

Spearing the Core of Albion: Myth, Social Identity and the Dancing Body in BalletBoyz's *England on Fire*

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Abstract. This research article examines the concepts of myth, social identity and the dancing body found at the core of the multidisciplinary production of *England on Fire* (2023) by BalletBoyz. Taking as starting point England's rich imaginary on the representation and corporeality of the mythical Albion and its vivid significance in the developing of collective identity, this analysis zooms in on the role of the dancing body as agent creating and shaping human agency. Spearing the core of Albion, the performativity in this collaborative artistic work brings to life 'the many formal and conceptual ideas upon which the making of art is based'¹, crossing borders across the semiotic spectrum and producing universal significance beyond precise time and space. In *England on Fire*, the symbolic across interdisciplinary borders is embodied in the dancing bodies inhabiting a shifting – at times archaic - world imaginary saturated with significance. Now, this radical cultural product encapsulates a vivid proposal that challenges pressing issues embedded in processes of social constructionism, delivering along the way a radical lynchpin in modern dance belonging to the twentieth-first century.

Keywords. Albion, Myth, Social Identity, *England on Fire*, BalletBoyz, Dancing Body, Nation, Semiotics, Symbol, Discourse.

Atravesando la esencia de Albión: Mito, identidad social y el cuerpo danzante en *England on Fire* de BalletBoyz

Resumen. Este artículo de investigación examina los conceptos de mito, identidad social y el cuerpo danzante que convergen en la producción multidisciplinaria de *England on Fire* (2023) de BalletBoyz. Tomando como punto

¹ Goldberg, RoseLee. (2001). *Performance Arte. From Futurism to Present*. Thames & Hudson. p.7.



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de partida el abundante imaginario inglés relacionado con la representación y la corporalidad de la mítica Albión y su vívido significado en el desarrollo de la identidad colectiva, este análisis se centra en el papel del cuerpo danzante como agente creador y moldeador de la agencia humana. Atravesando la esencia de Albión, la performatividad en este trabajo artístico colaborativo da vida a 'the many formal and conceptual ideas upon which the making of art is based' [las numerosas ideas formales y conceptuales en las que se basa la creación del arte], cruzando fronteras a través del espectro semiótico y produciendo un significado universal más allá del tiempo y del espacio precisos. En *England on Fire*, lo simbólico a través de las fronteras interdisciplinarias se encarna en los cuerpos danzantes que habitan un mundo imaginario cambiante, a veces arcaico, saturado de significado. Ahora, este producto cultural radical encapsula una propuesta vívida que desafía cuestiones apremiantes inherentes a los procesos de construccionismo social, produciendo a lo largo del camino un eje radical de danza moderna que pertenece al siglo XXI.

Palabras clave. Albión, Mito, Identidad social, *England on Fire*, BalletBoyz, el cuerpo danzante, Nación, Semiótica, Símbolo, Discurso.

In *Mythologies* (1973), the French theorist Ronald Barthes explored the role of myth in the shaping of human society and its symbolic value across borders and disciplines. To Barthes, myth is a symbol formed by interrelated elements he named as 'form' and 'concept'. In our semiotic spectrum, we recognise 'form' as something inherently defined, such as an image, an object, or a song; in fact, anything that makes an imprint in thinking patterns and creates referential in human agency. The positioning of 'concept' springs from 'form' and this is evident in the way we distinguish a sign - like when we identify a country's flag, a work of art, images of political/historical/ideological people, or recognise a musical piece saturated with symbolic power - because as agents we tend to bestow added meaning depending on our own habitus and accumulated capital. In the multidisciplinary production of *England of Fire* by BalletBoyz, this trope on recognition is central to the narrative structure at the core of this complex cultural product, in which a tattered and soiled St George's flag changes shape and tonality during the performance, creating instant signifying connotations in the spectator. This kind of activity alerts the spectators to the deconstructing process we are going to witness, inviting us to review our conceptualization of which role myth archetypes play in processes of collective recognition and in the formation of kinship. This positioning is relevant here because myth as a complex singular notion becomes part of the bigger process of mythmaking, in which the collective imaginary develops traits of social identity shared by groups and groupings across borders, as the identification of signs is embedded in its social functioning. Barthes understood the enormous power signs have in the collective imaginary and identified those elements as possessing symbolic value and accumulated capital beyond logocentric analysis. His theory was further expanded when proposing a 'rhetoric of the image' capable of creating meaning via connotation and tagged signifying activity as fundamental for our understanding of signs as 'the knowledge

a sign depends on is heavily cultural'². The Marxist sociologist and cultural theorist Stuart Hall developed this premise further in "The Work of Representation", as for him 'since all cultural objects convey meaning, and all cultural practices depend on meaning, they must make use of signs'³. Indeed, it is the codes functioning in our semiotic spectrum what gives meaning to the signifier (our visual perception) and to the signified (our conceptual perception), notions de Saussure labelled in 1916 as the plane of expression and the plane of content respectively (de Saussure, 2011). Hall's semiotic approach further zooms in on the capacity our conscious perception has in the interlinked formation of discourse, power and the subject⁴, concepts debated by Michel Foucault (1980, 1990) and functioning since the 1860s in Pierce's theory of signs as epistemes for inquiry (Pierce, in Colaprieto, 1996 and in Short, 2009). Following this line of thought, discourse is characterized by its specific and reflexive awareness to the ideological components pervasive to the signs exercised and implied in meaning. Yet, a sign by itself 'does not simple exist as part of a reality', as it also 'reflects and refracts another reality' for the reason that 'everything ideological possess semiotic value'⁵. This latter point is crucial to our understanding of myth and its influence on the construction of social identity, as recognised categorizing codes in the formation of collective identities are – fundamentally - created by agents and part of human agency's activity. We could certainly argue it is human agency what provides myth with its recurrence, validity and practice of identification in our imaginary as it is the main medium demarcating social identity and categorization. Hence, it is legitimate to accept that the existence of myth is entwined with the cultural practices (Bourdieu, 2007) of a particular collective identity, seeing that it fosters the creation of specific, recognised and accepted 'constituted taste'⁶ shared across social groups and groupings. On this arena, the symbolic is central to our sensitivity and to the furthering of kinship, as it is affected by the historical process and accumulated capital (social, economic, political, religious, cultural, ideological, educational, etc.) experienced by individuals within communities. This chimes with our structuralist vision of human activity as constructed by what we fundamentally are in mind and spirit, of what we all as humans have in common and share as universal truths (Lévi-Strauss, 1969). The humanist approach differs here from the premise that myth's representation might be built on binary oppositions with scope for creating negative stereotyping, though it is evident that binary opposition (Lévi-Strauss, 1983) is essential to any philosophical, ideological and socio-cultural manifestation because it creates two - often - polarised stances on which to devise and discuss a corpus of belief. Hitherto, it is important to bear in mind the analysis of structure by the anthropologist Lévi-Strauss on myth as a kind of language, as he argued the concept as both, historical and timeless (1983), but also as possessing a specific nuance of meanings to agents forming human agency

² Barthes, Ronald. (1977). *Image, Music, Text*. Harper Collins. pp. 34-35.

³ Hall, Stuart. (1999). "The Work of Representation". *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE Publications. p. 36.

⁴ Hall, Stuart. (1999). "The Work of Representation". *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. SAGE Publications. pp. 41-46.

⁵ Volosinov, V.N. (1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Harvard University Press. p.10.

⁶ Bourdieu, Pierre. (2007). "The Correspondence between Goods Production and Taste Production". *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge. p.230.

because it is linked to the shaping of kinship in collective identities. In this pool of theoretical lines regarding myth, the position taken by Ferdinand de Saussure (de Saussure, in Hall, 1999) and his connexions between representation and the production of meaning are fundamental to understand that it is impossible to dissociate myth from the structure of the cultural system wherein it functions and creates capital, especially social capital. But the structure of a cultural system is not just 'pointing to differences in cultural capital activity between various kinds of people'⁷, as it is crafted by thinking trends, habitus, ideological context, praxis and social phenomena happening in chronotope. This mixture of variable elements develops in time and space as cultural practices, carried out by agents functioning in the semiotic spectrum across borders and disciplines that ultimately contribute to shape collective identities⁸. On assessing different types of cultural products forming cultural capital operating in collective identities, artistic expressions of sensibility are captured in creations encompassing artworks, literary texts, musical compositions and body based creative pieces such as dance; the latter functioning via human dancing bodies capable of delivering emotion, identity, distinction, discourse and expressive subject either through a process of embodiment or by means of articulating significance corporeally. All these artistic expressions function as identifiers in daily life and across social encounters and strata (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), as 'art [...] is the human disposition of sensible or intelligent matter for an aesthetic end'⁹ capable of crafting defined and definitive taste (Bourdieu, 2007) and traits of identity in the unceasing zigzagging activity happening in groups and groupings. This occurs because as agents, 'choosing according to one's taste is a matter of identification of goods attuned to one's position'¹⁰ in the social world, and this perspective is acutely evident when approaching cultural products that encapsulate the ideological, sensorial, historical, ritualistic, imaginary and mythical landscapes of a nation's identity. In Great Britain, myth is intrinsically linked to notions of identity, and from Geoffrey of Monmouth to Edmund Spenser, or from John Milton to William Blake, the engrossing building of bridges of perception connecting the sides and borders shaping the myth of Albion developed shared features as identifiers. The consequent traffic of accumulated capital across borders contributed to construct the image of *one* Great Britain - and of *one* England, specifically - as a vivid mythical unit possessor of qualities capable to coalesce the many distinct identities inhabiting one island enfolding different signifying practices and alternative meanings.

⁷ Savage, Mike (2015). "Highbrow and Emerging Cultural Capital. Ways of Seeing". *Social Class in the 21st Century*. Pelican, an imprint of Penguin Books. p.118.

⁸ See Neville, F. and Reicher, S. (November 2011). "The experience of collective participation: Shared identity, relatedness and emotionality". *Contemporary Social Science: Journal of the Academy of Social Sciences* 6 (3):377-396. Retrieved on 12/06/2024 from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233219317_The_experience_of_collective_participation_Shared_identity_relatedness_and_emotionality

⁹ Fraleigh, Sondra. H. (1987). "Dance Itself". *Dance and the Lived Body. A Descriptive Aesthetics*. University of Pittsburgh Press. p.46.

¹⁰ Bourdieu, Pierre. (2007). "The Correspondence between Goods Production and taste Production". *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Routledge. p.232.

Since 2016, in the post-Brexit reduced cultural landscape of contemporary Great Britain, the concepts of myth and nation – the latter concept evaluated here in opposition to the ideology associated with a populist nationalism constructed on the basis of an ‘indifference to reality’¹¹ - have been revisited and reevaluated, as familiar images encapsulating shared British identity experienced a paradigm shift in which the different ideological and political preferences of each of the countries forming the island of Great Britain (Scotland, Wales and England) reaffirmed their distinctive – at times vastly polarised - single identities. In the case of the last listed country, the traditional name specifically linking England to Albion as nation - and to the connotative embodying notion of the mythical English Giant, the Giant Albion - rests on visual representations and literary works saturated with meaning recognized across diverse cultural branches in collective identities. One of the most powerful images crystallizing in the visual imaginary the notions of myth and identity is the well-known artwork at the British Museum of *The Dance of Albion* (circa 1794 -1796) by William Blake, and both notions are also present in his later in time literary text *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, one of Blake’s prophetic books¹². *The Dance of Albion* – also known as ‘Albion Rose’ or ‘Glad Day’ - is a striking hand-coloured plate (planographic colour-printed version) in which Blake’s use of red, blue, yellow and pink pigments produced an arresting image of a single male body in centrifugal position, with his arms outreached and his head in a cloud of light, standing on what it seems like a dark blue and black hillside. Created by Blake during a time of political controversy, repression of oppressed communal identities and economic-ideological revolution, the corporeality permeating this artwork is almost utopian in the intensity of its direct gaze and innocent in its purity, managing to convey Blake’s focus on unvarnished humanity, captured in the *not* absent-presence¹³ (Shilling, 2006) of a human body that manages to be finite yet universal. Embodying in this figure of Albion the personification of England, the naked body of the man is not an immobile static force but possesses instead a vivid dynamic tension that denotes his – and England’s - awakening to political clarity and freedom from oppression: it holds distinctive connotative ideological value across the sensorial imaginary and the semiotic spectrum. Amid the artistic views on Albion as a communal social phenomenon linking identity, myth, nation and human agency in chronotope, in the almost post-apocalyptic scenario of global-battered social structures and uncertainty after Covid, emerged in 2022 the intriguing book *England on Fire* by the author, researcher and online curator of images Stephen Ellcock and the writer and musician Mat Osman. Subtitled “A Visual Journey Through Albion’s Psychic Landscape”, the book is a hybrid cultural product merging literary text and 213 carefully curated and vastly diverse photographs, comprising images broadly different that range from medieval psalters, chalk carvings, horned human bodies, intricate mazes, Windrush’s emigrants, Brutalist high-rise towers in a desolate landscape, Surrealist paintings, Expressionistic dances, images of archaic traditions or esoteric bodies wearing ritualistic masks, to flying witches, cathedral gargoyles, an ancient cryptic curse, old tapestries, curious pictures from ancient texts, and more. The book is a cultural product that offers the

¹¹ Orwell, George. (1984). “Notes on Nationalism”. *Essays*. Penguin Modern. p.13.

¹² See Blake, William (2013). *Milton. The Prophetic Books of William Blake*. Phillips Press.

¹³ Shilling, Chris. (2006). ‘Absent-presence bodies’ in “Embodiment, Identity and Theory”. *The Body and Social Theory*. SAGE Publications. pp.179-181.

reader a visual trip entwined in a lyrical text encapsulating the mysterious and almost hallucinatory landscape of a mythical Albion rooted in folklore, tradition, ritual, prophecy, hermeneutics, history, memory and shared communal beliefs. It depicts with searing accuracy Albion's many landscapes and distinctiveness: the mind and spirit of the collective identities inhabiting this enduring and archaic land. Magically charting the hectic and piercing essence of England's spiritual cognition and social identity's imaginary, Ellcock and Osman guide the reader into a world, '[...] leading us, and where their psychic ancestors explored before us, is a new land - an enchanted, enchanting, maddening, quickening, furious, funny and fabulous England. An England on fire...' ¹⁴. Split into twelve sections ("Out of Darkness"; "Weeds & Wildness"; "Rebellious Nature"; "Stones"; "The Way"; "Myth, Magic & Ritual"; "Enchantment"; "Enclosure"; "Arcadia"; "Water"; "Settlements" and "Visions"), already in the book's "Introduction" Osman predicts the way of the journey ahead, stating that '[...] is a very English rebellion of the nameless against the privileged few' ¹⁵, these words placing this pervasive literary text along the same line of thought resting at the core of Blake's revolutionary prophetic books.

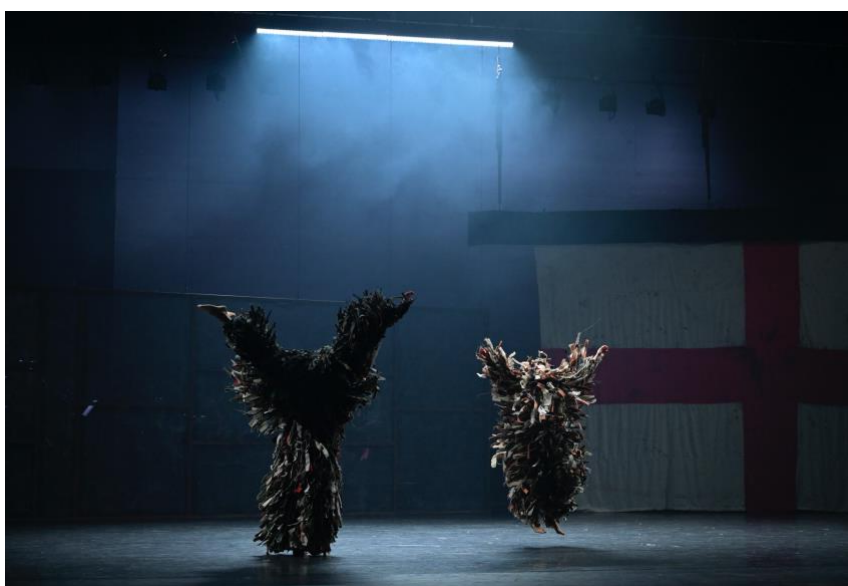
With its noticeable cover and its provocative title, Ellcock and Osman's *England on Fire* caught the eye of Michael Nunn and William Trevitt, the esteemed former dancers from The Royal Ballet, whose long professional trajectory and artistic works encompass from national and international stage productions to television and documentaries. After leaving in 1999 to pursue creative paths and experimental works, Nunn and Trevitt returned to London and launched in 2000 the company BalletBoyz. Their objective was a new and radical approach to explore dance, space and the dancing body in exciting cultural products beyond codified styles. Since then, the company has delivered trailblazing productions, and its artistic trajectory also incorporates art documentaries and dance films, in some cases one format (stage) being followed by another (film). BalletBoyz has won an array of glittering awards ¹⁶, validating since its formation Nunn and Trevitt's capacity to reinvent dance codifications and bringing artists together. From their first production with male dancers, the later inclusion of the female dancing body in their works enhanced the gendered capital functioning across the stage beyond biological difference, amplifying meaning in the semiotic spectrum and opening new paths to explore the potential connexions between dancing bodies, space and discourse. Landing on this fertile creative ground, Stephen Ellcock and Mat Osman's book, charged with metaphor and symbolism, provoked the curiosity of Nunn and Trevitt, inspiring them to initiate an interdisciplinary creative process to bring together diverse collaborators, asking them 'to look at the book, absorb it, and maybe something in there captures your imagination. Then put the book away and see where it takes

¹⁴ Ellcock, Stephen & Osman, Mat. (2022). "Introduction". *England on Fire*. Watkins Publishing. p.2.

¹⁵ Ellcock, Stephen & Osman, Mat. (2022). "Introduction". *England on Fire*. Watkins Publishing. p.1.

¹⁶ To mention here: the Laurence Olivier Award, the National Dance Awards, the International Emmy, the Golden Prague and the Rose d'Or.

you'¹⁷. The resulting cultural product – a collaboration of forty artists including composers, musicians, choreographers, directors and performers – borrowed for the production the title of the book and delivered a breath-taking interdisciplinary performative work vibrantly anarchic in its fluent energy that takes the stunned spectator on a sensorial journey across this vividly eclectic, yet eerily familiar Albion. In this production, the codified and recognisable proposal of a dancer as a single gendered body with strict codes of movement is spectacularly deconstructed, as the dancing bodies on stage dismantle via absorbing expressive movement the view of polarized gender attached to dance codifications, and repeatedly contest expectations based on established codified tropes. Again and again, the resulting combination of signifying factors in the production of BalletBoyz's *England on Fire* embraces different strands of artistic creativity, but it is the vivid performativity of the dancing bodies on stage what delivers a highly expressive – yet precisely executed technically - dynamic of movement that encompasses the principles of space, weight, time and flow in exact tempo. The resulting visual representation of these dancing bodies in space convey meaning and significance to the semiotic traffic happening on stage, corporeally shaping discourse and delivering with unexpected 'radical innocence' the querying of the 'fanciful ideas of original perfection'¹⁸ associated with the fictional shaping of social identity functioning in fields crafted by uninterrupted access to digital media in a globalized world. Moving away from prescriptive doxas, the multicultural and multiethnic ensemble of dancers in *England on Fire* corporeally construct a comprehensive cultural product belonging to the area of social anthropology theory in which fundamental structures of kinship (Lévi-Strauss, 1969) are formed and recognised.



Sophie Ormiston, Kai Tomioka and Benji Knapper in *England on Fire*

Image by George Piper

Source: BalletBoyz

¹⁷ Trevitt, W., in "Fire Island. Imagination, risk, controlled chaos: Michael Nunn and William Trevitt tell Isaac Ouro-Gnao about creating this work of many voices". *BalletBoyz. England on Fire*. Sadler's Wells programme (8-11 November 2023).

¹⁸ Newton, Michael. (2002). "Radical Innocence". *Savage Girls and Wild Boys. A history of feral children*. faber and faber. p.107.

In the choreographies of BalletBoyz's *England on Fire*, the performative elements creating significance to the action happening on stage are visually reinforced via the imaginative costume designs by Katherine Watt for the dancers, featuring from outfits made of sewn-together rags in earthy colours, esoteric black robes, gritty urban-coded attire, deconstructed period corsets or male Y-fronts, to ragged versions of traditional tutus and puffball skirts. This choice of costumes is brilliantly performative in re-coding ballet's imaginary via the visual impact generated in the audience, happening -for example- when a mesomorph male dancing body in a puffball skirt, puckishly gliding across the stage in perfect *en pointe*, faces the audience with dissident corporeal and facial mockery; or when another male dancing body masterly executes recognisable yet deconstructed ballet positions and phrases whilst wearing a ragtag of a blue tutu under a shabby reminder of a Victorian short dress. From the androgynous cut-out tee-shirts worn by the dancers that recall frayed St George's flags in the pulsating feral energy saturating the dancing bodies in "Rebellion", to the stockinged feet with suspenders worn by visually performative bi-gendered dancing bodies that bring to the spectators' mind sedate dressing habits associated with bygone male codes; or from an irreverent punkish crowned Queen in boxer shorts dragging a tattered cloak made of an England flag carried by a rioting ensemble that deconstructs myths on nationalism and identity, to the hypnotic corporeal imaginary created by the dancing bodies of druidic tribes' visions, this ebullient accumulation of signified and signifiers across borders conveys to the audience a purposely made volume of capital charged with defiant symbolic power. In this production, the ritualistic presence of antlered, phantasmagorical headpieces and strange masks reminiscing of magic presences possess a whimsical visual force that instantly generates connexions in our semiotic spectrum, connecting ancient and mythical rituals steeped in English time and history. Under the atmospheric lighting design by Andrew Ellis, the costumes in *England on Fire* are fundamental to its sensorial context and contribute to convey the corporeal language of the dancing bodies functioning in time on a precise space, bodies whose malleable performativity encompasses spatial scenarios ranging from inferred desolate urban spaces to hinted pastoral settings. Here, the inclusion of the dancing body in a physical space charged with symbolic meaning invites questions related to its peculiar potentiality in creating discourse as a social space (Durkheim, in Lefebvre, 2007). In *England on Fire*, the permuting use of the stage-space is thoroughly expressive, yet carefully split into areas: one section is a fixed space (an orchestra consisting of strings, percussion, woodwind and brass wind instruments), another section is movable (the shifting stage whereon the post-punk band Gag Salon plays), and the actual physical space used by the dancers' movements: a corporeal space wherein the dancing bodies interact, make connexions and establish their individual identity as agents creating human agency. This latter position recalls Lefebvre's theory of spatial architectonics (2007), in which he queried the possibility of the human body being capable of creating space. He based his questioning starting from the point of demarcating a dividing line between our understanding of bodies in abstract collective terms and that of 'a specific body, a body capable of indicating direction by a gesture, of defining rotation by turning around, of demarcating and

orienting space'¹⁹. Lefebvre enlarged this theory and concluded that 'the body with energies at its disposal, the living body, creates or produces its own space'²⁰. This is evident in *England on Fire*, as the stage-space employed by the dancing bodies plays the performativity of the sensorial and literary narrative we see unfolding in front of our eyes, affecting the spectator's perception of its symbolic value as 'dance poetizes space-time as it shapes and gives it corporeal utterance'²¹. In the production, it is the semiotic traffic created by the lived body (Fraleigh, 1987) of the dancers and the consequent spatial aspects of shapes and rhythms in human movement the dynamics at the core of choreutics (Laban, 2011). Indeed, space has a bearing in body movement beyond settings, and already Fraleigh argued the impact of Rudolph von Laban and Mary Wigman's objective studies on movement – also found in Hanya Holm's principles - that advocated for 'exacting high levels of skill and systematic use of paths of action in space'²² as part of the process of developing a path of corporeal activity (Fraleigh, 1987). Fraleigh enlarged this positioning, adding that later dancers, such as Doris Humphrey, Martha Graham or José Limón, did expand this path of corporeal action and significance, offering new visions in modern dance in which codified dance movements and significance was entwined in socio-cultural context. This technical standing rests at the core found in the use of stage-space and social space by the bodies in this production, capable of creating expressive subject and meaning in interlocking performative systems precisely operating in reciprocal manner between dancers and audience. In *England on Fire*, the role of the dancing body functioning in space becomes a necessary step to assess movement dynamics and meaning in the performance.

Portraying a complex multifaceted Albion, BalletBoyz delivers a blazing interdisciplinary artistic work holding an absorbing performative and technical dexterity. Here, the social identity embodied in the dancing bodies on stage push the boundaries of gender fluidity, re-drawing the boundaries of the human body and expressing a radical approach to the emblematic via connotative representation. In *England on Fire* there is an element of anarchy and irreverence filled with burning power that crosses the dividing line between audience and stage, generating expressive subject and offering new visions on the significance of modern dance as an art form. In this production, the rules of polarized gender understood as dualistic and intimately linked to the origins of our vision of the human body, the myths underpinning binary opposites (Fraleigh, 1987) and the mapping of social identities are all explored as part of a process in which the evolving individual self is the 'outcome of complex social processes which continue to produce change'²³. Traversing scholarly disciplines, *England on Fire* explores a dialectic relationship between lyrical text, visual imaginary, musical landscape, body, movement, space and human energy, generating and legitimating

¹⁹ Lefebvre, Henri. (2007). "Spatial Architectonics". *The Production of Space*. Blackwell. p.170.

²⁰ Ibid.p.170.

²¹ Fraleigh, Sondra. H. (2004). "Matching Space" in "Part II: Becoming". *Dancing Identity. Metaphysics in Motion*. University of Pittsburgh Press. p.130.

²² Fraleigh, Sondra. H. (1987). "Mythic Polarity". *Dance and the Lived Body. A Descriptive Aesthetics*. University of Pittsburgh Press. p.142.

²³ Howson, Alexandra. (2007). "The Civilized Body". *The Body in Society. An Introduction*. Polity Press. p.68.

significance in the symbolic universe of a kaleidoscopically England, of an England on fire.



Sophie Ormiston, Kai Tomioka and Benji Knapper in *England on Fire*

Image by George Piper

Source: BalletBoyz

Premiered in London at Sadler's Wells in November 2023, BalletBoyz's *England on Fire* is an astonishing and radical interdisciplinary lynchpin in modern dance belonging to the twentieth-first century. At its core, a breath-taking ensemble of fourteen exceptional dancers²⁴, whose breadth of knowledge and practice ranged from classical ballet and contemporary dance techniques to acrobatics, mime, theatre, contortion, satire, drag and choreographic authorship, presented to the spectator an incandescent cultural product challenging established performative system of coding. Corporeally constructing the narrative in the story we are told, the performing dancing bodies provoke a mounting electrifying emphatic parallelism (Shepherd, 2006) in the receptive spectator, as 'the shifts of tension either between the characters or between stage and audience'²⁵ deliver a complex yet universal cultural product which 'is lived not only through the body but also as

²⁴ Dance ensemble at the première in Sadler's Wells (2023): Harry Alexander, Edd Arnold, Tania Dimbelolo, Seirian Griffiths, Benji Knapper, Rosanna Lindsey, Sharol Mackenzie, Luigi Nardone, Folu Odimayo, Sophie Ormiston, Oxana Panchenko, Artemis Stamouli, Meghan Stevens, Kai Tomioka and Holly Vallis.

²⁵ Shepherd, Simon. (2006). *Theatre, Body and Pleasure*. Routledge. pp.8-9.

body by the performer and the perceiver'²⁶. In this production, Mary Douglas's doxastic view on the classical work of symbolic systems initiated by Derrida (Hall, 1999) that assesses the human body 'as a receptor of social meaning and a symbol of society'²⁷ takes preference, as the dancing bodies, as querying agents shaping human agency, corporeally form discourse beyond a system of difference. This positioning validates Volosinov's political premise (1986) proposing that whenever a sign is present, ideology is present because an artistic or symbolic presence of a physical entity is already an ideological product. In *England on Fire*, the dynamics of movement exerted by the dancers through poststructuralist body language and deconstruction of codified techniques hold an explicit and reflexive attention to the ideological side of the signs employed, since 'the absence of the transcendental signified extends the domain and the play of signification infinitely'²⁸. Again and again, the processes of interaction amid the dancing bodies functioning in space set them apart from evaluation stuck in prescriptive sets of preferred meanings. The production is split into sections by different choreographers encompassing works by Ola Ince, Holly Blakey, Russell Maliphant, Vidya Patel, Lucy Bennett, Edd Arnold (also one of the dancers in the production), Thick & Tight and Shelley Maxwell; together with an eclectic mixture of composers (Joe Zetlin, Gwilym Gold, Cassie Kinoshi, Charlotte Harding, Mukul and Keaton Henson), featuring a mixture of original compositions and collaborating arrangements that deliver an engaging sound world pregnant with referents identifiable to collective identities capable of connecting meaning across disciplines. Taken at the flood, the dancers in *England on Fire* absorb - organically and epistemologically - the musical compositions into their movement, producing works that reverberate across an oneiric cosmic imaginary connecting subject and significance with stunning visual results. This stance is present in all the choreographies forming this production, specifically coming to mind now the poetical dynamics in "The Way", featuring *The Ballad of Albion* by Keaton Henson, and Charlotte Harding's *Albion Requiem* and *True Lover's Farewell*, the latter's lyrics based on a text from George Ripley's *The Ripley Scroll*, which is a manuscript telling the story of the mythical making of the Philosopher's Stone. It is also present in the hypnotic corporeal fluidity resting at the core of Muluk's "Water", in which the dancing bodies become almost a liquid presence in a sensorially embodied sea and shore choreographed by Lucy Bennett. In *England on Fire*, the Expressionistic sonic features at the core of the narrative employ poetic text, media images, a live orchestra on stage, live solo singing and the post-punk band Gag Salon, also playing live on stage. The latter choice is a performative decision that comes together in the visually stunning choreography of 'Wildness', in which the - at first - slow moving collective of anonymous dancing bodies bathed in red light in a social space enact the rhythmical movements forming shapes on the dancefloor in a club, the percussive pulse gradually building up the dancers' dynamics into a vibrant sequence of corporeal phrases reverberating with infectious burning energy. Here, the pulsating force generates in the spectator instant specific socio-cultural identifying referents, bringing to

²⁶ Fraleigh, Sondra. H. (1987). "Dance Itself". *Dance and the Lived Body. A Descriptive Aesthetics*. University of Pittsburgh Press. p.53.

²⁷ Chris. Shilling. (2006). "The Socially Constructed Body". *The Body and Social Theory*. SAGE Publications. p.64.

²⁸ Derrida, Jacques. (2001). "Structure, Sign and Play". *Writing and Difference*. Routledge. p. 354.

memory a sensorial myriad of images associated to club culture, raves' iconography and their lasting role in the formation of English codes on alternative musical landscapes and chronotopic cultural capital.

In the choreographies forming the narrative in *England on Fire*, the use of live music and symbolic images deeply embedded in the spectrum of our historical and sensorial memory create an urgency in the audience seldom provoked in dance works. This is evident when after "The Way" a blackout is followed by a multitude of fly-by images shown in a massive television's screen placed upstage that condense - with eery accurate discernment - pivotal signifiers shaping contemporary Albion: rugby games, visions of rural England, Rees-Mogg lolling during an urgent parliamentary session on Brexit, Trooping the Colour, Nigel Farage, the protests and pulling down of colonialists' statues, BLM demonstrations, Margaret Thatcher's "The lady is not for turning", Tony Blair and New Labour, Elizabeth II, John Bercow shouting 'Order! Order!' in Parliament, food banks, Charles III's Coronation, Theresa May's dancing at the Tory conference, violence in protests, rail strikes' notifications, houses burning, slogans in placards, game shows ranging from the twentieth century up the 2020s, riot police, Covid and Mat Hancock asking the British people to 'stay at home' and 'keep the distance', Marcus Rashford, flaring demonstrators, the Iraq War, television personalities, Brutalist towers being dynamited, Neil Kinnock, cricket, the Biddy Stockholm barge for asylum seekers, Boris Johnson hanging from a flywire whilst waving two small Union flags, Thames TV, Joan Hickson's *Miss Marple*, Big Brother's eye, and more. At this moment in time, the audience is presented with a carousel of recognisable social, political, historical and cultural referents inviting all to assess their significance under a new critical perspective. As the dancers watch the fly-by ending and the first chords of *Horses* performed live on stage by Gag Salon break the air, the spectator is faced with an ensemble dance work that poignantly incites questions on the role of myth, nation and social identity determining this eclectic Albion. It is now when the dancers begin their movement phrases on a feral beat whilst smiling ironically and waving small Union flags, the ensemble facing the audience. The symbolic meaning of this highly political corporeal image catapults the spectator into the midst of a tumultuous semiotic traffic fast shaping signifiers and signifyings, making of the dancing bodies on stage carriers of ideological discourse and socio-cultural capital across borders. In *England on Fire*, repeatedly, the dancing body mutates from being just an organic presence into a highly complex product bearing significance in the sphere of social constructionism.



Harry Alexander, Luigi Nardone, Edd Arnold and Artemis Stamouli in *England on Fire*
Image by George Piper
Source: BalletBoyz

Each section in the production of *England on Fire* bears evocative titles introduced to the audience via metaphorical and lyrical texts projected onto the stage before each of the choreographies begin, underpinning the narrative (Bakhtin, 1981) at the core of the story we are told. This is significant, as words –potential utterances– are not a complete act in themselves, but links in a chain of discursive communication because ‘signs emerge only in the process of interaction between one individual consciousness and another’ for the simple reason that ‘the individual consciousness is a social-ideological fact’²⁹. The titles of the sections are suggestive: “Out of Darkness”, “Ritual”, “Enclosure”, “Settlement”, “Water”, “Wildness”, “The Way”, “Rebellion,” Visions” and “Arcadia”, and do create a sensorial landscape connecting signifier and signified. In the production, the use of lyrical text - visually seen by the spectators on a screen whilst read aloud to the audience in the neutral flat tone’s oratory of a male voice - generates a particular tension, focusing the spectator’s gaze on a metaphorical language in use. The texts employed in the production come from Osman and Elcok’s book, but also from Jarman’s *Through The Billboard Promised Land Without Ever Stopping*.³⁰ Originally written in 1971, the latter book is the only narrative fiction written by the author Derek Jarman and it tells the story of a surreal journey undertaken by a King and his servant disguised as beggars. Fabular and lyrical, the two meet

²⁹ Lamplugh, Paul. (Transcribed). (1973). “Marxism and the Philosophy of Language”. Retrieved from:

<https://www.marxists.org/archive/volosinov/1929/marxism-language.htm> . Further reading in, Volosinov, V.N. (1986). *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. Harvard University Press. pp.11-12.

³⁰ Jarman, Derek. (2022). *Through the Billboard Promised Land Without Ever Stopping*. House Sparrow Press.

surreal characters across lands, and the text explores nature and human relationships. Bringing the magical elements coded in these writings, from the opening of *England on Fire*, the introduction of visual and sonic lyrical sentences expands the sensory fields in the audience via a language charged with expressive significance. With sentences like 'the first muttering of the dawn chores', 'precipitous cliffs of marble fragments', 'the shadow of the night', 'the new nettles and the dog violets', 'the blossoms dropping' or 'the strawberry beds of the eternal present', the tumbling of words is evocative in the semiotic spectrum of human agency and do possess presence in metaphysical conceptualization. This is centripetal to our understanding of the performativity encoded in the type of language employed for introducing the choreographies, as 'language may be a formal system, but it is an *open-ended system*, not a closed one'³¹. Indeed, it is the redolent use of utterance and multiplicity of sensorial connexions during the production what generates in the spectator associations braiding the performativity in the poetic text and the movement of the dancing bodies, bidding the audience to 'turn [...] toward the invisible interior of poetic freedom'³². The metaphoricity in *England on Fire* is complex and the mediums employed in the production to deliver the text tallies with the function of *λόγος* as argued by Aristotle in *De Interpretatione*, in which he maintained that the *spoken* words are the symbols of mental experiences, and the *written* words are the symbols of the spoken (Aristotle, in Easthope, 2010). This line of thought is embedded in our sensitivity to poetic language and its capacity for discourse because it 'accords precedence to the signifier'.³³ Easthope expands this positioning further in "Discourse as Ideology" (2012) when affirming that poetry is always a poetic discourse', and linking this idea with de Saussure's understanding of discourse as 'a *social* fact and also a *social fact*'³⁴ because 'linguistic determination simultaneously involves ideological determination'.³⁵ In *England on Fire*, the discursive 'ideological determination' at the core of the narrative is embodied in the dancing bodies' performativity praxis and affects their assembling in a performative space (Butler, 2015). In turn, the consequent dynamics of individual agents taking positions and negotiating difference and sameness as part of a collective process generates social phenomena. At this point in the analysis of *England on Fire*, the above positioning requires bringing to paper the key role of social identity (Tajfel, in Postmes & Brancombe, 2010), a category originally devised in the 1970s and 1980s that marks the dividing line in the sphere of social psychology theory ensuing when our awareness of 'I' becomes 'We' in the fields of perception and significance.

³¹ Caputo, D. John. (2018). "Structuralism, Post-Structuralism and the Age of the Program". *Hermeneutics. Facts and Interpretation in the Age of Information*. A Pelican Book. Penguin Books. p.162.

³² Derrida, Jacques. (2001). "Force and Signification". *Writing and Difference*. Routledge. p.7.

³³ Easthope, Anthony. (2012). "Discourse as Language". *Poetry as Discourse*. Routledge. p.17.

³⁴ Easthope, Anthony. (2012). "Discourse as Ideology". *Poetry as Discourse*. Routledge. p.19.

³⁵ Ibid.p.19.



Artemis Stamouli in *England on Fire*
Image by George Piper
Source: BalletBoyz

In *England on Fire*, each of the choreographies progressively adds to the cognitive and visual semiotic activity narrating the journey experienced by a female character, from her position as a single agent to her social integration as a member of a collective identity. The introduction of her dancing body to the audience in “Out of Darkness” is highly and purposely symbolic, as the spectator witnesses the changing shape of one - at first- unrecognisable human form seemingly draped around some sort of black frame. As the lines of a human body becomes clearer and it slowly slides to the floor - confirming the shape of a female dancing body- the seemingly solid black frame slowly metamorphoses into a distinct organic emerging vision of anonymous dancing bodies - dressed in black and wearing antlered headpieces, masks, hoods and odd hats – that crystallises into a striking corporeal image, recalling instant association with old folklore mythology and traditions. Here, the ‘Other’ (Bakhtin, in Hall, 1999) is an identifiable female dancing body meeting for the first time this group of anonymous identities. It symbolizes the encounter between the outsider arriving to new shores and the reception by the established community. As the group of dancing bodies dressed in black slowly shed their clothing and head coverings, the bridging between single and collective social identity takes shapes as the dancing bodies make contact, indicating the necessary step of rituals to be accepted into the collective. It is an extraordinary moment, encoding connotative and denotative meaning charged with symbolic power in the social field. As the chords of “Ritual” break the air and the blistering dance dynamics of the dancing bodies burn the floor, the audience is presented with a transformative experience, in which the intersectionality of power relations³⁶ and experiences affecting body, space, time, action and energy in social

³⁶ “What is Intersectionality?” in Hill Collins, Patricia & Bilge, Sirma. (2020). *Intersectionality*. Polity Press. pp.1-36.

identities is entwined with human emotion, ritual and practice. *England on Fire*'s proposal of human encounters is threaded into the function of ritual, a notion Durkheim explored beyond its primary association with religion³⁷, and here it delivers a social and cultural script of social dynamics, expressed in symbolic action and interaction. Guiding us across multiple physical and metaphorical scenarios via social acts of engagement and rejection happening in social groups and groupings, the dancing bodies corporeally form connexions and express social identity either as individuals or as part of a group. Here, the gendered fluidity of the dancing bodies on stage questions the limits of mythic polarity (Fraleigh, 1987), and the choosing of a female dancing body as the conducting agent unravelling the string ball of the narrative at the core of *England on Fire* rewrites 'the script of femininity'³⁸ that dance's audiences are familiar with. The physical and sensorial kinaesthetic connexions made by the dancers builds up an identifiable kinespheric space as the production advances, as the dancing bodies alter and reshape the boundaries of dance codification and body image present in our perception of postmodern aesthetics. With bewildering fluidity, the dancing bodies merge the scholarly differences existing in matter of concept found in studies that divide corporeality from embodiment, as in *England on Fire*, the dancing bodies are capable of corporeally (Bernard)³⁹ articulate 'the mythic significance of the founding and recurring Expressionist principle of modern dance'⁴⁰. Yet, the dancing bodies in this production also possess an uncanny capacity to epitomise embodied metaphysics, a concept understood here as a 'non dualistic process descriptive' that compresses 'material intelligence (body) and the transformative prefix "em" which gives motion'⁴¹. Developed by Fraleigh (2004), her theoretical corpus brings to the table the evaluating differences and connexions between embodiment and corporeality in dance techniques, and their capacity to perform realistic shapes of Expressionist aesthetics understood by an audience with shared volume of capital across borders. In *England on Fire*, the resulting high degree of performativity of the dancing bodies functioning on stage sanctions their social identity - from individual to communal - as progressively delineated for agents forming positions in the sociological arena of human agency (Bourdieu, 2007). As the progressively oneiric narrative evolves, the ontological view dividing mind and body is implicitly challenged, positioning instead the dancing body as 'bearer of social value' (Bourdieu, in Howson, 2007)⁴² in our perception, as each of the dancers we see on stage generates symbolic value in the social fields. In this

³⁷ See Book I, Chapter Seven, Section II and Book II, Chapter Nine, Sections I, II, III, IV and Conclusion, in Durkheim, Émile. (1995). *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. The Free Press.

³⁸ Ussher, Jane M. (1997). "The Script of Femininity". *Fantasies of Femininity. Reframing the Boundaries of Sex*. Penguin Books. p.13.

³⁹ See Bernard, Michel. (Hall Open Science, 2019). "Corporeality as "antibody", or the aesthetic subversion of "body" as a traditional category". Retrieved on 12/07/2024 from <https://univ-paris8.hal.science/hal-02293685/document>.

⁴⁰ Fraleigh, Sondra. H. (1987). "Dance and Embodiment". *Dance and the Lived Body. A Descriptive Aesthetics*. University of Pittsburgh Press. p.14.

⁴¹ Fraleigh, Sondra. H. (2004). "Beginning". *Dancing Identity. Metaphysics in Motion*. University of Pittsburgh Press. p.21.

⁴² Howson, Alexandra. (2007). "The Body in Consumer Culture". *The Body in Society. An Introduction*. Polity Press. p.100.

multidisciplinary production, it is the dancing bodies on stage the link gelling together and bringing to life the many formal and conceptual ideas forming meaning beyond the limitations of established artistic forms. Repeatedly, the spectator becomes part of a relentless identifying process of recognition that positions the dancing bodies as central agents in the symbolic world they inhabit, outlining their dissimilar or intersecting borders of self-identity and level of participation in acts of kinship functioning across different metaphorical and physical settings, merging individuality with group identity.



BalletBoyz ensemble in *England on Fire*

Image by George Piper

Source: BalletBoyz

In the production of *England on Fire*, the spectator mutates from being an observing entity into a fellow traveller on a journey across the land of Albion, as the absorbing narrative invites questions on the intricate processes of recognition and acceptance experimented by agents in the social field. Here, the carefully curated titles of the choreographies form a hermeneutic loop, in which the symbolic universe we witness locates ‘all collective events in a cohesive unit that includes past, present and future’⁴³. This is evident in the nexuses connecting referents across signified and signifiers, and it takes unequivocal mythological significance in the last choreography of the production, the beautiful and gasp-inducing “Arcadia”. The name itself establishes instant connexions in our sensorial spectrum, as *Ἀρκαδία* is a poetic byword for the idyllic and utopian in nature and mankind. It was the mythical homeland of Pan, the God of fields, shepherds and flocks depicted playing the syrinx or pan flute, his myth developed originally in Greek and Roman poetry. When talking about Arcadia, its trope is

⁴³ Berger, Peter and Luckman, Thomas. (1999). “Society as Objective Reality”. *The Social Construction of Reality. A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. Penguin Books. p.120.

extensive across the cultural field. Artistic depictions of Arcadia include paintings of familiar pastoral visions like Thomas Eakins's *Arcadia* (c.1883), but it is the widening of the concept itself and the signifying force encoded in the idea of 'Et in Arcadia Deo' - usually translated as 'And in Arcadia I Am' or 'Even in Arcadia there Am I' - what extends its semantic and semiotic value in the production of artistic products. Exquisitely explored in artistic works as diverse as Nicolas Poussin's oil painting *Et in Arcadia Deo* (c.1637), Aubrey Beardsley's melancholic drawing (c.1901) or in the carved stone sculpture (1976) by Ian Hamilton Finlay bearing the same title, the conceptualization of Arcadia becomes a memento mori that questions the nature of death, life and self. This latter point chimes with the questioning on humankind, self-identity and nature permeating the bridges of fundamental significance resting at the core of BalletBoyz's *England on Fire*.

In this absorbing production, the title of the choreography "Arcadia" is literal and epistemological linked to the chapter with the same title in Ellcock and Osman's book, but each infers a different ending. In the book, Osman's literary text "Arcadia"⁴⁴ is subtitled "England is a hothouse flower that would die in the wild", and this same sentence is sung as lyrics during the choreography in the production; the trope performing as a signifying phonic element adding meaning to motif, flow and form in the dancing bodies. In Ellcock and Osman's book, the text of "Arcadia" is a parable on emigration, nation, identity and myth. It tells the story of the Tyburn boy, who questions the difference between a weed and a flower. Pushing open the gate of a garden, he tells us that weeds possess a resilience not found in precious flowers 'bred with only their own kind', and only surviving because they 'would die if the gardeners weren't here to keep the real world out' of this garden, 'neat as a clockwork'⁴⁵. In the book, although the Tyburn boy agrees on the existence of an 'England's real heart' and acknowledges the power contained in its 'wild rebellious nature', the text ends on a sombre, almost dystopian tone, a warning for the reader on the fragility of attaining Arcadia in this 'raw' Albion that it is 'a hothouse flower' where 'all the glass is cracked'. Yet, despite using the same mythical trope as in the book, the proposal of "Arcadia" by BalletBoyz sees the dancing bodies corporeally developing meaning beyond the limits of utterance towards a symbolic universe shaped by meaningful kinship. In the production of *England on Fire*, "Arcadia" opens in a blackout to the increasingly potent sound of beating drums played by the live orchestra, whilst a projection of poetic sentences onto the stage mixes the visual and sonic, bridging the division between utterance and music. As the soundscape fills the auditorium, the deliverance of the spoken lines 'one last walk, one last look' by a male voice sees emerging from darkness an ensemble of dancing bodies that sensorially brings back to the audience the first time the female dancing body met them in "Out of Darkness". Then, the 'Other' encountered a collective made of anonymous identities, but who are now, instead, corporeally signifiable identities. Each different, each recognisable, the reunion of these now defined social identities confirms the performativity of the dancing bodies enacting rituals

⁴⁴ Ellcock, Stephen & Osman, Mat. (2022). Chapter 9. "Arcadia". *England on Fire*. Watkins Publishing. pp.144-160.

⁴⁵ Ellcock, Stephen & Osman, Mat. (2022). Chapter 9. "Arcadia". *England on Fire*. Watkins Publishing. p.144.

of identification and happenstance. Now, the blazing corporeal force filling the stage confirms the singularity of these dancing bodies not just as agents creating capital, but also as established natural symbols (Douglas, 1970) expressing a social world. As the poetic lines ‘mankind is awake’ fill the auditorium and the identifiable female dancing body – who was at the beginning of the production the ‘Other’ – integrates as part of the body collective, the building up of cosmic energy by the dancing bodies is unstoppable and unrelenting, the beating drums shaping the percussive movement’s phrases following a rhymical pattern. With unapologetic purpose of action, at this point in the narrative, the human body ‘stops being a biological entity, metamorphosing into a highly malleable product’⁴⁶ (Foucault, in Shilling, 2006), and discourse becomes inherent to the merging of the social, ideological and physical worlds. The sudden stop of drums introduces – like a ritualistic litany – the delicate singing of the recurrent poetic trope ‘England is a hothouse flower and all the glass is cracked’, indicating a change of movement dynamics in the dancers, who initiate a corporeal process of contact in time and space, at first as part of the group, then in trios or duets, mirroring encounters in daily life. As the pulsating repetition of the last words of the sentence (‘and all the glass is cracked’) is further reduced to the repetitive echoing of ‘all the glass’, these last three words become increasingly anaphoric, punctuating the percussive motif in the dance sentences. After a sudden and minimal silent blackout marking the point at which the reliance on word-image dissolves into explosive energy, the first chords of electric strings and percussion by Gag Salon opens in an illuminated stage. It is now when, with extraordinary precision and blistering force, the accumulation⁴⁷ in the dancing bodies crack the borders of objective composition and deliver an electrifying psychodynamics connecting emotion and gesture in chronotope. Here, the cohesive elements found at the core of Delsarte’s structural system of dramatic expression (2017) are present in the coding of energy flow in the dancing bodies, and the consequent discourse becomes both, an embodied and ideological experience. Building a crescendo, the extraordinary dramaturgical model (Goffman, 1990) of *England on Fire* enacts the performativity of its own title, transmitting to the at first stunned spectator (but now a fellow traveller), the full significance behind its portrayal of an England, of an England on fire. Then, as the fellow traveller arriving at the end of the journey understand and accepts the warning on dystopian forces lurking in Albion, *England on Fire* delivers one last magistral coup de théâtre.

As the music of Gag Salon abruptly stops, on the suddenly obscured stage-space and under a beam of golden light, the dancing bodies form a small circle with their arms raised straight above their heads, delimiting an intimate space that brings instant association with images of recognition and affinity. Lowering their arms, the dancing bodies tighten the organic space in this human circle – some sitting down, other kneeling or half-standing – creating a centripetal force of energy

⁴⁶ Shilling, Chris. (2006). “The Socially Constructed Body”. *The Body and Social Theory*. SAGE Publications. p.65.

⁴⁷ See Brown, Trisha. In ‘Trisha Brown Archives’. Compositional method in the series *Accumulations*. Retrieved on 16/ 06/ 2024 from <https://trishabrowncompany.org/archive/about-the-trisha-brown-archive.html>

saturated with the significance of kinship. A vivid composition of strings is heard, the dancers, clapping and cheering, initiate now a process of social interaction enacting an inclusive ritual of empathy and recognition. It is now when the female dancing body that began her journey as the 'Other' enters this circle of pastoral Albion, now fully accepted and welcomed as a member of the collective. This breath-taking minimal scene last just short of one minute, yet its luminous beauty and innocent imaginary reverberates with the energy coded in meaningful human connexions across barriers, borders and social groups. It is an astonishing Arcadian moment of undiluted happiness, of reconciliation between humankind and nature, charged with semiotic significance across the spectrum of human agency. Here and now, the ephemeral splendour of this minimal intimate scene tugs at the fellow traveller one last time, as a witness of an astonishing visual signifying corporeal practice possessing significance beyond established doxas. As the last curtain slowly comes down on this pastoral scene of harmonic kinship, the fellow traveller recognises the capacity for kindness in humankind, re-evaluating the significance of social identity and myth structures in contemporary Albion and beyond its frontiers. In the unforgettable sensorial journey of *England on Fire*, BalletBoyz challenges our perception of systems of meanings, delivering an exceptional and complex cultural product capable of deconstructing consented mappings on civilization, myth, politics, nation, social identity, body idiom, cultural patterns, gender, nature, race, ethnicity, historical memory and accumulated capital functioning in a globalized world that - still – possess the capacity to experience the universal quality of hope (Bloch, 1986).

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