about the Graham generation in her article "That Stranger the Unmade dance" (TALK/SNDO 1982-2006, 2009). She found a way to make pain and ecstasy visible through the extreme use of breath and it's influence on a contracting and releasing body.<sup>5</sup> "Each mood had its form, and the rhythmic structure in combination with the symbolic, dramatic requirements of the content of the modern dance built up a vocabulary which eventually became codified into a grammar of Graham technique." (<sup>5</sup>) This is one thing that separates the development of modern dance from ballet. Modern dance is highly depending on the person, the choreographer and dancer that is shaping the movement. After the 1940s and 50s haven't lead to any major shifts in the established modern dance scene a change has been desperately needed in the 1960s. It was Merce Cunningham (1919-2009), a soloist of the Graham Company that initiated alongside with composer John Cage what we call postmodern dance today.



Merce Cunningham Portrait.  
[http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Merce\\_Cunningham\\_April\\_16,\\_1919-July\\_26,\\_2009.png](http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/00/Merce_Cunningham_April_16,_1919-July_26,_2009.png)

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<sup>5</sup> Banes, Sally. "Sources of Post-Modern Dance" *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 4.

# 2.1. JUDSON CHURCH MOVEMENT



Judson Church from East, Beyond My Ken.  
15. March 2011.  
[en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judson\\_Memorial\\_Church#mediaviewer/File:Judson\\_Church\\_from\\_east.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Judson_Memorial_Church#mediaviewer/File:Judson_Church_from_east.jpg)

"A crucial step in the development of their (Merce Cunningham, Alwin Nikolais, Paul Taylor) new concept of dance was the abandonment of the idea that dance must tell a story or express emotion. (...) Cunningham liberated choreography from traditional principles of good composition, such as the idea that every dance has a well-defined beginning, middle and end. His belief that "anything can follow anything" applies both to large structural units (...) and smaller ones." ( <sup>6</sup> ) He established stillness, non-traditional stage spacing that is missing centrality and frontality, randomness and chance operation in music and in

the use of props. His collaborator John Cage composed music or delivered non-conventional approaches to performance music and influenced music history just as much as Cunningham changed dance history. From 1944 on he gave dance concerts in various locations in New York. He stated the following aims: "1) any movement can be material for dance; 2) any procedure can be a valid compositional method; 3) any part of parts of the body can be used (subject to nature's limitations); 4) music, costume, décor, lighting, and dancing have their own separate logics and

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<sup>6</sup> Au, Susan. "The Metamorphosis of Form" Ballett and Modern Dance. London: Thames & Hudson Ltd. 155.

identities; 5) any dancer in the company might be a soloist; 6) any space might be danced in; 7) dancing can be about anything, but is fundamentally and primarily about the human body and its movements, beginning with walking." (7)

His ideas and collaborations with David Tudor, David Behrman, Christian Wolff, Pauline Oliveros, and La Monte Young, and visual artists Robert Rauschenberg, Jasper Johns, and Andy Warhol (7) are introducing a new kind of theatre and performance that resonates first in the cultural underground scene of a revolting New York society in the 60s; a society that shifts their state of mind when it comes to feminism and anti-racism (Martin Luther King movement), consume and lifestyle (hippie movement).<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, Cunningham didn't allow improvisation on stage. Once a piece was set the dancers would follow its structure.

In 1960 and 1961 Cunningham invited Robert Dunn to teach a composition class at the Cunningham studios, which turned out to be a melting pot for the first Judson Church generation to unite. Paul Berenson, Simone Forti, Marnie Mahaffey, Steve Paxton, Yvonne Rainer, Trisha Brown, David Gordon, Alex and Deborah Hay and Elaine Summers were enthusiastic about this unconventional platform free of evaluation and limits. "Robert Dunn organized the first concert at the Judson Church, after his students had found the place where they could show the work they had made in his class. The concert (was) given on July 6, 1962"(9).

Lucinda Childs was one of the many young and aspiring choreographers that would constantly create and show work at the Judson Church. They all had in common that they rejected dogmas of modern dance and ballet but they strongly varied in the aesthetics and tools they used.<sup>10</sup>

Dance historian Zeynep Gunduz summarizes the following elements of postmodern dance in her lecture "Characteristics of postmodern dance" (MTD, Amsterdam 2014). In the performances of postmodern choreographers

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<sup>7</sup> Banes, Sally. "Sources of Post-Modern Dance" Terpsichore in Sneakers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Gunduz, Zeynep. "1960s cultural and political background." MTD dance history. De Theaterschool. Amsterdam, 2014.

<sup>9</sup> Banes, Sally. "Sources of Post-Modern Dance" Terpsichore in Sneakers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 11.

<sup>10</sup> Gunduz, Zeynep. "Characteristics of postmodern dance." MTD dance history, De Theaterschool. Amsterdam 2014

one sees untrained natural bodies executing non-virtuosic material, gender does not play a roll or the equality of sex is emphasised. The concept of a lecture performance arises that relates to dance history and has an informative setting. Compositional tools were the play with time (real time, flattened time), unconventional non-theatre locations, the orientation to gravity, a natural costume and the use of repetition, geometrical forms and mathematical systems. The pleasure for the dancer stepped into the focus of making dance rather than pleasing an audience. Watching trial and error happening on stage is not a taboo anymore just like the visibility of fatigue.

# 2.1.1. VITA OF LUCINDA CHILDS



*Lucinda Childs Portrait.* 2010. 14 August 2014.  
[cdn0.walkerartcenter.org/static/cache/11/11b1f4380b7df43b4b018d311d62a125.jpg](https://cdn0.walkerartcenter.org/static/cache/11/11b1f4380b7df43b4b018d311d62a125.jpg)

Between the age of six and fifteen Childs attends dance classes at the Hanya Holm School. Hanya Holm was part of the German Expressive Dance movement and immigrated with her knowledge to the US to open a dance school. Childs didn't seem too impressed by the German Expressive Dance and thought about becoming an actress. It was the choreographer Helen Tamiris and her characteristic style that fascinated her again. She spent a summer taking classes of her in Colorado and she asked Childs to perform together. Now being certain about a career in dance, she graduated from the Sarah Lawrence College and took classes with Merce Cunningham. Yvonne Rainer invited her to join the newly formed Judson Dance Theatre where she

created her first thirteen works and collaborated with today's icons of Post-Modern art namely Robert Morris, Steve Paxton or James Waring. In 1964 she took composition classes of Robert Dunn. Just like her collaborators in the Judson Church she was interested in the inclusion of everyday movements into a dance vocabulary. She experimented with monologues and language.

As a student of Merce Cunningham Childs can identify herself with his ideas and starts exploring choreographic work by creating her first solos *Pastime* (1963) and *Carnation* (1964). She was then part of the unique institution of the Judson Dance Theatre – a collaboration laboratory in the space of a church that allows interdisciplinary between theatre, poetry, design and dance. Methods of working have been established that seem mundane and ordinary today, but were revolutionary at that time, for instance, the use of chance operation to determine music or choreography or the idea of constant repetition and the focus on details of commonplaces rather than virtuosity. Narratives and dramatic structures were suddenly over board and one was busy with creating atmospheres and abstractions. Pure movement became the essence of a piece and not just the medium for a libretto. Happenings were a new form of protest and art that dealt with public spaces and denied proscenium stages. One was highly influenced by other art movements like Dadaism or Minimalism. Childs was part of that time, very active and well known in the Judson Dance Theatre and played an important part in establishing these new ideas that naturally received bad critics outside of the underground avant-garde art audience that would attend the concerts. The use of delayed time, actual time or repetition to emphasize the passing of time would be new and exhausting for the audience in the first place.

The list of Childs' works is incredibly long and varies from early works in theatricality to later works of outstanding dance precision and minimalistic repetition till the choreography for operas just like the famous masterpiece *Einstein on the beach* (1976) in collaboration with Philip Glass and Robert Wilson.

In her earliest works she would explore everyday objects and how movement would evolve from their manipulation. The use of text would add a layer that is not per se coherent with what the spectator sees. In one performance of hers she is struggling in a flexible fabric while the audience listens to "noise music" by Philip Corner; *Pastime* (1963). The

following picture shows her solo *Carnation* (1964) where she is preciously and accurately playing with sponges and a salad colander till absurdity. The use of slow tempo, delayed time as a characteristic for the era of Post-Modern Dance is very



present.

Lucinda Childs in *Carnation*. <http://lucindachilds.com/images/albums/Lucinda-Childs/img011.jpg>

Childs also took part at the *Nine Evenings: Theatre and Engineering*. She collaborated with Bell Telephone engineers and produced the interactive and moving installation *Vehicle* (1966). Even though video technology (*Dance* 1979), lighted décor and technical design (*Einstein on the beach* 1976) would be part of her work on stage, the use of engineering technologies didn't remain. Moreover, most of her works have a performativity setting and put the audience in the role of a passive spectator. By that she does not follow the trend of happenings or events where the audience becomes performer or participant.

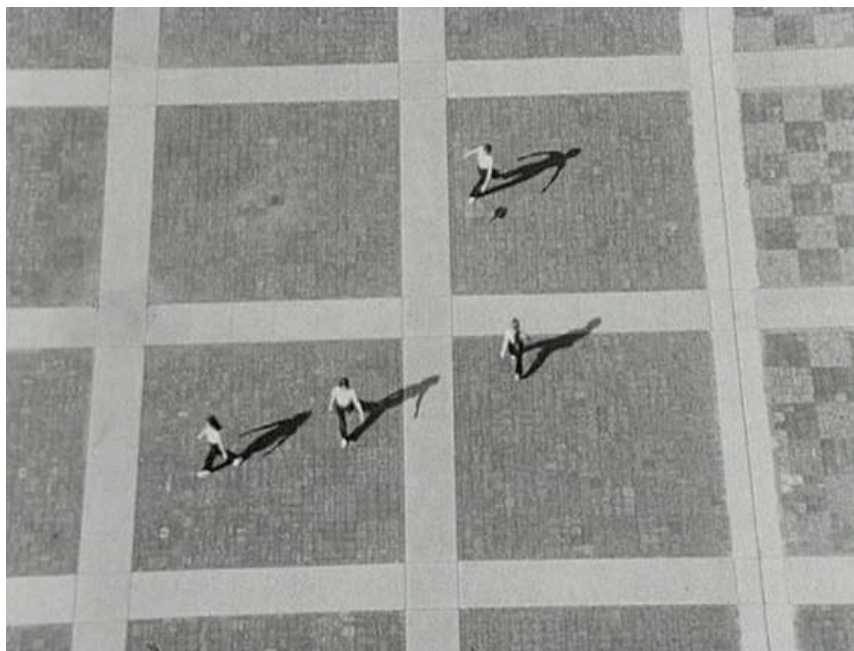
The constellation within the Judson Dance group changed and also due to her rising success she left the venue and worked outside of the Judson Church, even outside New York City. Her first work was *Untitled Trio* (1968). After five years of break she revisited the same piece and expanded the work to present it at the Whitney Museum in 1973. After this

break where she only thought and researched her own identity it was obvious that Childs discovered a new core to her work.

From now on she would minimise the use of props or language and would focus mainly on the precision of movement often in a very close relationship with music. Her compositional virtuosity lied in the ability to let the spectator's focus zoom into the smallest changes and details of a repetitively performed movement phrase. She plays with the small shifts within the body while constantly repeating or would put the focus on the space the group of dancers moved through in a specific pattern and rhythm, opposing or supporting each other.

The picture on the right shows *Calico Mingling* (1973) and it is a group piece for four dancers that would follow identical paths of circles and straight lines. By the way they would change their facing and their relation towards each other

a purely magical pattern appears on the concrete. If one would think of Cunningham's principles or general characteristics of Post-Modern Dance one could notice that the movement is very simple and could be executed also by non-dancers. It is a pedestrian walk. The aspect that makes it merely impossible for



non-dancers to execute this piece is the complexity of

Lucinda Childs: Calico Mingling.  
<http://peoplearedancing.files.wordpress.com/2013/08/kley8-11-10-7.jpg>

patterns in space. She seems to be fascinated by mathematical systems and the precision of geometric forms. If one thinks about her as a guest speaker at our Theatreschool one understands how her appearing can be so sharp, so precise. The fact that she is so concerned about the time – looking at her watch repetitively – could testify how dominant timing became in her work (and life). Childs uses real time by the tempo of the walks in *Calico Mingling*. She said once that she does not think about her work as minimalistic, but as something that would only reduce to what is



essential. She is so to say the pioneer amongst the group of Post-Modern choreographers that deals with simplicity and at the same time complexity of movement on this level. Gender is not a theme in her works. Neither clothing nor movement separates men from women; this counts for most of her works. In 1973 she founded the Lucinda Childs Dance Company that still exists today. Due to the different way of funding in the US the company's dancers work in seasonal contracts, on a more project-based organisation.

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Her career's climax was the collaboration with composer Philip Glass and director Robert Wilson on *Einstein on the Beach* (1976) and shortly after the production of *Dance* (1979) with music by Philip Glass and a video décor by Sol LeWitt. Both pieces reached major attention worldwide and are still performed. Just recently *Einstein on the beach* toured in a 2012 revival production around the world. These works have been discussed intensively in various articles and books; therefore, I forego to discuss their composition at this point. Childs received a Guggenheim Fellowship in 1979. She is also the recipient of the NEA/NEFA American Masterpiece Award, and in 2004 she was elevated from the rank of Officer to Commander in France's Order of Arts and Letters.<sup>12</sup>



Einstein on the Beach and Dance.  
[www.lucindachilds.com/history.php](http://www.lucindachilds.com/history.php)

<sup>11</sup> Banes, Sally. "Lucinda Childs: The Act of Seeing" *Terpsichore in Sneakers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company. 133ff.

<sup>12</sup> Lucinda Childs. *Lucinda Childs*. 2014. 14.08.14.

[www.lucindachilds.com/history.php](http://www.lucindachilds.com/history.php)

Childs is still very active today and is working mainly in Europe choreographing operas as well as own works. As a matter of fact she takes the libretto of an opera into account when creating movements on stage, but in her own productions as a guest choreographer for known ballet ensembles or for her own company abstraction is still present. Nevertheless, she lost the sharpness, her characteristic cleanness when it comes to dance. In *Oceana* (2011) choreographed for the Ballet de Nice to music of Osvaldo Golijov one sees a ballet vocabulary on stage that includes virtuosic pas de deux and the establishment of characters. She rediscovered the use of props like in her very early works at the Judson Dance Theatre. In *Chairman Dances* (2000) the dancers of Les Ballets de Monte Carlo or also Introdans are dressed in red on a red stage and play with a rectangle that is being moved.

None of her productions after *Dance* (1979) were of great relevance. Nevertheless, one must respect that she is a highly coveted choreographer still. Ironically she made *Histoire* for the Martha Graham Dance Company in 1999.

## 2.2. 1960S AND 70S IN THE NETHERLANDS

The Netherlands mirror developments in American modern dance with a small delay. Martha Graham first visited Amsterdam in 1954, which inspired dancers just as in the States to research new forms of dance besides ballet. At that point there was no question about the relevance of modern dance and especially Graham's technique anymore so even the big Dutch ballet companies Het National ballet under Rudi Dantzig and Hans van Manen and Nederlands Dans Theater under Glen Tetley experiment with modern dance in their repertoire.

Moniek Merckx states in her book "Moderne Dans In Ontwikkeling" (Amsterdam, 1985) that Dutch pioneers to discover postmodern dance in the form of the Judson Church movement are Lucas Hoving, Pauline de Groot and Koert Stuyf. It was them who travelled to New York in the 1960s and came back with knowledge to educate dancers in the Netherlands according



Pauline de Groot Portrait. [the-live-legacy-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/p\\_groot.jpg](http://the-live-legacy-project.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/p_groot.jpg)

to what they experienced abroad. Improvisation, non-narrative content, even Eastern relaxation techniques and many more aspects widened the dance

field in Holland. Through them Amsterdam formed a leading role in developing new dance in Europe. Koert Stuyf (1938) and his partner and "muse" of Dutch dance Ellen Edinoff (1944-2013) formed a school just like Pauline de Groot (1942). In their independent dance studios they followed similar approaches including small dance productions whereas de Groot



Koert Stuyf and Ellen Edinoff. [www.danspubliek.nl/stuyf.jpg](http://www.danspubliek.nl/stuyf.jpg)

included more experimental work in her curriculum and Stuyf concentrated more on offering traditional dance classes. Teachers that taught at the studio of Pauline de Groot were Yoka van Brummelen, Bianca van Dillen and Yenn Ben Yakov. It was in 1970 when first Stuyf's studio got included as a separate institution of de Theaterschool and one year later Pauline de Groot followed. This affiliation is of high relevance for the development of postmodern dance in the Netherlands and Europe as it forms the only platform with such an approach. Moreover, Amsterdam turned into a place that was open for experiments in dance just like New York was the mecca across the big lake. In 1975 Stuyf and de Groot developed the first curriculum together of what is called the modern dance department of de Theaterschool from then on. In the same year Stuyf leaves the institute, because he felt too caged by school and therefore state regulations about the study program. From 1977 on Pauline de Groot shares the artistic leadership with Aat Hougee and Bart Stuyf, both teachers of the education.

In the following years a different vision of dance will separate two parties in the team of the teachers. Bianca van Dillen amongst others points out the importance of an intense physical form based training like Graham and Cunningham technique while at the same time Pauline de Groot amongst others is following the idea of a more internal research and less form based but experience based classes. As de Groot is leading the education, parts of her teacher team leave. "In distancing from these choreographers (of the traditional subsidised modern dance scene; e.g. Dansproductie, Valse Bloed), the school acquired a relatively isolated position within the Dutch dance world." (<sup>13</sup>) In her publication "Op gespannen voet" (Amsterdam 1981, p.144) Eva van Schaik goes even further and describes the modern dance department a "sectarian" undertaking of Pauline de Groot. It was for sure postmodern and open for experimentation. Over the years a lot of changes in leadership happened. Jaap Flier, director from 1980 on, allowed structural changes and established today's name of the School for New Dance development (SNDO). As the AHK searched for even more structure Flier amongst others left the school in 1989 and established the European Dance Development Centre in Arnhem. Trude Cone and Ria Higler become artistic directors, followed by Jeroen Fabius and Robert Steijn in 2000, Gavin Louis in 2003 and Gabriel Smeets from 2006 till 2014.

With a clear shift happening in the 1990s towards conceptual dance with works of Jérôme Bel, Xavier Le Roy and Alain Platel etc. de Groot's idea of an education that is less formal without doubt finds its validation. "Many (graduates) have established an acknowledged career. What is clear is that the stress on creative, artistic development of the dancer by SNDO has contributed to dance-making in the Netherlands, first by introducing the word dance-maker as a term for the small-scale dance-making where artistic collaboration is important and choreography is made from a strongly individual-based movement research." (<sup>14</sup>)

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<sup>13</sup> Rethorst, Susan. "That Stranger the Unmade Dance." TALK/SNDO 1982-2006. Amsterdam: SNDO, 2009. 16.

<sup>14</sup> Rethorst, Susan. "That Stranger the Unmade Dance." TALK/SNDO 1982-2006. Amsterdam: SNDO, 2009. 24.

*The one that makes a difference in shaping what is not yet there. In bringing that forth. In exposing it.*

Beutler, Nicole. Notes on making Furry Animals, house publication by Gasthuis Theater: Amsterdam, 2003.

SNDO was and is still an international institute that invites various personages of new dance to Amsterdam and offers a platform for Contact Improvisation, Body-Mind Centering and other methods. In 1992 the AHK initiated a second education named Modern Theatre Dance that is educating modern dancers in a more traditional approach. Also because of that SNDO shifted into being a school for choreographers (officially since 2002). From 1970 till 1989 SNDO and Amsterdam was the only location for postmodern dance in Holland to be researched and performed and it still is a platform today.

# 2.2.1. VITA OF BIANCA VAN DILLEN

Bianca van Dillen followed a traditional ballet education, graduating from the Scapino Dansakademie in 1965 when it was still situated in Amsterdam. It was the trips to New York from 1967 till 1976 where she took classes of Eric Hawkins, former dancer of the Graham Dance Company. He developed an own aesthetic that was nevertheless highly minted by Graham. Amongst others she learnt from Viola Farber, Nancy Meehan and a joined a choreographical summer course with Graham dancer Robert Cohan. Coming back to Amsterdam with a fresh knowledge about New American Dance she gave classes at various schools, amongst them the modern dance education of de Theaterschool, which is SNDO today.<sup>15</sup>

In Talk/SNDO 1982-2006 (SNDO, 2009) Jeroen Fabius is giving a description of the school's development where it reads that Bianca van Dillen was teaching a more traditional form based modern dance class whereas director Pauline de Groot gradually invited more and more post-modern figures of the first Judson Church generation to teach. "People who did not agree with this policy had left by then, including Bianca van Dillen, Krisztina de Châtel and Yoka van Brummelen, all of whom would become the choreographers dominating state subsidized modern dance productions in the Netherlands in the late 1970s and 80s" (p.16).

In her career she was dancing for Scapino Ballet, Pillow Dance and Dansgroep Pauline de Groot. From 1983 till 1992 she was artistic leader of the only female dance initiative Dansproductie. Her choreographies for Dansproductie, Rotterdams Danscentrum and Rotterdamse Dansgroep have been highly acknowledged. On van Dillen's website ([www.stamina.nl](http://www.stamina.nl)) it reads that she is influenced by the works of Lucinda Childs, Hans van Manen and Merce Cunningham. Nevertheless, she finds Cunningham, Graham and classical

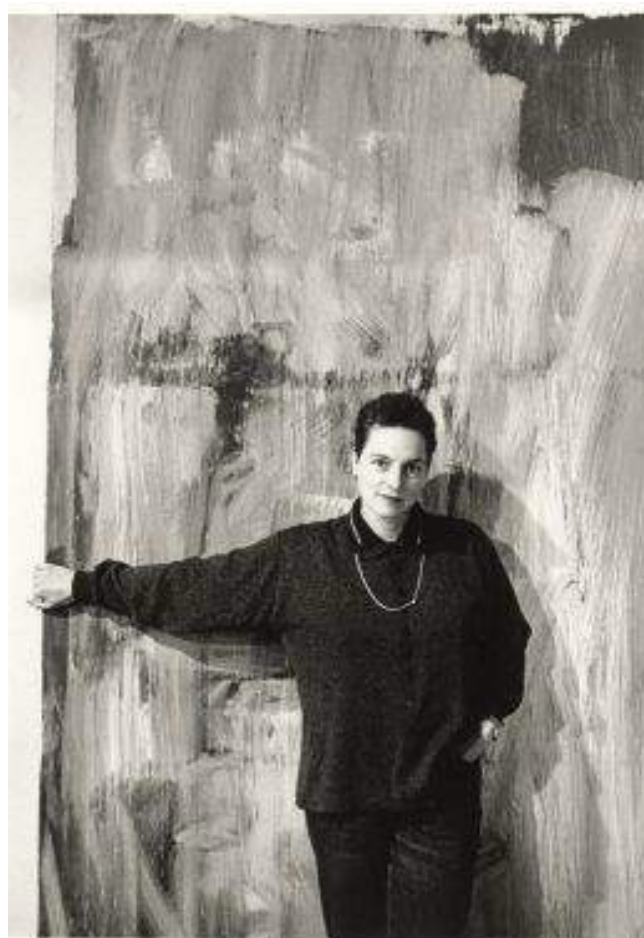
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<sup>15</sup> Stamina. Bianca van Dillen. 2000. 14.08.14. [www.stamina.nl](http://www.stamina.nl)

ballet technique at the base of her movement. Therefore, she seems very open to postmodern ideas of composition and content, while at the same time the movement itself of her work pleases a modern dance audience. Bianca van Dillen: "The „everything goes“ mentality was very present in New York in the years 60 and 70. Unconsciously, I took adopted this way of working and brought it with me to the Netherlands. The performances and combinations of disciplines at the Shaffy Theater (platform for avant-garde theatre and dance in Amsterdam) were attracting me. I was used to it: New York, Washington Square, The Garage, Broadway – they were inspiration for me and examples of collaboration." <sup>(16)</sup>

In the work with Dansproductie she researched the relation between modern dance, choreography, video, music and other disciplines. She put a strong emphasis on live music.

Another initiative initiated by van Dillen is Stamina which is a computer archive to store her work, accompanying notes and process documentations and the general legacy of her work mainly with Dansproductie. It also became a subsidised platform for educative research for new technologies in relation to movement. She is not choreographing new work anymore but assisting in recreating her existing work. Vermiljoen (1978) was remade for the Rotterdamse Schouwburg in 1992 and recently in collaboration with Nicole Beutler (2014).



Bianca van Dillen.  
mediaserver.tin.nl/getmedia.php?s=51xxx2462.001&b=400

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<sup>16)</sup> "Samen dansen in het Shaffy: Bianca van Dillen over Dansproductie en het Shaffy Theater." Felix Meritis. Felix Meritis. 2013. 18.08.14.  
[www.felix.meritis.nl/nl/opinie/commentaar/samen-dansen-in-het-shaffy-bianca-van-dillen-over-dansproductie-en-het-shaffy-theater](http://www.felix.meritis.nl/nl/opinie/commentaar/samen-dansen-in-het-shaffy-bianca-van-dillen-over-dansproductie-en-het-shaffy-theater)



# 3. CONTRASTING JUXTAPOSITION

Knowing roughly about the context of the dance performances being discussed in this chapter I listed the following aspects to be examined.

- Choreographical choices (e.g. unison vs. individual movement, use of time, space and dynamics, repetition vs. variation)
- Content and coherence of appearance (e.g. narrative vs. abstract, coherence between movement and content)
- Structure
- Interplay between disciplines (e.g. use of light, costume, props, stage design, etc.)
- Dance genre
- Performers (e.g. gender, role, skill, number of performers)
- Performance location
- Underlying concept (e.g. motives, leading ideas that transmit to the audience)

The contrasting juxtaposition shall reveal similarities and differences of Beutler's contemporary work compared to the originals. Therefore I will first analyse the original and in a second step the work of Beutler while I put it immediately in contrast at the same time.

# 3.1. RADIAL COURSES BY LUCINDA CHILDS VS. NICOLE BEUTLER

Lucinda Childs choreographed Radial Courses in 1976. I base this analysis on a recording from the same year.

The performance has a length of almost precisely ten minutes and consists out of three different patterns performed variedly but repetitively in a circle. Four male dancers (Bruce Jones, Garry Reigenborn, Keith Sabado and Dusan Tynek) wear white sneakers, a decent grey trouser and a pastel blue shirt. The stage is completely black and has a white floor. When a single light circle brightens up the central ring of the proscenium stage from above one notices the four men standing still on the 12 o'clock position of this ring watching contra clockwise. The light has a strong blue to it. The audience is seated on a podium on the 6 o'clock side of the stage. The piece is performed in complete silence. The dancers start walking in a circle in an up-tempo rhythm in a set rectangular formation that rotates around itself as well in order for each one of them to trace a circle of equal size. In every 6 and 12 o'clock position they will form a rhombus and in every 3 and 9 o'clock position a perfect square. After walking the first full circle in unison two of them separate from the group and perform a skipping-jumping phrase that lets them travel three quarter of the circle while the other two made only 2 quarter walking at the same amount of time. This principle applies to all phrases performed. All three of them use three quarter of the stage and let the dancer travel 1 quarter faster than the up-tempo walk. All dancers remain counting the same rhythm at all time. In the next two and a half minutes duos separate and catch up with each other again, maintaining the counter clockwise circle. Then suddenly one duet changes direction at the 12 o'clock position. 2 dancers

are walking clockwise and 2 counter clockwise, they maintain their original circles and walk through each other at the junctions. The next minute shows still a symmetrical pattern whereas then one single dancer is changing direction opening a new possibility. A game starts of finding couples and quartets at different sides of the circle. They never form trios. They introduce a third phrase beginning with a turn in the last third of the piece and vary between all three of them constantly changing the walking direction. The focus stays in walking direction as well. In the end they find the rhombus at the 6 o'clock downstage position again and they stop as abruptly as they started. The light turns off.

The use of arms is minimal; a constant easily controlled position on the side of the body is noticeable, also in moments of turning. On the video no intense physical exhaustion is noticeable. The dominating sound is the rhythm of the steps and the different sounds of the shoes while landing, jumping, turning and walking.

The movement vocabulary seems non-virtuosic but one sees trained dancer bodies and well rehearsed material. The virtuosity of the performance is noticeable in its subtle complexity in counts, special directions and positions. It is very coherent in its minimal use of only 3 abstract movement patterns additional to the simple walk, which is not comparable to a natural walk because of its high pace. There is no narrative, Childs reduces light, costume, set and movement to minimalistic leitmotif. These aspects and Childs biography make it easy to define her work as postmodern dance. One might wonder about only men on stage, but gender is no focal point of the performance as there is no physical interaction between the individuals and the costumes are neutral.

Critics perceive the performance as hypnotising, because of its repetitive execution while at the same time they feel challenged to understand the underlying system.<sup>17</sup>

The four dancers appear radically equal; the execution of all steps performed has been perfectly unified. A tension is rising from beginning till end as patterns get more and more intertwined, the end is not anticipated and therefore like a climax of a never stopped breathing in.

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<sup>17</sup> "For a new Lucinda Childs, less minimalism is more." *New York Times*. 2000. 18.08.14. [www.nytimes.com/2000/10/13/arts/13CHIL.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2000/10/13/arts/13CHIL.html)

The determination of the execution appears serious and strong while at the same time the skipping phrases are performed lightly and effortless. The individual is retreating and the system of the composition is the main focus.



Radial Courses. [www.anjabeutler.de/bilder/lul1.jpg](http://www.anjabeutler.de/bilder/lul1.jpg)

Beutler created an evening performance in 2010 named "2: Dialogue with Lucinda". It is an evening of two performances. The first one is Radial Courses and the second one Interior Drama (original by Lucinda Childs, 1977). I base this analysis on a recording of the premier at the Frascati Theatre, Amsterdam. It is the second time after Les Sylphides (2009) that Beutler took hands on an already existing piece to cover it.

The structure in Beutler's Radial Courses remains almost equal to the original. Four dancers perform an up-tempo walk interfered with different skipping, jumping and turning phrases that let them travel 3 quarters of the circle. One notices that Beutler stretches parts – where there were usually faster shifts in direction or more variation she chooses to reduce. Moreover, the overall speed of the rhythm is slower. As a result the steps performed appear more natural. The execution and the use of the arms are still as precise as in the original. The overall length of the piece is with 18 minutes almost twice as long as the original. A big contrast to Childs version is the beginning and the end. The four dancers are walking in circles already while the audience is entering – they are standing at all sides around the circle and often choose to sit down or lean against pillars and walls. The atmosphere is clearly less clean and sterile, but cosy and warm; also due to a warmer light. In the end the four dancers stop abruptly at the 6 o'clock position as well, but instead of a blackout one hears them breathing and sees them commonly leaving

after a few seconds. The light turning off after they left signals the end of the piece. That already is a hint that with Beutler's version the individual is more present than in Child's. In the middle of the piece one performer is stepping out to a prepared microphone to speak about what the dancers are thinking at that specific moment in the piece. "We are in the middle of the third section of Radial Courses, everybody is incredibly busy counting 9. (...) We organise ourselves around the circle by the four points which are the centre of each side of the space. (...) The piece is made up of four sections. (...) When Lucinda come to a rehearsal in the studio she talked to us about the title, and she decided to call it Radial courses because she thought it sounded better then just calling it running in circles." Later on gradually every dancer is stepping out of the routine for a while till only one is left performing the circle, you hear one dancer breathing and whispering counts in the microphone. They will all join again at one point and keep on whispering counts now and then till the end.

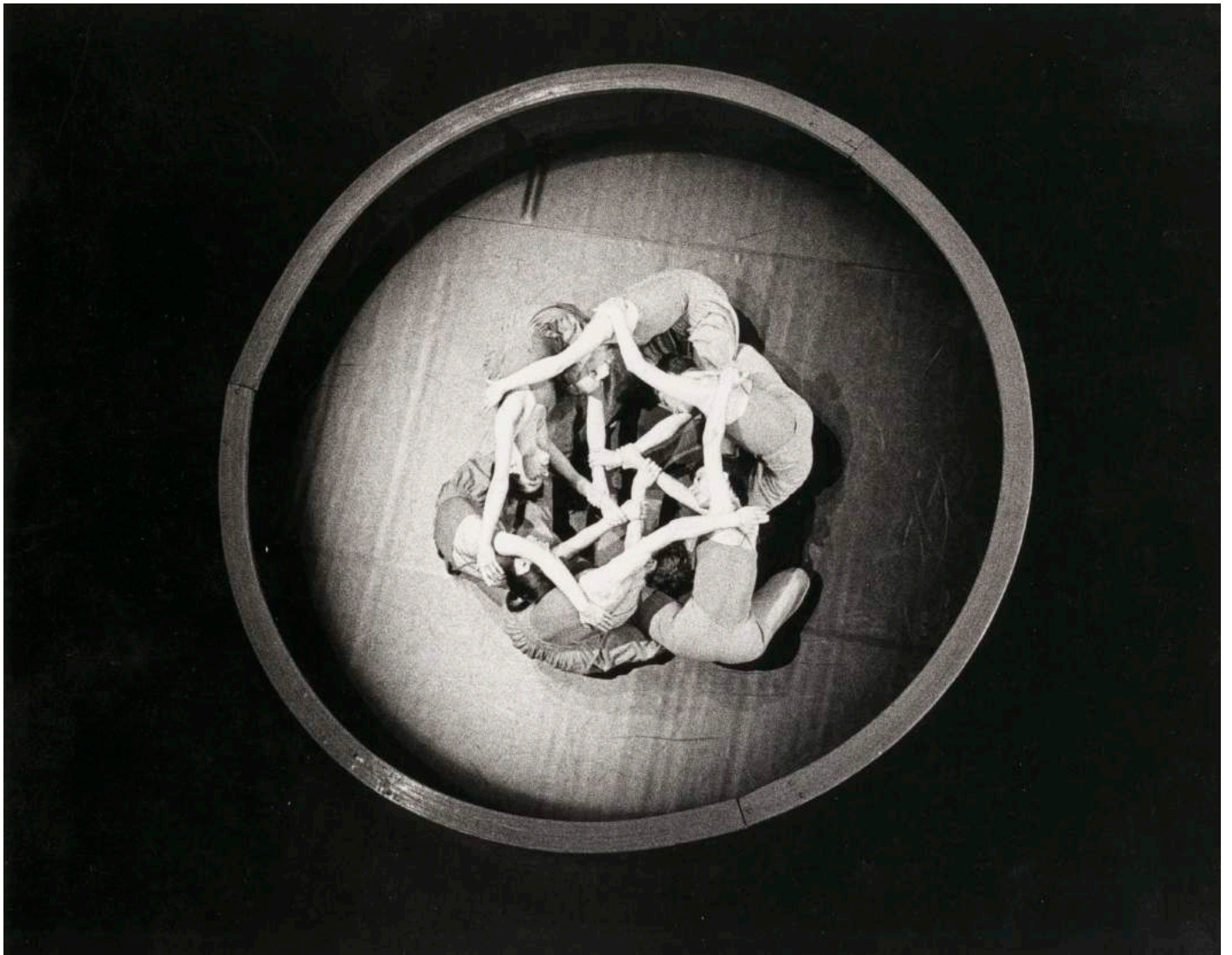
It is noticeable that Beutler's piece develops on a different level than Childs. Here one senses the breaking free of individuals that are stuck in one hierarchic system put on them. They separate themselves from each other through different clothes as well. One performer even wears a hat that she will give to another one in the section where she is the only one left executing the circle. While Childs reduced her work only to the homogeny layer of minimalism, Beutler displays the struggle of a superficially homorganic group in a minimal system while she adds more and more layers that destroy this simplicity and the minimalism of it. While she completely keeps the movement material she allows the dancers to consciously step out and into the system. At the same time one feels that even these moments of stepping out are precisely choreographed and timed breaks. The use of voice is another layer, just like the underlying humour and the distinction in costumes that are still very decent and casual. All of them wear white sneakers. With Hillary Firestone, Naiara Mendioroz Azkarate, Aimar Pérez Gali and Javier Vaquero Ollero two men and two women are performing, which could raise the question of gender, but the choreography makes no distinction. With Firestone reflecting on the act itself Beutler is using a tool primarily established in the Judson Church era as well: self-reflexivity.

Beutler surprisingly chooses to almost completely stick to the movement corset of the original. Therefore, it is not a remake, but truly a cover of the original. I refer to the definition of "cover" in music theory – a newly performed version of an existing piece whereas the majority of it remains original.<sup>18</sup> She works with non-dance tools to add more layers to the work. Her interest lies in the conflict of and individual as part of a group. Through costume, text, the self-reflexivity and the ability to step out of the rigid system she allows the spectator to zoom and distinguish individual characters. Moreover, the atmosphere created by an audience casually placed around the dance space is more cosy and close to the performer than the traditional proscenium setting of Childs. Beutler allows the sweat and exhaustion of the performer to be visible. Her work is therefore repetitive but through its complex layering not minimalistic as the original.

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<sup>18</sup> Pendzich, *Marc*, „Von der Coverversion zum Hit-Recycling.“ LIT Verlag: Münster, 2004, p.2

# 3.2. VERMILJOEN BY BIANCA VAN DILLEN VS. ECHO BY NICOLE BEUTLER



Vermiljoen top shot. NPprojects archive

"Vermiljoen" (1978) (Eng. vermeil) is the first evening production of Dansproductie and is choreographed by Bianca van Dillen. I base this analysis on a video recording of the same year.

Dansproductie is an only female collective and Vermiljoen danced by six highly skilled dancers: Truus Bronkhorst, Paulie Daniëls, Amy Gale, Toska ten Kate, Patrice Kennedy and Margie Smit. At the Holland festival 1979 it was performed with Angela Linssen (current director of the Modern Theatre Dance department of the AHK) as a guest replacing Amy Gale. They were dressed in an all red dress-like suite that displayed their femininity. The centre of the stage carries an elevated red ring that will function as a step and an enclosing circle. Van Dillen chose pre-existing music by Steve Reich: Six Pianos (1973). It is a never-ending repetitive high tempo soundscape with a constant chord at the base and an overlaying melodic score. The music does not stand in direct relation to the movements of the choreography. The music and the piece have a length of around 30 minutes. The light is never bright, but rather dimmed and is almost not changing from beginning till end. At the beginning the six women form a chain hugging and touching each other, a short black out gives five of them time to leave the stage again. With the light on again the first performer is starting to walk the stage in all directions in a slow pace. Gradually the other five are entering. With the fourth one a hop is added to the simple walk and gradually they increase in speed, with dancer number 5 a turn is added and with the sixth a port de bras, a curve and a tilt. They find themselves in unison, positioning around the circle till they lie down on it and each other for a short breath. They pose individually at the outside edge of the circle before they perform a ritual gestural dance standing and moving on top of it. Slow tempo and precious dedication to the execution is noticeable. They touch each other. As soon as they enter the circle they work on all levels between floor and an upright standing position, increasing the speed. For a long time they moved individually but now they perform a circular, folkloristic dance of stepping into the centre and out. Like a pulsing breath they open up the range of the circle till they find themselves jumping in and out using the elevated edge of the circle as a step to fly higher. Here is the climax of the piece and two dancers burst in an individual phrase while the other ones are slowing



down and come back to a natural walk. They form the beginning picture again, but this time on the other side of the stage – the music stops and the light turns off before the last dancer reaches the hugging constellation.

We do not find a libretto, but associations with a ritual, a folkloric dance and the simple pleasure of moving.



Vermiljoen top shot 2. NPprojects archive

The overall movement vocabulary is a mix of Cunningham based jumps and upper body rotations as well as Graham based contractions and floor work. This links to the biography of choreographer van Dillen. She is using postmodern compositional tools like the separated identity between music and movement, the use of a pedestrian walk and the abstract, in parts even repetitive movement. Nevertheless, dominating is a formal modern dance vocabulary. It is difficult to categorize her work; it lies in between

modern and postmodern dance. The movement vocabulary in itself was coherent and the recorded music a single track that also resonates in its repetitive characteristic with postmodern ideas. The audience was seated in a traditional way and the performance was frontal on a proscenium stage.

Beutler premiered with "5: Echo" at the Julidans festival 2014 in Amsterdam's Rabozaal. I base this analysis on the premier and rehearsals I attended.

The performance is collaboration between NBprojects and ICK Amsterdam. Three of the six dancers (Hillary Blake Firestone, Dereck Cayla, Maurizio Giunti, Christian Guerematchi, Kelly Hirina and Marjolein Vogels) are from Emio Greco | PC, Amsterdam's city company.

The performance is very clearly separated in two parts. The first part (ca. 30 min.) is a solo with Kelly Hirina. Beutler is using text, an echo effect on the microphone, nudity, diva-like props (high heels, and feathers on the head) and puts the performing body in the centre of attention. This first section is inspired by the work of Koert Stuyf and Ellen Edinoff. A visual interlude, a circular projection on five see through curtains that are being closed and opened is forming the transition to the second part (ca. 30 min.). This part is based on van Dillen's Vermiljoen.

The stage is all silver (stage design by Theun Mosk) and the three men and three women wear neon bright, colour-blocking short outfits. Also here one finds a red circle painted on the centre of the stage, but it is not elevated. The light design is by Minna Tikkainen. The music is by Gary Shepard, partner and long time collaborator of Beutler. He is DJ and composer and the music that is replacing Reich's Six Planos is a heartbeat pulsing club sound. In contrast to the original, they start all together in a tight group constellation walking slowly across the stage. Gradually they add speed, turns, curves and a port de bra. They are moving in perfect unison till they spread and perform mirrored on the right and left side of the stage. The music is just as repetitive as the movement at this point. A top shot of the original by van Dillen is projected on the back wall as the dancers slowly find their way towards the circle. They do not perform in unison with the original but a clear link between the

ritualistic slow motion performance live and on video is noticeable. The video gradually forms into the image of a pulsing speaker box. A heavy bass underlines the folkloric stepping in and out of the circle that is just like the original. One senses an intensifying build up and the dancers step out of the circle again to enter the entire space with a jumping phrase till they burst in random individual movement in one position. They unite with a gestural phrase and the music abruptly stops as they position themselves on the floor facing the back right corner. The light changed before to an all covering intense red and swaps back to a neutral white at this moment. The audience is facing sudden silence after 20 minutes of heavy sound. They perform an adagio first on the floor and then standing in unison, which was performed by one dancer in the original.



5: Echo. Anja Beutler. 2014. [www.ickamsterdam.com/images/prmedia/3/c2/5\\_ECHO\\_nbprojects-ickamsterdam12-%C2%AEAnjaBeutler.de.jpg](http://www.ickamsterdam.com/images/prmedia/3/c2/5_ECHO_nbprojects-ickamsterdam12-%C2%AEAnjaBeutler.de.jpg)

Compared to the cover of Childs this is clearly a re-make or a remix. She only used some structural and choreographical elements of the original. Beutler added and eliminated numerous elements, which make this piece almost a new creation inspired by van Dillen's original. In the after talk (Amsterdam Stadsschouburg, 08. Juli 2014) Beutler expresses how she used a

filter to translate a lot of aspects. A contemporary translation of the intense costumes of the original would be the modern and sportive outfits. Also the original black stage was now translated to technologic silver. Not coherent at this moment was the light design of Tikkainen that covered everything vermeil at one point. Beutler at the after talk: "All my collaborators relate in their own way to what was given and (...) that was (Tikkainen's) choice to translate it like this." The highest impact had the change of music to a contemporary beat. Beutler still associates the performed dance still with a ritual, the view through a kaleidoscope or a folkloristic dance. The club beat made it difficult to understand this link. "5: Echo" could be called a "Gesamtkunstwerk". I brought many disciplines together. The performance was abstract and did not follow a libretto. The collective was a focal point of Beutler's and therefore unison was dominating. The dancers were highly skilled and executing virtuosic movement. Choosing three male and three female dancers was a decision out of clarity and transparency. The choreography separates in two groups at certain points and the obvious choice was to choose both genders. The Graham and Cunningham technique that was so present in the original is more decent and less obvious in Beutler's version.

# 4. CONCLUSION

The way Beutler approaches dance history is comparable to the precise research of an archaeologist ("I fancy the job of an archaeologist."<sup>19</sup>). In both pieces treated in this paper she contacted the original choreographer and asked for allowance and assistance to dig into the work. For Child's Radial Courses company dancer Ty Boomershine was available and for Vermiljoen Bianca van Dillen herself could teach the original to Beutler's cast. Beutler is researching the historical context of the originals and collects an entire archive of pictures documents and video material that feed her inspiration. She shares summarized information with the audience in form of a booklet handed out shortly before the performance. Moreover, the fact that she is promoting her pieces in a way that it is clear that she is taking hands on some existing work, allows the audience to research for themselves in advance. Whatsoever both performances are standing for their own even if the spectators do not know about the original. Nevertheless, I noticed in talks with various audience members of which some knew and some didn't know the about the historical context that those being informed about the original tend to enjoy the work more. Clearly Beutler is providing extra information in form of articles, books and videos before the performance, but she is not educating about dance history in the performance itself. Her approach to the named pieces differs in the sense that Radial Courses stick much more to the original than 5: Echo. As a matter of Beutler's education one sees a lot of postmodern choreographical tools in her work whereas she responds to contemporary development mainly in the use of music, costume and set design. Also Beutler's other pieces that have been based on historical originals have faced great acknowledgment in the dance world and she stands in on line with co-creators like Trajal Harrell, Isabelle Schad or

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<sup>19</sup> Interview with Nicole Beutler in: *Echo – Video documentary*. Dir. Bertha Bermúdez Pascual. ICK Amsterdam, 2014

Martin Nachbar. All of them choose to translate certain aspects into a contemporary language whereas some remain original. This kind of approach is clearly to be separated from only taking inspirational influence from something. Whether an aspect of the historical original needs adjustment or remains as it was is with Beutler often intuitively decided. She allows herself to still implement enough fresh elements that will let her creations stand by themselves even without the historical context.

# 5. LIST OF LITERATURE

AND OTHER SOURCES

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- Various web articles – referred to in the footnotes of each page
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- The achieve of NBprojects

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