First I want to thank the Society for Dance Research for the kind invitation to come and speak to this audience about the way dance research is at the moment seen, and practised, in Holland. The Dutch Society for Dance Research has for some time now been debating about what actually constitutes dance research and about the ways in which to give the work that is being done some coherence. It might be interesting for a British audience to hear about the arguments put forward on the Continent. I am convinced, today will probably show whether rightly so, that reflection on dance research in Holland is lagging behind, at least compared to British efforts. This should mean that the other speakers today can react to my paper by taking up examples from the Dutch situation and saying, look, we have struggled with that problem as well, but now we have moved beyond that in such and such a way. Please note that all ideas expressed are strictly my own, and that my English has not been checked by a native speaker: kindly excuse whatever barbarisms remain in the text.

I will first present to you in a nutshell a history of dance research in Holland during the past half century, starting with the government or government-funded institutes that were or are concerned with the study of dance. Promising was the creation of the Centraal Dansberaad (CDB: Central Dance Council) in 1956, an institute functioning as archive, library and general clearing-house for anything concerning dance. It was, however, strongly biased towards contemporary theatrical dancing, and though the collecting of resources soon got under way, not much dance research of whatever kind was carried out at or initiated by the CDB during the next thirty years.
In 1985, on a rising tide of national pride in the successes of Dutch-based dance companies, Luuk Utrecht, ex-dancer and psychologist, was appointed at Utrecht University, to lecture in dance history and dance analysis, within the Department of Theatre Studies. The tenth anniversary of this one and only post earmarked for dance research in all of Dutch universities might also signal its demise: it must certainly be considered to be under threat from the huge cutbacks affecting Dutch academia. In 1987 Hans van Manen was invited to give ten lectures at the University of Nijmegen as an extraordinary professor. I would call this a public relations gimmick, which led to considerable press coverage, but did not have much perceptible positive influence in establishing dance as an academic subject.

Also in 1985 the Nederlands Instituut voor de Dans (NID, Netherlands Dance Institute) was created as a successor to the CDB. The NID carried on with the tasks of the CDB, but was also supposed to stimulate and initiate research in a much more systematic manner than its predecessor. This did produce some results, but the NID did not seem to be really committed to research. In 1993 the NID was amalgamated with other institutes to form the Theater Instituut Nederland (TIN: Dutch Theatre Institute), which means that dance has now no institute of its own, and has to struggle not to be completely submerged by the other theatre arts sharing the same building. And the same budget.

To complete the picture I should mention the Landelijk Overleg Kunstzinnige Vorming (LOKV: National Council for Arts Education) in Utrecht, which also deals with dance education, and the Landelijk Centrum voor de Amateurdans (LCA: National Centre for Amateur Dance), also in Utrecht, which is a clearinghouse for the amateur dance arts, amongst which we find folk dance taking pride of place. Both are certainly of great importance for the dance in Holland, but neither institute is dedicated to research, other than research immediately linked to dance practice or policy making. As I consider research to qualify as such only when at least some theoretical dimensions are involved, at an academic level, I am afraid I cannot count in all activities at the institutes mentioned. At the level of Higher Vocational Education, which also comprises the dance academies, there is no research carried out on a regular basis. I am not aware of the existence of any privately funded institutes wholly or partially dedicated to the study of dancing.

Then there are some hundred plus individuals who carry out dance research (that is, what they themselves call dance research): some are historians (as I am), some musicologists, anthropologists, art historians, and so on. I figure that less than half of those engaged in dance research can do so, if only partially, within the framework of a paid position; with the others dance research is a spare time activity. Productivity is rather low: during the past 50 years only a handful of publications of a more scholarly nature has been published in Holland or elsewhere by Dutch authors.

In order to bring these individuals together and invigorate their work, in 1991 the Vereniging voor Dansonderzoek (VDO, The Dutch Society for Dance Research) was founded: it has now been functioning for three years, with a membership totalling about 60 (of course not all of them active researchers). The society has started a
Bulletin and tries to stimulate the publication of monographs. Whether all this will
turn out a long-term success is difficult to say: it is not too difficult to prime the
pump, but not nearly so easy to keep it going.

The first conference ever organized by the VDO was supposed to provide an
inventory of the work being done. But no clear picture emerged from the papers
presented there. For this paper I have tried another approach: I have taken titles of
MA theses (40) and PhDs (5) presented at Dutch universities from 1980 to the
present, and work in progress announced by members of the VDO (35). These 80
items I suppose to be a fairly representative selection, though anthropology and
ethnomusicology are probably underrepresented, dance therapy is certainly under-
represented and medical studies have been disregarded.

We arrive at the following picture:

20th-c. European 58

- history of Dutch theatrical dancing 15
- history of foreign theatrical dancing 9
- pedagogy 7
- popular dance 6
- policy 6
- dance and other arts 4
- dance therapy 3
- psychology 3
- dance criticism 3
- meta-level 2

pre-20th-c. European 8

- 19th c. 3
- Renaissance, baroque 3
- Middle Ages 1
- Antiquity 1

Non-European 5

- South-America 2
- Asia 2
- Maghreb 1

Universals 9

- dance analysis 5
- notation, computer analysis 4

At this point we can conclude that a) there are fairly adequate archival and library resources, at least for some research purposes. Whether the TIN will continue to function properly in this respect is not yet clear; b) dance research is not institutionalized: the one part time job at Utrecht University is all there is, and we can only hope for its continued existence. What we are left with is a number of individuals engaged in dance research. The VDO tries to bring all these people together, and has partly, but only partly, succeeded in doing so; and c) dance scholarship is in Holland developing into on the one hand dance history, mainly of the recent past, and on the other hand practice related research (pedagogy, policy making). Other possible subjects are lagging behind. Either research into such subjects is not carried out, or researchers do not consider themselves to be dance researchers, but, for instance, anthropologists (who happen to be interested in dance). In fact, there will be some included in my list for whom this holds good.

Let us turn to a vision for the future. At our first conference it was protested that we should try to delineate more clearly what we understood dance research to be. Presumably, according to some of those present the psychologist and medical doctor invited to our first conference either did not belong there, or had to be relegated to a more marginal position. This second conference was held this year (honoured by the presence of Professor Lansdale who presented a paper there). The day's guiding questions were: Is there such a thing as Dance Studies as a distinctive discipline? And if so, what does that discipline look like? The outcome of the conference was, despite a lot of talking, a somewhat unremarkable 'free for all': whatever research carries the word dance somewhere in its title qualifies as dance research, which indeed exists as a distinctive discipline, simply because we say it does.

This is where we stand. The outcome of the first two conferences was a confirmation of existing practice (but apparently without any awareness of the restricted field of vision which existing practice implies). A third conference will focus on the question of institutionalization. If we are going to spend money, supposing there is any money to spend, what will we spend it on? If we upgrade the Bulletin of the VDO to a journal, what will its editorial policy be? If we manage to interest the Dutch universities, the TIN and the ministry in supporting the establishment of some network that will try to coordinate the research that is now scattered, where should the boundaries be drawn? I think this should not fail to get everybody trying to restrict or enlarge the scope of dance research, in whatever way serves their own interests best. But pragmatism is not enough. Discussing the pros and cons of some blueprint for dance research will never result in a consensus about the ways to do dance research, or the establishment of an institute where we will all work in harmony for ever after. But it is useful, even necessary for the individual who has to make decisions concerning what way he or she will act. Shall I support this initiative, join this group, subscribe to this journal, offer (or accept) this manuscript for publication, and so on.

I heartily disagree with the outcome of the debate in Holland up to now: the easy acceptance of the existence of dance research as a distinctive discipline, and the reluctance to set any limits to what can or cannot be included in this discipline, to
my mind to do not go together. The one is old fashioned politics, trying to carve out your own territory, the other post-modern eclecticism, trespassing on everybody else's.

Of course whether dance research is a discipline is not a good question: disciplines can be defined at will. You need a set of questions, an appropriate theory and method, or theories and methods, and the infrastructure of a journal, symposia and colloquia, and so on. Several new disciplines sprang up at Dutch universities when money was plentiful in the 1970s. But most existing disciplines are a historic growth and not easily dislodged. Some of the new disciplines of the boom years have again withered since the economy slumped in the 1980s. A new discipline, for instance, will only be guaranteed continued existence whenever and wherever you succeed in not only forcing your way in, but also staying long enough in business to acquire a history of your own. To this end you need to find an empty niche. I can see opportunities here in Holland for a discipline, and only for a discipline, that deals with dance as movement, what Jean-Claude Serre has called 'recherche en danse' as opposed to 'recherche sur la danse'.

One might draw the comparison with musicology in the strict sense: its field is music, those sequences of sound which are set apart as such. Thus to ask how much in 1780 a violinist in the orchestra of Count Esterhazs earned, is not a musicological question, but a problem of socio-economic history. A musicologist might provide the answer, because he is best acquainted with the sources, but this does not change the nature of the question. A butcher might inform you about the price fetched by cauliflower, but that does not turn cauliflower into meat. Dance research is not physics, psychology, medicine, economics, sociology, history or whatever, where for dance you can substitute something else; it is concerned with the analysis of a particular kind of human movement and nothing else. Whatever borrowings from other disciplines assist in this analysis, the movement always remains the focus of interest. Notation, computer analysis and practice should be an integral part of such a discipline: when one studies movement, one should know it from inside. Thus, I do not regard myself, for instance, as a dance researcher in this restricted sense of the word, nor many of those whose work was included in the above statistics.

At the other end of the spectrum is what I just called post-modern eclecticism. Maybe I should stress here that there are two aspects to post-modernism in scholarship as it is usually understood: the one is the focusing on meaning and on deconstruction, which is the recognition of construction. The concept construction implies that 'evidence' does not point towards facts but towards our interpretations of facts. A tolerance of multiple and shifting interpretations is the result. This preoccupation with 'how you know you know' (Clifford Geertz) is now becoming characteristic of every field of scholarship and science, so we need not discuss whether dance scholarship in Holland (or elsewhere) need be post-modern in this sense. It will be. To which I might add, quoting from George Eliot's Middlemarch: 'but scepticism, as we know, can never be thoroughly applied, else life would come to a standstill'. The ulterior consequences of post-modernism in this sense will be, I think, beneficial but limited: it is a passing stage which will not lead to radical change.
The other aspect of post-modernism is indeed eclecticism: that is the post-modernism we not only see in art and architecture, but also meet in scholarship. It is obvious in fashionable 'disciplines' as semiotics or women's studies. These are all multidisciplinary undertakings. First, if we take multi-disciplinary literally, this means that they cannot ever be a distinctive discipline. Unless of course they are carried on toward a truly interdisciplinary level, about the viability of which I think I have the right to feel quite sceptical, from my long experience of attempts at interdisciplinarity at the Dutch Open University. Secondly, multidisciplinarity is defended or even propagated by making an appeal to the supposed disappearance of boundaries between disciplines in a post-modern world. I do not think this is what is really happening: even if crossing boundaries is common, there is a counter-current of ever increasing specialisation. If disciplines seem to dissolve, it is because they tend to be splitting up in subdisciplines, which I can readily illustrate from Dutch examples. Thus, post-modern eclecticism is nothing but a feeble protest raised against an inexorable process of specialisation.

Consequently, I feel that 'disciplines' that conceive of themselves in multidisciplinary terms are not likely to be successful in the long term battle for scarce resources, as the Dutch situation seems to illustrate. It is wisdom for the historian to take shelter with history, for the anthropologists with anthropology, and so on. And this is not only good policy, it also leads to better results: e.g. somebody writing about the dance in ancient Greece should be firmly amongst ancient historians and classicists, not medical doctors or ethnomusicologists. Which does of course not mean that one should be parochial. Looking over the fence will never do any harm, and especially specific movement-related know-how should be acquired, when need arises, from the specialized dance researcher as was outlined above.

Let us forget about combining post-modern eclecticism and the pretence of being a distinctive discipline: you cannot have your cake and eat it. We should strive after establishing a specialist movement-orientated dance research on the one hand, and after stimulating dance research within existing disciplines on the other. If our Societies for Dance research could contribute to these two ends, they have not been created in vain. If they go on daydreaming about a comprehensive discipline bringing together all possible kinds of dance scholarship, they show themselves to be out of touch with society and academia.

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Voorschoten