



CONFLUVENCES 8

Negotiating Contemporary Dance in Africa

Hosted by



UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

SCHOOL OF DANCE
in the
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES

Director – Gerard Samuel

16 – 18 July 2015

Conference Convenor: Gerard Samuel
Conference Organisers: Sharon Friedman, Lisa Wilson and UCT School of Dance
Proceedings edited by: Sharon Friedman
CD Rom compiled by: Eduard Greyling
CD Rom design: Elizabeth Triegaardt

Published and distributed by: UCT School of Dance
Woolsack Drive
ROSEBANK
CAPE TOWN

This collection of papers has been compiled from electronic copies provided by individual authors.

In order to achieve a volume speedily available to the conference, any editing and proof reading
has been done in the interest of standardised formatting.

Individual Contributions: © 2015 by individual contributors.

Collection as a whole: © 2015 UCT School of Dance.

ISBN No 978 – 0 – 7992 – 2516 - 7

Confluences 8 – Negotiating Contemporary Dance in Africa

OPENING ADDRESS: GERARD M SAMUEL

While it is frequently true that the conceptualisation of one conference theme stems from another, in the case of *Confluences 8*, the theme ‘Negotiating contemporary dance in Africa’, has had a long gestation period. Influenced not only by a cluster of questions surrounding how to define contemporary dance in Africa that was debated during the 10th Jomba contemporary dance experience in Durban, *Confluences 8* may reopen both those and many older wounds. I am confident that it will, however, signal new directions.

I have noticed in South Africa since the mid 1990s, a robust practice and discussion around the form and shape that was to evolve as a new and common South African dance identity. This search was uppermost in the minds of many practitioners including myself who were aware that discourse around hybridity, syncretism and interculturalism has earlier roots (Bhabha, 2006), (Katrak, 2006), (Bharucha, 2001) (Braithwaite, 2006) *et al* More locally and in dance, Lliane Loots (Loots, 2009), Jay Pather (Pather, 2006), Juanita Finestone-Praeg (Finestone-Praeg, 2011) amongst others, skillfully problematised the uneven territory of our landscape drawing attention to issues as diverse as the politics of the body, performance aesthetics and democratised performance whether in privileged or marginalised spaces. In a diverse continent such as Africa all kinds of nuances; categories of power, questions of hierarchies, and some might argue monopolies, exist for the production and consumption of dance. South African dance scholar, Lliane Loots, reminds one that even the position of who can be called dancer is highly contested given our colonial and apartheid heritage (Loots, 2015). Many of the questions raised all those years ago still seem to remain and increasingly resonate outside of South African dance contexts.

Confluences 8 seeks to address: when does the work, as spectacle happening before us, qualify as an African ('authentic') dance? Whose dance is this (belongs to) anyway? How can we all dance each other's dances within the frames of appropriation and appreciation? What are the boundaries to these acts? Should there be any boundary (censure) to artistic exploration? When dance occurs in and on the African soil, can it be labeled as non-African Dance? To rephrase Joan Kealiinohomoku's earlier question: how can Ballet be read as part of this ethnic spectacle (Kealiinohomoku, 1983). Further, one could ask, what is contemporary dance itself? Does the loose term for dances that occur today suit, and aptly contain, all manner of approaches (such as post-modernist, cyborg manifestations) that seek shelter under its umbrella? Has the line between contemporary performance and dance become so blurred as to obliterate a need for a nod to Modernist roots? Should we be worried as more dance seems to require less specialised training, or that some highly trained dancers are opting to move less and less on stage? Who are these performance categories for, and are audiences or receivers of today's dance noticing any new gatekeepers of the body, aesthetic and space? Why do they not feel threatened?

There seems to me to be a scattered range of questions that need to be addressed even before one can begin to understand some of the myriad ways in which dancers, (and I use this term very broadly here) negotiate their contemporary practice in today's world of performance. Over the next few days more eloquent voices than mine will also ponder these issues, to pose their thoughts and musings on these

and other subjects which I know you will find engaging. Naturally, as Chair of our conference, I have enjoyed a sneak preview of their prepared texts but as our event is also a lived and embodied experience, I am hoping that you will add to their inquiry through your own lived knowledge as we courageously deepen our search. I can relate to many of those who have maintained that in order to understand dance, one needs a Nike approach/ a; 'just do it' approach. Sadly, this can also suggest a 'non-thinking' dancer and dismissive attitude to Dance as if our labour can be relegated to an out of mind experience. To them, I will argue my fear that such an approach misses an opportunity to experience the richness of reflection - the seamless connection between mind, body and soul that can be re-articulated by dance scholars who also belong to that realm of creative beings. Dance scholarship as an endeavour by many in our midst should be as cherished as much as the gift given in performance by dancers, choreographers, and producers. Some of these latter beings prefer to describe themselves as creators, or animators who place their work and selves in front of us in distinct and contemporary ways. It is my view that both the dancer and scholar should be acknowledged for their outpourings as a Dance phenomenology which offers illumination of our societies. Confluences thus welcomes new ways from which to see dance itself.

The notion of Contemporary Africa and what this might mean to the world of Dance is complex. For those of us who have not traveled and/or lived beyond the borders of our home country, opportunities like this conference allow for unique windows into the world of others and should not be underestimated. Homi Bhabha's provocation to critique cultural diversity in and of itself may assist one in "draw[ing] attention to the common ground and lost territory of contemporary critical debates" (Bhabha, 2006:155). The Dance industry in Africa is bombarded by the worlds of Music and Film that have wandered into the global market place – Nollywood and the nai nai in dance clubs offer a moment from which to theorise dance practices that can lead to an expunge of cultural differences; new networks of our ideas, bold alliances and confidence in our knowledge of coping mechanisms in the face of blinding inequities in Africa and beyond. Your success stories - entrepreneurial shifts, and insights that will become available through this 3 day conference in Cape Town, will allow new generations of glocal and sensitised dancers to tap into a deep well. I salute all these efforts.

More ties across Africa have become available to me but what prevents my pursuit into these African pathways? Our conference has some of the most courageous advocates - activist voices for Dance from Africa , who create, write, think – in short negotiate the many tangled issues of contemporaneity in Africa and in Dance. There is much to learn from the meaningful expression of their lives told in workshops, performances, posters and papers. Our presenters will immerse you in matters of power, privilege and discrimination but also in hope, wonder, pride, yearning and an abundant desire for Africa. This could reveal new facets of identity politics not only a desperate clamour for an understanding of 'who we are' or 'what we would like to be' but a celebration of all our journeys and emancipation through Dance. My special thanks to Georgina Thomson and Kristina Johnstone, our knowledgeable guest presenters, and to all our delegates many of whom have travelled long distances to be here. Welcome to each and every one of you. My thanks also extends to the three invited dance companies: Cape Dance Company (Debbie Turner); Garage Productions (Alfred Hinkel) and Underground Dance

Theatre (Thalia Laric, Kristina Johnstone, Cilna Katze and Steven van Wyk). I know your works will help us to find our *drishti* (focus point).

I would like to assert, and without arrogance note that as Africans our cupped hands in front of our bodies at this event are an offering to the global Dance marketplace. Many of our lessons have unlock unexpected solutions, for example, 'disability arts' as one arena where it could be argued that necessity and a lack of resources bred new knowledge of strategies for integrated dance. As we grapple with our footprint and legacy in dance, and what and how to archive this, we also deal with many patronising assumptions of Afro-beat and natural rhythm accorded to all who shuffle in the ochre dust - Africa. Our negotiation compels us to navigate contemporary dance in Africa carefully – to consider who we are writing for, but also to question who decides this is authentic writing. How do we make meaning of a painful past in an abundant continent like Africa? *Confluences 8* I trust will remind all why it is important to negotiate beyond mythical Africa, to be significant and yet tread lightly on hearts without heels.

Works Cited

Bhabha, H. K., 2006. Cultural diversity and cultural difference. In: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 155 - 157.

Bharucha, R., 2001. *The Politics of Cultural Practice: thinking through theatre in an age of globalisation*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Braithwaite, E. K., 2006. Creolization in Jamaica. In: B. Ashcroft, G. Griffiths & H. Tiffin, eds. *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge, pp. 152 -154.

Finestone-Praeg, J., 2011. *Difference is revolting. Body of questions ... or towards a democratized performance*. Cape Town, University of Cape Town School of Dance.

Katrak, K. H., 2006. *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers of the Third World*. Piscataway(New Jersey): Rutgers University Press.

Kealiinohomoku, J., 1983. An Anthropologist Looks at Ballet as a Form of Ethnic Dance.. In: R. Copeland & M. Cohen, eds. *What Is Dance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press., pp. 33-43.

Loots, L., 2009. *Navigating African identities, Otherness and the "Wild Untamed Body" in Dance training and pedagogy in South Africa: a case study of Flatfoot Dance Company's dance"Development" programmes*. Leicester, Congress on Research in Dance, pp. 293 - 299.

Loots, L., 2015. "You don't look like a dancer!": Gender and disability in the arena of dance as performance and as tool for learning in South Africa. *Agenda: Empowering women for gender equity*, pp. 1-11.

Pather, J., 2006. A response: African contemporary dance? Questioning issues of a performance aesthetic for a developing continent. *Critical arts- a journal of south-north cultural and media studies*, 20(2), pp. 9 - 15.



Part I – 7 **Speakers**

THE DANCE UMBRELLA FESTIVAL

Georgina Thomson

Dance Forum, Johannesburg

Abstract

This year (2015), Dance Forum presented the 27th edition of the Dance Umbrella. Way back in 1988, Dance Umbrella was an idea that was presented by Adrienne Sichel and Marilyn Jenkins to Philip Stein, the visionary behind the Vita Theatre and Dance Awards, the Vita Arts and Craft Now awards and exhibitions and other arts projects that he managed to keep going for nearly 20 years via corporate sponsorship. The concept of Dance Umbrella was to offer an open and free platform for contemporary dance and to embrace all forms of dance - ballet, afro-fusion and traditional dance: as long as it was a newly-created work it was eligible. Also it was determined that an equal percentage of the door-take should be paid to all participating choreographers. For the past 12 years, the festival has been managed by Dance Forum, a registered non-profit organisation, which was established in 2003. Dance Forum acts as a vehicle to manage various developmental aspects of the professional and non-professional contemporary dance industry in South Africa. The focus of Dance Forum is to provide cohesion between existing contemporary dance initiatives and to enhance opportunities for skills transfer, vocational training and the development of a culture of excellence within the industry regionally, nationally and internationally. This presentation speaks to the evolution of Dance Umbrella and the styles of dance presented and in what way a concerted effort has made to connect to the rest of Africa so as to share what we have with other African dance practitioners.

The Dance Umbrella festival has been managed for the past twelve years by Dance Forum, a registered non-profit organization, which was established in 2003. Dance Forum acts as a vehicle to manage various developmental aspects of the professional and non-professional contemporary dance industry in South Africa. The focus of Dance Forum is to provide cohesion between existing contemporary dance initiatives and to enhance opportunities for skills transfer, vocational training and the development of a culture of excellence within the industry regionally, nationally and internationally. The major project it manages is the annual Dance Umbrella festival and this year (2015), Dance Forum presented the 27th edition of the Dance Umbrella.

My first experience of actually seeing the Dance Umbrella was in 1991 when I returned to Johannesburg from Durban and started working at Wits Performing Arts Administration. Dance Umbrella had started in 1989 and it was, from the outset, an open and free platform for new contemporary dance work. Within this genre it also included new 'traditional' African dance, hip hop, Pantsula, Spanish/Ballet/Tap Afro fusion, contemporary dance: you name it, it was there! For me it was the first time to sit in an auditorium and see various "Mixed Bill" programmes that included all of the above in one session. It was

really an eye-opener for me, as I suddenly saw dance on a much wider scale than I had previously known.

As a ballet trained dancer, I had briefly moved into contemporary dance in the 80s before starting to work as an arts administrator and my exposure until then had been predominantly the old classic ballets and some new South African contemporary work from companies such as NAPAC Dance Company/Playhouse Dance Company and PACT Dance Company, Sonja Mayo, Adele Blank and Robyn Orlin - but I had never experienced anything like what I was seeing at that Dance Umbrella. What I found really interesting was how the audience was made up of people from all sectors of the community, coming to support their own, so already back in the 1990s people **were** coming together to discover each other and begin talking. I joined the Vita Promotions (the original producer of Dance Umbrella) in 1995 and in the last 20 years have had the amazing opportunity of taking the Dance Umbrella to new levels, keeping in mind what the contemporary dance sector wants so as to keep up with the trends.

Today I will speak about the **Dance Umbrella**: how the styles have changed from my tenure-ship in 1995; how it has evolved in that time and how it has made a concerted effort to connect to the rest of Africa so as to share what we have with other African dance practitioners.

For me it has been a wonderful adventure to be part of the Dance Umbrella since I started working on it in 1995. I took over the artistic direction of Dance Umbrella in 1998 and I had the good fortune of being able to re-structure, shift the focus and create new ways of making the product of contemporary dance more exciting and challenging.

Way back in 1988, Dance Umbrella was an idea that was presented by Adrienne Sichel and Marilyn Jenkins to Philip Stein, the visionary behind the Vita Theatre and Dance Awards, the Vita Arts and Craft Now awards and exhibitions and other arts projects that he managed to keep going for nearly 20 years via corporate sponsorship. The concept of Dance Umbrella was to offer an open and free platform for contemporary dance and to embrace all forms of dance - ballet, afro-fusion and traditional dance: as long as it was a **newly-created** work it was eligible. Also it was determined that an equal percentage of the door-take should be paid to all participating choreographers.

The first eight years of Dance Umbrella were managed by Nicola Danby who had joined Philip Stein in 1989, just after the first edition of the platform which ran for only four days and which included 14 choreographers, amongst them Robyn Orlin, Sylvia Glasser, Gerard Bester and Carly Dibakoane. As the

festival developed, the number of entries tripled each year and by the time I joined Vita in 1995, the platform was running for eight days and featuring over 60 new works.

The interest and enthusiasm to be part of Dance Umbrella has been evident from the outset. In 1998 as part of the 10th anniversary, I started commissioning new works from up to 10 choreographers who were paid a small fee. The Young Choreographers Grant was also then part of the festival and two young artists were selected and commissioned to premiere new works annually. As the commissioned works extended, so did the Dance Umbrella, and at one stage it ran for four weeks!

In 2000 the Dance Umbrella featured 86 works on the main programme and 60 on Stepping Stones, which had previously been called the Fringe. As time went by we restructured the event to include full-length works as choreographers did not want to be bound by the 20 minute time allocation – they spoke – we listened. ☺

From about 1998 performance art started being a part of Dance Umbrella, the first noticeable piece being the work of Steven Cohen. He was amazing, controversial and difficult. Steven started collaborating with Elu, a dancer/choreographer who usually presented avant-garde solo works and together they took the Dance Umbrella to another level entirely - opening the doors to people who didn't just want to dance. Of course Robyn Orlin was leading the way in this. - Already in the 1980s she was immeasurably stretching the boundaries of contemporary dance.

The vibrancy and wide spectrum of contemporary dance was very evident from the mid-nineties into the mid 2000s. I found myself sitting through a period of a whole month (2007) watching three days of Stepping Stones which usually included community groups presenting hip-hop, pantsula and Afro-fusion works; seven mixed bills featuring a combination of student and young choreographers, and then the main programme which hosted 16 commissioned works and five international companies. This was definitely the peak of the festival. FNB was the main funder and we also received additional funding from the National Lottery to make it possible to include everyone who applied. Choreographers we presented came from Gauteng, Eastern Cape, Cape Town, Kenya Switzerland, France, England, Durban, Mozambique and Congo-Brazzaville.

It was a heady time and the enthusiasm and passion that people brought to Dance Umbrella each year was remarkable. It was during this time that artists such as Peter van Heerden, Steven Cohen and Robyn Orlin created work that caused debate and shifted peoples notions about what dance actually is. Robyn Orlin's *Daddy, I've seen this piece six times before and I still don't know why they are hurting each other*,

premiered at Dance Umbrella in 1999. From there is it was invited to Danse L'Afrique in Madagascar and it took off to touring for nearly ten years throughout Europe the USA and even Australia. Robyn is today a well-known and well-established choreographer who is consistently commissioned to create work in Europe. She worked with the Paris Opera Ballet and created a work called *Piece for several memories* which premiered in the Paris Opera in April 2005. I went to watch and sat in the Opera House which has a huge Chagall mural work in the surrounds and watched Robyn Orlin premiere a work that was acclaimed but, as usual, despised by some. So how did Dance Umbrella play a role in this? Simple! We were the platform where Robyn came year after year, creating new work, knowing that we would embrace her development and process: I feel honoured to have been part of her journey.

The first work Steve Cohen presented was beautiful and disturbing. Dressed in a diamond-studded outfit, with a *mogondovid* (Star of David) as a crown and stiletto heels, he walked (teetered) surrounded by eggs all over the stage. His make-up alone was a work of art; and the audience was speechless. He also caused controversy at Dance Umbrella by rehearsing with a film that was replaced by a blue movie at the actual performance, causing great embarrassment to the festival and irritation to the audience. But today Steven lives in Paris and creates work that is presented internationally. He is still challenging people and he causes controversy and sadly is not seen in South Africa anymore.

There were many other choreographers who presented amazing work at Dance Umbrella, but there are some whose creations have stayed with me over the years:

Jay Pather was the leader of the 'site-specific' concept and in 2001 he created a work called *Cityscapes* which was presented at the Oriental Plaza, Carlton Centre, Nelson Mandela Square, Devonshire Hotel and ending in the Johannesburg Art Gallery.

Vincent Mantsoe's solo *Gula* was his first step to finding his identity as a dancer and choreographer. He developed his unique style over the years and annually presented new solo works until he was also finally picked up by the international platform circuit.

Gregory Vuyani Maqoma has indeed been a planner of his own destiny with sheer determination and guts to reach the status he today enjoys. He started creating work while still with Moving into Dance Mophatong which was interesting but not particularly ground breaking. When he went to Brussels he really found an identity which he has developed over the years and has produced the most remarkable work in the past ten years which to-date Dance Umbrella co-produces and premieres.

Boyzie Cekwana's astounding *Ja Nee* remains a work that I can still see clearly; as does *MA* by Akram Khan (UK), *Counter Circles*, a collaboration between Kenyan Ondiege Matthew and German Gerda Konig that worked with able and disabled dancers.

French choreographer **Dominique Boivin** danced with a mechanical digger in the Fitzgerald Square to the voice of Maria Callas. **Salia ne Seydou** from Burkina Faso produced a beautiful work called *Weeleni*...well, I could go on forever.

Other people I remember over the years who for me showed ground-breaking work, are Neville Campbell with Zimbabwe-company Tumbuka Dance Company, PACT Dance Company under the directorship of Esther Nasser; PJ Sabbagh; Jayesperi Moopen and Alfred Hinkel who with his JAZZART Dance Theatre always turned out tops; and more recently, artists like Mamela Nyamza who has come into her own, enjoying international invitations regularly.

On the Fringe and Stepping Stones programmes there have been hundreds of groups coming each year to Dance Umbrella, presenting grassroots work that expressed life and asked questions about Aids, Education, Governance and love. Many of them today are the audience who started their adventure with dance by being part of a group from the townships when the festival started.

FNB withdrew as the main title holder and sponsor in 2011 and to date we have not been able to find a sponsor/funder prepared to make a commitment of three years. The result of this has been that we cannot (sadly) maintain the same pace that we had reached by 2010. For three years, from 2012 to 2014 Dance Umbrella became part of the International Arts Alive Festival; we received Lottery funding in 2011 and 2015, but as things stand at the moment we do not know how long we can still continue to do what we do.

The committed and sustained funding we received from FNB for so many years gave us the power to really develop the Dance Umbrella into an internationally renowned event.

But today that has changed!

So now I'm going to shift the focus of my presentation by asking - **Where exactly are we going?**

Today the arts and culture industry is fragmented; funded on and off and generally not a community that is represented as an industry and assisted within a structure that is sustainable. This applies especially to the contemporary dance sector. There **are** funding sources, but ultimately there is not enough money to go around. There are still State theatres, but 70% of them are inactive beyond administration because they have no production funding. The Dance Umbrella may be gone this time next year for the same reason: no funding.

So, what **is** the problem? We cannot blame the powers-that-be because they change their portfolios every five years.

I believe that the time has come for artists to start looking deeper within themselves as to why we have landed here. In comparison with other African countries, we are not badly off: we have the National Arts Council, regional and local arts funding, the NLDTF which has a lot of money: but here we sit - battling to carry on. I know people think: "*I'm sure the Dance Umbrella can get funding*" - we also thought this! But we were wrong. It is now five years down the line and to date we sit with no committed new funding partner to see us into the next year or two, or three.

One of the big issues we have picked up recently is that the people in the arts industry (and in this case Dance) do not support one another. It is understandable on one level: "*fight for the funding and don't let someone else get in your way*"; "*it doesn't matter what they do let's start something else*"

Please don't get me wrong: I'm all for new projects as it brings growth and gives artists more opportunities to show their work. But when people start scheduling events that clash directly with other projects already happening, the problem moves to another level. The arts industry is a small one. We are a community that needs to be more aware and mindful of what our contemporaries are doing with an intention of looking at how we can develop together. I'm sure that, if this were the case, the 'powers that be' would not be so easily dismissive of our industry. Because that they are.

If one looks at the many "meetings, conferences" etc that have been presented over the past 20 years we would lose count. But what has changed? Nothing! The money gets less, the arts are sidelined and only if you dance to their tune do you get your foot in the door: and even then there is no surety that it will be allowed further into the office anyway.

It is time for the industry to gather together again: independent of any officials. We need to collaborate; to see how one project can assist another; how it doesn't duplicate what is already there; find mutually agreeable ways to continue the assistance and production of dance.

It will be a hard task to keep the Dance Umbrella going. Over the past three years Arts Alive kept us going. Yes, for 2015 we got NLDTF funding, but beyond this...what??

As a project the Dance Umbrella has been left very much on its own and this is sad. It is a platform that has developed an international reputation of being THE platform for South African dance, hosting international programmers, outside companies and the cream of the crop as well as nurturing young work. So why are we in this situation: because the industry itself has just done nothing. If we had only

worked together as a community to develop together and focused on making the Dance Umbrella the event it nearly became, things would be very different now.

I would like to thank the Confluences Conference for allowing me to reminisce about Dance Umbrella. It has been something very close to my heart and has brought me much joy in the 20 years I've been involved.

Georgina@danceforum.co.za

CAN YOU FEEL THE AFRO VIBE?

Kristina Johnstone

Makerere University, Uganda

Abstract

In developing nations, art is always underfunded and to have a platform that is begging for work from your side of the world is more than welcome. An example of such a platform is AfroVibes, a festival which takes place in the Netherlands and UK since 1999. Festivals like AfroVibes aim to promote art and culture from Africa and to tell African stories. But how do you define African stories? And how do you exhibit work from Africa without inviting exotic voyeurism? Drawing from my experience as a teacher and choreographer in Cape Town, South Africa and Kampala, Uganda, this paper considers some of these issues around how we dance these 'African stories'. How do we develop our own choreographic methods, when we are still pressured to produce art that allows spectators to enjoy 'exotic Africa from the comfort of their own Holland?' And what role do choreographers and dancers from Africa play in perpetuating exotic images, both consciously and unconsciously?

Can you feel the afro vibe?

A conspicuous group of visitors at the 2013 National Arts Festival were the representatives of the AfroVibes festival. 'Seriously, there's a festival called AfroVibes?' was my first uncensored reaction. The name 'AfroVibes' seems an odd throwback to the 1970s. After all, that's when the abbreviation 'vibe' was thought up and when afros became popular hairstyles. But after some research I learnt that, having been founded in 1999, AfroVibes, which takes place in the Netherlands and the UK, is very much part of the twenty-first century. On the festival website, a quote by Artistic Director James Ncgobo (a South African) explains that AfroVibes aims to promote art and culture from South Africa and Africa as a whole, and to tell African stories. This is a great opportunity for African artists. In developing nations, art is always underfunded and to have a platform that is begging for work from your side of the world is more than welcome. But how do you define African stories? And how do you exhibit work from Africa without inviting exotic voyeurism?

I have never been to AfroVibes and I am not pretending to critique a festival I do not know enough about. Rather, my aim is to unpack some of the issues surrounding the telling of 'African stories' through dance from my perspective as a teacher, choreographer and dancer working in Kampala, Uganda and in Cape Town, South Africa, and to respond to some of the writing that has already been published on this topic. My discussion is coloured by questions and interests that have arisen out of having a mixed background (I am half Finnish, half coloured South African and I grew up in Belgium). And the examples I use in this discussion are drawn mostly from my experiences in Kampala through my work at Makerere University's Department of Performing Arts and Film and the

Dance Transmissions Festival and as a freelance artist. In preparation for this paper, I conducted an informal interview with a number of dancers and choreographers who work in Kampala that further guided my thought process. This paper offers reflections on the issues rather than any definitive answers, and provides several starting points for future research and writing.

Why does a name like Afrovibes make me so uncomfortable? This question lies at the heart of my discussion. Perhaps my disbelief at hearing a name like 'Afrovibes' used so confidently is increased by my academic wariness of essentialist and stereotypical representations of Africa, its arts and cultures. I hear 'Afrovibes' and all I see is a host of postcolonial critics and feminists raising arms. We know by now that the term 'Africa' is not unproblematic; that 'in a very real way there is no such thing as Africa, except as such a space is highlighted and debated in opposition to the discourses that stereotype the continent as undeveloped, its peoples as incapable of self-governance or poor and its cultures as primitive' (Bennett, 2011: 80). And the word 'vibe' that suggests that art and culture from Africa can be reduced to a particular atmosphere or 'ambience' only adds to my suspicion.

Looking through the 2012 festival brochure, I read that Afrovibes invites audiences to 'experience the vibes of stunning performances onstage or hang out in the Township Café, with authentic African food and drink'. 'Afrovibes is more than just a show', the programme promises, 'it's an experience'. Or, as my friend and colleague Steven van Wyk adds: 'Enjoy exotic Africa from the comfort of your own Holland!' The exotic and romanticised image of Africa is still lurking. The festival brochure alone makes a neat little case study. A Township Café? Although, in the strictest sense, the word township has no racial connotations, it is hard to forget that the word originates in apartheid vocabulary. In this language 'township' was generally used to describe the areas surrounding cities or towns that were demarcated for black populations. And although some townships are now developing into prosperous middle-income centres, townships are still predominantly black and are mostly associated with poor sanitation and electricity, poor education and gang violence. Described as 'the heart of the festival' where you can enjoy 'swinging, groovy music', Afrovibes clearly chooses to ignore these uncomfortable socio-economic realities¹. Romanticised indeed.

¹Then again, a Township Café is not very different from the 'township tours' that are organised in South Africa, by South Africans, for the benefit of tourists, promising them a taste of real South African life. You could argue that such tours help to de-stigmatise areas that have been branded as poor and dangerous. Still, how much of this 'authentic' experience is a carefully rehearsed performance tailored to the expectations of the outsiders? A couple of years ago I read a news article that told how a company called Real Bronx Tours was offering guided tours through the 'ghetto' of New York. Within hours of the advert being posted online, the public outcry was so great that the company was forced to rethink its plans. The words 'ghetto' and 'township' are not that different in my view, but clearly South Africans are not as quick as New Yorkers to protest.

So what are these 'African' stories? On one hand it is the romanticised image of Africa as an exotic escape –as in the example of the Township Café with its swinging, groovy music –that appeals to Afro Vibes type audiences; and on the other hand, there is a perception that stories of pain and suffering are what is desirable in order to appeal to funders. This idea was certainly articulated by the Ugandan dancers I interviewed, and is my own experience watching and creating dance in Kampala. Whereas funding for contemporary dance from South African sources is limited in South Africa, Ugandan contemporary dance is almost entirely dependent on foreign funds. The funding options available to artists are the grants offered by NGO's and cultural institutions and embassy programmes that aim to connect the arts and culture from a country in the north with Ugandan arts and culture. But, accepting these funds inevitably exposes Ugandan artists and festival programmers to the power relations between north and south, as Liane Loots (2006) has discussed in a South African context. The stories then become confined or at least heavily linked to some form of developmental discourse that seeks to uplift (youth), empower (women) or rehabilitate (war victims). Often these stories told through dance respond less to personal ideas and more to 'big' issues that affect the city, the nation or the continent. An example of an African sob story that has been turned into a stage success, is *Kadogo* (originally titled *Memories of Child Soldiers*). *Kadogo* was first created in 2008 by French choreographer Valérie Miquel, who resides in Kampala and runs the Uganda National Contemporary Ballet (UNCB). While her work should definitely not be seen as representative of all Ugandan contemporary dance –there are far more skilled dancers and choreographers working in Kampala –it provides a clear example nonetheless. At a performance of *Kadogo* in Kampala in 2013, I was horrified by its glaring lack of choreographic substance, but perhaps even more so by the fact that the United States', Norwegian and French ambassadors were in attendance. Told by a westerner for westerners, *Kadogo* reinforces every known stereotype of Africa. It is an example of surface level choreography that lives on because of the patronage of foreign funders and local buy-in. *Kadogo*'s creator is French, but similar examples exist of work by Ugandan choreographers, albeit of a better quality². The question is to what extent are artists in Uganda responding to what funders want and to what extent is this merely a response to what they 'think' will appeal to funders and audiences in an attempt to access money to create? I would argue that Ugandan choreographers are complicit in selecting their stories and thus in perpetuating their own representation. Another aspect of these 'African stories' is that often they are synonymous with 'stories of black people'. From paging through some promotional material, Afro Vibes (and I am guessing other similar platforms) seems particularly interested in work that speaks to black African experiences. This is worth problematising as Ugandan ethnomusicologist Sylvia Nannyonga-

² An example of such work is Jonas Byaruhanga's *Scars of Innocence* that deals with Female Genital Mutilation.

Tamusuza discusses in her research into the construction of 'African music' by Scandinavians. She points out that the collapsing of 'blackness' with 'African music', or African art to apply the idea in this discussion, is part and parcel of perpetuating the exotic image of art and culture from Africa.

In the field of dance, a number of South African academics and practitioners, like Liane Loots, Sharon Friedman, Jay Pather, Maxwell Xolani Rani, Sarahleigh Castelyn and Gregory Maqoma have already highlighted the 'minefields' (Friedman, 2012) surrounding the performance and reception of contemporary dance from Africa, when this dance travels abroad or takes place in the context of cultural exchange programmes (cf Loots, 2006). Sharon Friedman, for example, discusses the impact of the tourist gaze on South African contemporary dance. Particularly after 1994, she writes, 'dance groups from Africa were invited to international festivals and competitions and were well funded, the brief being to fulfil the notion of exotic African Dance' (Friedman, 2012:89). Liane Loots speaks of African dance as 'an imagined dance [that] makes reference to a cultural tradition that many foreign based audiences believe is authentic and thus will pay to consume it' (in Friedman, 2012:90). A recurring theme in these investigations is that there is still a tendency to think of Africa as a monolithic whole and its cultural products as the exotic 'frozen stereotypes that correspond to dominant tourist images' of the continent (Witz et al 2001 in Friedman, 2012:90).

There is a need to contest umbrella terms such as African art, African music, African dance, or African contemporary dance for that matter, for the simple fact that the African continent is home to a great number of vastly divergent cultures and cultural expressions and that 'it is impossible to speak of Africa as a generalisation without erasing complexity, nuance and difference[...]' (Bennett, 2011:79). To group these cultural expressions under this umbrella makes little more than geographic sense. For example, Nannyonga-Tamusuza, whose research is mentioned above, argues that 'the term "African Music" is a brand name, an economic (popularised by the media as commercial product), political, and academic construct. 'This "African" brand', she writes, 'is only relevant to consumers outside of "Africa", for whom the category of "African music" enables them to find the product' (Nannyonga-Tamusuza, 2012:204). Festivals like AfroVibes show us that there is a market for this African brand and display a type of curatorship that responds to market demands and the imagined European construct of African art.

But if this is the platform that is on offer, how do you respond as an artist working in Africa? As Friedman asks, what is the impact of the tourist gaze on what she refers to as 'serious work'? (Friedman, 2012) Can we sell the spectacle and still engage in critical work that subverts rather than affirms the stereotypes? One point of view, articulated in Friedman's discussion and echoed by the Ugandan dancers I interviewed, is that so called spectacle work that responds to the simplistic and

exotic notion of Africa should be looked at as a financial means to an end. The suggestion is that perhaps ‘serious work’ and ‘spectacle work’ can co-exist and that they co-exist out of necessity, rather than because we endorse the image created by the African spectacle. Friedman quotes David April, a founder member of Johannesburg-based Moving Into Dance, who says ‘we all know what we are doing and why, and it has no impact at all since they are different audiences’ (in Friedman, 2012: 00).

But, looking at this statement on its own, I feel it contains some dangerous assumptions, particularly when talking about taking work ‘out there’, to AfroVibes and the like. As educated artists we may know what we are doing – I would agree with Jay Pather’s suggestion that perhaps as South Africans, moving out of a colonial and then an apartheid experience, our sensibilities are more acute (in Friedman, 2012:102) – but we are also assuming that audiences have the ability to discern between work that is meant to be serious and work that is created in response to the call of euro’s and pounds. I would argue that outside the spaces, such as Confluences, in which we are actively questioning dance, identity and representation, few audiences, let alone European audiences, are as attuned to these issues. Ugandan choreographer Catherine Nakawesa offers an interesting example (Ddamba, Ibanda et al Interview, 2015). In 2013, she created *Jungle Business*, a work in which she set out to explore vocabulary that was both animal-like and drawn from traditional African dances. She notes the completely different responses she received from her mentor from Ecole des Sables in Senegal on one hand and some dancers and choreographers she worked with at a workshop in Vienna on the other. Her mentor, she says, was mostly concerned with the image of Africa that a work like *Jungle Business* would be sending ‘out there’. Her European colleagues however, she notes, preferred *Jungle Business* –praising it for being different, ‘raw’ and ‘African’ –to some of her other work that, in her words, approached more of a contemporary dance style.

Nakawesa goes on to explain that because of where she is from, she is inevitably expected to act as an ambassador of Uganda, or even Africa, when she travels to Europe to train or perform. But while she articulates a certain difficulty with this position, another interviewee, Faizal Ddamba seems far less concerned. His point of view is: ‘so what if that’s who I am [an African], I’m proud of it!’ It would seem that the Ugandan dancers I spoke with, at least to some extent are complicit in their own representation –either reluctantly (the example of Nakawesa) or whole-heartedly (the example of Ddamba).

It is worth noting that in 2014, Ddamba, originally a breakdancer, attended a four-week training programme at Germaine Acogny’s Ecole des Sables in Senegal that focused on finding connections between Hip Hop and African dance forms. Formal training opportunities in dance are limited in

Uganda and where they exist –for example, Makerere University’s Department of Performing Arts and Film offers programmes in dance –the artists who are most active in contemporary dance in Kampala are, for various reasons that are beyond the scope of this paper, not finding their way to these programmes. Ecole des Sables, in West Africa, is thus a significant training ground for contemporary dancers from Uganda, located in East Africa. Moreover, the influence of West and Central African artists (who are largely francophone) on Ugandan contemporary dance is further increased since one of the main funders for dance in Kampala is Alliance française, an institution that promotes French and francophone art and culture. So, not only are many Ugandan dancers accessing training in West Africa, but the dance that comes to Kampala is also often from West Africa (or other francophone parts of Africa, or France).

This raises some questions. To what extent is contemporary dance in East Africa being impacted by dance and trends in West Africa, especially knowing that African dance and West African dance have, outside the continent of Africa, already become synonymous? Ugandan performer Samuel Ibanga mentions this. ‘When you say African dance in Denmark’, he explains, ‘they all think of Sabar [from Senegal]’ (Ddamba, Ibanga et al., interview 2015). Also, the work of the choreographers working in Kampala who have gotten their choreographic toolkit in Senegal (for example that of Keiga Dance Company’s Jonas Byaruhanga), shows an easy borrowing of traditional dance language not only from Uganda but from across the continent that is then altered and poured into a contemporary mould. Does Ecole des Sables then in some sense represent dance’s answer to pan-Africanism? And pan-Africanism, it is worth noting, is not entirely free from essentialist notions about Africa. Nannyonga-Tamusuza, for example, discusses the role played by Leopold Senghor’s pan-Africanism in deploying an essentialist discourse about ‘African’ culture and in animating many of the stereotypes associated with, in this case, African music. Similarly, it could be interesting to investigate to what extent programmes like the ones at Ecole des Sables and such Afro-fusion approaches in choreographic practice take part in what Desiree Lewis (2011) calls ‘recrafting colonial scripts’, or in other words the perpetuating of their own problematic representations that have been formed through dominant knowledge systems such as colonialism.

Post-colonial theory has made a great contribution to deconstructing the knowledge systems that are responsible for these colonial scripts. Lewis writes that ‘a wave of post-colonial theorising from the late 1970s examined dominant assumptions about certain body types and the histories and places associated with them’ (Lewis, 2011:199). Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978), for example, is a pivotal work that ‘laid the foundation for many post-colonial writers’ explorations of how legacies of colonial-inspired knowledge systems have defined bodies, human subjects and social histories’. And

although Said's work deals with what has been constructed as 'the East', his ideas have been successfully applied to African contexts.

One such context, I suggest here, that perpetuates a colonial script is contemporary dance at Kampala's National Theatre. The contemporary dance community in Kampala is small and the National Theatre is a hub where dancers meet, take class (this mainly happens when foreign artists visit the city and give workshops), teach, rehearse and perform. The audience for dance is also small and, although there is a growing local audience, it is still largely expatriate and white, and has a quick turnover since many expatriates who visit the theatre are not in Kampala for long-term stay. Add to this that the National Theatre's regular events include percussion evenings, bonfires with music and poetry, cultural dance shows, and houses a craft market on its grounds and you've got all the ingredients for an Afrovibes. It seems that this is an identity that the newest director of National Theatre supports. When he was appointed in 2013, one of the first improvements that were made was to refashion two pillars in the foyer area into the shapes of traditional drums. While you could chalk this up to poor individual taste, the building of such an unimaginative and stale symbol of Ugandan art into the architecture of Uganda's *national* theatre privileges a static and old-fashioned notion of culture and tradition. Much like an Afrovibes, a significant part of the National Theatre's programme offers an experience of 'African' art and culture that caters for (mainly white) foreigners seemingly without any conscious thought or effort to challenge stereotypes.

Contemporary dance in Kampala is thus placed in a curious position: battling similar expectations of exoticness simultaneously abroad and at home. Ugandan dancers are not only confronted with western expectations and stereotypes in Europe but through direct interactions with visiting expatriates at the National Theatre. In my informal interview, Julius Lugaaya, who is the director of a dance festival in Kampala, jokes about the 'hot vibe' among the Ugandan dancers and visiting expatriates at the theatre's dance classes (Ddamba, Ibanda et al., interview 2015). In the same interview, Samuel Ibanda subtly raises the topic of 'volunteers' or 'muzungus'³ who according to him are less interested in your art than in your muscles (Ddamba, Ibanda et al., interview 2015). Ibanda's explanation produced a lot of laughter since everyone around the table knew what he was talking about. Lugaaya and Ibanda both allude to a joke that comes up regularly among my dance colleagues. The joke is that 'theatre guys' –the collective term for male dancers or musicians who 'hang out' at the theatre –are known for having white girlfriends. Whether this is actually true or not, the talk around this subject reveals a host of sensationalised stereotypes. Expatriates may have connections to embassies or cultural institutions (read funders) which may lead to opportunities

³ Muzungus as a slang term in Uganda has come to mean (mainly white) foreigners.

abroad. The participants in the interview also recognised that these connections arise more often between male dancers and female expatriates. Florence Ssenyonjo, for example, explains that in her view ‘there are more girls around dancing boys than there are boys around dancing girls’ (Ddamba, Ibanda et al., interview 2015). More than one of the dancers suggested that this kind of connection between a Ugandan male dancer and a female ‘volunteer’ is one way of advancing one’s artistic career. In fact, there is a suggestion that the whole dance community might benefit from such a romantic relationship as Julius Lugaaya explains: ‘If things work out, we all benefit, if things go wrong, we all suffer’ (Ddamba, Ibanda et al., interview 2015). I was surprised to hear some of the dancers (not all) showing understanding towards and even endorsing this particular career-advancing strategy as a valid method of making connections, finding opportunities or ‘getting ahead’. One of the interviewees suggests that this is nothing more than a symbiotic relationship – you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours.

But as much as we might like to look at this example as forces working together ‘for the good of art’, or even as a case of nepotism, the example I’ve discussed here is in fact deeply problematic. Whether or not it is actually true that theatre guys have white girlfriends, the talk around this subject reveals a host of sensationalised stereotypes⁴ and issues surrounding the construction of African bodies and sexualities, which has its origins in colonial and early anthropological thinking and writing. By the nineteenth century, writes Lewis ‘Africans were deemed innately, biologically different and degenerate. And central to this essentialist belief were ideas about their distinctive pathological sexuality’ (Lewis, 2011:200). In this colonial myth-making, sex between black men and white women was seen as a threat to the natural order of things, and became the subject of both fear and fantasy. In the example of the dancers at the National Theatre, the ‘theatre guys’ are recast as heterosexual virile warriors⁵, which fits the colonial construction of the black male body

⁴ To test the prevalence of these stereotypes I decided to do a Google search. The answers to why white women date black men range from sexual curiosity (many answers referred to black men having very large penises), to wanting to have cute mixed race babies, to being so fat and ugly that no white man would want them. Because of low self-esteem, the answers argue, these white women settle for black men, implying that any confident, self-respecting woman would never stoop so low. In talking to Ugandan women, there is an added sense that white women in mixed race relationships are somehow to be pitied. Mostly, they are taken on a ride by Ugandan men, who are innately promiscuous and struggle with concepts like faithfulness and monogamy. Black men, on the other hand date white women because they think it will help them advance economically. According to the internet, sexual curiosity and desiring beauty play a role too, since white beauty has been constructed as the norm.

⁵ I would also argue that the role of heterosexual virile warrior suits Ugandan male dancers, as it helps them, in a largely homophobic environment, to counter any association with homosexuality that might be imposed by a western view of dance.

as crude, hyper-sexualised and an object of desire and fantasy in western-centric imagining (Lewis, 2011). The way this stereotype continues in the conversations I have overheard, is that the white female spectators who are chasing exotic bodies, are inevitably taken for a ride by the Ugandan men who use these women to access opportunities or advance economically. Thus, I would argue that the National Theatre is a space where exotic imaginations around African bodies are not only latent in dance classes and performances but are also acted out. It is an example of how colonial myths and assumptions about exotic African bodies have become part of postcolonial myths too.

Dance and representation of the body are inextricably linked. In the interview I conducted for this paper, I noticed with interest the vocabulary that was chosen by the interviewees to describe dance and dancers from Uganda at various times, both from their own perspective and that of outsiders. These words included 'raw', 'savage', 'crazy', 'jungle' and 'sexy', all of which neatly fit, as mentioned above, the colonial construction of African bodies as uncivilised, biologically different, inferior and even crudely sexual (Lewis, 2011). Desiree Lewis continues to explain that

Today, the legacy of colonialism endures in essentialist attitudes toward African sexuality and corporeal difference. [...] contemporary forms of othering are not always explicitly and recognisably racist. In fact, they might often be presented as positive and ennobling celebrations of the black body. In explaining this, post-colonial scholarship emphasises that colonial discourses are ingrained as hegemonic truths in mindsets and discursive practices. They are entrenched as normal, neutral or natural in the images and symbols on which societies draw to make sense of their worlds. Moreover, colonial-inspired scripts have been recrafted by Africans ostensibly concerned with independent self-definition or ennobling views of Africa (Lewis, 2011:201).

So how do we tell African stories? The noble savage is alive and well. The suggestion that the exotic image of Africa can be contained and 'controlled' by choreographic style – as in 'spectacle work' versus 'serious work' – does not sufficiently recognise the profound way in which African bodies, and consequently African dancing bodies, have been constructed. It is my suggestion that colonial myths are perpetuated both consciously, in order to access funds and opportunities 'out there', and unconsciously by re-inventing the images, symbols and words (sexy, savage, raw) that are used in these myths. And since, as Lewis points out, stereotypes about African bodies are more insidious than we even realise, an investigation of contemporary dance from Africa, whether it is performed here or abroad, needs to carefully consider how dominant knowledge systems have constructed these bodies. The body is not neutral. And certain stereotypes are firmly rooted in our collective imagination. Nannyonga-Tamusuza uses term 'reverse anthropology' to describe her work in which she as a researcher from Africa studies Europeans' relationship with 'African music'. Perhaps reverse anthropology is what is required of choreographers from Africa. A good example of reverse anthropology in dance performance is South African choreographer Neliwise Xaba's work *Uncles and*

Angels, in which she cleverly plays with the idea of mirroring her own representation. Critical work is work that challenges stereotypes and addresses the format in which it is made. A reverse anthropology in choreography begins when artists are able to critique the structures within which they are able to make art, including all the Afro Vibes.

References

Bennett, J. 2011. Subversion and resistance: activist initiatives. In *African Sexualities: A reader*. S. Tamale, Ed. Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford: Pambazuka Press: 77-100.

Ddamba, F., Ibanda, S., Kawooya, D., Lugaaya, J., Ssenyonjo F., Ssenyonjo, S., Nakawesa, C, & Tumusiime, J. 2015. Interview: 10 May. Kampala, Uganda (unpublished).

Friedman, S. Ed. 2012. The Impact of the Tourist Gaze on the Voice of South African Contemporary Dance. In *Post-Apartheid Dance: Many bodies, many voices, many stories*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 89-105.

Lewis, D. 2011. Representing African sexualities. In *African Sexualities: A reader*. S. Tamale, Ed. Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford: Pambazuka Press: 199-216.

Loots, L. 2006. Postcolonial visitations: A South African's dance and choreographic journey that faces up to the spectres of 'development' and globalisation. *Critical Arts*. 20(2):89-101.

Nannyonga-Tamusuza, S. 2012. What is "African Music"? Conceptualisations of "African Music" in Bergen (Norway) and Uppsala (Sweden). In *Ethnomusicology in East Africa. Perspectives from Uganda and Beyond*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers: 188-215.

Phillips, O. 2011. The 'perils' of sex and the panics of race: the dangers of interracial sex in colonial Southern Rhodesia. In *African Sexualities: A reader*. S. Tamale, Ed. Cape Town, Dakar, Nairobi & Oxford: Pambazuka Press: 101-115.

kristina.helenajohnstone@gmail.com

www.afrovibes.nl



.....Part II – h

LEGACIES AND 'DUSTY DANCES': ARCHIVAL PRACTICES AND THE 'WILL TO ARCHIVE' IN SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY DANCE.

Alan Parker

University of Cape Town: School of Dance

Abstract

This paper considers current archival practices within the landscape of contemporary dance in South Africa, with particular focus on those practices that engage with the digital or position the performing body as a living archive. The paper argues for the importance of archiving as an active and ongoing artistic practice that benefits the researcher and student performer in conceptualising the history and development of contemporary dance in South Africa and in understanding the complex interplay of various historical legacies inherent in the body of the individual artist. Recent South African archival projects such as Wits University's The Ar(t)chive, Jeannette Ginslov's P(AR)take (2014) and Tossie Van Tonder's Chthonia (2015) are considered as examples of digitised and/or embodied archival practices and are discussed alongside the author's own ongoing practical research into choreographic strategies aimed at 'performing the archive'.

Over the last decade the field of performance studies and its associated artistic practices have seen a growing fascination with the complex relationship between archival practices and time-based arts. In Europe and America this has manifested through an apparent resurgence of dance and performance into galleries and museums, spaces that have traditionally been associated with the collection, preservation and display of predominantly object-based arts.¹ Similarly, in recent years, a range of established choreographers and companies have begun initiating large-scale digital archival projects as a means to expand the longevity, accessibility and possibility of performance archives as web-based, interactive programmes.² On the surface these two constructions – performance and the archive - appear ontologically incompatible. As proposed by Peggy Phelan in her influential chapter *The ontology of performance*, performance is fundamentally ephemeral. It exists at a constant vanishing point and is defined through its own inevitable 'disappearance' (1993:146). This disappearance, Phelan argues, differentiates performance from other object-based art forms, where its "only life is in the present" (146) and any kind of recording, documentation or resulting reproduction after the event become "something other than performance" (146). Conversely, the 'archive' is traditionally conceived as being concerned with "permanence, dormancy and with a duty to posterity" (Griffiths, 2013:184) and, as Matthew Reason has argued, is "intended to preserve traces of the past, making it available for future generations to access, study and more broadly,

¹ These include, for example, large scale performative exhibitions such as *Twenty Dancers for the XX Century* (2012) by Boris Charmatz (director of the *Musée de la Danse*) at MoMA (see Lista, 2014 and Bishop, 2014) and the *Move. Choreographing you! Art and Dance since the 1960s* (2011) at the Hayward Gallery in London, curated by Stephanie Rosenthal (see Birringer, 2013; Brannigan, 2015 and Rosenthal, 2011).

² These include, for example, the Siobhan Davies RePlay digital archive (see Whatley, 2014) and William Forsythe's *Choreographic Objects* (See Griffiths, 2013).

simply to know" (2006:31). Some interesting quandaries arise from this initial disparity: Can the ephemeral be archived? How does one archive the ephemeral? What is archived and what is lost in the archiving of performance? And, what does the challenge of the ephemeral reveal about the practice of archiving itself?

For many years I have been deeply fascinated by the idea of archiving live performance, specifically in relation to dance. As a choreographer, teacher and dance researcher I am constantly reminded of the significant role ephemerality and 'liveness' play in this art form. Performances, in my experience, are never the same twice and often feel different (from the somatic perspective of the performer as well as from the experiential perspective of the spectator) in repeated manifestations. While choreography is itself, to use a Deleuzoguattarian term, an "apparatus of capture", 'invented' in order "to structure a system of command to which bodies have to subject themselves" (Lepecki, 2008:3), a performance is considerably more than its steps and as such, even though the choreography may appear structurally unchanging, the other attributes of the performer (such as energy, intention and presence) inevitably alter and falter, resulting in a different experience for both the performer and the individual spectator. Arguably it is this experiential conversation between performer and spectator, located in the "maniacally charged present" (Phelan, 1993:148) of the here-and-now, that defines a performance. From this perspective a performance is not necessarily conceived as only "what *was* happening on the stage" but also "what *is* happening in the minds and subsequently the memories of the audience" (Reason, 2003: 86). Phelan poetically refers to the memory of the spectator as the "realm of invisibility and the unconscious where [performance] eludes regulation and control" (1993:148), positioning the memory of the 'gazing spectator', the witness to the event itself, as the only 'real' archive of performance. This is essentially a double-challenge by performance to the archive. Its ontological ephemerality, while defying conventional archiving, simultaneously archives itself in the memory and the body of both the performer and the spectator, areas traditionally excluded from the traditional archive.

Conceiving of performance from a spectator-orientated perspective and positioning the spectator's memory and body - as the 'seat of memory' (Griffiths, 2013:187) – as viable archival territories have been at the foreground of my own choreographic practice and research for the last five years. As a researcher and a maker of dance performance I have been deeply intrigued by the notion of 'performing the archive' through choreographic strategies that engage the memory and body of the spectator. I have choreographed a series of experimental archival works as part of my ongoing practical research into this field. These include *Retrospective – altered daily* (2011), *Like Catching Smoke* (2012), *Detritus* (2013), *The Leftover Sacre* (2014), and most recently, *Detritus for One* (2015). In each work, the archival interest has not been in capturing or accurately re-enacting dances from

my own choreographic or performance past, but rather those dances experienced as a spectator and witness and the lasting impressions archived in the memory. While creating the most recent work, *Detritus for One*, which was a solo performance reflecting on some of those performance experiences that had deeply affected me as an audience member, I became increasingly aware of the lingering effect these past encounters have had on my choreographic practice. I began to recognise traces of these past events in my own works and in the way in which I think about choreography and performance. Each work had contributed something to my development as a choreographer and had, in essence, become part of a 'legacy' to which I was indebted. This was a significant realisation for me, because I had previously underestimated, and undervalued even, the real connection between my own choreographic practice and the complex palimpsest, comprised of layers of different legacies, from which it emerged. Legacy is something I had previously only associated with the performing body and my own dancing body, as separate from choreography. Training as a dancer requires one to assume and amalgamate various legacies of past styles, movements, techniques and physicalities into the body and the memory, but I have only recently realised how much 'legacy' exists not only within my performing body but in the body of my work.

As Perazzo Domm (2010:267) argues, theories of postmodernity have vastly reconsidered the relationship between the contemporary world and the past, suggesting that "the past intersects with the present in the form of textual and contextual discourses, rather than as a linear sequence of causally connected events", resulting in the 'dissolution of the category of the new' (Hutcheon in Perazzo Domm, 2010). In this context, she argues, the notion of choreographic "originality" is understood in terms of its intertextual and dialogical relationship to the past, where traces and texts become interwoven within the 'original', and where 'idiosyncrasy' and 'distinctiveness' are "perceived and read in relation to, not isolation from" (268) past contexts and histories.³ This layering of the choreographer's 'signature' redefines the relationship between the choreographer and history as "a special mode of bodily reading, of memorisation, and of the survival of images" (Lista, 2014:9), where traces of the past, through thoughts, ideas and 'dances', dialogue with, and transform, the present. In South African contemporary dance this idea of an embodied dialogue with past histories through choreographic practice is not an uncommon one. Leading contemporary choreographers, such as Vincent Mantsoe and Gregory Maqoma, have both articulated this as a key concern in their work. Mantsoe refers to this aspect of his practice as "personal legend" (Barnes, 2004:33) where, through a process of embodied 'translation', lived experience and bodily experience converge within the act of choreography and are interpreted within the body to be expressed by the

³ Perazzo Domm refers specifically to British choreographer Jonathan Burrows in this paper, but her assertions regarding perceived originality as the result of traces of histories in choreographic work is applicable outside of this instance.

body. Similarly, Kodesh (2006:45) has described Maqoma's choreographic vocabulary as a 'cocktail', where Maqoma's body becomes "a mixture of all of his influences, the origins of which cannot be identified" (46).

My ongoing process of engaging with the archive (as a concept) has affirmed for me the importance of archival practices on a significantly personal level. The introduction to this paper affirmed the necessity of archives (in a general sense) by defining the traditional archive as having a 'duty' to preserve traces of the past 'for posterity', so that future generations can 'know'. This description of the function of the archive is based on the assumption that knowledge of the past, preserved and documented within archives, enables us to better understand the present and to conceive of the future. The archive is thus closely connected to the idea of 'legacy'. Like an archive, a legacy "takes place in the present, refers to the past but is only realised in the future" (Roms, 2013:40). Legacies are charted and traced through archives, where connections are drawn between events in the past, occurrences in the present and ramifications for the future. This function of the archive, and its facilitation of perceiving and 'knowing' legacy, is my entry point into the theme of this conference, *Negotiating contemporary dance in Africa*.

To negotiate 'contemporary dance', on any continent, is a difficult and complex task. This 'umbrella' term describes a plethora of blurry, fluid, often regional, hybridised forms of movement expression that collectively have roots (although often quite tenuous) within the modern and postmodern dance revolutions in Europe and America in the 1930s and 1960s respectively. Additionally, 'contemporary dance' is a form that is typified by its amalgamation and fusing of disparate dance lexicons and philosophies. To negotiate 'contemporary dance' in Africa, a continent saturated in oppressive colonial and postcolonial histories, is thus an even more treacherous task.

Archival practices are potentially useful in this endeavour as they facilitate a process of 'knowing' and of perceiving the traces of an oppressive past, existing in the present, in order to reveal knowledge and understanding for the future. Similarly, notions of legacy, described quite romantically in the discussion thus far, become crucial points of critical awareness for the dancing body in Africa - a body that has historically been oppressed, written upon, devalued and othered through multiple systems and structures of cultural oppression and political control. As Burt (2003:35) acknowledges (echoing Foucault), "dance performances are produced through relentless processes of cultural inscription" onto bodies that are already "impregnated by history and the processes of history's destruction of the body" (Foucault in Burt, 2003:34). This destruction of the body, theorised by Foucault (1977) as an ongoing modification and controlling of the 'natural' body by (notably Western) institutions of disciplinary society, creates 'docile bodies' dissociated from

power and driven by obedience and subjection, and echoes the very requirements of dance training and of choreography. In order for dance to navigate its ephemerality and attain a sense of repeatability and reproducibility, the learning of individual dance techniques, styles, physicalities and choreographies necessitates the assimilation of these codes into the body of the dancer, what Carol Brown describes as “the violent circuitry of sameness” (1999:15). Dance training and choreography require discipline and repetition, and through these perpetuate the inscription and ‘destruction’ of the body. By understanding these legacies, inscribed within the contemporary dancer’s body, as well as the origins, histories, trajectories and philosophies connected to them, it becomes possible, on a personal level at least, to perceive, acknowledge and thus ‘negotiate’ the traces that mark the body.

The reassessment of inherited archival practices is also arguably important in conceiving contemporary dance in South Africa (and on the continent) because the action of archiving itself is a process imbued with a politics of power and control. As Foucault (1972:7) has argued, the ‘archive’ is not a ‘thing’ but rather “the general system of formation and transformation of statements”, where ‘moments’ are transformed into ‘documents’ and where documents become ‘monuments’ of the past. Traditional archival practices are thus deeply problematic because they operate within and propagate dominant systems of control and power. Historical archives imply a capacity as definitive authorities on what is worthy of archiving (and thus remembering) and what should remain ‘invisible’, thereby “configuring power relations through its contributory role in defining the parameters of perception” (Bacon, 2013:77) and making, through exclusion and inclusion, an ‘authoritative’ construction of “cultural memory” (Bernstein, 2007). The traditional archive claims ‘authority’ on the past but presents instead a selective, incomplete and subjective perspective on events in the past. In this conception the archive becomes a hierarchical power structure where its content is filtered and framed and where access to its knowledge is selective, limited and controlled. The value of the archive is therefore not in its relation to an unreliable and constructed past, but conversely, to an “experience of the future” (Derrida in Fensham, 2013:149) that the archive allows. Both Derrida and Foucault (and more recently Deleuze and Guattari), in their critiques and challenges to the notion of the traditional archive, have convincingly argued for the value of the archive as a means to understand the future. When viewed from the perspective of the future the archive,

Instead of lamenting performance’s inevitable ‘pastness’... encourages us to explore performance’s continuing presence in our encounter with these ideas... The archive offers a potential site for engagement that even the most comprehensive scholarly critique or artistic re-imagining can never fully exhaust. (Roms, 2013:37)

The ‘documents’ in the archive are therefore only as valuable as their potential to be, as Phelan describes, “a spur to memory, an encouragement of memory to become present” (1993:146). The archive provides only “indexical access points to past events” (Auslander in Allen, 2010: 63), that are rendered dynamic only through our engagement with them in the present.

The value of the archive and archival practices in understanding dance and choreography for the future is echoed by Lepecki (2010:28) in his suggestion that the “will to archive” is an important and necessary feature of current contemporary dance and choreography. In his paper *The Body as Archive: Will to re-enact and the afterlives of dances*, Lepecki argues that the recent ‘trend’ in contemporary dance and performance towards reconsidering the relationship between the archive and dances from the past is not predicated on an impulse to ‘rescue’ dances from disappearance nor to nostalgically recapture historical events, but instead to “identify in a past work still non-exhausted creative fields of ‘impalpable possibilities’... to unlock, release, and actualize a work’s many (virtual) com- and incompossibilities, which the originating instantiation of the work kept in reserve, virtually” (31). What Lepecki describes here is the transformative value of archival practices to not only resuscitate past performances (through re-enactment or re-engagement) but to reconsider their significance outside of the originating historical context and original authorial intentions - to “reactivate the possibilities and potential present, temporal significances” while distanced from the “economies of authoritative authors who want to keep their works under house arrest” (35). Lepecki identifies in this activity the ‘body as archive’ as the *only* appropriate archive for performance because “this redefining action is carried out through a common articulator: the dancer’s body” (31). Thus the only ‘real’ access to the archive of performance, for Lepecki, is through the body, choreographically (38), where the ‘afterlives’ of dances can be explored through an embodied excavation separate from strict historical contexts or concretised authorial intentions.

Lepecki’s call for a distancing of performative archival practices from the reigns of the originating author and for the relocation of these practices within the performing ‘body as archive’ is a somewhat controversial statement. Conventionally, dance and performance archives occur in one of two ways, each of which bears a strong connection to notions of legacy preservation. They are either retained or assembled by an official archival institution as a collection bearing national or regional significance, or they are created and housed by the originating artist or company as a means of legacy preservation. Both instances are predicated on a close correlation between the author/artist and the archive and propagate a system of control in terms of access and availability to the archive (governing who is allowed to access the knowledge and when) as well as a delineation of the methodologies governing the application of the knowledge (who can and cannot use the contents of the archive and how). It is only in recent years (‘the digital age’) that the relocation of these archives

into the digital realm of the internet has begun to relax the boundaries of these archives, allowing for a greater degree of access and personal interaction with archival materials stored online.

Lepecki cites the example of drag performer and Martha Graham impersonator, Richard Move, as an example of the ‘body as archive’ as a rupture and challenge to conventional archival practices. As Lepecki describes, Move, who bears no formal or ‘official’ connection to Graham or her company, has become renowned for his often humorous and convincing impersonation of Graham and his re-enactment of many of her signature works. After Graham’s death in 1991, controversy emerged over the legal ownership of her body of work, resulting in a four year period where no one (including members of the Graham Company) was allowed to perform any of her works. During this time, Move became “more or less the only person in the world publically performing Martha Graham’s choreography” (42). Move represents a break from the ‘official’ archive, bearing no connection to Graham’s school, company or brand, but becomes instead her ‘ghost’, performing ‘dead’ dances through his corporeal body thereby disrupting both “temporal economies, as well as authorial economies” (42). While Move received numerous cease and desist letters from Graham’s various entities and was legally required to disclose to the public his non-affiliation and unsanctioned status as a ‘Graham legacy’, as Lepecki argues, he has invariably become a ‘living archive’ of Graham’s work and of her legacy, by public perception. He has no ‘legal right’ to this legacy, and yet through his body creates a living and breathing archive of her personage and her work. Move can thus be conceived of as a ‘forgery’ (to use a term relative to object-based arts), but as Peters (2002:124) argues, artistic forgeries and fakes, by nature of their imperfection, gain archival value through their deflection from the original and thus become ‘authentic’ as records of time. Lepecki argues that this is possible only because works of art, although created and authored by a specific individual human hand, become, ultimately, self-sufficient and that their continued existence essentially erases the “presence of the artist in them, in order for the work to be released to its pure self-subsistence” (Benso in Lepecki, 2010:45). This assertion correlates with an earlier statement made in this paper regarding the definition of performance from a spectator-centred perspective, where performance is defined not *only* as that which occurs on the stage (what is authored), but *also* as that which occurs in the memory-archive of the spectator (what is experienced). The experience, and thus the lasting effect on the spectator, is not authored by the originator of the work but rather formed in collaboration and conversation *with* the author, via the performer. This encounter results in the body of the spectator, a body distanced from the originating legacy, becoming a potential archive for the experience of a performance in a similar way in which the body of the performer becomes an archive of the authored performance.

As previously noted, this conception of the ‘unsanctioned’ body of the spectator as an archive of live performance has been the foundation of my research into archival practices and the tracing of legacies in my choreographic work and my performing body. I would argue that this conception is uniquely useful in the context of South African dance where access to archival information remains limited and closely guarded. In South Africa, the archiving of dance has historically been left to individual choreographers, companies and organisations (such as festivals and/or theatres) and until recently, with the formation of the Ar(t)chive at Wits University by veteran dance historian and critic Adrienne Sichel and Jessica Denyschen, online access to archives has been non-existent. Existing ‘traditional’ archives are spread out in pockets around the country, in cupboards, boxes and garages. Those artists affiliated to institutions (such as universities or theatres), tend to house their archives within those institutions where access is controlled.⁴ The establishment of the Ar(t)chive, with its growing digital video archive accessible online, provides a new and valuable opportunity for artists and researchers, but this organisation is young, under-staffed and under-funded and so the body as archive remains, arguably, the most accessible archival practice available in assisting the South African dancer or choreographer in ‘negotiating contemporary dance’ in South Africa.

In recent years, two notable works by established South African choreographers, Jeannette Ginslov⁵ and Tossie van Tonder,⁶ have also considered archival practices in very different ways and I would like to briefly consider these as a means to further expound the discussion of current archival practices in South African contemporary dance and choreography. Ginslov’s *P(AR)take* (2014) and Van Tonder’s *Chthonia* (2015), both represent works that explore dancing legacies from the past through experimental archival practices in the present. Additionally, both works engage with the realm of the digital as a virtual space of memory and preservation in very different ways.

Ginslov’s *P(AR)take* was performed in Grahamstown during the 2014 National Arts Festival, framed as a virtual tour through a ‘digital archive’ comprising a roughly thirty year history of South African contemporary dance. The digital archive, created and curated by Ginslov, included short video clips from ten works, with the earliest work in the archive being Van Tonder’s *Thabangita* (1984) and Fana Tshabalala’s *Ndumba* (2013), the most recent. The tour was somewhat performative as the

⁴ Companies like First Physical Theatre, which is an established project of Rhodes University, stores its substantial archive at the National English Literary Museum (an affiliate of the university), where it can only be accessed by appointment. Similarly Cape Town City Ballet, with its 80 year affiliation with the University of Cape Town, has its archive housed at this institution, where access is limited and regulated.

⁵ Jeannette Ginslov is an award winning Danish/South African choreographer, who has been creating work for South African and international audiences since the mid-1980s and who now specialises predominantly in screendance.

⁶ Tossie van Tonder aka Nobonke, is an experimental choreographer and performance artist who has been creating work in South Africa since 1981.

participants actively walked through public spaces as they followed the 'digital archive' accessed through the use of an AR (Augmented reality) app called Aurasma (for Android and iPhone mobile devices). The technology in this virtual archive enabled participants to experience short video documentation of past South African choreographies activated by tags or 'triggers' placed on seemingly random objects and architectural structures around Grahamstown. The work was facilitated as an hour long guided walking tour, wherein Ginslov led participants, who had purchased a ticket (which included a temporary password for access to the digital archive), to the various sites of activation. In addition to edited video clips, brief historical information and context was also available for viewing via the app (National Arts Festival Programme, 2014:161). Ginslov's digital archive included a cross section of South African contemporary dance, presenting a potential 'canon' of signature works by leading choreographers. Although Ginslov's performing body is not overtly present in the work (she does not dance but rather guides and converses with the participants), her role as 'archivist' and 'author' in the work is notably apparent. The selection of works for inclusion in the archive is her own and is, presumably, guided by her experience and knowledge of South African contemporary dance (as an established choreographer within this context). While the works selected for inclusion hint at potential legacies and inspirations within her own choreographic identity, the work does not overtly concern itself with the future nor is it concerned, in any direct way, with 'exploding' the potentials of a documented past. The value of the work lies mostly in its rarity as a digital collection of traces of past (South African) events, but the structures of work itself reinforce the controlled and regimented nature of the traditional archive and negate any potential transformation. The activation of the participants' bodies by displacing the archive into the digital realm, and then displacing the access to this realm into the public sphere, creates the potential for an embodied engagement with the archive and its significance, but this is countered by the strictly controlled access to the archive, despite its location in the public sphere. Like the traditional archive, Ginslov's participatory archive (participation is implied by the title 'partake') is notably exclusive and access-controlled. In order to engage with this archive of South African contemporary dance one must pay (by purchasing a ticket), one must own the appropriate technological device (these were not provided), one must follow the pathway laid out by the authoritative 'archivist' (a guided tour), and one has limited access only for a predetermine duration (of one hour) "after which your purchased password will expire" (NAF Programme, 2014: 161). The experience of the archive in Ginslov's digital manifestation is thus not that different from an experience within a traditional archive, where appointments need to made, fees need to be paid, and mediation occurs between yourself as the seeker and the archivist as protector and holder of archival artefacts. As an archival

practice, *P(AR)take* does not seek to facilitate, in any significant way, a personal exploration of the future, but acts instead as a window, through the digital, into the past.

Van Tonder's *Chthonia*, commissioned by the Dance Umbrella, presents an experimental, performative, and choreographic exploration of archival practices within the history of contemporary dance in South Africa, inspired by her own process of archiving her body of work. In 2007, Van Tonder began a seven year archival project (The Tossie van Tonder aka Nobonke Dance Archive) where she collected, organised and compiled the 'detritus' leftover from her thirty two year career as a choreographer. Bringing together old photographs, programmes, posters, choreographic notes and reviews, alongside old and disintegrating footage on VHS and Betamax tapes, Van Tonder worked with videographer and editor Joelle Chesselet to have the materials digitised into a digital archive (Van Tonder, 2015). The resulting archive – a terabyte of information – they named 'Chthonia' –derived from the word 'chthonic' (a term that critic Adrienne Sichel had often used to describe Van Tonder's work), meaning 'relating to or inhabiting the underworld' (Soanes & Stevenson, 2004:255). Once the project had concluded in 2014, Van Tonder admits that she did not know what to do with her archive, and in fact wanted to destroy it as a ritual act of catharsis and cleansing (Van Tonder, personal communication 2015, January 15). Thankfully she elected instead to hand the archive over to The Ar(t)chive at the Wits School of Arts instead.

The performance, *Chthonia*, is Van Tonder's embodied expression of her archive and of the traces of dances, ideas, essences and emotions remaining in her living body-archive. Predominantly a solo performer, Van Tonder's vast choreographic lineage and history exists within her being and her body. Her performance of *Chthonia*, however, is not a choreographed expression of past gestures or movement motifs from her work but rather a somatic and abstract manifestation or 'metamorphosis' of the body *becoming* archive. Through the immediate and real presence of the corporeal body and a focused engagement with the "inner recesses of the psyche" (Van Tonder, 2015), Van Tonder becomes her archive. She describes the work as "an elemental inspiration and celebration of South African dance" manifested through "gathered movement, the word, the utterance, the story, ambient music, and archival film as much as the soul, spirit, matter, body and thought of the dancer" (Van Tonder, 2015).

While Van Tonder's embodied archive does not provide the spectator with any historical facts or documented information about her legacy or her body of work, it does capture, quite poignantly and poetically, the traces and essences of her work and of her personal legacy in a deeply ephemeral (and appropriately intangible) expression of the past becoming present becoming future. Van Tonder's body archive becomes, in this performance, all that the traditional archive is not, capturing

(momentarily) within it all that is lost and ‘uncatchable’ in performance’s inevitably disappearance. This is an archive, outside of ‘time’, of liminal experiences and sensations and half-formed, ineffable thoughts that can only be expressed by the body.

Archival practices in performance discourses and expressions can therefore be seen to hold considerable untapped value for the performer and the choreographer in Africa, but also in other locales, as a means to investigate and probe the significance of past inheritances and legacies influencing the present and the future. By conceiving of the body as an archive – as a living and breathing space in which to unlock the hidden and unearthed potentials of ‘dusty’ dances relegated to memory – the ‘will to archive’ through choreography and embodiment, allows the bodies of both the performer and the spectator to participate in the timeless interrogation, evolution and appreciation of the ephemeral.

References

Allen, J. 2010. Depth-charge in the archive: the documentation of performance revisited in the Digital age. *Research in Dance Education*. 11(1):61-70.

Bacon, J.L. 2013. Unstable archives: languages and myths of the visible. In *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*. G. Borggreen & R. Gade, Eds. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press. 73-91.

Barnes, T. 2004. Vincent Sekwati Koko Mantsoe. *Dance Theatre Journal*. 20(1):32-35.

Bernstein, C. 2007. Beyond the archive: cultural memory in dance and theater. *Journal of Research Practice*. 3(2): Article M14. Available: <http://jrp.icaap.org/index.php/jrp/article/view/110/98> [2010, June 10].

Birringer, J. 2013. What score? Pre-choreography and post-choreography. *International Journal of Performance Arts and Digital Media*. 9(3):7-13. DOI:10.1386/padm.9.1.7_1.

Bishop, C. 2014. The perils and possibilities of dance in the museum: Tate, MoMA, and Whitney. *Dance Research Journal*. 46(3):63-76. DOI:10.1017/S0149767714000497.

Brannigan, E. 2015. Dance and the gallery: curation as revision. *Dance Research Journal*. 47(1):5-25. DOI:10.1017/S0149767715000054.

Brown, C. 1999. Unpacking the body. *Dance Theatre Journal*. 14(4):12-16.

Burt, R. 2003. Memory, repetition and critical intervention. *Performance Research*. 8(2):34-41.

Derrida, J. 1995. *Archive fever*. Translated by E. Prenowitz. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Fensham, R. 2013. Choreographic archives: towards an ontology of movement images. In *Performing*

Archives/Archives of Performance. G. Borggreen & R. Gade, Eds. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press. 146-162.

Foucault, M. 1972. *The archaeology of knowledge*. Translated by A.M.S. Smith. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. 1977. *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Performance Arts & Digital Media. 9(1): 183-195. DOI:10.1386/padm.9.1.183_1.

Kodesh, H. 2006. Cultural cocktails: the choreography of Gregory Maqoma. *Critical Arts*. 20(2):39-60.

Lista, M. 2014. Play dead: dance, museums, and the “time-based arts”. *Dance Research Journal*. 46(3):6-23. DOI:10.1017/S0149767714000515.

Lepecki, A. 2008. On choreography. *Performance Research*. 13(1):1-4.

Lepecki, A. 2010. The body as archive: will to re-enact and the afterlives of dances. *Dance Research Journal*. 42(2):28-48. Available: EBSCOHost Academic Search Premier [2015, June 20].

National Arts Festival. 2014. *National Arts Festival Programme*. Grahamstown: National Arts Festival.

Perazzo Domm, D. 2010. Traces of history: Jonathan Burrows’ rethinking of the choreographic past. *Contemporary Theatre Review*. 20(3):267-282. DOI:10.1080/10486801.2010.489046.

Peters, S. 2002. The academic laboratory of fake – a proposal. *Performance Research*. 7(4):121-125.

Phelan, P. 1993. *Unmarked: the politics of performance*. London & New York: Routledge.

Reason, M. 2003. Archive or memory? The detritus of live performance. *New Theatre Quarterly*. 19(1): 82-89. DOI:10.1017/s0266464x02000076.

Reason, M. 2006. *Documentation, disappearance and the representation of live performance*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Roms, H. 2013. Archiving legacies: who cares for performance remains? In *Performing Archives/Archives of Performance*. G. Borggreen & R. Gade, Eds. Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press. 35-52.

Soanes, C. & Stevenson, A. Eds. 2004. *Concise Oxford English dictionary*. 11th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Van Tonder, T. 2015. *Chthonia*. Available: <http://theimageofyourperfection.com/archive/#chthonia> [2015, July 20].

Whatley, S. 2014. Digital inscriptions and the dancing body: expanding territories through and with The archive. *Choreographic Practices*. 5(1):121-138. DOI:10.1386/chor.5.1.121_1.

'After Images': Impressions Of The 'After' By South African Performer-Choreographer Mamela Nyamza

Dr Alude Mahali

Abstract

*'After image' alludes to an unrelenting or repeated feeling or sensation, particularly an aesthetic or visual one, that remains after its imaginative provocation has gone. After images can be multi-corporeal: visual, emotional and aural. I ask, what are the mnemonic impressions that we black South African women still see, feel and hear in our everyday lived experience, and how may these sensations be incorporated into performances? In this paper, I investigate these questions by analyzing the South African dancer, choreographer and performance artist Mamela Nyamza and her physical performance pieces *19-Born-76-Rebels* (2013) and *Isingqala* (2011), which evidence mnemonic impressions of the past that persist after the original stimulus is no longer operative. I also explore the meaning and implications of the 'beautiful pain syndrome' -- a condition which I feel best explains the shifting pulse of South African contemporaneity. The 'beautiful pain syndrome' is a cultural dis-ease revealed by the theatre maker through their aesthetic consideration (beautiful interpretation) of inherently painful material. I use the term 'syndrome' to point to the 'dis-ease' of the contemporary black woman regarding her South African identity – both in theatre making and in her everyday – as catalyzed by the country's tumultuous past.*

Introduction

The after-image is primarily produced by memory and the imagination. It is the emotional or psychological recall/re-imagining of something that is not immediately present to the senses. Both *19-Born-76-Rebels* (2013) and *Isingqala* (2011) evoke after-images in considering the past alongside the present. In this paper, I ask, what of the past remains in Nyamza's present lived experience and specifically, in what ways does the 'after' manifest itself in images in Nyamza's work? *19-Born-76-Rebels* recalls the Soweto Riots and massacre of 1976, focusing on the education black children of that era received. Nyamza uses after-images of her own black girlhood to explore the lingering damage of an inadequate education. *19-Born-76-Rebels* does not rely on set properties or a conventional performance space.¹ The performance is primarily physical theatre with very few word-based moments driving the plot. The focus is on the actors' ornate and telling costumes and their physicality and interaction with each other in the space. In performance, each scene is designated a separate playing space; first there is the introduction of two polarizing figures standing (on makeshift stilts) opposite one another centre

¹ *19-Born-76 Rebels* has been performed numerous times. It debuted at Young Blood (Cape Town) in June 2013, was commissioned for the Festival d'Avignon (France) in July 2013, later played at the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts' Infecting the City Festival (Cape Town) in March 2014 and at the National Arts Festival (Grahamston) in June 2014. This paper references the debut live version watched by the author in Cape Town, June 2013.

stage. Their 10 minute standoff consists of slight movement as they simultaneously look down to the ground, aware that there is a long way to fall. Neither figure wants to make the first move; one lifts her arms as if to take a step; then does not. This play is mirrored and repeated between them. The performers disrobe and then transition into young girls in the next scene, upstage on a stairway, at first cheerful as they run and play. The German Shepherd dogs visible from the margins, form part of the action reminding the girls and audience mnemonically about colonial power, signaled through these guard animals. The mood quickly turns sober as the girls are intimidated in the next scene, which takes place downstage centre, and the scenes to follow. This sets the tone for the rest of the performance, which encompasses a huge book (the only set property) in a make-believe schoolroom. The physical interaction with the book in the imagined schoolroom highlights how these girls experienced school as an ordeal, a burden, and the inequality of their education which leaves them exhausted, sweating and breathless as they eventually walk off stage carrying the book slowly. The audience is involved in the action, not because the performers directly interact with them but because there is no real sense of where the playing space begins and ends.

Isingqala is a solo work exploring the intersections between Nyamza and her past, and the way in which; she juxtaposes a traumatized country with her own devastating past – Nyamza's mother was raped and strangled to death (Nyamza in May, 2014). *Isingqala* is also primarily physical theatre, but without word-based moments.² The performance space in *Isingqala* is bare except for a coffin-like box hanging from the ceiling. For the most part, the performance takes place in darkness and when the audience enters, they are greeted by Nyamza's harrowing screams as they look for their seats. From then on, nothing is heard except Nyamza's feet as they hit the ground and all we see is flashes of her person where the minimal light, provided by erratically roving handheld torches, permits. She runs in a circle in the dark (except when the light catches her) for 6 minutes. She stops with her back to the audience and gesticulates for some time; we are not sure if she is fighting off an attacker, making love, praying emphatically or doing all three. The whole time we hear nothing except for her occasional screams, heavy breathing and sporadic sobbing. She lifts her arm up and down repetitively and violently as if to

² *Isingqala* has been performed numerous times. It debuted at the National Arts Festival (Grahamstown) in July 2011, played at the Gordon Institute for Performing and Creative Arts' Exuberance Project (Cape Town) in May 2012, then at the Maison des Arts du Gruthi (Switzerland) in September 2012 and finally, at the Zürcher Theater Spektakel (Switzerland) in August 2013. This paper references the live version watched by the author in Cape Town, May 2012.

strike but instead every time she lowers her arm, she drops a white top that spins in silence as the audience watches and listens.

Both *19-Born-76-Rebels* and *Isingqala* have been performed in non-traditional venues that have been transformed into theatrical spaces for example, a gallery, a hall, outside, a city square and the audience usually sits, in no particular order, surrounding the action. *19-Born-76-Rebels* can run anywhere between 15-45 minutes and *Isingqala* can run anywhere between 15-30 minutes, the action has evolved over the years depending on where and for whom each production is performed. Rather than depending on linear narratives or set properties, the performances use repeated physical imagery to tell a story.

19-Born-76-Rebels and *Isingqala* can also be considered simultaneous criticisms of a disappointing present, and a celebration of survival, insofar as they incorporate stories of surviving personal and historical trauma. The 'beautiful pain syndrome' characterizes Nyamza's work as no matter how painful the subject is, she explores it; drawing it nearer to herself because what these experiences reveal is something about her that she believes is too poignant to overlook. Thus, Nyamza intricately weaves beauty and aesthetic form into narratives of pain, loss and change for ameliorative purposes. This does not mean that the concept of survival is not problematized; Nyamza's work acknowledges a social, political and economic inertia in South Africa, and the progress that women like herself have been afforded, opportunities that were not possible in the past, even where she highlights a greater need for transformation. Unsurprisingly then, Nyamza's work is woman-centred because as she points out "as a child who grew up in Gugulethu, as a black woman, there are so many challenges... even to get to where I am today" (Nyamza in Youngblood, 2013b).

In *Isingqala*, an isiXhosa word meaning 'sorrow', typically characterized by incessant weeping, Nyamza is suggesting that the country as a whole is still in a state of profound mourning, but also that the state of womanhood, particularly that which exists outside of heteronormative practice, is in a state of *isingqala*.

A woman in her late 30s Nyamza has chosen to create mostly physical and non-text-based performances, but in recent years, she has been experimenting more with vocal performance and text. As a trained ballet dancer she uses her body as text and personal experience to investigate topics such as domesticity, sexual violence, sexuality, custom, motherhood and the commodification of the black female body (Samuel, 2011:44). In the last six years Nyamza has produced nearly ten original productions and has become influential in the South African theatre making and performance scene,

critiquing philosophies on the ideal female form reinforced by the ballet aesthetic as well as exploring shifting dominant female identities in a patriarchal society through her performances.

In the same way that social norms that favour men are uniformly part of socialization, black woman theatre makers like Nyamza are establishing new standards, new ways of being that depict the multifaceted identities that constitute black womanhood. Terese Migraine-George in *African Women and Representation: from performance to politics* (2008) draws attention to the African woman playwright and performer and her role in particularizing multidimensional and dynamic forms of representation to discover the spaces from which African women can speak and have spoken (Migraine-George, 2008:8). The African woman theatre maker has not only to reflect on representation and address the content of that representation, but she must also maintain awareness of the process and politics of representation by questioning the blind spots, discontinuities, gaps, and silences in them (2008:8). Nyamza's sentient body serves as a tool for expression of this largely hitherto suppressed discourse. Jeanie Forte observes, "one crucial aspect of contemporary feminism is the expression of pain, the pain of the female body in patriarchal culture" (Forte, 1992:252).

While this paper is primarily about after-images in Nyamza's *19-Born-76-Rebels* and *Isingqala*, unavoidably South Africa's troubled historical legacy is an integral part of the exploration. The painful effects of Apartheid and its aftermaths continue to devastate the social fabric of South Africa and as a result, ambiguous patterns of the telling of pain have emerged. Anne Coombes in *History After Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa* deliberates the penetrating consequence that South Africa's dual legacies of colonialism and Apartheid have had on the present (2003:4), suggesting that the gross violation of the human rights of 'non-white' persons under the law of apartheid is irreparable. One of the most damaging pieces of legislation to the progress of black South Africans was the Bantu Education Act, Act No 47, of 1953. This Act established a black Education Department under the Department of Native Affairs that assembled a curriculum which (according to Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs and later Prime Minister) matched, what he formulated to be the character, class and needs of black people (Stent, 1994:60). In other words, this piece of legislation legally blocked Africans from receiving an education that would empower them to aim for skilled work and professional positions; while predetermining their futures by equipping them only with skills to serve other black people in the homelands, or to work as labourers for white South Africans.

As the title *19-Born-76-Rebels* suggests, 1976 cites the Soweto uprisings of June 16, 1976 when black schoolchildren protested overcrowded classrooms, ill-equipped teachers, and finally the imposition of Afrikaans as a compulsory medium of instruction (Pohlandt-McCormick, 2000:23). In one scene in *19-Born-76-Rebels*, the schoolgirls (played by Nyamza and Magnet Theatre's Faniswa Yisa)³ sit to open a large book, they reveal in large print, for the audience to see, the annual funding assigned to each racial group for education. The money assigned to black education is meagre compared to that assigned to white education, and the size of the printed font corresponds with the varying figures. What these schoolchildren were fighting against was a political ideology that had little regard for how language and its absence – silences - is a form of physical and discursive violence (Pohlandt-McCormick, 2000:23). This is typified in *19-Born-76-Rebels* when Nyamza and Yisa in a sometimes absurdly comical exercise routinely regurgitate the Afrikaans they have been taught and diligently repeat words, aware of their economic and educational inequality, but undeterred in their desire to learn, despite frequent lashings for mispronouncing words. They hold their hands out, anticipating the lashing and count each lash in Afrikaans...*een twee drie vier* (one two three four). They repeat this sequence in a rhythmic gestural fashion holding their hands out in front of them, behind their heads, behind their backs until their voices fade in exhaustion, and they lower their bodies to the ground, simultaneously to rest. In another, similar exercise, the two-some hold the large brown paper covered book up across their bodies while standing behind one another. They receive more lashings smacking their respective hands on the book, and with each smack, flinch with pain. This emphasis on corporal punishment highlights how desperately these children wanted an education, in order to rise above their circumstances. Thus the political and conceptual oppression are shown working together to keep them oppressed through aggressive methods of pedagogic discipline, where even school became an unsafe space for a black girl.

Though the uprisings belong to the past, the event and its surrounding circumstances, have left after-images wrought with pain, anger, distrust and questions, including what did those schoolchildren fight for and (why) are we still fighting? Perhaps we have not learnt from history: this is what Nyamza takes up when she asserts:

³ The Magnet Theatre Educational Trust is funded by a number of organizations which include the National Arts Council of South Africa, the National Lottery and the Arts and Culture Trust amongst others. Based in Cape Town, the Magnet Theatre training programme caters for youth who come from various community theatre groups who struggle to be absorbed into the training at the University due to different issues including educational and financial disadvantages. [www.magnettheatre.co.za 9/1/2014]

I have found when creating work that deals with politics, white South Africans say, 'Oh no, let's leave the past behind'. But as artists, we bring a different context [to the subject]. In 19-Born-76-Rebels, I say we are repeating what we were fighting against. I would like to see how a broader audience would react to this piece if I showed it locally (Nyamza in Kamaldien, 2013).

Nyamza is iterating that the prejudices and discriminations stimulated and sanctioned under Apartheid have been internalized by most, to some degree (Coombes, 2003:3). A combination of these historical conditions, and their political and social legacies have made the transition to democracy from the late 1980s to 2000 tumultuous, and still problematic (Coombes, 2003:7).

1976 is the year Mamela Nyamza and her co-performer in *19-born-76-rebels*, Faniswa Yisa were born. They personify the beauty of new life emerging in the midst of painful and ugly circumstances, of riotous mass killings and security crackdowns. Both were raised in Gugulethu Township and attended Fezeka High School together. Thus, Nyamza and Yisa work around the theme of 1976 to interrogate how this period of political and social upheaval lingers in contemporary South Africa. Nyamza recounts a story, told to her by her mother, about running away from riot police in Gugulethu and being peppered with buckshot while being heavily pregnant, in 1976. Nyamza reflects on this story in a show talkback: "so, we survived these protests, we experienced it all in our mothers' wombs... so what do we say about it? We are born from that, so where to now? Coming out of it, what do we do with it?" (Nyamza, 2013b). Later, after the show's July debut at the Festival Avignon, France she muses: "the laws have changed but the reality has not changed," as she remarks that her child is still being taught Afrikaans as part of the school curriculum (Nyamza in Masango & Selander, 2013). In the second decade of this new millennium, we are still having conversations similar to those that we were having at the start of democracy some twenty years ago.⁴ Nyamza adds to the conversation by asserting that that we are still a country in pain, we are still a people in pain (Nyamza in Masango & Selander, 2013). The past relates to the present insofar as they sit alongside one another and much of the past still remains in the present. Contemporaneity demands that we look at this past as well as what has not happened yet, or what is currently happening (Nuttal, 2004:731), this is -- in effect -- the 'after'.

In *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world* (1985) and *On beauty and being just* (1999) Elaine Scarry affirms beauty's existence, reminding us that beauty is real, legitimate and a fundamental

⁴ I often use a plural 'we' in my argumentation. This is because, as a black South African woman, I speak from a space of 'shared blackness' with the majority of South Africa's citizens in particular and then I am addressing a global audience. As a writer, I choose to prioritise and foreground black experience.

part of our way of life, despite its conceptual authenticity sometimes being challenged.⁵ Scarry goes on to maintain that beauty and pain are attached to the body in a way that is undeniable because they are both experienced and expressed through the body. This idea is integral to Nyamza's performance as she moves with poignancy and disquieting beauty. For example when she viscerally recalls and physically enacts the corporal punishment that she experienced and came to expect, she expresses lived experience and aestheticized representation of abuse that students of the time would recognise. Nyamza's movement is also beautiful because of her precision in performance. Scarry's political critique on beauty suggests that in such contexts aesthetic beauty may be problematic because by consuming our attention, beauty can distract awareness from immoral social actions and make us inattentive to injustice (1999:58), and thereby minimize suffering. However, Scarry also argues that insofar as beauty distracts us from suffering it can also assist in tackling injustice by requiring an audience to immerse itself in acts of seeing and hearing so that they are not disaffected (Ibid.: 62).

In Nyamza's work, pain and beauty *do things*. Pain is the driver of the material under consideration and beauty is the performance vehicle. Here, performance relies on the ability of beautiful symbolic arrangements to materialize experiences that can be described in relation to painful sentiments. Pain is a consequence and at the same time, a motivation; a consequence of *becoming aware*, a motivation for actively engaging with a troubled history and fractured identity. The beautification of pain is a meaning-making tool. Another way to say this is that beauty is intermediary because beauty can be found in and through works of pain, since it is the art-maker who "carves pain into the ears of the uncaring and converts the rustiness of pain into the ripeness of rebirth for society" (Launko, 2000:viii).

In Production

Nyamza utilizes and incorporates familiar, iconic, visually beautiful and striking after-images. These are the material and visual prompts that incite memory and rouse imaginative feelings of the immediacy of the past's effects on the present. At first the after-image is exemplified in the arresting costumes worn by Nyamza and Yisa, which anticipate the political undertones of the work. Standing erect with unwavering assurance dressed in an orange and blue skirt, with a ruffled white blouse peeking out from under her bright orange jacket, and a Union Jack bowtie; Nyamza epitomizes colonial rule. Her costume references the colours of the old South African and British flags and thereby evokes imperial histories as she stares down at the onlookers with a sense of superiority. Yisa, in contrast, is dressed in green and

⁵ Scarry herself challenges the concept, destabilizing the idea that there is only one way to think about beauty.

black, with a voluminous yellow skirt completing her outfit, these reference the colours of the African National Congress (ANC) as well as three of the six colours of the new South African flag. The significance of this deliberate costuming is to represent opposite ends of the political spectrum: the British occupation and later Afrikaner rule, and the Black freedom fighters and later democratic political leaders. Later, they both reveal that they are wearing underwear with the old national flag emblazoned across their backsides, thus suggesting that regardless of the surface reconciliation the after-image and scars of apartheid are hidden things that we wear daily, like underwear.

Immediately noticeable is that both Nyamza and Yisa are elevated on empty coffee tins that function as makeshift stilts. Walking on these tins is risky and difficult, the pair stumble and shuffle with uncertainty, reflecting how they experience South Africa's transition into democracy, there is a certain amount of care and negotiation required. The way negotiation plays out in *19-Born-76-Rebels* is through an intense ten minute interaction between Nyamza and Yisa using very little physical movement. While Nyamza poses regally in between deliberately slow and considered curtseying movements, Yisa, in close proximity, circles Nyamza while staring her down: Nyamza's imperiousness meets frank challenge in Yisa's upturned chin.

The confrontation reads like a dance as the pair raise and lower their arms simultaneously, gazing thoughtfully at the ground, aware that because of the stilts, there is always the possibility of an awkward fall. During the confrontation, Nyamza has a tape recorder hidden in her ensemble and from her person we hear the voice of anti-apartheid activist, medical doctor, anthropologist and author Mamphela Ramphele, disclosing her thoughts on the state of the nation; what she considers to be the downfalls of the TRC⁶, education policy and the dangers of Bantu education and its disservice to black people. A formidable force, Ramphele was the first black female Vice-Chancellor of the University of Cape Town, and the first black female Managing Director of the World Bank. Ramphele, whose platform is education, acknowledges the revolt lead by young people against the poor quality of education in 1976, as she speaks of the, still shocking conditions of education in the twenty-first century. She too asks whether the youth of 1976 fought in vain.⁷ Ramphele aspired for more than was laid before her as a young girl, she grew up wanting to be a doctor (while Nyamza wanted to be a dancer), but both

⁶ The article expressing these thoughts is available at: <http://mg.co.za/article/2006-12-01-reconciliation-is-not-enough>.

⁷ Higher Education Today. An Interview with Dr. Mamphela Ramphele. Video interview. 11 July 2013. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANyoMlclOew>.

were led to believe that such aspirations were unrealistic and impossible.⁸ However, they have both risen above these expectations and limitations set in front of them.

Nyamza and Yisa -- physically embodying the merging of the two parties -- walk together and ascend a staircase set to the back of the stage. When they reach the top of the stairs, they join and lift their hands recalling the image of Nelson and F.W. De Klerk standing together in front of the Union Building after the first presidential inauguration on May 10, 1994, unified as they addressed a new South Africa full of hope and possibility. The emphasis on this moment of hopeful reconciliation in the work highlights the failures and the promises that have yet to be fulfilled. This is emphasised in what follows: Nyamza and Yisa discard the elaborate costumes, and reveal typical South African school uniforms, as they revert to schoolgirls. There are two German Shepherd dogs on the sidelines, the dogs reference apartheid police dogs, but also Nyamza's personal experience of the police and their dogs making the rounds in her school, particularly during periods of political unrest. The girls back away from the dogs slowly, intimidated, taking their time to kneel simultaneously, one leg at a time. This gives a corporeal sense of the fear and intimidation experienced by black South Africans every day under apartheid, and which remains as an after-effect in peoples' responses to dogs.

The performers transition to the next scene singing the Xhosa hymn, *lizalise idinga lakho* (The forgiveness of sins makes a person whole), which was sung as a morning prayer in their school, and at the TRC, and walk down a brown paper path, to a large school workbook covered in the same brown paper. Nyamza and Yisa repeat different gestures of enduring corporal punishment and the ritual of morning prayers at school and then with deep fear and dread, wringing their hands nervously and looking at each other, they simultaneously reach to turn over the pages of the oversized book. It is clear that education is daunting, rather than a nurturing space where questioning or personal growth are encouraged. Instead, school elicited fear which, is disempowering. The girls sit side-by-side with the book straddled across their laps, scratching the pages of the book in an up and down motion that repeats the same violence that the education system has enacted upon them by ignoring their language and personal needs. Their scratching becomes so feverish that it is as though they were trying to erase or even unlearn what they have been taught. They are overcome by the size and weight of the book and topple over. Yisa lodges the book between her teeth. Nyamza cloaks herself in the brown paper, Yisa

⁸ Backstage with Dr. Mamphela Ramphele. Video Interview. 9 July 2013. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az7r3L7vzFU>.

continues after her with the book between her teeth and they walk out. Together they carry the burden of this fragmented, inadequate and meagre education out of the venue. This show both makes visible the after-effects of this education system on these women, and celebrates their surviving it -- Nyamza gallantly declared in a show talk-back that, “[even] with that education, I’m here today” (Nyamza, 2013b); and Yisa echoes: “what we are celebrating about the harsh reality of how we grew up is the fact that we survived it” (Yisa in Youngblood, 2013).

Although Nyamza chooses to refer to Ramphele’s criticism of the TRC, it is important not to underestimate its contribution to contemporary South Africa. Heidi Grunbaum in *Memorializing the Past* (2011) reflects on the effects of time and historicity, which have shaped what it means to live with and understand brutality and pain in South Africa in the wake of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)⁹. She argues that is through the TRC process that a public language of ‘memory’ materialized, which in turn, has informed collective approaches to meaning-making about and after apartheid, and which we use to continue finding ways of making meaning now (2011:2). It is curious that ‘after’ alludes both to a past and a later time, a ‘behind’ and ‘what follows’, and so it feels both retrospective and forward-looking. The problems captured by the ‘beautiful pain syndrome’ in *19-born-76-rebels* are directly catalyzed by the wounds of Apartheid with which the TRC started to engage in the 1990s. The ability for pain to draw individuals in was seen in the extraordinary public performances of pain produced by South Africa’s history by way of the TRC which looked explicitly at black pain in a way that had not been done before, and particularly by rendering black pain, which had not been visible, visible. Thus it is illuminating to also think about the TRC as a useful antecedent in elucidating after-images.

Black American theorist Carol Henderson, writing about the scarring of the black body, defines scarring as: “a mark left on the skin or other tissue after a wound, burn, ulcer, pustule, lesion has healed, a marring or disfiguring mark on anything, the lasting mental or emotional effects of suffering or anguish” (2002:3). Thus, our corporeality tells its own story, and this is becoming more apparent in South African contemporary performance, in which the black body carries the scars of a reluctantly inherited history and a present spent trying to repair the many wrongs of the past. Henderson’s notion of scarring is reiterated by Nyamza who is aware of her position as an inheritor of a shameful and painful past. The 1976 new-borns were products of a period of violence, resistance, rebellion, protest and political activism. Nyamza writes:

⁹ Visit the TRC’s website for reference to all official transcripts: <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>.

Those in the wombs of their mothers at the time still carry the scars and wounds of those times of suffering today - if not in a real, then definitely in a symbolic manner; [the] mother's feelings, emotions, pains, trials and tribulations, rebelliousness, fighting the good fight as it were, having been transferred from mother to child-in-the-womb through the (symbolic/abstract) umbilical cord. Today's adult of 1976 is reliving and reinventing those womb experiences of then and like mother needs to continue to fight the good fight (2013a).

'The Cry' As A Vocal After-image

"It was a sound that broke the back of words"

Morrison 1997:261

Shedding tears and crying is perhaps the most recognizable way of corporeally and vocally expressing pain. In thinking about the way pain is aesthetically uttered in *19-Born-76-Rebels* and *Isingqala*, crying (and crying out) is the most repeated expression. Despite their best attempts at Afrikaans, the black girls in *19-Born-76-Rebels* are repeatedly battered and cry out in pain. However crying also serves as a metaphor for the affect the work has on the witness. The cry reverberates, it is at once distant and close by, be it in the piercing cry of the performers or in their pained looks of inexpressibility. The cry also exists outside of its ability to automatically always articulate itself with verbal language and thus relies on non-verbal utterance for expression.

This recalls an iconic moment during the TRC, when during Nomonde Calata's testimony as the wife of slain activist Fort Calata she broke into a loud wail (Cole, 2010:11). Cole argues that this wail captured something fundamental about the experience of gross violations of human rights and served as a sign of the extent to which visceral and vocal expression was vital to the TRC process (Ibid.:11). This expression of pain, was complex because Calata's cry was both personal and it suggested the pain of a nation over many generations. Enclosed in that wail was the complicity of citizens, admonishment of perpetrators, grief, allegation against an evil system and shame because, as South African politician Alex Borraine noted, "it caught up in a single howl all the darkness and horror of the Apartheid years" (2000:102-103). The TRC did not annotate or translate the non-verbal expressions of pain such as, cries, screams, sighs or moans. This is where art has intervened and extended the process. *19-Born-76-Rebels* and *Isingqala* pay close attention to non-verbal dimensions in an exploratory and structured way.

Nyamza works even more deliberately with non-verbal expression of pain in *Isingqala*. Here 'the cry' encapsulates truthful and actual crying, artificial staged crying, crying out, the imagery that permeates

the cry and the socio-political history of the gravity and profundity of the cry's origin. The cry signifies the conversion of pain and suffering into a social and artistic vessel, an imaginative medium. Loosely translated from isiXhosa to English, *isingqala* is that moment when one has been crying for so long or so heavily that when the tears and the wailing eventually subside, all you are left with is catching your breath between barely audible whimpers. Nyamza writes:

Let me begin with the bigger picture -- the country as a whole. I think we are in a state of *isingqala*, we are crying inside. This is a kind of 'aftermath'. In fact, we seem to be in a constant state of 'aftermath' or 'recovery'. This crying does not end, the sounds seem different but I feel they are for the same things, about the same things. We seem to say the same things, ask for the same things; we seem to cry for the same things and yet we seem not to understand one another. I wonder what happens when that quiet crying inside becomes sound, what happens when that 'private' becomes 'public'? When others find their own cries in you? I would say that this is the human condition of continuation as a cry. (2012)

Apart from a single dim light bulb and a ceiling fan, the lighting in *Isingqala* is provided by handheld torches, when these are not focused, Nyamza is in complete darkness. There is no soundtrack or audio used. In this intimate and inward looking work, Nyamza's back is, for the most part, to the audience. The work begins in utter darkness, with a primal scream and Nyamza, dressed in a grey shiny men's suit, white shirt and tie, and black shoes, circles the perimeter of the stage repeatedly and monotonously. At first she runs slowly and then gaining momentum as she runs, she screams: the scream reverberates, it is a scream of fear, a scream of someone running from some threatening danger. The scream evolves from a woman's scream to a scream that also sounds like an ambulance or a police siren. She continues to run in the same circle for some time. When she quietens down, we hear her breathing and whimpering sporadically. The space is delineated with rocks in the shape of a square which she circles. A flashlight follows her so that we are able to occasionally catch a glimpse of her running feet and body. Nyamza slows her running down to a brisk shuffle, then marches and her circle begins to narrow. She removes the blazer and uses it to hide her face as she continues to shuffle and march.

The scream sets the tone for *isingqala*, and in the moment that follows, Nyamza's body casts a shadow against the wall illuminating her silhouette as her back is turned to the audience and she violently and sporadically flails her arms and body. Nyamza cries uncontrollably, her chest and shoulders frenetically heaving, up and down, between her sobbing. The heaving turns into an unsettling waving of her arms, the repetition and increased pace make it seem as if she were a bird taking flight, desperate to escape from some painful experience. She breathes heavily and her breath provides a soundscape of urgency. The whole piece takes place in absolute silence, except for her sobbing, crying, breathing and screaming.

She throws a spinning top to the ground and it spins for some time before it stops, she throws another with the same effect. In the end, Nyamza comes to stand behind the coffin-like box covered with a black tablecloth, she removes her suit jacket and using a twofold image that could read as a preacher at a pulpit or a politician at a podium, she leans over the table and glares at the audience until the lights go out. The repetitive nature of the work evokes the 'sameness' that Nyamza complains about in the preceding reference.

This fixation with the 'after' in South Africa is not by accident, it is a purposeful endeavour to make meaning in the period after-post-apartheid. In this 'now', as a period of recovery, we often hear the words: 'struggle', 'pain', 'identity', 'wounds', 'scar', 'aftermath', 'after-after', 'hangover', which call for, or suggest some kind of unresolved pain and a desperate need for re-invention. We are not through working on ourselves, we are not through figuring ourselves out, in fact, there seems to be an increasing anxiety in working at this. As Nyamza professed earlier, "today's adult of 1976 is *re-living* and *re-inventing* those womb experiences of before and like her mother needs to continue to fight the good fight" (Nyamza, 2013a). Elin Diamond suggests that:

While a performance embeds traces of other performances, it also produces experiences whose interpretation only partially depends on previous experience. This creates the terminology of 're' in discussions of performance, as in *rebody*, *reinscribe*, *reconfigure*, *resignify*. 'Re' acknowledges the pre-existing discursive field, the repetition – and the desire to repeat – within the performative present, while 'embody', 'configure', 'inscribe', 'signify', assert the possibility of materializing something that exceeds our knowledge, that alters the shape of sites and imagines other as yet unsuspected modes of being (1996: 2).

The material knowing of blackness is implanted in what is being performed – it is a physical knowing of a black woman identity. That is why one struggles to separate the performer and the individual in Nyamza's case. It is not blackness alone that exceeds the performative but blackness in relation to South Africa's socio-political and socio-historic positioning. *19-Born-76-Rebels* and *Isingqala* present the opportunity to *re-work* and *re-imagine* how 'after' is concieved and understood in the 'now'. What I take from Diamond is that perhaps all performance relies on some kind of past, some kind of precursor. But what the performative present exhibits, with the continuation of the 're', is the possibility of new territory. Even though the 're' calls back to itself, requires a 'going back to' something, it does so with the knowledge that a return to a previous experience can mean giving birth to something new -- this is the 'after'. Of course the past spills into the present, which means we also carry the pain of the past. Accessing that pain in performance is what gives us authority over what that pain means in our lives

now. South Africans think of June 16, 1976, not just as a historiography of the Soweto civil unrest (Baines, 2007:284) but also in relation to its after-images rooted in place, feeling and in contemporary performances of the past because the present has not been resolved into the dream. While Nyamza may be telling stories that recall the past, she does so to illuminate new contemporary problems. Nyamza draws attention to how the past defines present identities, while bringing to light the danger of repeating the past.

Bibliography

Baines, G. 2007. The Master Narrative of South Africa's Liberation Struggle: Remembering and Forgetting June 16, 1976. *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*. 40(2):283-302.

Boraine, A. 2000. *A Country Unmasked: Inside South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Brown, L. Ed. 1993. *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cole, C. 2010. *Performing South Africa's Truth Commission: Stages of transition*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

Coombes, A. 2003. *History after Apartheid: Visual Culture and Public Memory in a Democratic South Africa*. Durham & London: Duke University Press.

Diamond, E. Ed. 1996. *Performance and Cultural Politics*. London & New York: Routledge.

Forte, J. 1992. Focus on the Body: Pain, Praxis and Pleasure in Feminist Performance. In *Critical Theory and Performance*. J.G. Reinhardt. & J.R. Roach, Eds. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. 248-262.

Grunebaum, H. 2011. *Memorializing the Past: everyday life in South Africa after the truth and reconciliation commission*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers.

Henderson, C. 2002. *Scarring the Black Body: race and representation in African American literature*. Columbia Missouri: University of Missouri Press.

Hopkins, K. & Roderer, C. 2004. Righting the Wrongs of Apartheid Justice for Victims and Unjust Profiteers. *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*. (105):129-153.

Kamaldien, Y. 2013. *Dancer Mamela Nyamza in her own words*. Available: <http://yazkam.wordpress.com/2013/11/08/dancer-mamela-nyamza-in-her-own-words/> [2014, October 1].

Launko, O. 2000. *Pain remembers, love rekindles*. Ibadan: Opon Ifa Publishers.

May, J. 2014. 5 Minutes with Performance Artist Mamela Nyamza. *Times Live*. Available: <http://www.timeslive.co.za/thetimes/2014/03/12/5-minutes-with-performance-artist-mamela-nyamza> [5 January 2015]

Masango, B & Selander, G. 2013. Born Rebels in Avignon. *Safari Culturel*. Available: <http://blogpartenaire-safariculturel.blogs.liberation.fr/blog/2013/07/born-rebels-in-avignon.html> [2014, October 8].

Migraine-George, T. 2008. *African Women and Representation: from performance to politics*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Morrison, T. 1997. *Beloved*. London: Vintage.

Nuttall, S. 2004. City Forms and Writing the 'Now' in South Africa. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 30(4):731-748.

Nyamza, M. 2012. *Isingqala*. [Production description]: Gordon Institute for Creative and Performing Arts (GIPCA) Exuberance Project. 11-13 May. Cape Town: University of Cape Town.

Nyamza, M. 2013a. *19-Born-76-Rebels*. [Production description]: Young Blood Arts and Culture Development. 27 June. Cape Town.

Nyamza, M. 2013b. *19-Born-76-Rebels*. [Production Talkback]: Young Blood Arts and Culture Development. 27 June. Cape Town.

Pohlmann-McCormick, H. 2000. "I saw a nightmare...": violence and the construction of memory (Soweto, June 16, 1976). *History and Theory*. 39:23-44.

Ramphela, M. 2006. Reconciliation is not enough. *Mail & Guardian*. Available: <http://mg.co.za/article/2006-12-01-reconciliation-is-not-enough>

Samuel, G. M. 2011. Shampoo Dancing and Scars – (Dis)embodiment in afro-contemporary choreography in South Africa. *Proceedings of Congress on Research in Dance*: 40-47.

Scarry, E. 1985. *The body in pain: the making and unmaking of the world*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Scarry, E. 1999. *On beauty and being just*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Stent, M. 1994. The pillars of apartheid. In *The legacy of apartheid*. J. Harker, Ed. London: Guardian Newspapers Limited. 53-64.

Backstage with Dr. Mamphela Ramphela. Video Interview. Published: 9 July 2013. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=az7r3L7vzFU>

Higher Education Today. An Interview with Dr. Mamphela Ramphela. Video interview. Published: 11 July 2013. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ANyoMlcIOew>

Youngblood. 2013. Video excerpt. Published 9 July 2013. Available: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWIICU2cLw0>

aludemahali@gmail.com

CHOREOGRAPHING THE INDIVIDUAL: ANDRÉYA OUAMBA'S CONTEMPORARY DANCE APPROACH

Amy Swanson

Northwestern University, Chicago, USA.

"I don't like to be invited somewhere because I'm African. For me, it's like I do not exist. I do not exist in a pocket, you know? I want to exist because I am Andréya."

Andréya Ouamba¹

Abstract

Andréya Ouamba, director of Association/Compagnie 1er Temps based in Dakar, Senegal, is part of a new generation of contemporary choreographers from Africa who have achieved international recognition since the turn of the twenty-first century. Ouamba is increasingly influential in contemporary dance circles in Africa and beyond through the implementation of annual training workshops and creative residencies for emerging dancers and choreographers as well as choreography and international performances for his company. In response to increasing global capitalism and neoliberal economics, a shift in patronage for the arts from the state to international resources helped shape a shift away from neo-traditional dance and towards the constitution of individual dance styles. This, in combination with awareness of the weighted significations and meanings that the label "African" holds, led choreographers such as Ouamba to reject the category "African" in favor of identifying simply as "contemporary" choreographers. Following participation in several intensive workshops and creative residencies of Ouamba's since 2010, my paper examines Ouamba's means of creating and disseminating a particular approach to contemporary dance in relation to his stated desire to be recognized for his individual contributions de-linked from his African identity. I posit that Ouamba's emphasis on individuality, improvisation, and movement style over codified movements problematizes notions of Africanness for local and global audiences, though at the same time, his contradictory reliance on his African identity and the resources it makes available illustrates the inevitability of foreign power in the lives and artistic trajectories of contemporary African artists.

Introduction

Andréya Ouamba, director of Association/Compagnie 1er Temps based in Dakar, Senegal, is part of a new generation of contemporary choreographers from Africa who have achieved international recognition since the turn of the twenty-first century. Following declines in state funding for the arts and widespread reaction against ideologies of a coherent African identity, Ouamba's generation strives for recognition as individual artists who contribute to global contemporary dance circuits, not as "Africans."

¹ Wilson, Reggie and Andréya Ouamba. Interview with Emily Coates: 89.

Yet, they must continually contend with the loaded category “African” and its fraught signifiers that curators and audiences alike attribute them.

This paper explores Ouamba’s particular choreographic and pedagogical processes as they reflect and constitute his stated desire to be recognized as Andréya rather than as “African.” Focusing primarily on his annual training workshops, Atelier Expérience et Corps (AEx-Corps), and his 2011 work *Sueur des Ombres*, I argue that Ouamba’s emphasis on individuality, improvisation, and a distinct style over specific, codified movements characterizes his departure from notions of “Africa” and signifies the impossibility of any totalizing notion of Africanness for local and global audiences alike. At the same time, Ouamba’s tendency to explore subject matter that specifically addresses the African continent and his intention to broaden opportunities available to African dancers suggests that to some extent he relies on his African identity and the resources it makes available. This contradiction reflects a broader tendency among contemporary artists, inflected by neoliberal economics, to construct one’s own unique style while translating one’s work into legible and competitive terms for funding agencies.

Andréya Ouamba and his cohort

Born in 1975 in the Republic of Congo, Ouamba began dancing by imitating American “street” dances as a teenager.² He decided to focus his professional career in dance in 1993 after viewing a performance by Chrisogone Diangouaya’s contemporary dance company, Ballet Théâtre Monana. Ouamba quickly became not only a company member but also the assistant choreographer, a role he recalls as instrumental to his development as a contemporary choreographer.³ Working with the company likely familiarized Ouamba with the unequal expectations linked to African choreographers at an international level, as Diangouaya learned regional dances for the sole purpose of developing an “African” program in order to be invited to perform abroad.⁴ In 1999, Ouamba relocated to Dakar following an invitation to participate in Germaine Acogny’s intensive workshop for emerging choreographers which coincided with the Republic of Congo Civil War. The following year, he established his Compagnie 1er Temps. In the early 2000s, Ouamba collaborated and trained with numerous international choreographers both in Dakar and in France, including Marianne Niox (Cameroon/Senegal), Michelle Rioux (Canada) Bernardo

² Kringelbach, *Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar*:50.

³ Sanou:75.

⁴ Kringelbach *Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar*: 50.

Montet (France), Susan Buirge (United States/France), and Reggie Wilson (United States). In 2006, Ouamba and collaborator Fatou Cissé gained increased international recognition when they won the Rencontres chorégraphiques d'Afrique et de l'Océan Indien in Paris for their duet, *Impro-visé* 2. He launched the first AEx-Corps workshop in 2008, an intensive training workshop for emerging dancers and choreographers with instruction by Ouamba and invited choreographers. Currently, Ouamba continues to choreograph and tour internationally with his pan-African company, administer AEx-Corps workshops, and implement creative residencies under the newer platform, Pamoja, in collaboration with Faustin Linyekula of the Democratic Republic of Congo and Panaibra Canda of Mozambique.⁵

Ouamba's work exemplifies the approaches taken up by the larger cohort of choreographers in which he takes part,⁶ reflective of broad shifts in artistic practices in response to increasing global capitalism and neoliberal economics. In the case of Senegal, dance scholar Hélène Neveu Kringelbach identifies differences in access to state patronage as the determining factor that shaped late twentieth-century changes in contemporary dance.⁷ The generation of contemporary choreographers that came before Ouamba could rely on governmental support to some extent, though funding for the arts was quickly declining from what it was in the years directly following independence when Senghor's government invested heavily in the arts. The first structural adjustment programs were implemented in Senegal in the early 1980s, coinciding with the beginning of Abdou Diouf's presidency.⁸ With the resulting severe cuts in state expenses and without Senghor and his cultural politics as head of state, funding for the arts drastically decreased and international funding agencies replaced the government as major patrons for the arts. The French Institute in particular, serves as both the primary patron and venue for contemporary dance in Senegal.⁹ This pattern parallels that of other contexts as well, such as Burkina Faso, another hub of contemporary dance on the continent, where cultural institutions exploded under

⁵ PAMOJA: *Réseau de résidence et production*.

⁶ Texts by other authors indicate that numerous other choreographers of the same generation as Ouamba share similar values in terms of emphasizing individuality, collaboration with dancers, and improvisation. These include the late Augusto Cuvilas of Mozambique, Faustin Linyekula of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Bienvenue Bazié, Lacina Coulibaly, and Seydou Boro of Burkina Faso. See Douglas, Gilbert, et al. "Under Fire: Defining a contemporary African dance aesthetic – can it be done?" and Sieveking, Nadine. "Create Your Space!": Locating Contemporary Dance in Ouagadougou."

⁷ Kringelbach. *Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar*:38.

⁸ Kringelbach. *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*:53.

⁹ Kringelbach, *Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar*:49.

Thomas Sankara's revolutionary regime from 1983-1987 but where artists today find themselves in unstable conditions.¹⁰

This shift in patronage contributed to artists' turning towards individuality and proficiency in global contemporary dance standards and away from "traditional" dances, central to the choreography of prior generations. Kringelbach posits that the generation of choreographers preceding that of Ouamba, of which Germaine Acogny is part, attempted to re-enchant "traditional" performing practices while framing work as social commentary.¹¹ In contrast, Ouamba's generation came of age when state funding for the arts all but disappeared, forcing artists to look to international resources for support. Without the stability of state funding, these artists compete against one another for limited outside resources, making the establishment of one's own individual aesthetic crucial.¹² Though I argue that Ouamba exercises significant personal agency in his work, I recognize that his emphasis on individuality and his deployment of global choreographic practices are in part shaped by the political economic conditions within which he lives and works.

Method

The remainder of this paper employs a bottom-up approach to describe and analyze the processes taken up by Ouamba in relation to his stated concern regarding being labeled as "African." I take up art historian Elizabeth Harney's contention that documentation of postcolonial African artists must be written as a bottom-up history, "in which the uniqueness and vibrancy of local artistic practice and cultural narrative is read in terms of the artists' own concerns."¹³ Such an approach avoids characterizing the artists within prescribed postcolonial narratives that emerged within Western epistemologies. In order to foreground Ouamba's own concerns, I rely on my notes and embodied memories from my participation in AEx-Corps workshops with Ouamba between 2010-2012. These are

¹⁰ Sieveking, Nadine. *Culture as a Resource for Development? Critical Perspectives from the Field of Contemporary African Dance*:271.

¹¹ Kringelbach. *Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar*:47.

¹² Dancers rely on occasional workshops in order to train in contemporary dance. There are no regular classes or ongoing rehearsals in Dakar likely as a result of the absence of state funding and the inability of the economy to support private classes or studios.

¹³ Harney. *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*:4.

supported with notes from conversations with Ouamba during pre-dissertation research in 2014 and 2015 as well as videos of his choreography posted on YouTube, and published interviews.

AEx-Corps

At an AEx-Corps workshop in 2011, held in the vast second floor room of the Foyer des Jeunes de Ouakam, the open windows allowing both significant airflow and the noise of the carpentry below to fill the space, Ouamba instructed participants to move across the room while staying low and maintaining a bounded relation to the floor. After demonstrating this concept by flinging his body to the floor, rolling, and bouncing back to his feet in a deep plié, his back curved forward in an arch and his focus down, the group of approximately twelve dancers experimented with this proposition. We threw ourselves across the floor, both attempting to imitate Ouamba and discover how our own bodies could uniquely respond to his specific instructions. Filing in whenever a space opened up, we scurried across the floor, ran back to the other side of the room, and repeated the exercise over and over again. This improvisatory exercise challenged us to come up with our own movement on the spot while remaining within certain limitations.¹⁴

Later the same day, Ouamba proposed another experiment. He had the group spread out around the perimeter of the dance space and instructed dancers to enter the space at will, move through the space by walking or running in various ways while always maintaining at least a meter of space between themselves and other dancers. This exercise called on dancers to both experiment with new ways of travelling through space by extending the simple movements of walking and running beyond their quotidian usage while maintaining awareness of the location and directionality of all others in the room.¹⁵

In both of these exercises, and numerous others that Ouamba proposed during the six-week workshop, he did not prescribe specific movements, counts, or rhythms, thereby departing from conventional dance technique classes. These exercises were supported by recorded music of a range of styles that played in the background but did not dictate any particular rhythm for dancers to adhere to. Ouamba encouraged dancers to find new ways of moving through the employment of certain restrictions in regards to space, locomotion, and relation to the floor and to one another. These two exercises

¹⁴ Notes, 12.16.2011.

¹⁵ Ibid.

demonstrate Ouamba's multi-dimensional approach to establishing and transmitting his unique movement style, also visible in his choreographed works.

Sueur des Ombres

In his 2011 piece, *Sueur des Ombres* (*Sweat of the Shadows*), Ouamba's style is discernible on each of the six dancers who are also given the freedom to express their own individuality. For much of the piece, the dancers occupy separate parts of the stage and dance in solos or pairs. Each dancer both embodies his/her own distinct movement style as well as evoking that of Ouamba, visible in the dancers' deep plié, sharp direction changes, quick circles of extended arms, and internal focus.¹⁶

The dancers manipulate long bamboo sticks throughout the duration of the piece, which at times function as spatial boundaries. The entire stage is never available to all six dancers at any given moment, but rather, they constantly negotiate their relationship to the bamboo and to one another. Similar to the exercise in which AEx-Corps participants attempted to always maintain at least a meter of space between one another, here too, dancers must navigate within specific spatial relationships that limit their range of movement and imply alternative forms of connection to one another. Likewise, the dancers always appear grounded and cognizant of their relation to the floor, whether upright and stationary, scurrying across the floor on hands and feet, or maintaining a deep lunge while moving through space, just as AEx-Corps participants were asked to attempt.¹⁷

Together, AEx-Corps and *Sueur des Ombres* exemplify Ouamba's particular movement style, marked by a bounded relation to the floor, distinct spatial limitations, and internal focus. They also evidence his contention that current and future trajectories of contemporary dance rely on individuality. During a conversation in 2014, Ouamba stated that he is interested in developing and teaching an *approach* to contemporary dance rather than teaching specific movements grounded in technique or prescribed dance forms.

¹⁶ Chaîne de ouafatou. "Andréya Ouamba/Cie 1er Temps Sueur des Ombres clip 01."

¹⁷ Ibid.

La danse contemporaine c'est pas un mélange de la danse traditionnelle et la danse contemporaine, c'est pas ça. On ne parle plus beaucoup de la technique, on parle beaucoup plus des approches.¹⁸

Contemporary dance is not a mixture of traditional dance and contemporary dance, it's not that. We no longer talk very much about technique, we talk much more about approaches.

Dismissing simplistic fusions of traditional and contemporary dance steps, Ouamba links his objective of emphasizing approach over technique to broader contemporary dance circles through the use of first person plural. He aligns his philosophy with that of other choreographers in Africa, including Faustin Linyekula and Vincent Mantsoe, who, he said, each have individual and recognizable dance styles. Ouamba contends that they, like him, deploy their own distinct approaches to contemporary dance, which allows for individual styles to emerge, rather than relying on technique or prescribed movement vocabularies. He stressed the importance of ability of artists to create something new through a specific approach, whereas technical proficiency limits the artist in that it does not allow for dancers to respond to artistic inquiries.¹⁹

For Ouamba, the transmission of choreographic tools for the next generation of choreographers to create their own individual styles is as important as the development of his own style. In Salia Sanou's *Danse Afrique Contemporaine*, Ouamba states,

Pour une nouvelle création...je transmets aux danseurs toutes les petites idées qui tournent dans ma tête. Je prends ainsi beaucoup de temps en atelier pour permettre aux danseurs de trouver par eux-mêmes de nouvelles formes.²⁰

For a new creation...I transmit all the small ideas that turn in my head to the dancers. I take a lot of time in workshops to permit dancers to find new forms by themselves.

Ouamba's permission for his dancers to find new forms is evident in the multiple solos and duets that take place in *Sueur des Ombres*. At the same time, the overall movement aesthetic evokes Ouamba's specific movement style. In no obvious way does the movement register as "African," but to anyone

¹⁸ Notes, 7.18.2014.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Sanou:75.

familiar with Ouamba's work, the piece absolutely registers as "Andréya." His choreography, which evidences the painstaking process he has engaged over the duration of his career to create his own distinct movement style, demonstrates his desire to be recognized on account of his individuality and not because of his Africanness.

Individuality in opposition to Africanness

Ouamba's insistence on an individual approach or style, visually attributable to specific choreographers, operates in opposition to dance marked as African. The consolidation and transformation of regional social dances into the genre of neo-traditional dance for the concert dance stage was integral to the constitution of national identities throughout Africa following the wave of independence in the early 1960s. Meant to serve not only citizens of new nation-states in the forging of national identities but also as a cultural ambassador to international communities, neo-traditional African dance has had a global presence ever since its inception. Today, African dance classes and performances by African dance companies are found across the globe, mobilizing a specific iteration of dance marked by virtuosic and synchronic movement, bright colored fabrics, djembe drumming, and supposedly created by authorless communities. These elements have come to constitute a globalized predominant imaginary of "African dance."²¹

Ouamba does not draw on neo-traditional dance vocabularies in his choreography. His frustration with the label "African" stems in part from the widespread association of "African dance" with the neo-traditional genre and the particular images and representations that the genre generates. He states that "African" is tied to many connotations and in the case of dance, the label signifies "celui qui fait du Tamtam, c'est celui qui danse avec les raffias, c'est celui qui a beaucoup d'énergie."²² (One who plays the Tamtam, one who dances with raffia, one who has a lot of energy.) In a broader context, the category "African" continues to bear significations stemming from colonial-era anthropological, literary, and performative representations of the continent as primitive, exotic, and populated by discrete and homogeneous tribes. Contemporary choreographers' main venue, the proscenium stage, is an heir to theatrical productions that historically framed Africa and African peoples as the West's inferior Other. Ouamba's rejection of the label "African" is also caused by his awareness of widespread misconceptions

²¹ Castaldi, Francesca. *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal*.

²² Ouamba, Andréya. Personal Interview.

of the continent and its peoples as exotic and homogeneous. He states, whereas a choreographer from France is not labeled a European choreographer but rather a French choreographer, choreographers from the African continent are labeled “African” as if Africa is a country.²³ Furthermore, he aims to manifest a universal approach to dance that is not tied to a specific geographic location. Even when his choreography addresses topics specific to Africa, he asserts that the questions the piece asks could be applied anywhere. When creating a new work, he begins with an open-ended inquiry: “Ce que je pense c'est sur quoi je travaille et ce que j'aimerais dire, et pourquoi j'aimerais le dire, et comment j'aimerais le dire.”²⁴ (What I think about is on what I'm working and what I want to say, and why I want to say it, and how I want to say it.)

As art historian Sylvester Okwunodu Ogbechie asserts,

The paradigm of European primacy that structures [narratives of modernity] makes it impossible for [African] artists to emerge as active subjects of modernity...Since they (as Africans) are assumed to exist in the past of Europe, their practice is always deemed superfluous and their very existence belated.²⁵

Following the categories “modern” and “postmodern,” “contemporaneity” is also tied to Western epistemes. The very category “African contemporary choreographer” is thus deemed paradoxical to those for whom the possibility of coevalness between African and Western artists is foreclosed. As a strategy to contend with the weighted significations, over-simplified meanings, and impossibility of coevalness inherent to the category “African,” contemporary choreographers including Ouamba eschew the qualifier “African” altogether in favor of labeling themselves “contemporary choreographers.”

Africa Revisited

However, apart from his movement style, Ouamba often refers to Africa as subject matter of his work and centers the continent in his stated objectives. *Sueur des Ombres* in particular does not necessarily reference the African continent, framed instead as exploring memory and the difficulty of overcoming

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ogbechie, Sylvester Okwunodu.. The Perils of Unilateral Power: Neomodernist Metaphors and the New Global Order:183.

bad memories,²⁶ yet a number of Ouamba's other works do take content specific to Africa as subject matter. His latest piece, *Ja'a arrêté de croire au futur* (*I stopped believing in the future*), comments on the false promises of elite politicians in Africa.²⁷ His 2006 *Impro-visé* 2 focuses on talibé, or young children studying the Koran in Senegal who are obliged to beg for money and food. His 2010 collaboration with Reggie Wilson, *The Good Dance – dakar/brooklyn*, explores the two men's separate yet entangled roots, revisiting the Congo River of Ouamba's native Brazzaville.²⁸ He draws from local conditions in both Congo and Senegal to create works that circulate on international stages, thereby providing global audiences with depictions of particular aspects of life on the African continent, yet presented abstractly through movement having little or nothing in common with "African dance." The six dancers in *Sueur des Ombres* represent four countries: Congo Brazzaville, Burkina Faso, Benin, and Senegal. Though non-African dancers occasionally participate in AEx-Corps workshops, myself included, the workshops are broadly framed as intended for Senegalese and other African dancers. Ouamba states, "The goal [of AEx-Corps] is to give opportunities to dancers in Dakar to discover other ways to make a dance, other ways to do dance, other ways to think about dance...and to give them the possibility to know what's going on outside of Senegal."²⁹ Similarly, his newest undertaking, Pamoja, is described on the website as

A Panafrican [sic] network of production and residencies. Pamoja, "together" in swahili [sic] language, stemmed from a simple observation: the difficulty for African artists to create and show their work on the African continent and the lack of artists' and projects' circulation between African countries.³⁰

Ouamba frames his workshops and choreographic works as conduits for increased access to contemporary dance for African dancers. He positions the many dimensions of his work as catalysts for growth in the field of contemporary dance in Africa and aims to provide opportunities to support the next generation of African choreographers. While his interest in transnational collaboration exceeds national frameworks, his imperative resides resolutely within the African continent. His employment of

²⁶ Chaîne de ouafatou. "Andréya Ouamba/Cie 1er Temps Sueur des Ombres clip 01."

²⁷ J'ai arrêté de croire au futur...Andréya Ouamba.

²⁸ Wilson, Reggie and Andréya Ouamba. Interview with Emily Coates:81.

²⁹ Ouamba, Andréya. Interview with Esther Baker-Tarpaga.

³⁰ Pamoja: Réseau de résidence et production.

themes specific to Africa complicates his stated desire to be recognized regardless of his African identity and bears the question of the extent to which he references Africa for the purpose of fitting into categories demarcated by funding agencies. For example, the French Institute delineates its goals, both generally and specifically in relation to dance, in terms connoting difference between France and the “foreign cultures” it operates within.³¹ One of its aims is to establish “a policy of welcoming foreign professionals at major events in France,”³² suggesting that the artists it intends to support must read as both “foreign” and proficient in “professional” standards, according to its own rubric, on French stages. Just as international funding agencies contributed to artists turning towards individuality, so to do they contribute to the need to register as “foreign” or “African” to some extent on international stages. For Ouamba, this registers in the racially marked bodies of his dancers and often in the subject matter of his works, but not in his movement vocabulary. This complex and seemingly contradictory balancing of individuality and Africanness illustrates the inevitability of foreign power in the lives of contemporary African artists and the multidimensional forces they must contend with as cultural producers under the conditions of global capitalism and neoliberal economics.

Conclusion

Andréya Ouamba’s choreography and pedagogy is at once local and global, both specific to a notion of “Africa” and having nothing to do with it. His work exists at the crossroads of locality and globality as well as his personal subjectivity and the political economic conditions that structure it. Ouamba, and the larger cohort of contemporary choreographers who live and work in Africa of which he is part, embody the impossibility of any totalizing notion of Africanness through their multi-dimensional choreography without shunning the continent. They gesture towards a future in which ample opportunity for artistic production on the African continent exists and in which such artistic production is recognized on its own terms rather than as signifying “Africa.”

³¹ Institut Français: About Us.

³² Institut Français: Dance.

Works Cited

Castaldi, F. 2006. *Choreographies of African Identities: Négritude, Dance, and the National Ballet of Senegal*. Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press.

Chaîne de ouafatou. 2011. Andréya Ouamba/Cie 1er Temps Sueur des Ombres clip 01. Online Video Clip. Available: *YouTube*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KQnUfaR46Ww> > 18 November [Accessed 14 March 2015]

Douglas, G. et al. 2006. Under Fire: Defining a contemporary African dance aesthetic – can it be done? *Critical Arts*. 20(2):102-115.

Harney, E. 2004. *In Senghor's Shadow: Art, Politics, and the Avant-Garde in Senegal, 1960-1995*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Institut Français. <http://www.institutfrancais.com/en/about-us> > [Accessed 26 May 2015]. > J'ai arrêté de croire au futur... Andréya Ouamba. *L'Atelier de Paris Carolyn Carlson*. < <http://atelierdeparis.org/fr/andreya-ouamba/j-ai-arrete-de-croire-au-futur>. [Accessed 14 March 2015].

Neveu Kringelbach, H. 2013. *Dance Circles: Movement, Morality and Self-Fashioning in Urban Senegal*. New York & Oxford: Berghahn Books..

Neveu Kringelbach, H. 2014. Choreographic Performance, Generations and the Art of Life in Post-Colonial Dakar. *Africa*. 84(1):36-54.

Ogbechie, S.O. 2008. The Perils of Unilateral Power: Neomodernist Metaphors and the New Global Order. In *Antinomies of Art and Culture: Modernity, Postmodernity, Contemporaneity*. T Smith, O Enwezor & N. Condee, Eds. Durham and London: Duke University Press: 165-186.

Ouamba, A. Interview with Esther Baker-Tarpaga. Dakar, Senegal: Andréya Ouamba and Atelier Aex-Corps. *Shifting Traces: Dance and Technology In and Outside Africa* Online Video Clip. Available <https://shiftafrica.wordpress.com/category/atelier-aex-corps>. [Accessed March 2015].

Quamba, A. Personal Interview. 16 May 2015.

Pamoja: Réseau de résidence et production. <http://www.pamoja-livearts.org/index.php/en/>. [Accessed 15 March 2015].

Sanou, S. 2008. *Afrique Danse Contemporain*. Paris: Édition Cercle d'Art.

Sieveking, N. 2014. 'Create Your Space!': Locating Contemporary Dance in Ouagadougou. *Africa*. 84(1):55-77.

Sieveking, N. 2013. Culture as a Resource for Development? Critical Perspectives from the Field of Contemporary African Dance. In *Self-Reflexive Area Studies*. Ed. M. Middell. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag GmbH.

Wilson, R. & Ouamba, 2010. Interview with Emily Coates. Portfolio: Reggie Wilson & Andréya Ouamba In Rehearsal. *Theater*. 40(1):74-96.

Amyswanson218@u.northwestern.edu

NEGOTIATING AFRICA IN CONTEMPORARY DANCE

Charles RP Maema

Abstract.

The surge of interest in the work of contemporary African artists, partly due to the impact of globalisation on contemporary arts and culture, has drawn attention to stereotypical and essentialised (re)presentations of both dance in Africa and her arts in general. This more recent work reveals the complexities of the ways in which 'Contemporary African dance' defines itself with reference to the longstanding African dance traditions. This includes the manner in which it is conceptualised and the configuration of the various discourses of ideas and practice framed in a multiplicity of cultural spaces, shaped by social forces and political and economic conditions. This process reaffirms the existence of a coherent artistic landscape that is visibly resilient, and which justifies the label [Contemporary African Dance], as applied to the works of numerous dancers/choreographers while readily acknowledging that others perceive such a label as disabling in negotiating the boundaries of power informing the global cultural complex. Therefore, central to the proposed notion of (re)negotiating 'Africa' in Contemporary Dance is the manner in which African contemporality is (re)presented when conceptualising and configuring Contemporary African Dance and its various ideas and practice without conforming to or being corseted into a rigid, fictitious and essentialised Africanity.

Introduction: Advancement of Contemporary African dance

'Contemporary dance' is a precise genre within the currents of Occidental dance, with its own theoretical, conceptual and aesthetic framing, its predecessors, its innovators, its representatives and its school. As a dance genre, contemporary dance is fluid in nature; it does not succumb to rigidity. Instead, the way it is conceptualised is founded on the notion of innovation and change. This in turn permits contemporary dance to appropriate elements from other dance forms to create new modes of representation, expression and structuring of its performative traits.

Nonetheless, contrary to European notions of contemporary dance's birth rights, "Contemporary African Dance" is not a sub-genre of the contemporary (European) dance; instead it is a product of the contemporary thought process of discovering the new (Speer, 2008). Contemporary African Dance and Contemporary Dance (European) are ideally post-colonial in terms of their dates; nonetheless they cannot be explained or even described sufficiently without reference to their historical context. The emergence of this dance genre can be traced back to the early 1970s, to a handful of African dance pioneers (Germaine Acogny from Senegal, Alphonse Tierou from Ivory Coast and Koffi Koko from Benin, to mention a few), residing in Europe and exploring contemporary (European) dance. Their choreographic creations discounted local dance practices and various indigenous stylistic ideas found in continental Africa. They applied instead a rhetoric tradition steeped in Pan-Africanism that emerged from Premier congrès international de la race noire led by

WEB du Bois in 1919 in Paris and the establishment of the Négritude movement in France and Francophone Africa. This discursive field placed them at liberty to appropriate a concept of an African dance tradition that is disconnected from the local perspective. Subsequently, this led to the establishment of Mudra Afrique dance school in Dakar, Senegal, founded under the auspices of President Léopold Sédar Senghor and Maurice Bejart, directed by Germaine Acogny, and funded by UNESCO (the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) and the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation. The mission was the development of modern African dance with a Pan-African identity. The configuration of this modern “Africa” dance that flowed from these pioneers was indicative that they belonged to an intellectual, western-educated, upper stratum. To quote the words of German Jewish editor, writer and scholar Beier Ulli,

the approach is intellectual rather than emotional. The artist is not experiencing but observing the traditional ceremonies. He is excited by them, but is not part of them (Ulli 1968:10).

The utilisation of rituals is only as performative, choreographic and staging tools that granted legitimacy to the constructed dance tradition that collapsed ritual traditions from Africa into a common denominator.

Interestingly, the 1990s became a defining moment in the history of contemporary African dance. This tidal turn was precipitated by initiatives facilitated by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1992 through its institutions, l'Afaa (Association française d'action artistique) and Afrique en créations (Africa in Creation). The sole purpose of these institutions was the promotion of French culture and artists abroad through various prestigious events and tours. Afrique en créations was not the first incentive, but the most influential and permanent institution that promoted the development of a contemporary dance scene in Africa. This objective was attained through facilitation of large-scale projects including photographic exhibitions, dance workshops and conferences for young dancers in Africa. Another incentive to stimulate creation and development was the contemporary choreography competition Rencontres chorégraphiques de l'Afrique et de l'océan Indien (Choreographic encounters of Africa and the Indian Ocean) later renamed Dans l'Afrique, offering €33 000 in prize money to be shared among three winners. The geographical locations for hosting the competitions as well as the panel adjudicators, predominantly made of “experts” from Europe, were chosen by l' Afaa and Afrique en créations. The organisers insisted that dancers and choreographers should move away from the so-called African “traditional” dance aesthetics while at the same time retaining their cultural roots to develop a new form that is still identifiable as evidently African to a western audience.

Undoubtedly, the initiatives of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its institutions should be credited for the explosion of new choreographic talent we are witnessing today in Africa and that is finding acclaim on international stages as innovative contemporary choreographic creations. By contrast, Sieveking (2012) states that many artists as well as an enormous number of audiences were neither impressed nor applauded the surge of contemporary African dance and choreography. They viewed contemporary dance from Africa as an artificial construct, and a neo-colonialist project that is seeking to reproduce currents of European dance in Africa. Including critical attitudes among “African Dance” practitioners regarding whether to identify with the label (Contemporary African Dance) or not.

“Contemporary African Dance” - is it a justifiable label?

Africa's choreographers are creating a whole new style. If only they knew what to call it (Thea Nerissa Barnes 2005).

Maybe we cannot define it as contemporary African dance or the other way round but I think for the sake of ongoing [sic] generation we need to define what we are doing (Siyanda Duma 2006).

Defining Contemporary African Dance or answering that ubiquitous question; “what is Contemporary African Dance?” is an elusive undertaking. Adewole (2005) argues that neither a definition nor the quest for one will ever end the debate. Nonetheless, the existence of this coherent and visibly resilient artistic landscape that consists of innumerable archives of its ideas and practices justifies the label “Contemporary Africa Dance” as an analytic category that distinguishes a set of aesthetics, artistic styles and genres from others. Conversely, Sieveking notes the expression of a self-reflective and critical attitude of many dance practitioners including the ambivalent position they assume with respect to essentialising an analytic category of “African Dance” traditions as well as a frequent rejection of occidental artistic genres convention and aesthetics (2013). Coupled with the history and evolution of contemporary dance from Africa, one can concede that there seems to be a compelling argument that “Contemporary Africa Dance” as a label is superficially disabling. Considering, “African” is often presented as an epistemological negation to which no profit can be tabulated in a ledger of artistic and cultural capital. In addition, the positioning of Africa as marginal in the sphere of artistic and institutional power has been a dominant narrative in the media (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). With respect to that, self-reflective and critical attitudes of dance practitioners like Kettly Noël and numerous others are justified in dismissing the label Contemporary “African” Dance as discriminatory and concealing the identity of the artist revealing only race and geographical location. Such inclusive labels inform racialised politics of difference and generalises choreographic creations of contemporary dance practitioners from Africa.

Nonetheless, the application of “African” in the label (Contemporary African Dance), should be re-examined and interpreted not as indicative or as advocating rigidity, absoluteness or fixedness as some would like to argue. Instead, it is a malleable construct. It simultaneously refers to cultural and geographic situation and modes of subjectivity and subjectivisation (strategic positioning an artist adopts in relation to the field), dimensions of identification, and ethical strategies (Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu, 2009). Africa in this observance is a multiplicity of cultural spaces that are shaped by political, economic conditions and social forces that do not privilege any one way of conceptualising African culture or identity. It is a project without a totalising construct that defines its centre. Enwezor & Okeke-Agulu (2009) argue that the term ‘African’ is capacious; that on one hand it accommodates slippages, incompleteness, eccentricities, idiosyncrasies and ambivalences. Therefore, it need not be exclusively observed through ethnocentric, national, regional and continental lenses; instead, it can be seen as a network that represents a multiplicity of traditions that are continuously accessible for artists to exploit in shaping various ideas and practice informing whatever they designate “Contemporary African Dance”. On the other hand, “African” is also temporal; specifically in the manner it engenders or disavows emotional attachment in the present. It centres on the shape of Africa in the world today.

Critical to our inquiry is therefore: (1) how these formulations inform our understanding of archives of ideas and practices that reflect the multiplicity of contexts and how these manifest in the production of contemporary African dance; (2) how Africa is represented, negotiated and articulated in contemporary dance from Africa and its various discourses; and (3) whether these multiplicities of context are indicative of rapture or resilience of African musical/dance traditions, and their ability to adapt and reinvent themselves in post-colonial Africa.

Contemporary African dance defining itself against traditions

It has been historically argued that the notion of art for art’s sake is not applicable to African arts. These simplistic assumptions and overgeneralisations accentuated or prioritised the functionality of arts in Africa over the formal aesthetic. This suggests the notion that organisation of long-standing African musical/ dance traditions are founded on social, political and religious considerations, not only on theatricality. This framing reinforces the historicising of longstanding African arts (musical/ dance, poetry, painting and sculpture) traditions as belonging to the collective, as a reductionist domain with the dominion of rituals and non-autonomous producers. A view point that ostensibly denies longstanding African dance traditions complexities and developmental characteristics associated with other dance forms. These traits are usually considered in terms of ephemerality and progress in the imaginary of Occidental theatrical traditions. It was this notion that the African

national ballets movement of the 1950s and 1960s tried to invert with its choreographic creations. These national ballets were products of modern Africa, and they signified a departure from the ethos of presenting long-standing African musical/ dance traditions as they stood. They both venerated these traditions and presented them in proscenium arches across European and the Americas with emancipation and self-manifestation as an underlying principle. Nonetheless, their performances still succumbed to colonial hegemonic modes of representation that correspond with the preconceived notions of authentic Africanity (timeless, static, homogenous, pure and isolated). They featured dance as a form of auto-chauvinism because they adhered to western models of art objectification and cultural museum (Tierou, 2001).

According to Menash (2004) cited in Siegert (2010), the new generation of African choreographers and dancers refused to be corseted in this rigid and fictitious “Africanity” and adopted contemporary African dance as an alternative perspective. Central to its mode of production was that it concerned itself with the agency of the dancer over objectification by the colonialist gaze. This identification is critical because it highlights the most important differences between the long-standing African dance traditions and contemporary African dance (Kwakwa, 1979, cited in Nicolls, 1996). However, contemporary dance frequently comes second to “traditional” dances and indigenous dance forms, usually touted at political/ social and religious events under the guise of preservation of old traditions to support the hegemonic status quo (Loots, 2012). Likewise, the idea is often perpetuated that contemporary African dance is contaminated due its appropriation of European dance currents and, to a degree, variance with the ethos of ‘traditional’ living and that this renders it culturally illegitimate. Contrary to this view, available evidence seems to suggest that the contact of Africa with Europe is not fundamentally different from contacts with any other alien cultures. The reading of these contacts between Africa and Europe as indicative of an historical period that characterises the commencement of a dance tradition or fabrication of authenticity is illogical. Kasfir (1992:43) argues that there are innumerable befores and afters in this history and to select contact with European colonialism or the Industrial Revolution as the unbridgeable chasm between traditional, authentic and aftermath polluted by foreign contact, is arbitrary in the extreme. The problem with this inference is that it fails to recognise that, in addition to the pre-colonial trans-Saharan trade that led to shared cultural traits and created a nexus between various ethnic groups in Africa, coastal trade also had a major impact. Innumerable foreign materials and artistic traditions were absorbed into African modes of artistic (visual and performance) production through the encounter with various alien cultures. Due to this process of acculturation, so-called ‘traditional’ African dances were affected by these exchanges and influences; they are not pure, homogeneous or isolated. Outside influence is therefore not a new phenomenon in Africa.

Arguably the advent of contemporary African dance represented a departure from the mode of production prevalent in long-standing African musical/dance performance traditions and the manner in which these traditions were presented by the national ballets. This is not an indication of complete dislodgment from these musical/ dance traditions or the dichotomised relationship between “traditional” and “contemporary” that tends to be framed in ruminations about the ascendancy or death of one or the other. Instead, dancer and choreographer Opiyo Okach (cited in Ondego, 2008) states that contemporary African dance is the practice and conception of choreographic creation in Africa today based on a concrete, theoretical and historical understanding of dance and performance in Africa. This knowledge and understanding of longstanding musical/dance traditions and their oral histories, combined with European contemporary dance training, informs a self-confident strategic appropriation to defend African culture in a competitive struggle over global ideas of what constitutes legitimacy. This appropriation of western contemporary dance introduces an emancipatory or decolonisation trajectory parallel to the critical concept of colonial mimicry put forward by the post-colonial theorist Homi K Bhabha, who states that colonial hegemony can be undermined from within its framing (cf Bhabha 1994). This aesthetic choice (a combination of African and European dance traditions) undermines prevalent discourses of low and high art and forges a new transnational politics of dance. It considers Contemporary African dance as an imagined community outside neo-colonialism and racist representation (Sörgel, 2011), thereby transcending earlier discourses of post-independence nationalism. By presenting multidimensional contexts from which contemporary African dance practitioners can draw to inform their choreographic creations in artistic worlds, they have developed themselves.

Conceptualisation and configuration of contemporary African dance trajectories

To critically interrogate the notion of multiplicities of contexts as an informing agent in the conceptualisation, configurations and trajectories of Contemporary African Dance I will draw on the work of South African choreographers/ dancers Vincent Mantsoe and Gregory Maqoma as examples. These contemporary African performing artists represent the first generation of post-apartheid South African choreographers/ dancers. Interest in these choreographers/dancers as subjects is reinvigorated by the framing of their work in post-apartheid South Africa and Europe. It is also worth noting that this is also not premised on an assumption that their choreographic creations represent the only mode of configuring and conceptualising contemporary African dance trajectories. Instead it is rather their achievements of last two decades and their ability to plug into the international discourses of Contemporary dance that epitomise them appropriate subjects for this analysis.

Post-apartheid South Africa (1994 onwards) ushered an epoch of change in the social and political landscape of the country that required the arts and production of arts to reposition itself. The repositioning was precipitated by the dissolution of apartheid as a common enemy that artists collectively rallied against and, to a large extent, informed the context and content of the work they produced. Consequently, post-1994 artists moved away from producing art that deals with collective issues, instead they gravitated towards work which addresses individual issues. These artists exploited the freedom of movement that came with the post-apartheid era. They were able to travel and explore other art worlds on the local and international festival scene, exhibitions and workshops, and this exposure informed their individual aesthetics. It is against this very backdrop that Mantsoe and Maqoma's Contemporary African Dance has evolved; albeit their configuration and conceptualisation of its various discourses of ideas and practice vary enormously.

Mantsoe describes his work as a fusion of contemporary dance technique with Aboriginal Australian dance, Asian (Indian classical dance, Tai Chi, Martial Art, Balinese dance), as well as a variety of African dance traditions. The appeal to ritual plays a fundamental role in Mantsoe's dance and choreographic creation; it legitimises his practice as part of a miscellaneous collection of performative tools and forms of staging. For the past two decades, Mantsoe's repertory has been "a glimpse of dance as a direct expression of spiritual connection to something greater than the physical self" (Sulcas, 2007). He informs his choreographic creation by drawing from ideas and practice of *izangoma* [plural]. *Isangoma* [singular] is seen as a combination of a priest, medium, predictor and healer with powers deriving from being the personification of an ancestral spirit. Mantsoe's association with ideas and practices of *izangoma* has been with him all of his life. He was brought up in a household where his grandmother, mother and two of his aunts were practising *izangoma* and grew up observing and assisting in some of their rituals. He observed how they utilised dance, singing and drumming to induce trance and summon ancestors' spirits to mediate in the world of the living and prescribe various treatments for physical and psychological ailments. Although Mantsoe observed these rituals, he was never initiated into becoming *isangoma*; instead he insists that he is a healer through his dance performances in the proscenium arch.

By alluding to these ideas and practices, Mantsoe contributes to the mystification of his identity, at the same time accentuating his authority as representative of this authentic tradition. Themes such as ancestral spirits, nature spirits, healing and trance are central to most of Mantsoe's repertoire. One of his earlier award-winning solo choreographic creations *Gula Bird* (1992) portrays a man who becomes possessed by a spirit while walking in a forest and is transformed into a bird. During this transformation, when a bird becomes a man and a man a bird, Mantsoe states the man is unbound

from bad spirits inhabiting him because of the beauty and spirituality embodied in the forest itself (Mantsoe, cited in Waterman & Glasser 1998:24).

Besides this dialogue with nature and his recognition of spirits and earth energies that inform the context and his configuration of Contemporary African Dance, Mantsoe also asserts that the dancing in his choreographic creations induces an altered state of consciousness and enables him to enter into a trance. This phenomenon has become a hallmark of his performances; observable in his repertoire that includes Mpheyane Deceit(1997), Phokwane (1998), Men-Jaro (2003), NDAA Greetings (2003) and Ebhofolo This madness (2007), to mention a few. Bridget Cauthery says:

Through the vehicle of his living, breathing, dancing body, Mantsoe is able to open himself to the mysteries and healing energy of the spirit world, becoming a vessel for their knowledge and blessing. (Cauthery, 2007:208.)

Although Mantsoe manages to open himself up in order to enter trance, everything he does in the process is carefully choreographed (Watt, 2003). In this case trance as a cultural complex of ideas and practice in his choreographic creations becomes reconceptualised as a traded commodity. Certainly, trance is not concomitant with a specific part of Mantsoe's body and can neither be removed nor expunged from him. It exists within him, as an embodied 'object' that he simultaneously brings with himself and brings it out in cautiously constructed and choreographed performances "that meet with the spirits', presenters' and ticket buyers' approval" (Cauthery, 2007:211). Therefore, his trance is procured with compensation and he is an active agent in this transaction.

Mantsoe's configuration and conceptualisation trajectories of Contemporary African Dance may however, be problematical. Loots points out that, although in no way wanting to belittle the historical and aesthetic contribution to South Africa's emerging dance and choreography in the early 1980s in particular, Mantsoe's work could be argued to buy into images of a half-naked black man dancing in a semblance of what could be seen (by a Western eye) as an imagined 'traditional' African dance coupled, (as she points out ironically), with just enough 'technique' to pass as a 'good dancer' by these self-same Western eyes and it is partly what won him Western (and specifically European)acceptance and praise. She further warns that although fusion of contemporary African dance is a medium of expression favoured by many in the African Contemporary arena, it may, (and often has), render invisible any notion of social, economic and political context (Loots, 2006:94)

It is precisely these notions that are addressed in Maqoma's Contemporary African Dance; are visible and constitute a dominant narrative in the configuration and conceptualisation of his choreographic creation. His work is framed as a socio-political commentary of the democratic post-apartheid and

postcolonial epoch in South Africa. He focuses on the contradictions and tensions embedded in the new political and social order by interrogating and exploring complexities innate in the relationship between the individual and society through the optics of sexuality and identity. Although Maqoma is living in a democratic society that guarantees equal human rights for all, a sizable number of the members of the society in which he lives still maintain orthodox views concerning sexuality and masculinity that are grounded in religious dogma and essentialised views of what constitutes an African.

Maqoma's choreographic creation as a black homosexual male challenges the status quo by uncovering and confronting these societal contradictions. This is prevalent in his choreographic creation *Miss Thandi* (2002), a work that was conceived as a tribute to Vuyo Raymond Matinyana, South African drag artist and cultural activist based in Amsterdam who, before his death in 2001, used to perform under the name of 'Glorious Miss Thandi'. Dressed in drag, he performed popular South African songs as a statement of belonging and memories of his country of birth. Maqoma's choreography in this work is autobiographical. He impersonates 'Miss Thandi' as both a tribute to Matinyana and a personal expression of his homosexuality (Kodesh, 2006b:54). This work traverses boundaries between Maqoma, the choreographer/ dancer, 'Miss Thandi' the drag artist, and Matinyana the individual. It directly challenges the perceptions and representations of masculinity within the bounds of the culture of amaXhosa and South Africa at large. This choreographic creation explicitly transgresses and mocks this idealised masculinity and questions these traditions. Maqoma has himself undergone the rite of passage of amaXhosa from boyhood into manhood. His refusal to conform and his willingness to throw open new possibilities for dealing with identity in a transforming social context can be seen in this question:

Men in dresses, in high heels, wigs and makeup, dealing with themes of abused gender equality and brazen sexuality. Do these actions make choreographers who are dealing with these issues any less African in their cultures and value systems? (Maqoma, 2006:35.)

According to Maqoma (2006), these conflicts, politics and tensions between modernity and tradition have turned him as an artist into a watchdog. His interrogations of issues of sexuality and masculinity directly contest the benchmarks used to evaluate what is acceptably 'African', especially in artistic representations. He has critically engaged in various discourses about the choreographic creations and performances of contemporary African artists like himself, which some may regard as 'not African' or 'not African enough' in conception or presentation.

Conclusion: Africa, we are negotiating

The advancement and history of Contemporary African dance reveals that it evolved from a multitude of art worlds. It manifests itself as a product of the contemporary thought process of discovering the new. In its infant stages, it exploited Pan-Africanism and Négritude in its various discourses of ideas and practice as processes of discovering the new. This led to the establishment of the first school in Africa dedicated to its practice. Nonetheless, the framing of its conceptualisation and configuration exploited African ritual traditions by disconnecting them from a local perspective and using them only as staging and performance tools.

It was in 1990 that we witnessed an explosion in contemporary choreography talent in Africa and on international stages facilitated by the French foreign ministry and its institutions. However, this surge also presented challenges. Other African artists and audiences considered contemporary dance from Africa as a neo-colonialist project that reproduced currents of European dance. There were controversies around whether the label “Contemporary African Dance” was appropriate. Arguably, these notions are premised on the reading of “African” as a disabling signifier that perpetuates racialised politics of difference. For these reasons, “African” in this context is viewed through fractured lenses that perceive it as reference to ethnocentric, national, regional, and continental orientation rather than a malleable construct that interrupts rigidity, absoluteness or fixedness and accommodates slippages, incompleteness, eccentricities, idiosyncrasies and ambivalences. Accepting this would make available a network of multiple traditions for artists to exploit in shaping various ideas and practice to inform whatever they designate ‘contemporary African dance’:-

a contemporary dance tradition that negotiates a shapeshifting Africa, one of mud huts and skyscrapers which reveal and represent itself via multidimensional contexts (culture, geography, subjectivity, subjectivisation, identification and ethical strategies).

an Africa shaped by previous and current political, social, and economic forces that does not privilege any one way of conceptualising African culture or identity.

an Africa of sons of *izangoma* (diviners) that are contemporary dance artists like Vincent Mantsoe, who summons the spirits of ancestors and those of nature into the proscenium arch, and simultaneously an active agent in trade transactions of trance as commoditised cultural complex of ideas and practices.

an Africa of men in dresses, in high heels, wigs and make up like Gregory Maqoma, who has been turned into a watchdog by the battles of politics and tensions between modernity and

tradition. Through his choreographic creations he is constantly interrogating essentialised notions of sexuality and masculinity in post-colonial Africa.

an Africa of artists operating in art worlds that enables conceptualisation and configuration of representations of African contemporality without being corseted into an imagined, rigid, fictitious and essentialised idea of Africa or Africanity.

References

Adewole, F. 2005. *Shifts in shape: Africa dancing on the global stage*. Paper presented at the African Dance Expert Meeting, Julidans Festival, Amsterdam.

Appiah, A. 1991. Is the post- in postmodernism the post- in postcolonial? *Critical Inquiry*, 17(2):336–57.

Bhabha, H.K. 1994. *The location of culture*. London, New York: Routledge.

Barnes, N.T. 2005. 'It's not dance - it's life'. The Guardian.[online] 14 March. Available from: [mar/14/dance](http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2005/mar/14/dance),[accessed 21/06/12].

Cauthery, B. 2007. Vincent Sekwati Mantsoe: Trance as a cultural commodity. In *Proceeding of the 13th Annual conference with CORD, France June 2007*. Paris: Society of Dance History Scholars: 21–4.

Coughlan, G. 2001. Review: Motswa Hole (Person from far away). *Artslink*, 3 December. www.artlink.co.za/news_article.htm?contentID=14446 [accessed 25/08/12].

Craighead, Clare. 2006. 'Black dance': Navigating the politics of 'black' in relation to 'the dance object' and the body as discourse. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 20(2):16–33.

Drewal, T. M. 1991. The state of research on performance in Africa. *African Studies Review*, 34(3):1–64.

Douglas, G. et al. 2006. Under Fire: Defining a contemporary African dance aesthetic-can it be done? *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):102-115.

Enwezor, O. & Okeke-Agulu, C. 2009. *Contemporary African art since 1980*. Bologna: Damiani.

Giguère, C. & Coulibaly, L. 2008. African dance: The myth to reality. *The Panopticon*. www.lepanoptique.com/sections/arts-litterature/la-danse-africaine%C2%BB-du-mythe-aux-realites,[accessed 05/08/12].

Ginslov, J. 1998. *The Dance Factory Johannesburg: A site of resistance*. Unpublished MA thesis, Rhodes University, Grahamstown.

Glasser, S. 1996. Is dance political movement? *Journal of the Anthropological Studies of Human Movement*. 3(6):112–22.

Görtz, A.C. 2011. Linguistic markers as evidence for cultural awareness: A critical examination of international critiques of a South African dance company. Unpublished MA thesis, University of Stellenbosch.

Grundy, K. W. 1996. Cultural politics in South Africa: An inconclusive transformation. *African Studies Review*. 39(1):1–24.

Hardt, Y. 2011. Staging the ethnographic of dance history: Contemporary dance and its play with tradition. *Dance Research Journal*. 34(1):27–42.

Harvey, G. 2010. Animism rather than shamanism: New approach to what shamans do (for other animists). In *Spirit possession and trance: New interdisciplinary perspectives*. B. Schmidt & Huskison, L, Eds. London: Continuum International: 16–34.

Horn, A. 1986. South African Theatre: Ideology and Rebellion. *Research in African Literatures*. 17(2):211-233.

Kasfir, S. 1992. African Art and Authenticity: A Text with a Shadow. *African Arts*: 25(2):40-53+96-97.

Klein, G. & Noeth, S. Eds. 2011. *Emerging bodies: The performance of worldmaking in dance and choreography*. London: Transaction.

Kodesh, H. 2006a. For arts' sake? Contemporary dance in South Africa. Unpublished MA thesis, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Kodesh, H. 2006b. Cultural cocktails: The choreography of Gregory Maqoma. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):39–60.

Lewis-Williams, D.J & Dowson, T.A. 1999. *Images of power: Understanding San rock art*. 2nd edition. Johannesburg: Southern.

Livermore, J. 2003. *More than words can say: A view of literacy through the arts*. Canberra: Australian Centre for Arts Education, University of Canberra.

Loots, L & Young-Jahangeer, M. Eds. 2005. *African contemporary dance? Questioning issues of a performance aesthetic for a developing and independent continent*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Loots, L. 2006. Post-colonial visitations: A South African's dance and choreographic journey that faces up to the spectres of 'development' and globalisation. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):89–101.

Loots, L. 2012. African Creative Economy Conference Programme, Roundtable discussion paper/points: *The possibilities for growth within dance and the real and potential contributions to development and/or economic growth in Africa*. December. Nairobi: Kenya.

Middell, M. Ed. 2013. Self-Reflective Area Studies. Leipziger University.

Maree, L. 2005. The state of the art(s). In *State of the nation: South Africa 2004–2005*, J. Daniel., R. Southall & J Lutchman, Eds, East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press: 287–312.

Mensah, A. 2005. Black bodies, white gaze. In *Proceedings of the contribution for the In Transit Festival Conference: A new generation of African choreographers December 06*. Berlin: Haus der Kulturen der Welt: 1–6.

Neuman, L. W. 1997. *Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative approaches*, 3rd edition. London: Allyn and Bacon.

Nicholls, R. 1996. African dance: Transition and continuity. In *African dance: An historical and philosophical inquiry*. Kariamu Asante, Ed. Trenton, NJ: African World Press: 41–62.

Nii-Yartey, F. 2001. Principles of African dance choreography: Some perspective from Ghana. In *Contemporary choreography: A critical reader*. J Butterworth & L Wildschut, Eds. London: Routledge.

Ondego, O. 2008. Two Decades of Contemporary African Dance Without A Following. Art Matters. Info, Flaunting Creativity in Africa and the Diaspora, 23

september. <http://artmatters.info/theatre/2008/09/two-decades-of-contemporary-african-dance-without-a-following/>, [accessed 2015/05/28].

Pather, J. 2006. A response: African contemporary dance? Questioning issues of a performance aesthetic for a developing continent. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):9–15.

Peterson, B. 1990. Apartheid and the political imagination in black South African theatre. *Journal of Southern African Studies*. 16(2):229–45.

Reddy, V. 2006. The poetics and the politics of African contemporary dance: Contesting the visceral. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):116–20.

Samuel, G. 2011. Shampoo dancing and scars: (Dis)embodiment in Afro-contemporary choreography in South Africa. *Dance Research Journal*. 43(1):40–7.

Sassen, R. 2010. Why Dance Umbrella must not die: *Times Live*, 15 May. www.timeslive.co.za/sundaytimes/article451024.ece/Why-Dance-Umbrella-must-not-die, [accessed 31/08/12].

Sieveking, N. 2006. Animism on stage. Tracing anthropology's heritage in contemporary African dance in Europe. In: *Celebrating transgression: Method and politics in anthropological studies of cultures*. U. Rao & J. Hutnyk, Eds. New York/ Oxford: Berghahn Books: 153–64.

Siegert, N. 2010. Contemporary dance from Africa as creative opposition to stereotypical images of Africanity. *Buala Contemporary African Culture*, 16 May. www.buala.org/en/stage/>contemporary-dance-from-africa-as-creative-opposition-to-stereotypical-images-of-africanity, [accessed 05/08/12].

Speer, K. 2008. The globalization of contemporary dance in Francophone Africa, January May. www.katespeerdance.org/Speer [accessed 25/04/15].

Strohschein, H. 2007. Between modern dance and intercultural performance: The multiple truths of the Bird Belly Princess. Unpublished MA thesis, Graduate College of Bowling Green State University, Ohio.

Sulcas, R. 2007. Beyond the body: Making Spirit Move dance review: Association Noa/ Company Vincent Mantsoe. *New York Times*, 28 August. www.nytimes.com/2007/arts/dance/>22nao.html, [accessed 24/08/12].

Thomson, G. 2008. *FNB Dance Umbrella 20 years on: Two decades of contemporary choreography and dance*. Johannesburg: First National Bank.

Van Heerden, J. 2008. Theatre in a new democracy: Some major trends in South African theatre from 1994–2003. Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Stellenbosch.

Watt, G. 2003. Vincent Mantsoe 'Bupiro Mukuti', 'Ndaa'. *Ballet Magazine*, 26 October. www.ballet.co.uk/magazines/yr03/nov03/gwrev_vincent_mantsoe_1003.htm, [accessed 15/09/12].

Young-Jahangeer, M. & Loots, L. 2006. Unsteady terrain: Encountering contemporary dance and music practices in Africa. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):1–8.

UNEXPECTED BODIES IN UNEXPECTED SPACES: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY EXPLORING INTEGRATED DANCE IN CAPE TOWN AND CALIFORNIA

Coralie Valentyn

University of the Western Cape

Abstract

While dance is generally considered a site of free expression, access to many forms of dance remains constrained by limiting ideas about what constitutes dance and what bodies are imagined as ideal for this mode of cultural expression. Professional dance, consequently, has become a practice in which not everyone can imagine participating, raising questions about which types of bodies are privileged and why (Cooper Albright, 1997). Drawing on ethnographic data from two integrated dance companies, this paper serves to explore the choreographic possibilities that disability offers dance, advocating more inclusive and theoretically compelling approaches for understanding movement and the body in dance. Moreover, the implications for research of this nature extend beyond dance. Through changing what dancers and audiences imagine as being possible in that arena, this type of research also offers insights into nation-building and identity reimaginings in other spheres of political and social life, allowing for more constructive engagement around issues of access and inclusivity.

Introduction

The study began with the assumption that while dance is generally considered a site of free expression, access to many forms of dance remains constrained by limiting ideas about what constitutes dance and what bodies are imagined as ideal for this mode of cultural expression. Socially constructed notions of what it means to be a dancer have not only created restrictions for those already in these spaces, but have also greatly limited access to those on the 'outside' as well as for audiences who continue to perceive dance in a particular way. Consequently, professional dance has become a practice in which not everyone can imagine participating, raising questions about which types of bodies are privileged and why (Cooper Albright, 1997). In this context, disability serves to challenge conventional perceptions of what constitutes movement and more importantly, what constitutes a dancer.

This presentation uses two integrated dance companies as case studies: Remix in Cape Town and Axis in California. Critically engaging with both dance companies in 2012 over a period of 3 months and 7 days respectively, led me to think about the implications of combining an unexpected body with an historically reserved performative space. Drawing on my experiences from conducting fieldwork in both spaces, I suggest that Remix and Axis successfully disrupt ableist preconceptions of

the dancing body; not by glossing over disability but through a direct engagement with it. It is this direct engagement that excites me and further encourages me to explore the creative possibilities that disability offers dance.

Methodology

One of the characteristics of Anthropology that makes it distinct from other disciplines is the emphasis on participation, its value placed on an empirical approach (Howson, 2004). I was interested in exploring human experiences around dance profoundly informed by what I termed personal participation. By 'personal participation' I mean the combination of my personal dance experience with the ways in which I conducted research, more explicitly, participating in dance classes. I therefore used personal participation rather than participant observation to signify not only the ways in which I was physically and emotionally involved in my project as a dance, but also my investment as a researcher. I attempted, firstly to provide rich, descriptive material based on human experience and interaction made possible through conversations set up in both formal and informal manners. My research questions were around the creative possibilities that disability offers dance as well as the significance of these possibilities for the South African context.

In 2012 I participated, over a period of three months, in open dance classes offered by Cape Town dance company Remix. My engagement as a dancer and a researcher allowed me the opportunity to get to know the dancers whom I eventually interviewed and observed during rehearsals and performances. Moreover, it allowed me to experience what it is like to dance in an integrated company, something I had never experienced before. I also participated in a week long Summer Intensive in Oakland with Axis, one of America's most established integrated companies. During the Intensive, I had the opportunity to participate in technique, improvisation and composition classes, to attend a forum discussion on integrated dance, to interview company members as well as workshop participants and lastly, to choreograph a trio which formed part of a community showing at the end of the week.

Integrated dance in South Africa

In the early 1990s, against the backdrop of a radically changing political landscape, South Africa witnessed the emergence of what some have termed Disability Arts (Samuel, 2012). The apartheid government had successfully managed to maintain performing arts, ballet in particular, as an exclusionary domain (Friedman, 2012). In efforts to make performing arts, specifically dance, more inclusive, shifts in practice and discourse started taking place. Practitioners and dance scholars began grappling with what dance means in post-apartheid South Africa and how it could begin to

address the myriad of issues created by years of inequality. The new democratic dispensation thus ushered in an environment conducive for the development of inclusive dance practice, beginning with the implementation of programmes in special needs schools and later with the development of integrated dance companies. Adam Benjamin planted the seed for integrated work in the early 2000s with the Tshwarangano Project followed by other professional dance companies namely, Agulhas Theatre Works, Remix and more recently Unmute, blossoming in later years. The study and practice of integrated dance therefore takes on a new meaning in South Africa because of our history and the ways in which that history continues to shape our present socio-cultural interactions. South Africa thus offers wonderful potential for reconciliation not only within the arts but also on a broader societal level.

Research site - Remix

At this point it is important to mention that due to lack of funding, Remix unfortunately had to close its doors. The year that I conducted my research was the last year that Remix was operational.

Remix was a physically integrated Contemporary Dance company. It was founded about 12 years ago by Nicola Visser and Malcolm Black. I found out about the company through speaking to my good friend Cilna, a dancer, dance practitioner and one of my research participants. She was also very interested in challenging normative and idealised dance. I discovered that Remix offered open dance classes once a week in Rondebosch, Cape Town. When I walked in on that first day I did not know what to expect, but I was warmly received, which slightly put me at ease. The weeks that followed challenged me in often unexpected ways. More than anything, I had to become comfortable in my own skin, appreciating my own body before I could learn to appreciate someone else's 'differently abled' body, a term first articulated by Zama, another of my participants. I found the experience of dancing with Zama, the newest company member at the time, to be one of the most liberating. For the first time I was moving with, and being moved by, someone with no lower body, intrigued by his mobility despite his having no legs.

Research site - Axis

Axis celebrates its 28th anniversary this year. Founded by Judith Smith and under the auspices of the Oakland community, Axis has thrived and become recognised as a well-respected professional Contemporary Dance company. So much so that they appeared twice on the acclaimed reality show 'So you think you can dance'. In 2012 I participated in their annual Summer Intensive workshop for physically integrated dance. The intensive lasted for a week and comprised three two-hour classes daily: technique, improvisation and composition. On some evenings there were additional activities

such as an open community jam or discussion about integrated dance in the American context. We also had the opportunity to choreograph and perform our work at an open showing at the end of the workshop. After having danced with Remix, I felt slightly prepared; however my difficulties were around negotiating my role as 'researcher'. I felt it necessary, from the beginning, to form part of the group, rather than slipping away to write notes or 'observe' interactions. Although I was upfront in my application about my reasons for wanting to attend a programme like the Intensive, it took me a few days to openly state my research interest to the other participants, perhaps concerned that disclosure would in some way liken me to the nosy researcher. Moreover, my reasons for attending the Intensive were, and remain, deeply personal - in addition to scholarly. Currently Axis has 5 full-time company dancers with and without disabilities and, like Remix, is committed to educational programmes. Educational programmes now constitute 50% of what Axis does in a year. They run a number of workshops for children and adults and have weekly classes open to both experienced and less experienced dancers. More than anything, Axis is marketed as a professional Contemporary company and prides itself on being on the same level as some of the best companies around the world.

Unexpected bodies in unexpected spaces

Given that disability signifies the cultural antithesis of the fit, healthy body, what happens when visibly disabled people move into the role of dancer, the very same role that has been historically reserved for the glorification of an ideal body? Does the integration of disabled bodies into contemporary dance result in a disruption of ableist preconceptions about professional dance? Or does the disabled body "transcend" its disability to become a dancer? (Cooper-Albright, 1997:57)

The title of this presentation is informed by a conversation with Mazique, a fellow Axis Summer Intensive participant, while talking about the ways in which disability creates new choreographic possibilities in dance. The disabled body in dance, as Cooper-Albright suggests, is unexpected because it is 'the cultural antithesis of the fit, healthy body'. By implication, this unexpected body transforms the normative space into an unexpected performative space. The question Cooper-Albright asks however, forced me to think about how disability disrupts notions of the elusive body, the ephemeral body in dance, rendering it undeniably material or physical.

Cooper Albright's question led me to think about what happens when an unexpected body and historically reserved performative space, such as the stage, combine. In some instances, the outcome has been a commitment to aesthetic ideals - in which a dancer's disability is disguised in an attempt to 'normalize' it within the performative space (Cooper Albright, 1997). In a review of 'Choreographing difference', Jackson states that "inclusion does not always guarantee reformation of the representational structures of performance" (Jackson, 2001:246). These instances therefore

do not challenge the representational category of dance; rather it perpetuates limiting ideals about dance more generally and the dancing body in particular. As previously stated, I suggest that both Axis and Remix successfully disrupt ableist preconceptions: not by glossing over disability but through a direct engagement with it.

Rather than have the disabled dancers move exactly like the non-disabled dancers or trying to hide the fact that somebody is disabled, we capitalise on that because I love the way that wheelchairs move and the stillness those of us that live in them have. I love the architecture that is created when you have somebody like Emily on crutches, when you have a dancer like one of our dancers Lisa who is a quadruple amputee without prosthetics, with her walking legs with her cheetah running legs, it just radically expands the possibilities and you can't do that with a group of people who are more or less in the same body moving the same way (Judith Smith, August 2012).

Judith Smith, founder and artistic director of Axis, beautifully articulates that it is disability that creates new and exciting possibilities in dance. This would not be possible if everyone 'moved in the same way'. Axis fully embraces its status as an integrated company and uses it as an opportunity to work with all types of bodies in imaginative ways. South African dance practitioner Cilna similarly had this to say about Remix:

Firstly as a choreographer you have to not think of a body as less able but rather as having other abilities. So it's not like oh no, my dancer doesn't have legs so there is less that I can do with him, rather look at what you can do with that dancer because he doesn't have legs. Because I really feel that some of the movements that Zama did would not have been possible if he did have legs. Also from a conceptual point of view and from an intellectual point of view it just opens up so many more corridors and for a choreographer who does want to sort of tackle social issues and have audiences think about the medium of dance especially I think it such a great way of exploring that... it's a great way to make your audience think about what dance can be, should be and what it doesn't have to be, you know? (Cilna, July 2012).

Cilna, like Judith, foregrounds the ways in which disability expands the possibilities in dance. She suggests that certain movements would not have been possible if Zama had legs. Thereby she alludes to a different 'vocabulary of movement' available to dancers and choreographers in integrated companies. In addition, Cilna refers to the ways in which integrated companies, who really engage with disability, connect with social issues and can use performance as a way to challenge normative dance ideals. It provides a space for dialogue around issues of social inequality. This is particularly prevalent in the South African context.

Conclusion

In this presentation I suggested that disability creates new possibilities not only in dance but especially in choreography. The vocabulary of movement is radically expanded and allows choreographers to experiment with different bodies and modes of mobility to create interesting

movements. Moreover, in a country like South Africa with a painful history of colonialism and apartheid, integrated dance takes on new meaning. I suggest that integrated dance offers novel ways of bringing people together through a shared love of movement. It thus has the ability to represent a model for nation building, through which new identities can be constructed for both dancers and audience. This being said, the implications for research of this nature extend beyond dance. Through changing what dancers and audiences imagine as being possible in that arena, this type of research also offers insights into nation-building and identity reimaginings in other spheres of political and social life, allowing for more constructive engagement around issues of access and inclusivity.

References

Cooper-Albright, A. 1997; *Choreographing Difference: The body and identity in Contemporary dance*. United States of America: Wesleyan University Press.

Friedman, S. Edit. 2012; *Post-Apartheid Dance: many bodies, many voices, many stories*. Newcastle on Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Jackson, N. 2001; Recent trends in dance and cultural studies. *Dance Chronicle*. 24 (2):243-248.

Samuel, G. 2012; Left Feet First: dancing disability. In *Post-Apartheid Dance: many bodies, many voices, many stories*. S. Friedman, Ed. UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Interviews:

Cilna Katzke (27/07/2012, Cape Town)

Mazique (10/08/2012, Oakland)

Judith Smith (11/08/2012, Oakland)

coraliepearlvalentyn@gmail.com

DANCING [MY] VERNACULAR: INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF THE CHOREOGRAPHER-FACILITATOR WORKING WITH A DIVERSITY OF BODIES IN THE DEVISED CREATION PROCESS OF *ONTWRIG*.

Estelle Olivier

University of Stellenbosch

Abstract

How can I use the body's vernacular language to serve the message of my performance work? How do I hide the [in]adequacies of diverse bodies? These questions often accompany my creative process as a choreographer in dramatic, instead of dance, contexts. How and where do I begin this time in creating this work? The reality of working with diversity (in bodies and cultures) has often challenged my chosen method of working and led me to repeatedly choose the role of a choreographer-facilitator over a "top-down" choreographic approach. This change in perspective transpired out of a growing realisation that South African theatre makers/performance creators and/or dance makers find themselves in a uniquely 'multi-cultured' space. A diversity of perspective often blooms into a reality where the convergence of background and training takes place and can yield something 'new' or 'surprising'; yet the challenges presented by different ethnicities, modes of training, experience and artistic tendencies/perspectives can often present multiple obstacles during a creative process. Turning these obstacles into opportunities is a key strategy of a devised working/theatre process that relies on the fundamental principles of ensemble and facilitation.

*Underpinned by the theories on ensemble and choreography (Burrows 2010, Butterworth 2009, & Lavender 2010), this paper will share some perspectives surrounding the navigation of such a process during the creative development of *Ontwrig* – a production -that combined multi-faceted performance aesthetics, including improvisation, dance theatre, puppetry and stop-motion animation.*

Introduction: Dissecting past strategies

The only constant factor is that while potentially paralysing obstacles may arise during dance creation, artistic solutions from one dance rarely satisfy the needs of the next.

(Lavender in Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009:71).

Reflecting on my methods as choreographer over the past decade has allowed me to observe how I have gradually and intuitively shifted my strategy. My original approach was to take responsibility for all aspects of the choreography. For example, I would plan and construct every step, action and intention before encountering my performers. In rehearsal, I would then simply teach the vocabulary to the performers. I was under the impression that this would be the most effective way to structure/create a dance. I also believed that by using this strategy I could remain in control of an environment that often proved intimidating, overwhelming and unpredictable.

This approach was perhaps a response to the fact that over the last decade, the styles, genres and forms of performance that I have been asked to choreograph for include Musical Theatre, Children's Theatre, Dramatic Theatre, Physical Theatre and Site-specific Theatre for purposes as diverse as education or training; professional theatre and performance; and community-based interactions.

The performers I have worked with range from individuals with no formal movement or dance training, students with limited and sporadic movement training or non-theatrical techniques; to professional performers with a wide variety of training backgrounds that may not always include formal or expressive dance. As a result, I have found myself constantly challenged to create meaningful work on performers with a variety of body types, ethnicities, cultures, skills and aptitudes, in a diversity of theatre and performance contexts.

However, whilst using this “top-down” choreographic approach I frequently observed that performers found it difficult to perform the steps correctly or, more importantly, with conviction. Despite the fact that I used vocabulary that I thought was at an appropriate technical level, I still sensed that the choreography never really seemed to sit appropriately on these bodies. In turn, this led to rehearsals filled with on-the-spot re-evaluations of the vocabulary I had so carefully constructed beforehand. This challenged me to adjust my original vocabulary and sometimes even my interpretation of the dances in the moment.

Coming from a formal dance background, and having only choreographed on formally-trained dancers before arriving in a context of dramatic arts education, I readily attributed the problem I encountered to a lack of technique on the side of the performers I worked with. I also questioned my ability to find suitable vocabulary during my private creative sessions. I kept finding myself asking: How can I put a Band-Aid on the performer's 'lack' of technique? And yet, actors and performers in dramatic arts education do receive training in a variety of techniques. Other questions started appearing/recurring: What am I missing? Is it possible to find a way to elicit the technique(s) that may already be there from the performers?

Implementing Improvisation

In my on-going process - facilitating/teaching movement and physical theatre in a tertiary academic institution and choreographing for semi-professional and professional productions I began, more often than not, to work with suggestion and improvisation as mechanisms to elicit vocabulary. I realised that I had begun to work with an approach that lay somewhere in between improvisation and executing a pre-planned idea. For example, I would typically start the working process or a rehearsal with an improvisation, then depending on how the performer(s) seemed to interpret this, I would add more parameters to arrive at a vocabulary that would best suit the dramatic context. I would intuitively use the improvisation as a strategy to observe the performer's approach to a task,

problem and/or challenge. Burrows (2010:27) affirms the value of such an approach by suggesting that both the act of improvising and choreography “is a negotiation with the patterns your body is thinking.”

I discovered that these improvisations provided the opportunities for movement patterns and preferences to present themselves. What I have come to recognise as my intuitive choreographic strategy is to try to sense what the performer’s natural abilities and strategies are and then shape these into a vocabulary for performance.

Whilst the value of this approach was apparent, it also posed problems. Firstly, improvisation requires as much skill as any formal/pre-determined technique from both the participants and the facilitator if creative impulses are to be guided and/or shaped appropriately. The complication that I have encountered in using this approach is that when the dancer/performer is not invested in being a co-author of the work, and is not necessarily prepared to (or expecting to have to) improvise, the process and (the creation of a potentially inspired) product can fail miserably. Secondly, the vocabulary arrived at/originated may simply end up being a stylisation of the performer’s habitual movement patterns. The third problem I have encountered is articulated by Burrows (2010:25): “Working in this way can produce a lot of material very fast. It isn’t, however, always easy to know how to use what you find.”

Negotiating choreographic approaches

Butterworth’s “Didactic-Democratic framework model” proposes five possible working relationships for the choreographer and dancer (2009:177). I found this model useful in dissecting my own practice and aiding me to understand and improve on what had been an intuitive¹ approach to the choreographic process.

Butterworth’s model combines strategies for choreography that extends from a standpoint where the choreographer takes full responsibility for the artistic outcome, and then gradually shifts this relationship between dancer and choreographer by increasing the dancer’s creative responsibility. In the first mentioned approach, the choreographer is the expert and may be perceived as autocratic by the dancer who remains an instrument in the choreographer’s hands. Eventually, on the democratic end of Butterworth’s scale, the dancer and the choreographer share ownership of the process and product and function as an ensemble (Butterworth 2009:186-190). Although a choreographer or dancer may prefer one method to another, Butterworth (2009:186) maintains that all five processes

¹ Based on theories contextualised by Pressing, I maintain that when working intuitively one is immediately combining the information and/or knowing gathered from different perceptive capabilities (body-mind connection, gauging environmental influences, feeling sense) and prior experience (including cognition) in a process of deduction to inform decision making. (Pressing in Keefe and Murray, 2007:73-74).

may occur during the creation of a single work and “the choreographer or workshop leader makes conscious decisions about the appropriateness of an approach at a particular point in time, depending on the context, the participant needs, and the intended outcome.”

The democratic model in this framework has become more apparent and attractive to me in my personal working process for three reasons.

1. It has allowed a more fluid organisation of knowledge transference between all participants.
2. It offers an alternative to the perception that the role of the choreographer is to remain (or appear) in control of all situations during the creative process, a perception that I have often experienced as rigid, intimidating and debilitating. The democratic approach allows a collective to guide the outcome and has allowed me to trust my senses and intuition to gauge a situation rather than work with a preconceived idea or towards a set outcome.
3. It offers an organic way of navigating diversity of any kind. Butterworth (2009:191) reflects on this and proposes that “[...] those who choose to work together invent methods for dealing with the reconciliation of difference.” Skills of negotiation, building of trust and mutual respect can be the fruits of this shared labour.

Performance Project - Ontwrig

An opportunity to test and refine some of these recurring questions, preferences, observations as discussed above presented itself when a colleague, Professor Petrus du Preez approached me to participate in the creation of a Practise as Research (PaR) performance project. This project formed part of a larger NRF (South Africa) and FWO (Belgium) funded project² between the University of Stellenbosch Drama Department (US Drama) and the University of Ghent S:PAM (Studies in Performing Arts and Media). The objective of the larger research project was to investigate the Theatre Puppet and Trauma in performance in Post-Apartheid South Africa. This performance work - *Ontwrig*³ offered me an opportunity to investigate my approach to choreography further through a PaR methodology. US Drama uses PaR as an integrated methodology that underpins the approach to teaching, curriculum design and structure. Essentially the inclusion of PaR supports a preference towards an active learning process where students interrogate their own learning through active participation and reflection. This provides different approaches in which the students can involve themselves in a creative process and creates a natural opportunity for extending this type of learning

² The larger research project is named: *Masks, Puppets and Performative Objects in Relation to Trauma, Reconciliation and Performance in South Africa*.

³ *Ontwrig* is an Afrikaans word meaning disrupted or disjointed.

process into a devised creation process. The nature of this project also allowed me to investigate the role of the choreographer when challenged by working with diverse bodies.

Selecting the Performers - Collaboration

In the gap between what you each agree with, and what you disagree with, is a place where you might discover something new. It will most likely be something you recognise when you see it, but didn't know that you knew. This is the reason to collaborate (Burrows 2010: 58).

Du Preez and I both decided to perform in the work as well as share the artistic leadership throughout this project. Our previous shared creative contexts were in text-based theatre where we each fulfilled a more traditional role as director (Du Preez) or choreographer (Olivier). The context of *Ontwrig* offered an opportunity for us to discover new territory by attempting a different kind of collaboration. We also embraced the opportunity to test creative ideas with/against one another and draw on our experience to test strategies and methods of working.

With our expertise in Dance and Physical Theatre (Olivier), Acting and Puppetry (Du Preez) respectively, we envisioned the aesthetic of the work to be visual and physical. My strategy was to work with a physical theatre approach because it allows this transference between body, self and creative idea and it lends itself towards the approaches of facilitation and ensemble. Mindful that we did not intuitively share the same approach and considering all aspects of the project, we eventually settled for the idea of devised theatre. Although Du Preez and I brought the original motivation for the work forward, the contribution of the group was of the utmost importance to us.

Collaboration is about choosing the right people to work with, and then trusting them. You don't, however, have to agree about everything. Collaboration is sometimes about finding the right way to disagree (Burrows 2010: 58).

Burrows points to the complex interplay between collaborators when devising work. In Butterworth's framework model she suggests that the relationship of *choreographer as facilitator/dancer as creator* as well as the *choreographer/ dancer as co-owner* of the work require certain interpersonal and creative skills from both parties (Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009:186-189). Such processes require careful guidance and negotiation to try to elicit the most appropriate ideas to make the product successful. The selection of the other performers therefore became paramount.

Through a rigorous and careful audition process, we chose six student performers to work with us on this production. The nature of enquiry and research as well as the preferred method of generating material for *Ontwrig* led us to consider the following factors in the selection process:

1. Does the individual demonstrate the ability to communicate their personal perspective, as well as reflect in a meaningful way on the contributions of others?

2. Does the individual demonstrate a technical competency in all foundational aspects of performance, as well as responsiveness to the styles of performance (puppetry and dance) that we deemed necessary for this production?
3. Does the individual demonstrate the ability to originate non-verbal vocabulary with confidence through improvisation and play?
4. Does the individual offer a physical vernacular that would contribute to the thematic/conceptual possibilities of the performance?

When suggesting that a performer possesses a physical vernacular I am arguing that an individual has a characteristic physical language or vocabulary that is a convergence of their inherent, habitual, cultural, personal and formalized movement patterns -a physical slang if you will. In performance contexts where non-verbal expressive modes are significant, a performer may refine such a language into a sophisticated physical vernacular vocabulary through which they can express meaning.

5. Is the final selection of cast members inclusive of a range of ethnicities, cultures and languages?
6. Does the individual demonstrate the ability to function in the context of an ensemble?

From these factors, it is possible to identify a primary consideration with finding bodies whose variation in physical vernacular could serve the message of the performance work as well as performers who showed a sense of agency in their practise.

The Process: Methods, strategies, failures and red flags

The original choice to work with devised theatre confirmed itself because of this need to work with autobiographical material and as a strategy to navigate the above-mentioned differences. I carefully considered how to set up the circumstances and environment with which to facilitate this type of exchange. In a discussion of his own creative process/working with ensemble and/or improvisation, Britton states:

I establish the environment of the work, introduce the principles that inform it, guide the performers' attention, provide permission to take risks, judge when to push and when to pull back. I also represent the audience. I am the 'other' beyond the others of the ensemble. If I do not work through the principles, I undermine the entire process
(Britton 2013:317).

I find this navigation process by far one of the most challenging aspects, as it does not simply involve creating a fixed/predictable environment but demands being readily available and able to sense the emotional space of each participant and shift the environment accordingly. In my experience, this requires constant in-process reflection on your own actions as project leader.

Attempting to gauge the effectiveness and nature of this type of performative process was part of the PaR methodology, and interviews were conducted with the performers towards this end.

Langa, for instance, revealed that she found the creative process different to other processes she had participated in as a student-performer. She also found it demanding because the material came from a personal place. (Langa [student-performer], personal interview May 2015) Abrahams also comments on the demands of the process:

I found it challenging at some points because there was a kind of pressure [...] to produce stuff that would mean something, but then the less I would stress about it the more it would mean something. (Abrahams [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

Langa further highlights this tension between personal expression/exposure and meaningfulness when she suggests that the guidance provided by Du Preez and myself enabled her personal contribution to become aesthetically refined, yet remain truthful. (Langa [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

These comments and observations point to the difficult art of mindfulness required by a choreographer in such a creative process/context who needs to discern in-process between valid doubts and an debilitating inner critic. Lavender refers to these as red flag moments that may present themselves in process as “small, disconnected, and/or previously unaddressed worries.” He suggests that a choreographer often only makes sense of these when engaging in critical reflection during or after the process (Lavender in Butterworth & Wilschut, 2009:81). In the next section, I would like to discuss the recognition of two such concerns.

1 Eliciting the vernacular vocabulary

Ontwrig was constructed entirely from material originated through improvisations, personal stories or researched narratives. Du Preez and myself, identified four predetermined categories to explore, organise and contextualise the material. The categories were *Archive*, *History* (apartheid), *Body* (post-apartheid) and *Memory* (personal). The process of eliciting these stories was a complex navigation.

Because we are working with performance as research and a lineage of practice and how other people have worked, especially in [with regards to] appropriating the personal and the autobiographical, we decided to experiment with Pina Bausch’s way of working - just asking questions. We [didn’t] know what the questions were, and that is basically the first question: what *is* the question? (Du Preez, personal interview March 2015).

Drawing inspiration from Bausch's⁴ process, Du Preez and I asked ourselves and the other performers questions concerning ideas and experiences of trauma in relation to apartheid, post-apartheid, identity and racial tensions. Here are examples of some of the questions asked during informal group discussions: What do you view as trauma? What image(s) do you associate with trauma? What is your body's experience of/response to trauma/a traumatic event? Is there a difference when the trauma is private as opposed to public?

This initial inquiry led us to find questions that might be considered appropriate for exploration in our specific performative context. For example: What should I have done differently in the event/situation that caused the trauma? Have I ever caused trauma? Who knows about my/the trauma? What is the trauma of our time/generation?

Other mechanisms of inquiry included asking the performers to: research their family origins; interview their parents and/or extended family's about their experiences and memories of (post)apartheid South Africa; engage in creative writing exercises on their own experiences related to these themes.

From here, the collective's personal interpretations and viewpoints inspired my design of improvisations to elicit vocabulary. For example, the final scene in *Ontwrig* is a dance sequence that is the result of combining the diverse vernaculars that were derived from multiple different bodies. The sequence was developed from improvisations centred around ideas of feeling restricted, and an image of twisting hands - two themes or orientations that were provided by the performers' original responses to how they viewed trauma. Some perspectives from the performers on this process:

I actually really enjoyed [...] that we could come up with our own vocabulary and explore and see how certain things, simple exercises would actually [...] bring up things that [...] mean something significant. (Abrahams [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

It was more a thing of also being asked how I thought of things, how I interpreted things... not just doing the moves but having a meaning behind those moves also that correlated with what was going on internally. (Langa [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

Our individual interpretations of working through it had an opportunity to come through because we workshopped things. (Swartz [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

These observations gathered from informal interviews with the cast formed part of my personal process of critical reflection, and I was able to deduce that the interviews, tasks and improvisational methods used during the workshop process were effective for eliciting meaningful personal or autobiographic narratives and vocabulary.

⁴ Pina Bausch is widely regarded as a pivotal choreographer/theatre maker in the style of (German) *Tanztheater*. The methods and mechanisms she used to elicit thematically appropriate vocabulary from her dancers have been inspirational to both Du Preez and myself, and felt to be appropriate for this process.

During one of the interviews, an insightful opinion presented itself. Petersen stated that although he felt his connection to the work (*Ontwrig*) was highly personal and found the process meaningful, he had difficulty embodying the vocabulary because he experienced a lack of emotional connection to the work. When comparing this to a previous production (*Swyg*) he realised when he did experience an emotional connection he was also the author of the work. He reflected that the vocabulary was more habitual to the body and it changed the way he felt about it. When comparing this experience to the vocabulary he generated in *Ontwrig*:

I feel like it is not things that I would generally do or regularly do, it's not organic for me. I like to work with my pelvis a lot, the squiggly watery stuff. [The] linear movements challenged me the most. (Petersen [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

On reflection, this comment seems to confirm that I facilitated a process of challenging an individual performer's habitual patterns, especially since I felt it necessary for, and encouraged, the cast to learn the vernacular language of other performers in an attempt to find an ensemble/collective vocabulary. Petersen's insight, however, led me to question the success of this process of meaning making at the level of the individual performer: did my quest for inclusivity actually end up excluding the individual?

The inclusion and navigation of multiple perspectives therefore became another red flag concern. Heaton voices a similar a concern when he observes that collaborative processes all too frequently "are dulled into bland, obscure banality" by too much compromise and cooperation (Heaton in Butterworth & Wildschut, 2009:191).

2 Inviting multiple perspectives

Apart from its value as a performance product for viewing by a public audience, *Ontwrig* also served as a learning opportunity in the context of dramatic arts education. For this reason, it was important for me as an educator to create an environment in which all cast members as student-performers could contribute, as a means of facilitating their personal growth and agency as performing artists and/or educators. In some instances, it became clear that the decision to work in this way was fruitful:

I enjoyed it a lot; especially when we sat down to listen to each other's stories because people don't take the time to do that anymore. I found it very inspiring, I don't know it just sparked up something new to be able to make theatre from people's actual stories. It was challenging also in the sense of going to dig up stories from my family, having to scratch open old wounds again, to listen to other people's wounds and then just comparing how the stories actually are [...].

And almost all the cast members reflected that the process of working with a diverse group, and being given the opportunity to consider multiple angles, changed their personal perspectives:

Seeing that we're working in the context of South African theatre and racism and all that kind of thing [...], if there was one person choreographing it we wouldn't get the whole different angles thing. And because we came from different backgrounds, we could share our aspects which gave it that, I think, [...] that variety. So if it was one choreographer or just two I don't think it would have been the same. (Abrahams [student-performer], personal interview May 2015)

Abrahams indicates a sense of shared creativity and ownership. However, on a practical level there were still places where setting up an environment to allow the group to guide the choreographic eye, or allowing everyone to inform the ideas being used, or inviting multiple perspectives into the creative space, led to conflicts and confusions. For example, improvisational processes may yield a lot of source material, some of which may not serve the purpose of the work. The selection of appropriate material can then be difficult, and sometimes involve a painful decision for both choreographer(s) and performer(s), as it may prove difficult to preserve the value of an individual's personal expressive contribution or artistic sense when it is not included in the final performance.

Inside Outside: Practical problems and solutions

I used different strategies to navigate these kinds of situations. For example, I deliberately used the thoughts presented in *The Choreographers Handbook* (2010) by Jonathan Burrows to challenge and question my decisions and that of the fellow creative/performers during the process. Burrows wrote his handbook in a way that it offers multiple perspectives – much in the same way one may experience when working as a collective – challenging different thoughts and angles of the choreographic approach. This enabled me to pose questions that I would not generally think of.

A second very real concern became apparent in the decision that Du Preez and I had made about being both facilitators and performers: performing and guiding a work constantly divides your attention both as choreographer and as performer. "If you think *about* work while you are *doing* work, you are not paying full attention to the reality of each moment. You are not [a]live" (Britton 2013:319).

Britton accurately describes what I felt as my own experience of performing in a work that I was also choreographing/facilitating. During rehearsals, right up until final technical rehearsals, I was constantly focusing on the process of other performers, trying to remember details of changes/corrections/directions that needed to still be made, and not allowing myself full attention during performance practise. Du Preez states that being an insider in the process may be easier during the earlier stages of devising. He felt that it became difficult for himself to navigate when the process required the selection of focal points for staging as well as a sustained sense of the "general arc of performance" (Du Preez, personal interview May 2015).

In our case, the need for a reliable outside eye became increasingly important. One strategy we used was to record almost all generated material. This offered me an opportunity to study the material on my own in preparation for the next rehearsal. The problems I encountered with this strategy were that it sometimes took away from the process of embodiment⁵ and physical sense making. Another element is that a video camera cannot always capture and convey the mood and environment that live performance creates. Therefore, while some material may seem 'flat' on camera it may convey a different feeling in performance. This often became a time consuming endeavour that caused split focus and unnecessary distractions.

A second strategy was to invite an outside perspective from appropriate mentors. The reflections of our Belgium collaborators as well as our colleagues at US Drama offered again a multitude of choices that needed evaluation, discussion and decision. Du Preez notes that because of this navigation of different roles he felt his normal director's perspective fade away to be able to look at choreographic elements. (Du Preez, personal interview May 2015) This reveals some of the new perspectives and discoveries that collaboration can yield.

During further consideration, Du Preez and I realized that the performance had too many elements on stage that may have contradicted one another. Aesthetically the production needed clarification. When considering the student performers' reflection on their experience I sense the value of this process to lie not in the product but in the journey towards it.

There is this mind-set or this idea that you are working with a freedom [...]. Sometimes if something didn't work for a person or if we forgot it over a while there was room to put in new things (Swartz [student-performer], personal interview May 2015).

To me it feels that that [the final performance] is just a product of everything that is meaningful, but what we developed and how we developed is more special for me. There's a lot of works that came out but that we never used, and that is what I appreciated (Petersen -student performer, personal interview May 2015).

It's given me [...] a clearer way [...] for future works of knowing how I can go about creating something, that it's not necessarily the obvious (Swartz [student-performer], personal interview May 2015).

Conclusion

While the devised theatre approach has its obvious disadvantages and may seem time consuming and taxing, I propose that it offers insight to facilitating the choreographer and dancer/performer to discover creative strategies to deal with issues brought forward by diversity and the unpredictability of the creative working environment. Furthermore, this method of working is a valuable tool in the

⁵ I understand embodiment as a process of repetition so that an action becomes second nature coupled with this in the realm of performance there is an imbedded understanding of the meaning and quality of embodied actions.

environment of training and education as can offer a space where a young creative can test their skills and develop a sense of agency and innovation.

Bibliography:

Britton, J. 2013. Self-with-Others: A psychophysical approach to training the individual in ensemble. In: J Britton. Ed. *Encountering Ensemble*. London, New Dehli, New York and Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Burrows, J. 2010. *A Choreographers Handbook*. London and New York: Routledge.

Butterworth, J. 2009. Too Many Cooks? A framework for dance making and devising. In: J. Butterworth, & L Wildschut, Eds. *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lavender, L. 2009. Facilitating the Choreographic Process. In: J Butterworth J & L. Wildschut, Eds. *Contemporary Choreography: A Critical Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Pressing, J. 2007. Improvisation – Methods and Models. In: J Keefe & S. Murray, Eds. *Physical Theatres: A Critical Reader*. London and New York: Routledge.

Interviews:

Personal interview with Andrico Goosen, conducted by Estelle Olivier on 21 May 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Caleb Petersen, conducted by Estelle Olivier on 21 May 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Dawid Joubert, conducted by Estelle Olivier on 21 May 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Katlego Langa, conducted by Estelle Olivier on 25 May 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Liezel Swartz, conducted by Estelle Olivier on 21 May 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Lindsey Abrahams, conducted by Estelle Olivier on 21 May 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Professor Petrus du Preez, conducted by Marieke Breyne on 19 March 2015, Stellenbosch.

Personal interview with Professor Petrus Du Preez, conducted by Estelle Olivier 21 May 2015, Stellenbosch

estelleb@sun.ac.za

**LEAVING A DIGITAL FOOTPRINT:
THE IMPORTANCE OF AN ONLINE PRESENCE IN SOUTH AFRICAN DANCE AND
CHOREOGRAPHY.**

Ester van der Walt
Rhodes University

Abstract

The internet has become a prominent, if not the predominant, portal for information sharing. Although I understand the internet could not possibly hold all information, a part of me wants to believe that it holds all the important/necessary/relevant/useful information I need. I have come to realise that others believe this myth too. So it stands to reason that if information cannot be found online, it possibly won't be found at all. This realisation brought me to the conclusion that, as an up-and-coming South African choreographer, my work should be available online. Online archiving offers useful and user-friendly ways to deal with a personal archive. A plethora of free options exist for creating an online presence, and although initiatives like the Ar(t)chive give an opportunity for a "one-stop-shop" of more established choreographers, there are also options for lesser known practitioners to share their work. This paper focusses on online archiving filmed performances and considers my findings regarding the online presence of South African choreography. This paper also shares a few simple and free ways to generate a digital footprint online.

In informational terms, use of the internet clearly has the potential to influence the capacity of 'ordinary' citizens and resource-poor social or political groups to gain information and expertise through vastly increasing the range of information that is freely available to any internet user, on virtually any subject imaginable (Fenton, 2012:123).

Platforms for sharing visual records of performance works, such as YouTube, are free and easy to use. It seems that it is easier than ever before to generate a publically accessible archive of artistic works. And yet it is still incredibly difficult to access recorded footage of a number of highly influential South African choreographers' works. I was profoundly struck by the great need for South African choreographers to generate online archives for their works on two separate occasions. The first was during my time as an assistant researcher for Jeannette Ginslov's P(AR)take (2014), and digital retrospective of dance as seen at the National Arts Festival during its 40 years. The second was during a seminar series presented in 2014 by Prof Juanita Finestone-Praeg, artistic director of First Physical Theatre Company at that time, regarding the expansive and ground-breaking body of work of the company. In both of these instances I gained access, for the first time, to performances which have shaped the landscape of South African choreography and dance. It seems illogical that I had gained a general knowledge of American and European dance history (as information and footage of many of these international choreographers is easily available online) and yet, as a South African choreographer, I was engaging with footage of some

of these seminal South African works for the first time. Many of these works are not available online, not even partially. This limits the visibility of South African choreography locally and globally.

It has become easier than ever before for choreographers of diverse and varying economic and social backgrounds to reach a widespread national and international audience through the use of free online platforms such as YouTube. Although recording equipment is still expensive, the advent of more sophisticated yet reasonably priced technologies for camera phones have made it quite possible to record a performance without needing to buy or rent out expensive professional equipment, and a number of free video editing programmes are available for download online. These more accessible technologies can serve as a way to record performances, as well as a portal to the internet so that those recordings can be shared. Even if these records do not turn up first on your chosen search engine, the fact is that those records can be accessed by any critic, writer or researcher who has access to the internet. Once information is available it is at the very least in the position to be considered by a broader audience of writers, researchers, critics and potential audience members as part of the South African choreographic landscape.

Consequently a number of significant questions emerge: Why is it so difficult to gain access to seminal choreographic works made in the past, and equally, why are records of more current works unavailable to the public for personal, professional and academic research purposes? A discussion of the necessity for a stronger online presence of South African dance and choreography may serve as one way to explore these complex questions regarding the archived history of South African dance and choreography.

Selective histories/ “The canon”/ Incomplete archives

Writing dance is the exception rather than the rule, and the impossibility of pinning it down has become a quality of the artform, a defining freedom. Dance can go on re-inventing itself, always concerned with the authenticity of the movement, always free of its own history (Burrows, 2000:30).

This freedom from history, and the resulting potential for dance to reinvent itself in an ‘authentic’ way, may sound very romantic and idyllic, but it must be problematised by the knowledge that the development of dance and choreography does not truly seem to exist outside of its own history, but rather exists within a selective history. Issues around a selective history in South African dance and choreography are not only influenced by the difficulties which have been experienced in the past when attempting to archive dance works, such as the difficulty in establishing a notational system for dance,

but also due to the sparseness of film and editing equipment. It is also influenced by the devaluing of many “non-white” artistic works during Apartheid when more emphasis was placed on preserving the works of white practitioners than black and coloured artists. Widespread access to cellphones with film capabilities and cheaper handheld cameras are recent developments. In the past, access to this kind of equipment was expensive. Consequently only a small number of artistic works were filmed and preserved in this way. Although there was a great deal of artistic development across racial divides in the country, the inaccessibility of resources has left South African dance and choreography with a selective recorded and filmed history.

This history is not only generated by the limited access to film equipment. It also exists due to the exclusion of a great many artists from open national platforms such as the Main National Arts Festival (Larlham, 2007:182-3), and from consideration for awards such as the Standard Bank Young Artist Awards during Apartheid. These events and awards generate a record for the country indicating the development of dance and choreography and the practitioners who had greatly influenced this development. Due to limited visual records, these kinds of textual archives become, in some cases, the only records of the developments of this history. Due to the exclusion of artists based on race rather than artistic achievement and innovation, the history accessible now is partial, and the canon of South African choreography could be said to be an incomplete and therefore an inaccurate representation of this history.

The canon is certainly developed from a particular bias. Those with the power to archive histories dictate which choreographers have significance for their view of the history of dance and choreography. It is not uncommon for archival institutions such as museums and libraries to serve as an indication of a shared national memory. This is due to the belief that archives can accurately express the past by presenting sources which refer to that past. The danger, however, is that these institutions can ‘create’ a national identity through the manner in which they select and present information (Furedi, 1993:5). Even if it is not intentionally destructive, the archivist or historian is always present in his/her own work, and this presence of personal beliefs will influence how information is presented. The views, desires and personal agendas of the historian and the society will inevitably impact on how the sources are experienced. This is due to the fact that recording and compiling history is a process filled with value judgements. The historian must decide what is important for future audiences to know, and which pieces of information can be disregarded (Curthoys & Docker, 2006:184).

Together with the bias that exists when generating an archive due to the historian's mediation of the records, another important consideration in the development of the canon is the availability of sources: records, reviews and process documents of choreographic works. When there are no, or limited, sources available regarding a choreographer and their work, it becomes difficult to research and write about, which, in part, results in the exclusion of these artists from the history of choreography and the South African canon. The exclusion of some works are not necessarily due to a bias or the tastes and trends of critics and academics. It is the inability to access information which leads to a lack of reflection on, and investigation into, these works.

The difficulties associated with this selective record keeping had a significant effect on the creation of the dance retrospective P(AR)take (2014) by Jeannette Ginslov. The retrospective engaged with a search for the development of a choreographic identity in South Africa, and traced the history of dance performed on the Main Stage at the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown. Ginslov served as artist and historian in the process of developing this work. The ten worksⁱ chosen to be included in P(AR)take attempted to represent some important political or historical aspect of the time they were created in.

The fact that only an incomplete history was available for Ginslov to draw on resulted in a re-presentation of the selective history and 'the canon'. Although the partial nature of the retrospective was stated and discussed with the audience, this does not change the fact that a prejudicial and partial history was restated. The acknowledgement of this partial nature does address the concern of a selective history, but it cannot rectify this history or construct a more inclusive history, as the available resources and the scope of the project could not allow for such a reconfiguration of history. In fact, it is difficult to say whether such a reconstruction is even possible, considering the sparseness of resources, and the exclusion of certain works from platforms such as the Main National Arts Festival in the past. P(AR)take presents a practical example of a problem which is faced by a great number of researchers. Although some primary data can be collected from practitioners and audiences who witnessed artistic work during Apartheid, a great deal of information seems at this time to be inaccessible.

Consequently, it is important to investigate current South African dance and choreography carefully in an attempt to generate a more complete idea of the developments in this field. Works such as P(AR)take endeavour to critically explore South African dance histories. The incomplete nature of our dance history should not only encourage these kinds of investigations, it may be useful to learn from the frustrations of dealing with a partial history by generating a more detailed archive of our current choreographic practices. Young choreographers could help to develop a culture of archiving by keeping

records of their own works which could make South Africa's history richer and more detailed for future researchers and practitioners.

The postmodern archive/ Remaining differently/ The artist's archive

An important concern when dealing with an archive is the question of whether or not the representation of the artwork as seen in the archive has a credible relation to the original work (Preston-Dunlop & Sayers, 2011:39). There may be the assumption that a filmed record of an event is a reliable replica of that event. This may, however, be a more complex issue. In the same way that written notation of dance can capture the 'surface form' or a template from which to create a work as closely related to the original as possible (Preston-Dunlop & Sayers, 2011:6), film may be said to capture the surface form as well. The surface form, however, is not the entire work. A performance is comprised of more than just the shapes of movements, as captured by the camera. The breath and intention of the performer; the attitude and level of attentiveness of the audience; and the possibility of being swallowed up by the world created through the performance or alienated as an audience member to remain aware of the theatre or performance space, all influence how a performance is experienced by a viewer. These elements, together with the movements of the performers, generate a particular experience and a particular memory of the event. It could be said that film only captures these elements partially and consequently, that "performance's only life is in the present" (Phelan, 1993:146).

It must, however, be considered that the archive or record of an art form does not necessarily need to capture the artistic event in its entirety. A partial record can be extremely useful for performance - which resists the possibility of a complete record through the very nature of the form (Phelan, 1993:146) - as long as this partial nature is known to the user. It is also important to acknowledge the restrictions of the subjective nature of remembering. This is not to say that an objective memory is more valuable than subjective memory, but only that considering something to be objective when it is in fact subjective may be damaging. It may be misleading to believe that a particular version of history is told objectively and to take that version of history as fact, when it is only one of many versions of an event or experience. This awareness of the subjectivity of memory should not be limited to the retellings of events by people, it should also be considered when viewing a filmed version of an event. The sense that the video camera is objective could be said to be false due to the limitations of the medium. Film captures what the camera operator chooses to capture and frames that experience in a digital space, making it possible to edit and manipulate the image, and therefore to manipulate the record of the

memory. The 'rememberer' is subjective, whether that rememberer is a person recounting a story from memory, or a filmed recording of an event (Fatseas, 2009:48).

Searching for dance through a filmed archive is perhaps a search for a 'lost object' (Freshwater, 2003:745). The object cannot be accessed by any means, as with live performed dance, once the moment has passed that performance is, in essence, gone. Any 'object' or representation found through research will not be the lost object, it will not be the dance. It will only be 'a substitute'. Freshwater (2003:745) continues to discuss this idea by stating that, "what we discover is as much a creation of our search for it as anything else." To view the movements on film is not the same as experiencing that performance live in its historical and spatial context.

A filmed record of a live performance not only removes the audience from a live engagement with the performer, it also removes the performance from its context. It no longer exists in the same space. The digital becomes its space, its site. The notion of film as a site for choreography introduces the significant difference between film used as a medium for dance and film used as a means of recording or documenting dance. In the same way that some performances are described as site-specific due to the non-traditional space used for the performance, filmed dance can be described as site-specific when creating a screendance work (Rosenberg, 2000:275).

Live performances which have been recorded are removed from their sites and contexts because the digital becomes the site of any movement captured on film. Whilst watching the recording it may be possible to see the original site, but the performance no longer exists in that space. The performance is placed in a virtual space. The audience member in a live performance has a certain level of agency in viewing which does not exist once the work is presented on film. The audience member can no longer choose where to look. The camera shows the audience where to look by excluding all other information from the frame. This is very interesting and effective in a screendance work because it allows the choreographer to focus on a particular movement in a certain way. When live performances are filmed so that a durable record of the work can exist, the filmed footage and the manner in which that footage is edited may engage with the same type of focus seen in screendance, but this is not necessarily an accurate record of what was available for viewing during the performance. In this way a durable record of a dance is different from a screendance work in that it is only a partial record of the performance, while a screendance work is a complete presentation of the intended choreography, as it was made to be experienced through the digital and the selective view of the frame.

The usefulness of a partial record can be seen through the tradition of Western music. There is a great deal of nuance and detail that cannot be expressed in the notation of music. Sheet music is an incomplete record of the music, because it can indicate a limited range of actions to be taken on an instrument, but it cannot fully account for the limitless possibilities within the musician playing the instrument. This, however, has not discouraged composers and musicians from the use of centralised systems of music notation which allow for the broad, and in a sense timeless, sharing of musical works. The recreations of these works will vary from musician to musician but this variation does not strip the field of its history. Music notation allows for the history of music to be archived in such a way that this history can be investigated, reinterpreted and experienced in a way which may not recreate the original event perfectly, but at the very least reanimates that history in a new and accessible way. In this way music notation can be seen as a vital means of generating an archival history of music which allows for a more postmodern conception of the archive in which there is the constant awareness that all information is influenced by the means through which it is mediated for the purpose of archiving (Nesmith, 2002:26).

The choreographer and dancer's instrument, the body, requires a more detailed notation than music, as it can exist in more dimensions than music does (Burrows, 2000:30). The notation of this instrument is incredibly complex, considering that the body has an infinitely wider range of possibilities than a musical instrument. The advent of film, and the increasing accessibility of film enabled equipment such as cellphones, could be said to provide choreography and dance communities with the universal 'notation' that some of its practitioners have been trying to develop. This means of archiving dance does not present a complete record of the work, but in the same way that sheet music allows for the music to remain differently, so too film could be seen as the way to generate a history of dance and choreography that remains in a different yet still useful way (Schneider, 2001).

This means of archiving may also provide the opportunity to build up a more complex and inclusive archival history of dance and choreography. Through the use of online platforms such as YouTube works can now be publically archived for free, and retrieved by those who have internet access. This may allow the selective history of dance to expand beyond the canons of dance and choreography to include a broader representation of works as we develop our own history from current artistic explorations.

Complex archives/hidden histories

When film is considered a durable record of an event it becomes one piece of a puzzle. It is a central piece, but it cannot stand alone. Robin Nelson's (2013: 26) engagement with practice as researchⁱⁱ lists a durable record of a performance as a vital part of a research endeavour which uses performance as a central means of exploring or disseminating the research. It does, however, list the durable record as a result of a primary product or performance, and includes process documentation and complementary writing as necessary for this kind of research. The durable record does not create a comprehensive picture by itself. The filmed record together with historical information, programme notes, reviews and interviews, creator's notes and any other available source related to the work can be used to generate a fuller understanding of what the work may have been when it was performed. The film is important but only partial in its presentation of the work.

The First Physical Theatre Company have not only developed a broad body of work which span 20 years and a great deal of pioneering innovations for South African dance and physical theatre, but also have a detailed archive of these works. This archive includes filmed footage, programme notes, written analyses, cast lists and scripts. I engaged with these incredible resources for the first time during a seminar series by Prof Juanita Finestone-Praeg regarding the Company's work. The emphasis placed on documenting and archiving within the company indicates the development of a culture of archiving. These fascinating records seem to be, for the time being, a kind of hidden history. The Company has had a significant effect on South African dance and physical theatre with their members including innovative and interesting choreographers and performers such as Gary Gordon, Juanita Finestone-Praeg, Andrew Buckland and many more who have produced seminal South African works. This Company has created works which question the nature of art and performance and investigate a wide range of subjects, and yet, due to limited access to these records, the rich history presented through their archives has become somewhat hidden from the general public.

It was this engagement with such a rich and interesting archive which has encouraged me to generate my own archive, and which drives me to encourage other young artists to build up their archives. As young artists we have the opportunity to generate a more diverse archival history for future researchers. It seems vital to stimulate a culture of archiving so that it becomes what seems like an ordinary part of the process of creating work, similar to the culture of generating sheet music to record musical works as a standard practice for musicians and composers. Together with the development of archives I believe that accessibility to these archives is essential. When records become available to a

broad readership it becomes possible for performance works to live and exist outside of the performative moment, and to develop thought and creative practice in others in a widespread way.

Creating a personal archive/Web anxiety/Free resources

There are, of course, shelves and shelves full of books related to dance, choreography, performance, theatre history and numerous related subjects in libraries and bookshops. These are incredibly valuable and vital resources for research. Together with this there are also a great number of academic journals and magazines which have the potential to provide slightly more current information, as publication of these insights could be considered a speedier process than the publishing of a book. Beyond these avenues of information access, however, there is a great deal happening that is so current, or new, or undercover, or yet to be defined and understood or at the very least investigated, that this information cannot be found in books or journals. This information, which is likely being shared by the choreographer or dancer as they are happening, through a rehearsal blog or the updates on a website, as well as video and photo archives, cannot be accessed in many other ways. Other than direct contact with the artist, there is potentially no better way than an up to date online presence to share information with those who write about, research and watch choreography and dance.

Projects such as the Ar(t)chive are creating opportunities for established choreographers to archive not only makes it easier for journalists and researchers to reference works and generate scholarly interest in a choreographer, it is also a very important tool for generating an audience, as many people will look up an artist online before purchasing tickets to watch a show.

Leaving a digital footprint should not, however, take over a choreographer's life. The feeling of always being online and always updating the huge amount of online portals for information sharing, can become a source of anxiety (Cumiskey & Hjorth, 2013:3). Limiting the amount of sites you run can make a digital presence more manageable and effective. It may be prudent to create a website which contains all the information you wish to make public. If you make this website the central point for your online archive it becomes easy to manage and keep up to date. Sites such as weebly.com allow users to create and manage websites for free. They also provide templates for website designs so that users do not need to know anything about programming to generate a website. It is possible to pay for more features on these sites, but the free options are completely suitable for generating a central online reference point. When using the free options for these kinds of websites it becomes important to store images and video footage on another site, as free sites will limit the amount of images and videos you can save on

their servers. YouTube is a free and easy way to archive a large number of videos and to make them available to the public. YouTube has a wide membership and is easy to use. Ensure that your channel's name is either your full name or the name of your company so that it is easy for users to find. It's may seem impressive to have a lot of views on a video, but as an emerging choreographer the aim is perhaps not millions of views, but rather accessibility. Even if only one journalist watches your video, they can write about your work and reach a wide readership. Considering the dominance of Google as a search engine, I have chosen to use Google+ to archive photos of performances and casts. This means that when a user does a archive their works, and through a short registration process, the Ar(t)chive makes these works available to the public. However, for up and coming choreographers there are many free, online platforms which could make their work easily accessible to the public.

Building up an online

Google Image search with your name, it is likely that your images will appear in the early results. Google+ is a free platform that has the potential to increase your online visibility considering the great number of people using Google as their preferred search engine.

The use of just these three portals (a website, a video sharing site, and an image archive) can generate a comprehensive online presence, which gives users access to information, images and videos. However, when someone searches your name online one of the first search results that will come up is your Facebook profile. Some use Facebook for purely professional purposes, but others want to keep Facebook for private use, as a way to connect with friends and share personal content. If you would like to use Facebook for private rather than professional purposes then limiting the public information available to those who are not Facebook friends with you to just a profile and cover picture, as well as links to your website is important. This allows the user appropriate information to identify you, and provides links to website and information pages, which contain the information you want to make public. This allows for your webpage, which will only show up later in the search engine results, to be accessed quickly. If you use Facebook as your entrance point and guide users via Facebook to your archives, it becomes manageable to use a free site which will not show up early in search engine results, as the site will not become completely lost in the huge pool of information on the internet. The site address can also be given directly on business cards or in correspondence, so that this information is easily available and as inclusive as possible.

Conclusion

A filmed record of a dance work can be seen as a valuable resource. Once recorded, a work can be “transmitted and disseminated; it is transferable and renewable, and it can carry compressed information that can feed back into the choreographic process” (Delahunta & Shaw, 2006: 54). A record of the work allows for dance to cease to be an unknowable, intangible thing. The record gives the work a new context which may benefit a viewer greatly, albeit in a different way than the live performance would.

Generating an online presence, however, is not only about filmed footage. Although footage will likely be the source users refer to most regularly, an artistic archive can comprise of written sources and still images as well. These sources can be used to generate a rich and detailed archive of the choreographic process and the final work. Stimulating a culture of online archiving within the dance community in South Africa may allow for the creation of an interesting and immersive history of dance and choreography so that we can cease to work in the shadow of a partial history, and instead generate a broader field of knowledge, experiments and experiences to draw from for the further development of South African dance and choreography.

Reference List:

Burrows, J. 2000. Time, motion, symbol, line. *Eye Magazine*. 37:29-37.
Available: <http://www.jonathanburrows.info/downloads/TMSL.pdf> .[2014, 16 March].

Cumiskey, K.M. & Hjorth, L. 2013. Between the Seams: Mobile media practice, presence and politics. In K.M. Cumiskey & L. Hjorth Eds. *Mobile Media Practices, Presence and Politics: The challenge of being seamlessly mobile*. New York: Routledge: 1-11.

Curthoys, A. & Docker, J. 2006. *Is History Fiction?* Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.

Delahunta, S. & Shaw, N.Z. 2006. Constructing Memories: Creation of choreographic resource. *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*. 11(4):53-62.

Fatseas, A. 2009. *Body of Knowledge: Interrogating physical intelligence and the translation of memory into motion in Coming To*. University of Witwatersrand: Research report towards MADA by dissertation.

Fenton, N. 2012. The internet and social networking. In J. Curran, N. Fenton & D. Freeman. *Misunderstanding the Internet*. Oxon: Routledge: 123-148.

Freshwater, H. 2003. The Allure of the Archive. *Poetics Today*. 24(4):729-758.

Furedi, F. 1993. *Mythical Past, Elusive Future: History and society in an anxious age*. London: Pluto Press.

Larlham, D. 2007. Transforming geographies and reconfiguring spaces: South Africa's National Art's Festival. *The Drama Review*. 51(3):182-188.

Nelson, R. 2013. *Practice as Research in the Arts*. Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Nesmith, T. 2002. Seeing archives: postmodernism and the challenging intellectual place of archives. *The American Archivist*. 65(1):24-41.

Phelan, P. 1993. *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*. Oxon: Routledge.

Preston-Dunlop, V. & Sayers, L.A. 2011. Gained in Translation: recreation as creative practice. *Dance Chronicle*. 34(1):5-45.

Rosenberg, D. 2000. Video Space: A Site for Choreography. *Leonardo*. 33 (4):275-280.

Schneider, R. 2001. Archives performance remains. *Performance Research*. 6(2):100-108.

Bibliography:

Barber, S. & Peniston-Bird, C.M. 2007. Introduction. In S. Barber & C.M Peniston-Bird , Eds. *History Beyond the Text: A student's guide to approaching alternative sources*. Oxon: Routledge. : 1-14.

Berkhofer, R. F. Jnr. 2008. *Fashioning History: Current practices and principles*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Blenkinsop, L. 2009. The Internet: Virtual space. In S. Barber & C.M Peniston-Bird, Eds. *History Beyond the Text: A student's guide to approaching alternative sources*. Oxon: Routledge. 122-135.

Desai, D., Hamlin, J. & Mattson, R. 2010. Introduction. In D. Desai, J. Hamlin & R. Mattson, Eds. *History as Art, Art as History: Contemporary art and social studies education*. Oxon: Routledge: 3-14.

Desai, D. & Hamlin, J. 2010. Artists in the realm of historical methods: the sounds, smell and taste of history. In D. Desai, J. Hamlin & R. Mattson, Eds. *History as Art, Art as History: Contemporary art and social studies education*. Oxon: Routledge: 47-66.

Ginslov, J. 2014a. P(AR)take. Programme Note. *National Arts Festival*. Grahamstown: 161.

Ginslov, J. 2014b, July 4. *P(AR)take- @ the National Arts Festival. South Africa's first AR*

Dance Archive. Available: <http://www.screendanceafrica.com/news/2014/07/04/partake-the-national-arts-festival-south-africas-first-ar-dance-archive/> [2014, July 21].

Ginslov, J. (2014c, June 15). *P(AR)TAKE National Arts Festival 2014 by Jeannette Ginslov*. Film Trailer. Accessed 2014, July 21, from <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Qv1aUQw1GpE>

Grundy, K. 1993. The Politics of the National Arts Festival. *Occasional Paper, Number Thirty-Four*. Grahamstown: Rhodes University.

Isaacman, A., Lalu, P. & Nygren, T. 2005. Digitisation, history, and the making of a postcolonial archive of Southern African liberation struggles: The Aluka project. *Africa Today*. 52(2):55-77.

Lindes, J. 2014, July 8. Virtual reality ARrives at festival. *SABC News*. Available: <http://www.sabc.co.za/news/f1/80d3ca8044a7d84eae82ff3bfe17c0b1/Virtual-reality-ARrives-at-fest-20140708>. [2014, July 21].

O'Toole, J. 2006. *Doing Drama Research: Stepping into enquiry in drama, theatre and education*. City East: Drama Australia.

<http://estervanderwalt.weebly.com/>

Notes

ⁱ The ten choreographic works featured in P(AR)take are:

1. *Thabangita* (1984) Tossie van Tonder
2. *Gula matari* (1996) Vincent Mantsoe
3. *African moves* (1998) Debbie Rakusin and David Matamela
4. *Daddy I've seen this piece six times...* (2000) Robyn Orlin
5. *Clinical capsule* (2001) Jeannette Ginslov
6. *The unspeakable story* (2004) Gary Gordon
7. *Beautiful us* (2006) Gregory Maqoma
8. *Body of evidence* (2009) Jay Pather
9. *Isingqala* (2011) Mamela Nyamza
10. *Ndumba* (2013) Fana Tshabalala

ⁱⁱ Practice as research posits that performance or performance practices may serve as a means of generating knowledge. Robin Nelson outlines a possible approach to practice as research through which the creation of a performative work is in itself a kind of knowledge, a source of information, a methodology for research.

BLACK BODIES MATTER: WITH APOLOGIES TO BEYONCÉ

Gerard M. Samuel

University of Cape Town

Abstract:

The negotiation by showgirls who were seeking employ outside of South Africa in the 1970s is another exemplar of forgotten histories of Contemporary dance in South Africa. I parallel their journeys with the rise of black women choreographers in South Africa to argue for a wider reclaiming of 'black bodies that matter'. This paper draws on Ramsay Burt's theorisation of modernity and race (1998), and Andrea Stuart's (1996) pithy accounts of showgirls, to dispel dance histories of 'serious dancers'; examine the associated hyper-sexuality of some bodies and assert an egalitarianism in South African Dance that should not left unquestioned.

Keywords: *black bodies, showgirls, South Africa*

Introduction

When former principal dancer of Moving Into Dance Company, David April contacted me from Johannesburg earlier this year, he was clearly upset that the *Confluences* committee had not noticed its collapsing and association of musician Beyoncé with a Latino identity. I was taken aback. Was this a moment of administrative hiccup in the course of busy and often bureaucratic lives of academics or could this slippage be read as part of a much wider disregard when it comes to them/ the black folk/ the other in the arts. I wondered whether the committee, of which I am the Chair, would have messed up any foregrounding of Margot Fonteyn as e.g. a Czechoslovakian and not British ballerina. This got me thinking around the ways in which some bodies in Dance seem to matter more, and by implication, how other bodies matter less. What happens when we attempt to dance un-mattered bodies for our-selves and others? As a response to Gaytri Spivak's (Spivak, 1990) 'who is the authentic voice?' for these insignificant others, I position my own exotic tale as a (dis)graceful brown dancing body (Samuel, 2015) - peer of the exotic showgirl in South Africa. In this paper, I want to problematise the transactions of South African dancers journeying outside of the country and in our 'homelands'¹ since the late 1970s. I will briefly examine to what extent these othered bodies negotiate their contemporary dance which could be read as predatory/ survival tactics/ bridges/ voyeuristic explorations.

¹ The homelands were territories established by the Apartheid government to contain the population based on tribal and or ethnic lines. These were supposedly independent areas though effectively these puppet governments were funded and led by the Pretoria administration, the central axis of all Apartheid government's structures.

Predators in Africa

So much has already been written about opportunistic adventure especially from the West to Africa (Fanon, 1961; 1965b; Bhabha, 1984; Bharucha, 1997) and the impact of colonialism and apartheid on the development of Dance in South Africa (Friedman, 2012; Glasser, 1991; Loots, 2006) that one may succumb to a Colonialist Fatigue Syndrome. However, in the context of this paper and its specific focus on some unsung South African hero(ine)s in the post-apartheid era, I argue that it is necessary to re-look at this territory. In gingerly taking up a mantle for the rewriting of black dancing bodies in South Africa for all those who do not seem to matter to some dance audiences: critics and historians, I am acutely aware that even my noble quest is a selection, one that will exclude so many stories. The notion of 'black' discussed in this paper is not to be confused with a signal to identify race only, but extends to a far wider notion of the politics of privilege and people blackened by prejudice and injustice. This wide lens may include Jews, homosexuals, people with disabilities, the aged, foreigners, all who are deemed 'the untouchables'.

The matter of history is littered with silent stories and only certain historical selections have survived a journey to the page usually conjured by captains of industry, politicians and powerful religious leaders (most of whom are male). As these his-stories take centre stage, I am troubled as to who will write the complex history of Dance in South Africa as 21 years of democracy glide by? Which forms of dance will be included (and excluded) in this weighty account? Who will fund this retelling? How will young choreographers dance the multiple stories from first ever queen in the history of the Khoisan ,Katrina Esau /'Ouma Gielmeid', to sodomite² (for some) Sun City showgirls who were separated by a mere 752kms on the South African landscape?

Before I begin this critique of opportunism, permit me to clarify the term 'showgirls' as it is used in the South African context. In my limited search of the phenomenon of this category of dancer (as opposed to concert theatre dancer and her engagement in artistic productions), the showgirl appeared in commercial dance or productions focused as entertainment. In the context of Sun City, this was in an extravaganza – a lavishly designed production with enormous sets and massive costumes (often with harness and headgear festooned with ostrich and pheasant feathers) of Las Vegas ilk. These scintillating productions often included nude (read topless dancers) and were typically (though not exclusively) held at entertainment resorts whose cash cow was legalised gambling in the form of the casino. One such entertainment complex - the Sun City Resort (Sun City Resort Official Site, 2015) was opened in the former homeland of Bophuthatswana in 1979 by

² See A. Donaldson's full article, '21 ways to leave your lustre', published in the Sunday Times in which he describes Sun City as "an anaesthetised Sodom for suburbia". (Donaldson, 2000:2).

multi-millionaire businessman, Sol Kerzner. Dance writer, and former showgirl at Sun City in its declining years, Danelle Crous-Huyser (Crous-Huyser, 2002) reflected on shifts in Sun City Extravaganzas between 1979 – 2002 in a ground breaking study that provides a brief window into this world: the changing profile of foreign to local dancers; the introduction of the first black South African topless, showgirl, Seipate Motswana; height and weight controlling norms for bodies; budget cuts and thematic shifts in content are laid bare against a backdrop of the political landscape rife with contradiction. Only three years after the brutal quelling of the Soweto Uprising in Johannesburg, in 'Sin City', as it was dubbed, Crous Huyser wrote

After the audience members had seen topless girls on stage they could go and watch pornographic films and indulge in other 'licentious' activities. South Africans loved to visit Sun City with mistresses and 'let it all hang out' (Crous-Huyser, 2002:44).

Her delight in *Pulse* the extravaganza for the 1999 season, is telling when she notes it as "Sun City's first in-house extravaganza inspired by our continent" (Crous-Huyser, 2002:46). Many notions of what constituted Euro-centricism, and national pride were being challenged as can be seen in the African inspired name of the previous year's extravaganza *Baletsatsi*. This production was choreographed by Alfred Hinkel in 1998. Crous-Huyser was aware that the policy of Sun City at this time was to employ only Black dancers but that she was contracted anyway "despite being 'white'" (Crous-Huyser, 2002:46). For Crous Huyser, *Pulse* in 1999 was "a beautiful show with an African theme accompanied by gumboot dance, an adage act, drumming sequences and topless dancers parading feathered costumes" (ibid). The notion of voyeurism of both white and black bodies of showgirls can be argued as aspects of survival tactics for these dancers. But, just who was using whom? Many showgirls were treated as not serious³ or properly trained dancers. Crous-Huyser's remarked that all the dancers in the Lido in Paris including the showgirls (as if they were not dancers in the first place) had to have classical ballet training. She also mentions that Motswana received various other training from the doyenne of South Africa's earlier minstrel shows, Joan Brickhill. The 'White minstrel'⁴ show as forerunner to the extravaganza and the place of nudity itself e.g. in traditional African contexts also needs to be considered here and may provide avenues for future

³ According to Friedman; dismissive and condescending attitudes towards dancers who were showgirls or danced in musicals was not only confined to so called Coloured dancers who were not engaged in the serious art of ballet. This she maintains has been her experience both as a young showgirl and a long time choreographer of music theatre (Friedman, 2015). The epistemes surrounding who could/should be allowed (sic) to dance, and the serious art form of ballet thus maligned the training and reception of contemporary dance.

⁴ A distinction can be drawn between the largely American 'black face' minstrel shows that toured South Africa from the late 1800s to the newer, spectacular shows that emerged in the 1960s. Brickhill & Burke's production of *Minstrel Follies* was for the African Consolidated Theatres in 1966 (Crous-Huyser, 2002:41).

research. Ironically, South African showgirls earned more than some ballet dancers at the time as they were initially paid tax free in Rands and not dollars like their foreign counterparts.

Such airing of hidden stories and contextual paradigms for Crous-Huyser's article is in itself worth noting as it flows from the earliest attempts in South Africa to re-write our rich contemporary Dance History. In 2001, a skills development initiative, aptly named *Dance History Research project*, funded largely by the Danish Cultural Ministry and the *Shuttle 99* programme, was spearheaded by Fred Hageman, Jill Waterman in Johannesburg and Lene Thiessen and Karen Vedel from Denmark amongst others. This initiative drew the participation, perhaps for the very first time, of dance writers from four of South Africa's leading provinces. As a participant from KwaZulu-Natal, my emic perspective for this paper recalls a weekend in Johannesburg of robust debate and engagement with many challenges raised by the diverse group of choreographers, young dance academics, and arts critics. Foremost amongst these concerns was which stories to tell: critiques of lavish ballet and opera productions and budgets now coming to light; lost stories of groups and communities in far flung rural spaces; homophobia; liturgical dancing- the avenues were overwhelming. For my part, I had a keen interest at that time to signal the defiance of a black, female choreographer, Pearl Ndaba in the largely male dominated dance space of mpantsula. Importantly, it is this selective process, this selective memory of whose histories get told, whose dance and bodies matter, that lies at the crux here. As one examines the pathways that have been marred by predatory colonials, new strategies must be employed to continually remind us of multiple stories that must be trawled.

What was bizarre legislature in the late 1980s meant that gambling and casinos, not permitted in South Africa, were permitted in certain homeland districts such as the Wild coast casino complex in Transkei and the Sun City resort with its Superbowl (home to the *Miss South Africa Pageant*) and the adjoining, pristine Gary Player golf estate in Bophuthatswana. The dance found in this opulent setting with its promised free-spirited weekend getaway carries a darker connotation of depravity and decadence as the wealthy squandered their cash amidst a State of Emergency on its borders. The world of the casino suggests a sharp contrast to the highly regulated society under extreme surveillance that was South Africa, and can be likened to the lure of some cities in the USA in the prohibition era - these spaces provided a glutton's taste of the forbidden fruits. Patrons of this oasis drank not only the cabaret and revue bars but the brown coloured showgirls.

South Afro-philia in Paris: survivors

Following the demise of the performing arts councils in 1997, dance companies that were sheltered therein had to close and could no longer receive any direct funding in terms of the Cultural

Institutions Act. Their limited choices were to downscale or disband. Some, like the former Playhouse Dance Company of which I was a member, braved the uncertainties of the new systems for arts funding and re-grouped as new and independently registered entities. Thus in Durban, small independent⁵ dance companies like the Fantastic Flying Fish Dance Company was born. Mark Hawkins and David Gouldie were at its helm at its inception. As an increased number of dance-artists placed their needs at the doors of the newly established National Arts Council (NAC), they joined the hungry masses already at the NAC, many for the first time. Matters turned ugly as small and inadequate budgets, incapable of addressing the multiple needs of the burgeoning South African dance populations was on offer. Some of the dance companies in Durban that have weathered these storms include Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre, Flatfoot Dance Company and the Floating Outfit Project (FOP). FFFDC has effectively closed its doors as a dance company since 2006.

Some like FOP took up the invitations to appear outside of South Africa's borders, as an example in France, forging new and exciting collaborations with other diasporic Africans and locals encountered in the City of Lights, Paris, and elsewhere. This trafficking has no doubt offered exposure to new methods and approaches to Dance and theatre making as can be attested from Desire Davids' (one of the founders of FOP) successful return with *The colouRED Chameleon* to the Joseph Stone auditorium, in Cape Town in 2014. Whilst Davids and Cekwana are celebrated artists outside of the country, especially in the past 5 years, neither have been invited by the major theatres in Cape Town to showcase their work. This is shameful. Or, is it, given the context of disparity that prevails for large numbers of dancers in the Cape who have yet to appear on main stages? Davids' birthplace is Paarl and FOP is based in Durban. Cekwana has appeared in Cape at the invitation of *Infecting the City* in 2014 after a gap of more than 10 yrs. As these and other artists struggle to receive the recognition that some, like me, argue they deserve, the question that repeatedly seems to surface is to what extent is art that is made by black dancers less valued in their home country? Are local choreographers receiving the necessary funding and support to share their stories in South Africa and the rest of the globe? I would argue that so much more still needs to be done.

But before one can examine what might be some of the underlying reasons for this pitiful state of affairs, one needs to consider the widespread violence on the bodies in this specific context. bell hooks in her critique of whiteness had reminded one of the systems of domination: colonialism and racism which she claimed "actively coerce black folks to internalise negative perceptions of blackness, to be self- hating" (Hooks, 1992:338). I have often wondered why one daily experiences

⁵ These independent dance companies varied greatly in scale and artistic vision. In Cape Town, the former CAPAB Ballet of over 40 dancers became halved to form Cape Town City Ballet. It is presently led by Elizabeth Triegaardt, Robin van Wyk and Keith Mackintosh.

mostly black people throwing themselves into whizzing traffic when brightly painted Zebra crossings abound? Could it be that some Black South Africans have internalised their lack of value to such an extent as to suffer a kind of post-traumatic apartheid disorder? Black deaths are reported with such abandon in daily newspapers so as to prompt my next contemporary dance work or blog which I will entitle: "(b)lack road (k)ills". hooks had suggested that:

Understanding how racism works, he can see the way in which whiteness acts to terrorize without seeing himself as bad, or as all white people as bad, and black people as good. Repudiating "us and them" dichotomies does not mean that we should *never* speak the ways of observing the world from the standpoint of "whiteness" may indeed distort perception, impede understanding of the way racism works both in the larger world as well the world of our intimate interactions (hooks, 1992:346).

These intimate daily actions like walking in the streets, getting on a shared bus, sitting on a common park bench which are hopefully taken for granted today must also seen as opportunities by South Africans for an encounter with the other.

The unsung showgirls

Ramsay Burt's most recent account of the ascent to fame of the African American, Josephine Baker in Paris in the 1920s in his book *Alien Bodies: representation of modernity, 'race' and nation in early modern dance* (1998) is illuminating in this meeting with the other. Fuelled perhaps by what he describes as "the exotic and glamorous myth that has grown up around her memory" (Burt, 1998:58), a renewed interest in Baker's life history surfaced shortly after her death in 1975. I began to notice how some dancers closer to home were, like Baker, given very little critical attention at the pinnacle of their careers as dancers, which might be attributed to their positions as so called 'not serious dancers'. Perhaps to some reviewers, they were just cabaret or showgirls. As Caribbean born, cultural studies lecturer, Andreas Stuart has shown in her book of the same title/ *Showgirls*

The racial myths that so fundamentally shape perceptions of black showgirls like Josephine, also had profound impact on the archetype of the popular female performer. (Stuart, 1996:80.

One such showgirl is Cape Town trained dancer Leslie Ann Mitchell, who had danced with both the oldest contemporary dance company in the city (and arguably the country) - Jazzart dance theatre, and for one of the longest community dance projects that largely served the so called Coloured community – Silverleaf in the 1970s. Mitchell went on to dance with NAPAC Ballet in the early 1980s and later for Sun City extravaganzas (mentioned above). As one of Mitchell's contemporaries (I had partnered her [quite poorly] in the ballet, *Le Beau Danube* an old work by Massine when we danced together at the short-lived NAPAC Dance company), I am also aware of one of Mitchell's colleagues who shared a similar career path eventually dancing on foreign shores - the leggy dancer, Telisha

Daniels who had also danced at the celebrated Lido club in Paris in the 1990s. I can still vividly recall Daniels who later became a ‘Blue belle’⁶ strut in the Playhouse production *Midnight Express* with Sam Marais, Basil Appollis and Sophia Foster in the late 1980s. The lives of these “beautiful, even textured brown skin” (Burt, 1998:81) dancers have yet to be reflected upon. Is this a tragic missed opportunity of some dance stories that should belong to all our collective past? For me, it is, as it underscores the countless lives of brown and black bodies that are associated with the history of dance in South Africa that remains unaccounted.

The recent loss of one of the first male dancers of colour, Christopher Kindo, who was born in Simonstown and who attended the UCT Ballet School, reminded me of a long list of unsung dance heroes. Kippy, as he was fondly known to many in the dance circles, had laid the foundations for dancers like myself who were only a few years younger, towards an activism. He unknowingly offered himself as a role model for those of us who were defined as non white or coloured dancers instilling pride and a courage to explore other dance forms. We were both ballet dancers but Kippy was already a formidable contemporary and jazz performer and later choreographer. In a fitting tribute to his life and contribution Chris Barron writes, “He was the first coloured person to perform as a principal dancer for the Cape Performing Arts Board, a founder member , principal dancer and dance master of the Performing Arts Council of Transvaal Dance Company and co-founder of South Africa’s first contemporary dance company, Jazzart”. (Barron, 2015) Of his many achievements, perhaps the grittiest reminder for me was his community dance project undertaken with Teva Scarborough. Barron writes that Kindo “also started the Tertia Kindo Arts Project in Oceanview in memory of his niece who was murdered there in 1997” (Barron, 2015). It is this final twist in Kindo’s life that jolts my return to the all too common experience of black bodies as waste, commodity – bodies that do not seem to matter.

In writing this paper, as an act of remembering these Non White dancers I recall only a few un-mattered names in the Cape: Robert Philander, Sharon Paulsen, Llewellyn de Villiers, Nigel Lucas, Shaun Adams, Gregory Alexander, Celeste Stallone (Theunissen⁷), Hisham Omardien, Laveen Naidu,

⁶ The Blue belles are a highly prized position within the ranks of the showgirls at the Lido in Paris. Dancers whether black or white still need to be 1,75m tall. The prestige and glamour of this status conceals the physical demands of wearing feathered harnesses and headgear, performing in high heels in a tough regime of 6 shows a week. Another lesser known South African ‘Blue belle’ was Georgina Thomson.

⁷ Celeste Theunissen and I attended UCT Ballet School from 1982 - 1984. She adopted a stage name in the early 1980s which is not unremarkable in the world of ballet (consider Alicia Marks/Alicia Markova *et al.*) in itself. However, in the context of South Africa, name changing and racial re-classification had far reaching consequences in the social and political lives for its citizens. The obvious choice of a powerful and white American name like Stallone given the popularity of the Rocky movies should not go unnoticed. Celeste also later danced as a showgirl at the Wild Coast resort in the former Transkei homeland.

Fahiem Stellenboom, Desire Davids, Merle Gideon, Quinton Ribbenaar, Ebrahim Medell. Desire Davids. I am confident that there are many others, not to mention the many White dancers lives, that are left unexplored.

Some may argue against my plea, or that the colour of the dancer should not matter, and I agree. But when the non seeing of race /colour has blinded our ability to see the extraordinary, uneven playing fields, or private dance studios – and opportunities for some to learn and perform dance whilst others remain on the sidelines – that plagued South African bodies in the darkest hours of apartheid – these contextual hardships that were faced by some and not by others must be guarded against with force as they can quickly and as dangerously re-surface in chin jutting for ‘my culture’ and quests for ‘my traditional values’. A re-writing of all lives that matter must continuously be undertaken. In South Africa where inequities loom large, the challenge remains for dance academics like me to articulate the different experiences of this sublime performing art form Dance when some bodies matter more than others? It needs to be said; as African bodies we need to celebrate all our dancers even more. Burt provides a compelling argument for this reasoning when he claimed “Dancing to jazz music in a dance Baker introduced to Paris was for white Europeans a temporary ritualized blurring of the difference between self and ‘other’ through losing themselves in the strong, ‘primitive’ rhythms of the music” (Burt, 1998:81).

Such blurring of differences of self and other was welcomed in the euphoria of the collapse of apartheid. White selves and Black others found one another in heady dance fusion experiments. But, 21 years later I argue that this neutralising can equally obscure or nurture a false egalitarianism. New Mexico State University’s anthropologist, Mary Alice Scott reminds one

The critical dilemma of power, therefore, is the following: although PAR [practice as research] aims to equalize power relations between the researcher and researched, (or at a minimum to reduce power inequalities between them), in practice PAR projects may quite easily reproduce and exacerbate power inequalities while obscuring these processes through a discourse of false egalitarianism (Scott, 2012:1).

The need for more than Voyeurism

What is the discourse of egalitarianism? Can the power of African American star Beyoncé, with her alter ego Sasha Fierce be compared to the (in)experience of the young Mozambican mpantsula dancers – Tofu Tofu? Who is the voyeur and who the willing or complicit participant? Startling examples of the conflicted journey from circus freak to showman, of Franz Taaibosch also known as Clicko in the early 20th c. give account for reviled and celebrated treatments of the other. Trading as savage Bushmen Clicko’s story has been unearthed by Neil Parsons (University of Botswana), and edited by professor of English and African Literature (University of Texas), Berndt Lindfors and is not

isolated (Parsons, 1999). How can the objectified, hyper-sexualised black body re-constitute itself? If black artists are laughing all the way to the bank at our complicity in their commodification, then what about our responsibilities when such commodification entrenches a powerlessness for thousands of black women. What does that mean for the powerless Myanmar, or Sudanese women, or Nigerian girls reportedly forced into marriage?

These questions and their answers are complex and perhaps I have raised too many issues in this singular paper. Whilst 'non-serious dance', showgirls, Coloured folk, opportunism, voyeurism and objectification are pithy subject matter, each area warrants further study in the African context. For me, Davids (briefly discussed earlier), Mamela Nyamza, Dada Masilo and Nelly Xaba are amongst the leading black women's voices in South Africa who are negotiating and provoking their audiences not to look, but to stare at these complex and highly emotive issues. In Davids confrontation with racial reclassification in *The Coloured Chameleon*; Xaba's *Uncles and Angles* and her larger than life-sized, own objectified body that challenges the practices of virgin testing; and Nyamza's superwoman in *Shift* one has some of the finest examples of 'black bodies that matter'. As Nyamza and Xaba left the UCT School of Dance's steps only a few weeks ago with bags stuffed with white tutus and dismembered mannequin legs under their arms, headed for the National Arts Festival, I smiled at what promised to be their latest foray. These ballet-bodies, -black female bodies seemed to matter; they seemed unapologetic in their claim for acknowledgement as bodies and stories that matter.

Works cited

Barron, C. 2015. Christopher Kindo: Ballet dancer and choreographer. *Sunday Times*. Durban, 26 April. KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa.

Bhabha, H. 1984. Of mimicry and Man: the ambivalence of colonial discourse. *Discipleship: A Special Issue on Psychoanalysis*. 28(Spring):125- 133.

Bharucha, R. 1997. Negotiating the "River" Intercultural Interactions and Interventions. *The Drama Review*. 41(3):31-38.

Burt, R. 1998. 'Savage' dancer: Tout Paris goes to see Josephine Baker. In R. Burt, *Alien Bodies representations of modernity, 'race' and nation in early modern dance*. Abingdon, Oxon, UK: Routledge: 57-83.

Crous-Huyser, D. 2002. Extravaganza at Sun City (1979 - 2002): shifts - covering the uncovered. In L. Thiessen, Ed. *Proceedings of Dance History Research Skills Development Project: Footsteps across the Landscape of Dance in South Africa, Shuttle 02*. Johannesburg, Gauteng, South Africa: University of the Witwatersrand School of the Arts: 41-47.

Fanon, F. 1965. *The wretched of the earth*. C. Farrington, Trans. London: Macgibbon and Kee.

Friedman, S. 2012. Mapping an historical context for theatre dance in South Africa. In S. Friedman, Ed. *Post-apartheid Dance many bodies many voices many stories*. Newcastle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars:1-16.

Friedman, S. 2015. Personal telecon Showgirls & 'serious dance'. Cape Town, South Africa.

Glasser, S. 1991. Is Dance Political Movement? *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*.6(3):112-122.

hooks, b. 1992. Representing Whiteness in the Black imagination. Routledge. [April 8, 2015].

Loots, L. 2006. Post-colonial visitations:a South African's dance and choreographic journey that faces up to the spectres of 'development' and globalisation. *Critical arts*. 20(2):89 - 101.

Parsons, N. 1999. "Clicko" : Franz Taaibosch, South African Bushman entertainer in England, France, Cuba and the United States, 1908 - 1940. In B. Lindfors Ed. *Africans on Stage: studies in ethnological show business*. Bloomington, USA: Indiana University Press: 203 -227.

Samuel, G. M. 2015. (dis)graceful dancing bodies in South Africa. *Choreographic Practices*.6(1).

Scott, M. A. 2012. False Egalitarianism and Illusions of Inherent Good. *Savage Minds*. Retrieved June 2, 2015, Available: <http://savageminds.org/2012/06/30/false-egalitarianism-and-illusions-of-inherent-good/>.[June 2, 2015].

Spivak, G. C. 1990. Questions of Multiculturalism . In G. C. Spivak, & S. Harasym, Eds. *The Post-Colonial Critic: interviews, strategies, dialogues*. London, UK: Routledge.

Stuart, A. 1996. *Showgirls*. London, UK: Jonathan Cape, Random House.

Sun City Resort Official Site. 2015. Available: Sun International:
<http://www.suninternational.com/sun-city/Pages/default.aspx>

Gerard.samuel@uct.ac.za

THE DEMYSTIFICATION OF INDIAN CLASSICAL/TRADITIONAL DANCE

“CAN INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE ALSO BE AFRICAN DANCE?”

NEGOTIATING CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN AFRICA

Negotiate: as in ‘conferring to reach some agreement’

Heather Parker Lewis

Abstract

*How could Indian classical/traditional dance as an ‘agent of change’ in the Indian Diaspora also be seen as African dance? This question is addressed through a brief reconstruction of the history of Indian dance; a deconstruction of the myths relating to Indian classical/traditional dance (or dance performed according to the principles of *Natya Sastra*); a description of current regional styles of Indian dance; and a discussion of the impenetrable taboos linked to the devadasis, wives of the deity who became the silent subalterns of dance. With reference to ancient manuscripts, temple sculptures, palace murals, and Mogul miniatures, Indian history, religion and its politics, I assess some of the written and visual evidence that informs how Indian dance has always adapted. Indian dance has embraced fusion; responded to new forms of music especially from South India and the Muslim religion in the North; it changed to suit widespread colonialism across the sub-continent from the 16th Century and survived an outright banning by the first independent government of India in 1947. Indian dance is resilient and quite able to adjust to contemporary influences and include African stories. The form seems to have an aura of sanctity that has engendered an attitude of elitism and exclusion. How can Indian dance be viewed in other spaces like Africa that is away from sacred dance and religious rituals?*

Setting the scene:

The word ‘mystify’ can be considered on a continuum from simple bewilderment to deliberate obfuscation and its synonym is ‘confusion’. In this brief presentation, in which I flit across two-thousand years of dance history, I merely intend to articulate the confusion I have grappled with during my journey as Indian dancer and researcher in South Africa. This presentation is not an attempt to blame, criticise, excuse, apologise or even really to make suggestions. And this is certainly not a rebuttal of the contemporary performances that South African based schools of Indian dance have hosted (in which Indian dance has been performed outside of the *margam* or *traditional repertoire*); or of the energetic, creative, powerful collaborative and award-winning work of Jayesperi Moopen and Tribhangi Dance Theatre. The currently exciting and celebratory productions of Lliane Loots and her contemporary Flatfoot Dance Company, that includes Kathak exponent and artiste Manesh Maharaj of Kala Darshan, will hopefully provide a model

that will point Indian classical dancers in a direction leading to greater experimentation in form and story-telling without any sense of compromising on technique and uniqueness of style.

Introduction to the topic:

Four of the major classical dance forms of India with their post-colonial nomenclature are: Bharata Natyam, Kathak, Odissi, Kuchipudi. These styles from the North (Kathak), South (Bharata Natyam and Kuchipudi) and North East (Odissi) were originally performed in small, intimate spaces within the temples and royal courts and always in the presence of the deity (or - in the Mogul courts – the tulsi beads representing the god, Vishnu) and were danced as solo performances or by small groups of (usually) female dancers; prior to the 1930s the dancers in the South and South East were dedicated and married to the deity for the specific purpose of perpetuating dance in the temples. The name Kathak, chosen for dance from the North, is said to be based on the history of the story-teller, the Kathakars or itinerant groups of story tellers/actors/dancers. Kuchipudi and Odissi are named for areas of origin. The choice of the name Bharata Natyam was a particularly sharp socio-political move for dance in Tamil Nadu in South India as it immediately gave the impression that this dance originated with the ancient text of Bharata Muni from the year 200CE. But, whatever name was selected, it was essential that if post nineteen-hundred dance was going to be used as a proud political/cultural tool to encourage investment in the independence of India from Britain, then it most definitely had to move away from the reputation of Nautch, the dance of those working as prostitutes who were *never married to the deity*, but were instead *dedicated to the temple to raise funds to support their families*.

Dance in Southern Africa is performed in Western theatres; if one adopts a simplistic definition of the term contemporary as meaning in the ‘here and now’ then yes, inevitably, Indian dance has altered.⁽¹⁾ In relation to choreography and style the dance has adjusted and this indicates a sensitivity to visual presentation, Bollywood theatricals, audiences in the New Millennium, the Western stage and auditorium and the influences of Indian classical dance styles (each upon the other), as well as aspects of Western dance in contemporary performances. It is important to remember that there were never any devadasi or mahari dedications in Southern Africa; young girls, children really, who were dedicated to dance in the temples and married to a deity.

However, a simplistic definition of contemporary is not what is being addressed; in this paper we are looking at 'contemporary' as an agent of change.

In India there are dancers searching for a new dance language; Mayuri and Madhuri are entertaining and slick and perhaps tend more towards Bollywood, or even the Hollywood dance movies of the 1940s; because not everyone is going to push the boundaries as far as interdisciplinary artist Shyamala Moorty has stretched them. Describing the emotional content of her own long, hard journey in gaining acceptance for her unique performance style, Anita Ratnam (celebrated Neo Bharata Natyam dancer at the forefront of contemporary exchange on stages both in India and the West) uses the term 'polarisation'; polarisation between classical and contemporary, modernity and tradition, rigidity versus excessive enthusiasm.

Prasthana Purkayartha, at Plymouth University in the United Kingdom, teaches contemporary movement to theatre and dance students and is writing on Indian modern dance, feminism and trans-nationalism – she is a lecturer in theatre and performance arts who discusses the context of transformation as one culture is transported onto the stage of another culture. She is bridging the gap between tradition and progressive modern life today. She writes about risk and experimentation and the need for friction to stimulate and she views dance as a political space. Not that risk taking is new. Indian dancers in Paris in the early 1800s were presented with a performance platform for their forms of exotic and oriental dance when a French impresario took a devadasi group to Europe; Dancer Ramli Ibrahim of Malaysia [a student of revered Guru Deba Prasad] is the creative genius behind the Sutra Foundation; his productions involve Odissi in a contemporary context and his choreography echoes the pas de deux of classical ballet.

With the similarities between African and Indian dance (bare feet, stamping, drumming), the shared belief that dance is a link between this world and the spiritual world, we can be forgiven, however, for having anticipated that, in Africa, there would be space for a greater contemporary innovative exchange on the classroom floor; perhaps even along the lines of the choreography of the dance pioneer Chandralekha who was classically trained but combined dance with yoga and martial arts; or that, classical Indian dance, so deeply rooted in a theatrical tradition, would have engaged robustly with the presentation of our current African stories on stage, as Rangoli Dance Company in California has succeeded in doing in connection with politicised issues. *The*

ancient Indian dance texts tell us that there is nothing that cannot be portrayed on stage providing one keeps to the rules of propriety and apparently using live animals in a performance was not part of best stage practice nor were scenes of intimacy! Lord Brahma in Natya Sastra, when pacifying the Asuras (demons), says the Natya Veda was created to represent all aspects of life, the good and the bad, including killing, and all kinds of people and various situations. He states: Thus this dramatic art is common to one and all without any discrimination. Shyamala Moorty (who also performed with Rangoli Dance Company) acknowledges the value of dance portraying modern historical, violent and political events with the focus on the alternative use of public space. However, once all legal restrictions in South Africa relating to *who could dance what with whom* were removed post-apartheid, the approach remained conservative and Indian dance today continues to be very much community based and performances are supported mainly by an all-Indian audience; themes remain religious in nature.

In the Indian Diaspora in Southern Africa, where the development of dance was hindered internally by political *policies of separation* and externally by imposed *cultural isolation*, change is a complex issue and one related to the preservation of cultural identity. In 1959 Salochana Naidoo from Durban went to study dance in India with Srimathi Lalitha. The first South African girls to train as classical dancers in India did not return to teach in this country until 1960; we were by then already decades behind the rest of the Indian dance world. Ketu Katrak, Professor of Drama (University of California, Irvine) in her book published in 2011: *New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora*, does not include a chapter on *cutting edge choreography* in South Africa, despite it being home to the largest Indian population outside of the sub-continent itself. While Indian dancers around the world are giving themselves permission to be inventive and in India young dancers, like Kavya Muralidaran, experiment progressively with *nritya* (story telling through expressive dance), the Indian classical dance community in South Africa, possibly because there is a fear of losing 'authenticity', appears almost impervious to change and intent on remaining within conservative and traditional boundaries.

In South Africa it is not easy to access classes in Indian dance if one is born outside of the Indian community, although Kathak and Bharata Natyam have been taught here for decades. There is little opportunity to attend workshops for those who are interested and wish to learn more about the dance but do not wish to dedicate the rest of their lives to dancing. Indian dance is still taught in what I call the 'all or nothing' method. You join, you go through the religious rituals and from then on, until your maiden performance some five to seven years later, you do not miss a single class. You cannot pop in and out of Indian classical dance classes.**(2)** Music is also difficult to access for the traditional repertoire and music for items is recorded live in India.

Bending to the will of the guru, religious ritual, the absence of what I think of as a 'shared creative space' (collaboration leading to innovation in the classroom), reinforces a sense of elitism and exclusion (of the 'self' and of others who do not perform Indian dance); the issue of 'impenetrability' is a topic that will be addressed later in this paper. However, in reality, the idea of a 'rarefied space' is as much a myth today (when the desire of most dancers is to complete their maiden performance/arangethram and never dance again) as is the perpetuation of the romantic idea that Indian dance has not altered in its journey of over two-thousand years. A classical dancer from 2015 would not cope in the back row in a dance class if transported back to the year 200CE, although hand gestures (hastas/mudras) would be familiar. When dancers Ram Gopal and Uday Shankar (whose student Shanthi Bardan is credited with developing modern Indian dance), in the first decades of the nineteen-hundreds, introduced Indian dance to Western audiences, what they did *not* know, they invented! **(3 & 4)**

What must be clarified, however, is that it is *the principles* relating to classical dance that have not altered. It is the doctrine behind a dance presentation and criteria for judging that have remained constant and these were: *religious and spiritual; personal and practical; and the philosophy of beauty or proficiency, aesthetics and technique*. The principles applied equally to all styles of dance that were performed according to rules, that is, dance that was not popular or folk. In the ancient text Natya Sastra, compiled by Bharata Muni, in the chapter on Class Dance (line:14) we are told: *You will do it properly...* This promulgation leads us directly back to the negotiation within Indian dance around concepts of authenticity, purity of form, separation of styles and the word 'fusion', a word which, I must emphasize, was most definitely not in Bharata Muni's vocabulary. **(5)**

Natya Sastra of Bharata Muni:

The Natya Sastra is a complete treatise on drama (dance, music, writing of plays, prosody, metrics, stagecraft, make-up, stage management, props, costume, jewellery, designing a set and even building the auditorium) and was devised by Lord Brahma after he had meditated on the four Sacred Vedas; it was transcribed in Ancient Sanskrit and is the story of dance and drama as narrated by a sage or muni called Bharata who was chosen by Lord Brahma to teach the art of drama; but the term 'bharata' also means an actor. What Bharata describes tends more towards what we today would call opera; opera that included 32 short dance pieces for the stage that were choreographed from the 108 Karanas of Lord Shiva, the basic units of dance (that are sculpted in relief in panels in the major and the smaller temples across India); particularly important is the complete set of 108 Karanas at the Tillai Nataraja Temple in Chidambaram (1100-1200CE) and the unfinished set above the main altar at the Brihadeshvara Temple in Tanjore (985-1050CE). Although there are of course earlier sculpted images of Shiva the Cosmic Dancer; the Ellora image is from the 700s and the Asanpat image in Orissa could be as early as the 4th Century.

Natya Sastra, a comprehensive body of knowledge on the Canons of Drama, is the mainstay of Indian dance/drama; it is not the only dance and drama text available, but it is the oldest surviving complete text or recension based on revisions and critical commentary of copies of the original manuscript. As a result it is usually the only text referred to in a dance programme; and in a teaching situation there will be a reference as well to Nandikeshvara's Abhinayam Darpana (dating uncertain, but likely pre-Middle Ages) the text that refers to the techniques employed in Bharata Natyam dance; techniques that *did not concur* with the writings of Bharata.

Interestingly, another seldom emphasized fact about this text Natya Sastra is that it was written as a result of a religious coup; it's a religious text and representative of that period when the deities of the universe (Brahma, Shiva and Vishnu) were replacing the nature gods of fire, earth, water, wind and heaven etc (commentary of Manomohan Ghosh). Shiva as Nataraja, the God of Dance, in Natya Sastra, bestows his art form as a gift to mankind and in the final chapter (line:79) we read: *one who practices this great art is elevated to the status of a Vedic scholar, one who has performed sacrifices, and an eminent benefactor.* For this very reason the dance developed as a sacred art form in which the dance-practitioner was (and still is) confronted by many mysteries connected to religious sanctification of the dance space, the performance of

essential rituals and the promise of divine energy. To ensure adherence to the rituals that guaranteed the success of the performance, it is written in Natya Sastra that whoever dances without performing the sacred rituals on stage during the Preliminaries (to a performance) will be born as a lower animal in their next reincarnation. With this threat hanging over heads we can perhaps understand why Indian dancers are so conservative. The sons of Bharata, when they broke the rules and were disrespectful regarding what was considered appropriate to present on stage, were threatened with being relegated to the Sudra caste, a caste that was denied access to the sacred scriptures.

Deeply embedded in the psyche of the performer ... these rituals have reinforced what can be perceived or interpreted as elitism and exclusion; they relate to ways of imparting knowledge, religious rituals in the teaching situation and on stage (salutations to the deity, prayer, offering of flowers and lighting of lamps) that are still carried out today (albeit in a very much reduced form), not to mention the costuming of the classical dancer that turns her into the earthly representation of divine energy. The costume is exotic and in a sense it is intimidating; when the dancer enters the stage in her costume she carries with her two-thousand years of dance history. Dancing classical dance minus the costume is frowned upon by the gurus of dance and by conservative dancers; and in India by conservative audiences who will boycott dancers who do not appear on stage dressed according to convention when performing the traditional repertoire. It takes at least two hours to prepare the hair and the jewellery, the painting of the hands and feet, the make up and the assembling of the costume that transforms the dancer into a bride for the god. The wearing of the costume creates a mental and emotional barrier between the dancer and the rest of the world (and other dancers) as that which is not sacred is excluded as the dancer assumes her persona for the stage and ties the bells (blessed in the temple) onto her ankles.

The fulfillment of the promise of divine energy, however, is only possible if the dancer practices sadhana which is dedication, discipline and continual practice; sadhana will then efface the ego to allow the dancer to embrace the deity within. **(6)** An inner journey occurs that changes the energy of the surrounding space. This is what Bharata is referring to when he declares dance is auspicious, loved by most people, must be provided free for his people (including the low castes) by their king and that it is for *the overall success and safety of the community*. Dance was established as a form of advancement and protection for the entire community; and drama was

a form of spiritual and emotional upliftment. Shiva, speaking in the *Natya Sastra*, says that to perform his dance is superior to a bath in the Ganges and better than reciting a thousand japas (recitation of mantras according to the 108 prayer beads).

In his discussion of the Preliminaries to a Play (line:158) Bharata refers to his dancers as *the pure devis* or divine ladies. In this role the dancer bears a dual responsibility when she enters the sacred space on stage. The key to her dance was more than keeping an audience entertained. As a result *sadhana* is unforgiving and pushes the dancer to the limits and beyond. (7)

Music as an agent of change:

Bharata was intent for *Karanas* to be the only style of dance on stage and indeed for a thousand years it was the dance form that conferred spiritual liberation, yet in his chapter on Class Dance (line: 272) we read: *the Tandava is mostly to accompany the adoration of the Gods but its gentle form sukmarā-prayoga* (prayoga means performance) *relates to the erotic sentiment*. Even in 200CE there was room, if not for deviation, then for interpretation.

There was more than one manner in which to present the dance steps. There was also regional dance or what is termed *Desi* (referred to rather grudgingly by Bharata, who usually went into excessive detail); and *Desi* (also a classical form of dance to set rules), existed alongside *Karanas*. Around the year 500 the Sage Matanga wrote a text on *raga*, the melodies that informed *Desi*. The *Sangita Ratnakara* from 1240, written by royal physician and accountant Sarangadeva, describes *Desi* dance in detail. Dance was very much part of Jainism and of Buddhism. The earliest existing image confirming female dancers performing *Desi* dance in a sacred space is from the Bharhut Stupa (Andhra Pradesh) and with this image we see dance (clearly not *Karanas*) performed by four dancers (in classical attire of the era) with slightly flexed knees, waist deflections, *swastika* position (crossed foot and ankle) and hand gestures; they are accompanied by their seated musicians and perform before a male and female audience; this image in the India Museum in Kolkata is from the Ajatasatru Pillar, Bharhut Stupa, Sunga period and is dated, because of the accompanying Ashoka Mauryan Brahmic Script, to 200BCE (before *Natya Sastra* was transcribed). The dancers are worshipping a relic of Buddha and the image is identified as 'adoration of the turban relic by dancers'.

Pandarika Vitthala, writing the *Nartananirnaya* for the Emperor Akbar in 1570 says: *margatala* (that is Karanas of Bharata) *confers spiritual liberation but the singing (instrumental) playing and dancing which appeals to the heart according to the tastes of people in different regions is called desi.* (8)

In the late fifteen-hundreds there was no distinction between dance in the North and South and Desi dance was danced across the sub-continent. The dance we think of as Kathak, performed in the upright posture with the emphasis on rhythmic patterns in complex tala was also danced in Tamil Nadu and Vitthala describes the steps for the gharghara (ankle bells) in detail. What Vitthala also tells us is that, at times, Karanas (*margatala*) and Desi steps were combined in one programme because, by 1400, the dance of the 108 Karanas (designed originally to accompany the operatic/dramatic tradition) had all but vanished from the scene. Karanas was not able to adapt to Carnatic music - the modern musical modes of South India - tala and raga that were inspired by devotional songs (of *bhakti*) and propagated by the *haridasa*, the travelling bards of South India.(9) With Karanas there was no chance of mixing and matching steps because the arm and hand movement was a combined movement each paired with a specific cari (foot/leg movement). As a result Karanas was replaced in court and temple by Desi, a far more flexible form of classical dance in terms of the construction of steps. Desi was a solo dance style for court and temple that emphasised *nritya*, expressive dance that tells a particular story with hand gestures. In his text (that is about Desi dance in 1570) the author Vitthala includes a *pushpanjali* (offering of flowers to sanctify the stage) with *nrtta* (pure dance steps) and *abhinaya* (expressive story gestures) from the twelve-hundreds that we can follow in 2015. And it is from Desi (that also followed the ancient *principles* of Bharata) that the current dance styles of India developed as dance adapted, not only to music, but to history and religion.

History and religion as agents of change:

The complex interface between Hinduism and Christianity and Hinduism and Islam has played an influential role; the stand-off between dancers against Christian proselytisers and Indian Anglophiles that began in the eighteen-hundreds, almost wiped classical Indian dance off the map. The British had no understanding of dance in a religious context; they labeled all dance foreign to them as promiscuous; an attitude that the Indian elite were quick to emulate. The early legislation that controlled 'who danced and where they danced' was introduced into the regional parliaments, not by the English, but by Indians themselves.(10)

Separation of styles to promote the culture of each region through dance is a post-colonial development. Paintings from temples and palaces in the South show dancers in a variety of costumes; in South India, in the royal court (Ramanathapuram Palace Tamil Nadu:1700s) a wall mural depicts two female dancers in the harem, one dancer in the tightest of tights is partnered by a dancer in a long skirt in the Mogul tradition, the jewellery shows a Muslim influence. There was sharing across all regions and no political boundaries where the art was concerned. In the 1800s Northern dance styles were taught to the royal dancers in Tamil Nadu at the request of Raja Serfoji the Second, who, by the way, also invited ballet dancers to the palace to perform with the rajadasis (palace dancers).

Dating the dance:

Karanas: this dance style, that originated over two-thousand years ago, died out in the Middle Ages, although the sculptors continued the tradition of representing deities in these classic poses in the temples. (Karanas was dance performed in the typical semi-*plie* position with knees bent and flexed to the side; Kathak being the only exception to this rule.)

Desi: this form, also danced with the bent and outwardly flexed knee position, was originally danced across the sub-continent; in the South it became known by many different names including Sadir, the dance of the royal courts. We see images of Desi dance in temple reliefs although (understandably) the deities themselves are always sculpted in postures illustrating Karanas. Some of the best preserved sculpted Desi images are from the 1250AD Ramappa Temple (named for its sculptor) and built during the Kakatiya Dynasty at Warangal in Andhra Pradesh. (These appear to be the same Desi steps written about in the text by the royal military commander Jayappa Senaani, author of *Nrtta Rathnavali*.) Regional styles today originate from Desi and not Karanas; although many will argue this, the evidence lies in the *Nartananirnaya*.

Kathak: the dance form now identified with North India, developed at the Mogul courts in the 1500s, it was subject to Persian influences and danced to Hindustani music (steps and style changed); after the extensive Muslim invasions of India the dance in the North was cleansed of all references to the deities of Hinduism. Muslim rulers preferred their dancers to perform in the upright stance as they felt the bent and flexed knee position was unseemly. (11) The costumes (long skirt and the veil) reflected the Persian influence. If we study the Mughal and Rajput

miniatures then these exquisite album paintings, however, also capture dance for the populace. In the street the dances continued to be danced by males and in the araimandi (flexed/bent knee position). (12)

Bharata Natyam (Devadasi dance from South India): danced to Carnatic music developed from Desi dance in the early 1800s (steps remained the same but the style or manner of presentation was altered due to the influence of the Tanjore Quartet); there are no sculpted images of the gymnastic, crisp and linear form that today is known as Bharata Natyam in the ancient temples of India or in the frescoes although there are (and this is a significant point) images in the temples of folk dance that is still performed today.

Odissi: (Mahari dance from the North-East): after legislation banning dancing and temple dedications was promulgated, the service (seva) of the maharis of Orissa dwindled away; the dance as Odissi was re-codified to Oriya music by the Jayantika (revivalist movement) in the 1940s with the assistance of the acrobatic boy-dancers (the gotipuas) and their gurus and with reference to temple sculptures of the shalabhanjika or branch-breakers (symbols of fertility); the 13th Century Sun temple at Konark contains many examples of beautiful women sculpted in now familiar Odissi poses. There is a currently fashionable trend to deny that temple maharis of Orissa were ever dancers and to assert that they merely sang for the deity. However, based on the evidence from ancient rock inscriptions, the rich temple iconography and the presence of dancers at the royal court it seems highly unlikely that Orissa was the only place in India where temple dance never happened.

Kuchipudi (Central India): is also danced to Carnatic music and with its shared geographical boundaries with Orissa and Tamil Nadu, it may be closer to what Bharata Natyam originally looked like before it fell under the influence of the Tanjore Quartet. There was also a sharing of dance and dancers between Andhra Pradesh and Orissa as there are records of Telugu speaking dancers relocating to Orissa in earlier centuries.

Frescoes and historical facts:

Dance never existed in isolation in India; teachers of dance and composers of music are always looking for creative inspiration and when dancers and their gurus relocated either out of choice, or need, or at the command of the king (when a royal princess married she took her dancers with her) there was sharing of ideas, steps, lyrics, music. When Chodagangadeva (1077-1150),

whose maternal grandfather built the great temple at Tanjore, took the throne in Puri, he constructed the Jagannath Temple. It is believed that at the dedication of this temple the poet Jayadeva, who married the dancer Padmavati, recited his Geetagovinda. What is known from temple records and not surmised, is that Chodagangadeva introduced into Puri one-hundred temple dancers from South India known as sani sampradaya (traditional community of temple dancers). The tillana is a particular piece of music that developed from the tarana from the Hindustani Ustads and it is a favourite Bharata Natyam item usually selected to end an evening of entertainment. We know that the kautavams performed within the temples were altered by the Tanjore Quartet when they added lyrics to these items which previously had been nritta, or pure-dance items.

There was a rich tradition of mural painting in South India — both in the palaces (where dance was a major form of entertainment) and in the temples; there are frescoes at the Great Temple in Tanjore of dancers performing a Desi duet; at Bodi Jamin Palace in Tamil Nadu (mid-1800s), at Ramasamy Temple and the Srivilliputhur Temple in Kumbakonam (1600-1700) there are detailed wall murals, some show the male teacher/nattuvanar walking alongside the female dancers with his small hand held cymbals — this was still a feature of public performances in Tamil Nadu in the 1930s. **(13)** In these wall murals dating from the 1600s and into the 1800s, we see dancers performing in costumes familiar to us today (draped pants, pleats, form fitting tops), but the dancers have bent wrists, dropped elbows, extravagantly twirling fingers and some have waist deflections in the Odissi tradition. They are dancing (what appear to be familiar Bharata Natyam steps) in a style that Pandarika Vitthala describes in the Nartananirnaya as ‘sulu’ or dance that was sinuous, undulating, like the swaying hood of a snake or the flickering of a lamp flame in the wind; it was provocative, alluring, powerfully feminine and quite sexy dancing.

Serfoji the Second (1777-1832) of Tanjore inherited his title when still a child. To protect him from the machinations of his predatory uncle, he was removed from South India by the British and placed in the care of Christian missionaries and he grew up in a Christian environment; his closest boyhood companion was a Christian. Serfoji was enamoured of Western music, dance and culture and he especially loved the violin. **(14)** He was highly educated, literary, creative and he made some advances in eye surgery connected to the removal of cataracts. But that is by the way. The British were not in favour of any dancing that did not fit their cultural stereotyping and it is likely that Serfoji would have been very sensitive to any allegations of sexual promiscuity,

misconduct or unseemly dancing in his court where music (of the highest standard) and dance were a nightly occurrence and the rajadasis (court dancers) were experts in their field.

The rajas had a great deal of say and influence regarding what was danced in court and temple, how it was danced and by whom.

Raja Serfoji engaged the services of the four Pillai brothers, skilled dance teachers, musicians, composers and choreographers. Referred to as the Tanjore Quartet, they trained the rajadasis and the temple devadasis (servants of the god); and they taught all forms of Desi, including those dances performed to Hindustani music. The steps they taught were the same steps/adavu listed in a curriculum laid down by a previous raja, Raja Tulaja (1763-1787); steps still danced in 2015. The Quartet organized the current dance syllabus and repertoire of items for Bharata Natyam (that is also still in vogue today). When Bharata Natyam emerged from the temples and royal courts at the beginning of the 1900s we see photographic images of the devadasis draped in the cumbersome nine-yard sari. When we watch cinema clips of the dedicated court dancer Tanjore Balasaraswati (1918-1984) there is not a hint of 'sulu' (as described by Vitthala or as represented in the wall murals of the 1600s) in her movements; she is dancing the steps minus any flourishes and in the crisp, linear, geometric patterns performed today.

The impenetrable: dance and sexual secrets plus politics as agents of change:

The impenetrability of Indian dance involves neither the rituals nor the sanctity, it does not really matter that the terminology is in Sanskrit, and even the unique technique (with steps that include all major and minor limbs of the body, including neck, eyes and head and particularly the use of the hand gestures and all performed to mnemonic rhythmic syllables) can be mastered; and the choreography according to particular geometric patterns can be learnt; the music is different from Western music but it can be studied. The most taboo and impenetrable aspect of Indian dance is the history of the devadasi. For over two millennia these women were the custodians of an art form that was only performed by an exclusive group who existed outside of the norms of the rest of society.

The dancer in ancient Indian mythology, religious texts and literature is a factor to be reckoned with long before the advent of the Christian Era. Within the temple she had various roles but one can best think of her as a ritual specialist who also served the deity, (her husband), in the same way in which her earthly husband would have been served. She was part of the

ceremonial when the deity was woken, bathed, dressed, fed, entertained, worshipped and bedded at night; this final private ritual went unwitnessed by any other temple attendants. **(15 & 16)** An early reference to her presence in the temple is in the *Natya Sastra* itself. Bharata tells us in his Chapter on Roles (for dance and drama) that dance in temples was *mainly performed by women in the roles of men*. (i.e. women danced/acted in the guise of men as they did within the harem when the item required the character to be a male.) In the translation by Ghosh, he refers in his chapter The Gallant (line:74) to courtesans (dancer/courtesan role overlapped) who *belonged to god*, also translated as *women belonging to the temple*. These same women he tells us (Chapter on the Courtesan) could not be ‘bought’ by any man; in other words there were rules as to who could consort with a woman who belonged to god or the temple, rules still in place in the 1700s as described by the Dutch traveller Haafner.

In the ancient dance texts, including *Natya Sastra*, there is no mention of the dancer as a metaphor for the soul (female) seeking god (male); it is earthy love that is personified. The dance is referred to as erotic. The dancer, both in the text by Bharata and the text published in 1570 by Vitthala, is described in relation to her physical characteristics (Vitthala offers intimate anatomical detail), plus her great skills in dance and music, her absolute dedication to hard work; her life-stages are described only in relation to her love-life. How she reacted emotionally in a relationship with her sexual partner. (She had enthusiasm for sexual sport in the first phase; lived only for erotic love in the second stage; in the third stage of maturation she was fully experienced in the ways of sexual love.)

The dedicated dancers were chosen from those communities who could offer water to a Brahmin; the families were matriarchal in nature; the head of the family would have been a retired devadasi. Chosen in childhood, these girls trained either in the village with the local nattuvanar or were sent to the great temples where streets were set aside for the housing of the temple dancers. They were married to the deity in a full marriage ceremony; after completing their training they demonstrated their prowess with a public recital or maiden performance and at this point they were branded on the arm and their families chose a patron for them. For their maiden performance all the required items that involved pure dance, plus their ability to express emotion and dramatize events, were presented as well as folk dance. Although the dancers, once engaged by the temple, received benefices from the temple for themselves and their families (usually in the form of a grant of land) a major alternative source

of income was through a patron, if they so wished to have one. There were strict rules regarding who the dancer could associate with, relationships with the lower castes being strictly forbidden. Harsh punishments ensued if the laws were transgressed; for milder infringements the dancer was required to imbibe the five products of the cow, a fermented mixture of urine, dung, milk, curd and ghee.

The temple dancer's role was an ambiguous one: We may condemn her, we may romanticise her, we can deny her, be shamed by her, we can stigmatize her but we can never forget her; when we dance we will always be haunted by the devadasi's shadow. These women, although called servants or slaves of the god, cannot be interpreted solely in terms of what Spivak in her writing calls the 'subaltern'**(17)**, the subordinate in an hierarchical relationship. The Hindu girl child was not educated like her brothers, yet these devadasis were, and this is often forgotten, highly educated females. They could read and write; they studied Sanskrit and the Sastras. They were independent legal entities and allowed to adopt children to train in their profession if they had no offspring of their own. Haafner writing in the 1700s informs us that they were adept at practicing birth control. They lived in the community free of the restrictions placed upon married Hindu women. They had their own income to do with as they wished. Being married to a god they could never be widowed and were auspicious guests when families went through rites of passage. They were also required to be in attendance on the raja; this role, the role in relation to the kings who represented the deity in his earthly form, is described in the Natya Sastra when the king is surrounded by his dancers indicating that their role within the palace was as important as that within the temple. They had a degree of control over their professional lives and sexual relationships that ordinary women did not dare to dream about.

Unfortunately, when social mores changed, as Victorian-Christian value systems impinged on an ancient tradition, the devadasi was seen as dangerous to the social structure and threatening to other women; she was sexually active, but her sexual role was not primarily reproductive. She was sexually active outside of a conjugal union. The change in attitude escalated in the late 1800s At the forefront was missionary Amy Carmichael who brought pressure to bear on the authorities to stop women from recruiting children to dance and ultimately to be prostituted. This was a blanket condemnation without any understanding of the difference between the prostitute and the devadasi who presented her dance as an offering to the deity. Carmichael was intent on rescuing women who did not wish to be rescued. The devadasis were not

understood, by those from the West, in terms of what Mohanty would describe as the 'complexity of women and their roles in the Orient'. They were, and I quote again from the writings of feminist, Chandra Mohanty, not considered as 'real, material subjects of their collective history'.**(18)** There was no understanding of the complexities of these women's lives and how they differed from women in the Western hemisphere. Across India legislation was passed (piecemeal at first) to limit the activities of all women attached to temples.

The highly emotive Anti-Natuch Movement spread, supported in the Madras parliament by a female doctor, Dr Muthulakshmi Reddy. The devadasis, repositories of thousands of years of dance history, were moved outside of the power structure; they became an anachronism. **(19)** Devadasis stood accused of polluting a religious art form because they had perpetuated the sexual role that society had imposed upon them for over two-thousand years. The acts of the various parliaments that intended to legislate for dance and the dancer relied on emotive language; these pieces of legislation were labeled as attempts 'to reform' and 'to protect'. When laws to protect her were passed the devadasi, with her 'new improved social status' was forced to abandon the customs on which her identity was previously based. However, while the devadasis were insalubrious, the dance, now under the control of the upper-castes, remained divine. In one sense she was dispatched outside of society and through a Western cultural approach that judged her life-style as immoral. The devadasis submitted eloquent memorials to parliament stating that the existing legislation that banned prostitution should be enforced, rather than that their roles and income be taken from them. They were ignored. It seems the decision had already been made. There was a hidden agenda against which the women were powerless.

In the *Memories of S. Sarada* she writes: *Dr Arundale called for a special meeting which my grandfather attended. He told me that Dr Arundale has said that this art work of Rukmini Devi was for the welfare of India. The work should advance the emancipation of our nation. It (dance) could be used as a channel for the spiritual power of Lord Nataraja.* **(20)** And so dance became a cultural tool of the Indian liberation movement and was ultimately made available as an art form for the upper-class Brahmin girls who previously had not even been allowed to watch a devadasi performance. And Bharata Natyam, as it was now named, underwent another cleansing procedure as the ancient lyrics that the devadasis danced to were censored, being considered too suggestive for the new dancing-elite.

The movement to rescue dance from the devadasis culminated in the Prevention of Dedication Act of 1947 (one of the first acts passed by the Government of India and not by the British as most Indian dance books state) – dancers were no longer allowed to enter the precincts of the temples. They were robbed of their art form, their livelihood and their reputation and dance was successfully used as a political/cultural tool in the fight for the Independence of India. The devadasis were now the legal equals of all their uneducated, unemployed, married sisters whose survival in the family depended solely on the men of the household. Some devadasis returned home and were allowed to marry, although it seems few men were willing to take on someone who had previously been the wife of a god. Others became teachers of the art form. Some turned to the cinema or prostitution as the only form of income left to them. Others were sent to institutions where they were forcibly rehabilitated. Educated, professional Indian men and women made sure the dance did not die. The new dance forms of India were tested on public platforms in India as regional classical styles and from there they spread to the rest of the world. The temple dancers became subalterns in the exact sense of the word, marginalized women. Their voices were never heard again.

NOTES

(1) I am aware of the changes in the choreographing of steps since the 1980s and how some steps are now considered old-fashioned and not used at all; in classical dance what is danced on the right is repeated on the left, but now these steps are broken up and interspersed with other moves and there has been an inclusion of leaps and jumps that look more like ballet than Indian dance, high leg elevations based on research by Guru Padma Subramanyam that have been incorporated from ancient dance (Karanas) into Bharata Natyam although they were never ever part of the Bharata Natyam tradition in the first place, but were more than likely steps used in ancient rope dancing, balancing acts and gymnastic forms of the dance; and there is a modern tendency to dance everything faster and faster with awful results for technique, because the foot moves look untidy and are sometimes not completed at all.

(2) My own guru, Savitri Ganger Naidoo, studied in India at a gurukul in the guru-shishya tradition; she lived in the home of her teacher (a descendant of a devadasi family) and learnt at her feet; the approach was stern and inflexible. We, as developing artists, were, when Guru Savitri opened her school of Bharata Natyam in Cape Town in 1980, firmly controlled and expressly forbidden to share what we were taught, to alter anything, or to dance anywhere

without permission. Items for graduation were taught and those lessons not repeated. The word of your guru remains law and if your guru refuses to continue instruction because of an infringement of rules then there are no alternatives as there would be if you intended to dance ballet or Spanish dance or modern dance.

(3) Décoret-Ahiha, Anne - anthropologist on cross-culturalism and dance; information from her writings on authenticity and imperialist nostalgia.

(4) Kalarani, R: Bharatanatyam in Tamil Nadu after AD 1200: (p.179) *Udhay Sankar was a pioneer in presenting a new form of dance production named oriental dance. He adapted the distinct styles and nuances from Bharata Natyam, Odissi, Kathak and Manipuri. The distinction between nritta and abhinaya (pure dance and expression) was broken in this style. It was an independent movement of the human form. There was no definite tala (rhythm/timing) or musical composition to restrict the flow of movements. The dance was not set to any musical composition, but the music was set to the dance choreography... the dance Labour and Machinery was his masterpiece.*

(5) Natya Sastra consists of six-thousand verses; it was recorded in written form around 200CE and based on the much earlier oral Natya Veda (sruti or *that which was heard*) created by Lord Brahma after he had meditated on the four sacred Vedic texts: Rig Veda (lyrics); Sama Veda (music); Atharva Veda (sacrificial formula/actions) Yajur Veda (incantations/expressions/rasa).

(6) Roebert, D: 2014 – see references; philosopher, artist, writer, author of several novels with Indian dance as a subtext and a rasika/expert on Indian dance.

(7) For example: in 1980, when I trained, only a sip of water was grudgingly permitted during class; there were no rest periods. Sadhana is not talked of in the classroom, but it is why your guru makes you dance until you drop; why the arangetram or first full public recital by the dancer in traditional costume should be a solo performance, around three hours in length with no break between items and if the ankle bells rip your feet to pieces that is your karma. That is how I trained. Today the arangetram (or rangpravesh in Sanskrit – the ascent of the stage) has turned into a show and a group effort. Some dancers, to avoid this small adjustment to the contemporary situation, will choose to return to India and perform solo in a temple to keep the traditions alive.

(8) Pandarika Vitthala's magnificent work on dance and music was not commissioned by Akbar but was written (at Vitthala's own instigation) to help the emperor understand dance in all its amazing variety; Vitthala was welcome at the royal courts of both South and North India although he himself was from the South.

(9) Nartananirnaya by P. Vitthala – his volume on music refers in detail.

(10) Invasions by those of the Islamic faith into India date from 700AD; initially the invasions related to looting both of the North and South but actual conquest was linked to the spread of Islam and the creation of the Mogul Empire in the 1700s in North India. The British East India Company ruled large areas of India with its private army from the late 1700s. In 1858 the British Government took control of India with its policy of colonization and India became part of the British Empire in 1876 with independence only being achieved in 1947.

(11) Information supplied by Kathak Guru Manesh Maharaj of Kala Darshan in Durban.

(12) A painting commissioned in 1649 by Rana Jagat Singh of Mewar from the Jaipur studio refers; *Vasanta Ragini/Spring Melody* (The Met.N.Y.) from the Rajasthan School of painting (pre-1600) two female musicians accompany a female dancer dressed as Lord Krishna and in deep araimandi position, probably performing a natta adavu step, the stretching heel step of Bharata Natyam.

(13) Ratnam, A. Ed. Nirmalam/the genius of S. Sarada: Earlier recollections: Chapter by S. Sarada:26: *The nattuvanar stood in front of the bench near the side of the dancer. In their enthusiasm, they even used to come forward along with the dancer, playing their cymbals with their hands showing the rhythmic pattern of nrittam.* Sarada was a colleague and confidante of Rukmini Devi – see note (20).

(14) Radika, V.S. doctoral thesis (2011)

(15) Tantric practices included *maithuna* (copulation); this is described in detail by Frederique Marglin and discussed by Alessandra Lopez y Royo in her paper 'Odissi, Temple Rituals and Sculptures'; women married to the deity were considered auspicious because they would never be widowed. Marglin in her book (Wives of the God King: the rituals of the devadasis of Puri:1985) describes the devadasis as 'creators and maintainers of life, the sources of prosperity, well-being and pleasure' and maintains they performed abhinaya/expressive dance but their

dancing bore no resemblance to current Odissi, the latter she describes as being a dance for theatre and not the temple. Marglin learnt dances from the maharis, but she never described these dances so we cannot make comparisons of our own. She did not believe that pure dance or nrtta was part of mahari ritual. She was fully initiated by a priest of the Puri Jagannath temple who taught her the esoteric content of the mahari ritual; this involved a form of sexual intercourse that turned the mahari into a goddess (calanti devi) and stimulated by her own movements she then shed on the ground her sexual fluids and sexual essence (sakti uccchista). This sexual union with the god ensured the well being of the kingdom. In other words: the auspiciousness of the dancer meant that she was never widowed and could always perform the sexual act. In South India the deity observed pollution when a devadasi died and her bier stopped briefly at the temple door.

(16) Parker Lewis: (Dance of Bliss, 2012:200-230) for an overview of the devadasi in law, society, temple and history.

(17) 'The subaltern' is a word coined by Antonio Gramsci a Marxist theoretician, politician and linguist; the depth and intricacy of its full meaning is expanded on in the complex discourse in the writings of philosopher Gayatri Spivak in which an Anglophile, in taking on the language and opinions of the oppressor, can also become a subaltern. (Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory : Editor:F.Barker/1994)

(18) Chandra Mohanty is Professor of Women and Gender studies Syracuse University; writing in Feminine Scholarship and Colonial Discourses in a 1st and 3rd World context.

(19)As the power of the rajahs declined, as well as their incomes, in a country now heavily taxed by a foreign power, the devadasi were minus any royal protection. There were few places for rajadasis at the royal courts after 1900.

(20) Dr. George Arundale (he was a history teacher, not a doctor of medicine) was the husband of Rukmini Devi who founded the Kalakshetra School of Music and Dance in Chennai in 1936; the institution now has university status. Rukmini Devi was responsible for the establishing of Bharata Natyam as a respectable occupation and art form and gave it her indelible imprint. She was encouraged by Anna Pavlova with whom she had ballet lessons. Rukmini and George married when she was 16 and George was 42 and it caused a furor amongst Indian Brahmins. (In this sense their relationship strangely echoes the dancer and patron relationship.) The newly

married couple had to leave the country for a while and there were no children of this union. One speculates that the children would have had great difficulty in finding a space in a caste-bound Indian culture. What directly relates to dance, however, is the interesting connection between the Indian National Congress and the Theosophical Society — Annie Besant who was virulently against the devadasi system had, at various points in her career, been president of both organizations. Dr Arundale was a theosophist and the Kalakshetra Institute was originally situated on the property of the Theosophical Society and the school Dr Arundale opened was named for Annie Besant.

References

Sanskrit dance texts in translation:

Natya Sastra. 1950, 1961. A treatise on Hindu Dramaturgy and Histrionics ascribed to Bharata Muni and translated by Manomohan Ghosh in two volumes. — Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal.

Natya Sastra of Bharata Muni. 2000. — English edition by a Board of Scholars published by Sri Satguru publications (a division of India Book Centre).

Nartananirnaya by Pandarika Vitthala (original text 1570) published by Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts and Mothal Banarsidass Publishers Delhi; translation, edit and critical commentary by R Sathyanarayana: 1994.

Books on dance directly related to this paper:

Jordan, K. 2003. *From Sacred Servant to Profane Prostitute - a history of the changing legal status of devadasis in India 1857-1947*. New Delhi: Manohar Publishers.

Kalarani, R. 2004. *Bharata Natyam in Tamilnadu - after 1200AD. Madurai, Tamil Nadu*: J.J. Publications.

Parker Lewis, H. 2012. *Dance of Bliss; the sacred dance of India*. Cape Town: ihilihili press.

Patnaik, D.N. 1971. *Odissi Dance Orissa Sangeet Natak*, Dept. of Culture, Government of Odisha.

Ratnam, A. Ed. 2005. *Nirmalam/the genius of S.Sarada*. Arangham Trust.

Soneji, D. 2012. *Unfinished Gestures – devadasi, memory, modernity in South India*. University of Chicago Press.

Subramanyam, P. 2003. Common dance codes of India and Indonesia. Chennai: Nrithyodaya.

Vedam, V. 2003. *Handbook on Natya Sastra*. Kalakshetra Foundation.

Vijaisri, P. 2004. *Recasting the Devadasi – patterns of sacred prostitution in colonial South India* Kanishka Pub.

Articles

Haafner, J. 2015: India's Temple Dancers: Indispensable Ornament of the religion (extract from: *Travels in a Palanquin* (1808) translation by Dr Paul van der Velde University of Amsterdam

Krishnan, H. 2008. Inscribing practice; reconfigurations and textualizations of Devadasi Repertoire in the 19th and early 20th Century South India. Research paper supported by the Dance Dept. Wesleyan University)

Lopez, Y.R. 2003. Odissi, Temple Rituals and Sculptures (presented at the Third Cotzen Advanced Seminar, The Archaeology of Ritual UCLA Los Angeles 2004. Available: humanitieslab.stanford.edu/117/868

Radika, V.S. 2011. Development of Sadir in the court of Raja Serfoji 2nd 1798 -1832 PhD thesis, University of Hyderabad. Available: shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream.

Roebert, D. Classical Indian Dance as Sadhana: some notes inviting elaboration Sept. 2014 Available. www.academia.edu (share research)

With grateful acknowledgment to the research from those at the forefront of change, not only in form, but also in attitude: Ketu Katrak, Shyamala Murthi, Prarthana Purkayastha, Anne Décoret-Ahiha, Anita Ratnam; Gayatri Spivak and Chandra Mohanty; as well as guidance and assistance from art-historian Gandhi Rajan and members of the National Museum Institute of History of Art, Conservation and Musicology in India; and a special thanks to Michael Nixon for sharing his library of wonderful books on dance and music and to Odissi dancer Rahul Acharya, disciple of Durga Charan Ranbir, for his insights on the sacred texts housed in the archives at Jagannath Temple in Puri.

heatherparkerlewis@gmail.com

BUTOH-BALLET: A WORKSHOP STUDY WITH CAPE TOWN CITY BALLET

Jacki Job

Abstract

In 2003, I facilitated butoh workshops for members of Cape Town City Ballet company in Cape Town, and researched how butoh could shift the performance processes of ballet dancers. This paper draws on ballet's historical legacy and the impressions it continues to make across cultures in South Africa. It also argues for the relevance of butoh principles in a South African context. Spivak's 'decolonising the imagination' is appropriated to suggest how butoh challenges the hegemony of ballet by offering ways to reimagine the body, its aesthetic and ways of representing meaning to the performance of dance in South Africa. Judith Butler's description of fantasy is included to analyse the dancers individual responses to butoh, and demonstrates the potential for shifting entrenched behaviour and gendered stereotypes that can theoretically effect change on a larger scale. Butoh-Ballet follows Rustom Bharucha's suggestion to stretch one's limitations and assumptions by co-habiting blurred spaces. This paper marks the earliest reflective analysis of the subtle shifts butoh could make to ballet in South Africa today. The study is held within the complexities of our humanity as multi-cultural South Africans, and advocates more collaborative efforts and respect of differences across artistic disciplines in order to connect and be relevant to contemporary South African society

Introduction

Butoh was developed in Japan in the 1950s and 1960s and could be described as a dance that is abstract, imprecise, focusing on broken lines and introspection. Ballet seems to be in direct opposition to butoh, with its aesthetics invested in realism, precision, straight lines and extrovert actions. The title, Butoh-Ballet, is a deliberate distillation of the oppositional qualities encapsulated in each dance style. It is also an attempt to transmit a circular transformative energy, that I believe, stems from difference. Cultural distinctions cannot be denied when writing about dance in South Africa. The impact of British and Dutch colonialism, as well as its offshoot, apartheid, has contributed to a public perception of ballet as a form of White people's dance, whereas persons classified as Black, Coloured or Indian are associated with traditional and/or contemporary dance. This paper will show how the intersection of butoh and ballet can provide insight into ways of re-imagining the body in performance that could potentially connect with people on a day-to-day level in South Africa's multi-cultural society.

I acknowledge a personal, 'endarkened' voice that emanates from my hybrid identity as Coloured, woman, and pioneer Butoh artist in South Africa. However, I agree with the claim of feminist theorist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, that "the structures underpinning aesthetic representation [...] also underpin political representation" [but does not] guarantee that the

interests of [those systematically discriminated...] will be recognized [...] or heard" (Morton, 2003:57). Therefore, Butoh-Ballet is not about reworking a ballet by using indigenous themes, or attempting to reverse its White-ness by adulating Black dancers that perform classical works like Swan Lake (van Wyk, 2011). I do believe that butoh situates the external focus of the body found in ballet, with a more liminal and nuanced approach that could shift ballet dancers perception of their bodies and performance processes. My positioning is in line with performance studies theorist, Richard Schechner, who stated that "other things should be brought into performance" (Harding & Rosenthal, 2011), and French playwright, Antonin Artaud, who held that to move beyond clear social significations, our dance should perhaps express a mystical meaning (Artaud, 1938). Also informed by the intercultural notions of Rustom Bharucha, this paper aims to "find those blurred spaces that bring us together [...to] find other ways of stretching the limits and assumptions of our secular selves" (Bharucha, 2000:122).

The Workshop Study

In 2013, I conducted 5 workshops with 4 dancers from Cape Town City Ballet company. Through a combination of butoh-based exercises, Japanese anecdotes, open-ended, Zen-like phrases, a wide score of music, film narratives, metaphors and pictures, I developed a bricolage methodology that enabled the dancers to have simultaneous stimulation points, and add complex twists and depth to their work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011:5). In each session the dancers - Ashley (male), Brenda, Cindy and Dianna¹ - individually explored specific exercises that challenged their somatic sense of gravity, weight, time and space, as well as their psychological attitudes to beauty and perfection. I attempted to receive multiple perspectives through a range of research tools such as questionnaires, video documentation, interviews after the workshop process, as well as watching rehearsals and performances of Cape Town City Ballet. This body of writing is supported with numerous excerpts from their responses. Chronologically, I refer to incidences recorded in my memory prior to the first date of the workshop process. Their actual experiences during the workshop, as well as their individual reflections 2 months after the workshops, are also noted. In addition, I look at how their dance training as well their individual and group

¹ To protect the professional identity of the dancers, pseudonyms have been used. I deliberately refer to them by their first names in order to reflect a sense of intimacy between the participants and myself.

responses may have indicated a certain kind of physicality or emotional reaction in their experience of butoh.

In gathering all the information I set out to look at all of the material, as if for the first time, without any pre-determined outcomes. One of the most important findings is a heightened use of the imagination. For me, imagination is an inner process that enables the mind to create visual images of the self and/or surrounding world in deeply personal and individual terms. The dancers described imagination as influencing their creative thoughts and different execution of movements. For example, extended limbs and upright postures usually associated with ballet were replaced with more asymmetrical, distorted shapes and floor-based work. I found metaphors helpful in realising ideas that may not seem realistic on a physical level alone. This connects to gender theorist, Judith Butler's, description of fantasy "[as] what allows us to imagine ourselves and others otherwise; it establishes the possible in excess of the real; it points elsewhere, and when it is embodied, it brings the elsewhere home" (Butler, 2004:29). I choose to think of home as a place of origin and return. It might then follow that work imagined from this place could be described as original whilst equally effecting a return to being authentic. One might then ask, could ballet in South Africa that so rigorously follows Eurocentric ideals be authentic? The subsequent paragraphs will discuss how the outcome of the workshop study provided me with some insights to answer this question. According to South African theatre maker, Jay Pather, African artists that reflect a more self-conscious critique of their work, are able to develop new artistic ideas when it is informed by "a life lived within and of our communities at this time and in this place" (Pather, 2006:14). I apply Pather's notions to my understanding of Butler's description of how embodying 'otherness' can establish connections between what may have been previously perceived as different. In relation to making ballet relevant to South African contexts, I believe the dancers ability to insert elements of what or who may be considered 'other' or 'otherwise' in performance might be one way to "rejuvenate audience interest" (Triegaardt, 2012:25) and bring it 'home'.

One of the objectives of this workshop was to discover alternate ways of perceiving the dancer's body in performance. According to Butler (1990), gender is a performative act and social conditioning results in one's anatomy at birth determining a feminine or masculine approach to life. She adds how subversions of the convention are often attributed to homosexual preferences, resulting in further stereotypes and prejudices. For example, by describing a lesbian as butch, or a homosexual man as camp or effeminate. I agree with Butler's theories and am aware of how educational, religious, social and political

components of society reinforce gender stereotypes that look at females and males in binary comparison to each other. For example, femininity may be described as being soft-spoken, submissive, physically weak, utilising less material space and concerned with introspection. Masculinity, on the other hand, may be described as being brusque, in charge, physically strong, inhabiting a wide physical space and more prone to extrovert acts. Traditionally, many of the roles played in ballet, as well as the construction of exercises in ballet class, reinforce gender stereotypes. In the ballet, *Giselle*, the female protagonist is beautiful, but also portrayed as a peasant, physically weak and mentally ill. She is unable to cope with the deceit of the man she is in love with, becomes mad and eventually dies. Her male counterpart is handsome and from nobility. In spite of his deceit, which was directly responsible for her death², his expression of regret and sorrow makes her forgive him in the afterlife. Therefore, assuaged of all guilt, he is able to carry on with his life. Another ballet, *Coppélia*, portrays the female as a beautiful but as an inanimate mannequin that can only be 'brought to life' (sic) by the hand of her maker, a male, Dr Coppélius.

In my reflexive analysis of the workshop study, I was interested in checking how their responses subverted what society and ballet perceives as conventional gender related reactions. I considered how their dance training as well their individual and group responses may have indicated certain physical or emotional reactions, and found that butoh subverted stereotypical representations of gender without the use of make-up, costuming or sexually themed exercises. In addition, each of the dancer's reactions could be interpreted as both conventionally and unconventionally masculine and feminine.

Before the start of the workshops, none of the dancers had any indication of what butoh was. They listened passively and appeared to be apprehensive. These emotions could be seen as a feminine stereotype. However, I interpreted the increasingly autonomous behaviour and movement of the female dancers over the workshop period as masculine and hence, a subversion of the feminine stereotype. This could also be seen in how their perception of the aesthetic of beauty shifted. In this regard, Dianna claimed to have found

² I found a contemporary parallel to the story of *Giselle* in the trial against South African paralympian champion, Oscar Pistorius, for fatally shooting his girlfriend, a lesser known South African reality TV show celebrity and model, Reeva Steenkamp, in February 2013. Due to the international status of the accused, the trial received live global coverage on television. Pistorius was initially arrested and charged with murder, but in October 2014, after a lengthy and often emotionally theatric trial process, was found guilty of a lesser charge, culpable homicide. It is not my intention to dispute the lawful judgement of the court. For me, however, this trial echoes one underlying message of *Giselle* – where a man's expression of regret under the premise of love may be enough for him 'to get away with murder.'

new ways of “opening her mind to relating to her body” (Dianna, Written Response, Cape Town, 9 April, 2013). As opposed to moving with an upright torso and elongated limbs associated with ballet, she began to lie down on the floor and caress it with her hands. She was able to allow herself to ‘tap into the real stuff’ and feel ugly and embarrassed when expressing love, an emotion that she described as “not always the most dignified” (*Ibid.*). Dianna explained that dancers perceived themselves as ugly when portraying negative emotions such as ‘shock’ or ‘envy’ on stage. Following her experience of butoh, she claimed to be more comfortable with expressing ‘taboo’ subjects and found expression for this newfound sensibility when dancing the role of a prostitute in the ballet *Camille*. I noted how Ashley’s physical and verbal responses increasingly destabilised his conventional masculine image when he applied his imagination to the exercise. In the beginning, he preferred to deal with his sense of awkwardness by not fully engaging with the exercises and appeared to be disinterested. When participating, he showed off muscular strength in the execution of the exercises. For example, he walked by kicking out his legs with firm, flexed feet and stamping them on the floor whilst his arms remained at the sides of his body. The exercise at that time focused on a kind of sensitivity and required the dancers to imagine eyes underneath their feet. To me, Ashley showed a quality of insensitivity in his soldier-like walk that might be interpreted as masculine. By the 3rd workshop he gradually became more introspective and even light in his actions, which may be associated with femininity. At one moment he gently fluttered his fingers above his shoulders like wings. At various points I was reminded how butohists³ often incorporate ambiguous and ambivalent meaning by juxtaposing contrasts in dance. Similarly, during the last workshop, I found it interesting when Ashley verbally described his stance as broad and strong, failing to realise that his feet were pointing towards each other. Contrary to his perception of strength, his physicality made him look vulnerable. Over the 5 workshops, the dancers’ movements appeared to stem directly from their imagination and were quite unlike their usual patterns. Their seemingly unique experience was corroborated by statements such as, “I imagined I was a lily” (Ashley, Verbal response, Cape Town, 2 April, 2013), or “I felt like an octopus” (Brenda, Verbal response, Cape Town, 29 March, 2013).

Further shifts in perception were noted as they became less concerned with external forces, such as the mirror, or the obvious showing off of a physical form or ballet technique. In the first three workshops, they often adjusted their clothing and checked balletic positions, such

³ Those who maintain the spirit of the original butoh founders, Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo, are called butohists (Fraleigh, 2006).

as the tendu (to point the toe with an extended leg). If one were to associate acts of grooming and an overt consciousness of the external form as feminine qualities, Ashley's behaviour and his notable attention to the mirror could be described as a subversion of a masculine stereotype. However, after the first 2 workshops, all of the dancers became less concerned about how they looked and even closed their eyes (perhaps unconsciously) whilst doing the exercises.

Brenda's first images of butoh (seen on the internet) were of movements that conveyed physically distorted, strange bodies that might be perceived as negative. Yet after experiencing an exercise that expressed love by moving with a mangled, disabled body she claimed, "It feels like I've got life in me, and there's energy inside of me" (Brenda, Verbal Response, Cape Town, 5 April, 2013). As a dance scholar I noticed how the shift in her physical state - from fatigue at the beginning of the session to being energised at the end, in spite of moving with great restraint - was motivated from the inside. Her remark, "It felt like it was a new day" (Brenda, Interview, Cape Town, 17 June, 2013), echoes the French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, who spoke of "imagination [...] as perception renaissante [perception renaissance]" (Sokolowski, 2000:220). By the end of the fifth workshop Brenda described how she experienced the difference of atmosphere and intention between butoh and ballet.

She wrote,

Normally in this studio it's lots of people and point shoes klanking and bashing and loud music.[...] But in your class it gives us time to go to that quiet place [...] Not to think of choreography but to just feel and go to that place where your mind/spirit/body or whatever takes you (Brenda, Written response, Cape Town, 2 April, 2013).

I believe that Brenda's overall experience could be described as her attaining a deeper awareness of her body, and consequently, of life. For me, this corresponds to the French phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty's description of "the body as 'la cachette de la vie' (the place where life hides away)" (Shusterman, 2005:171).

Cindy's description of her experience at the end of the third session might begin to answer the aforementioned question on whether ballet had the possibility of being authentic. She explained,

One needs to commit. You need to say something. And it doesn't have to be life-changing or deep all the time. But it must be real. Ballet should inevitably be one

and the same as what we did today. Authentic" (Cindy, Verbal response, Cape Town, 2 April, 2013)

To this end, Cindy felt that the visual imagery produced from metaphors could be used to give credence to characters played in ballet performances. She imagined that if one could really embody another person or thing, the performance would be credible, even if it were not understood. She said, "Put layers into the character and you can appreciate something you don't understand" (Ibid., 5 April, 2013). She claimed that butoh taught her about the detail within a movement, and in this sense, polished her dance. Cindy noted shifts in the way she perceived her body and said,

What I really took away from it was the internal feeling of things...you can have your back as your front and your front as your back, to be able to feel things in that way" (Cindy, Interview, Cape Town, 13 June, 2013).

When discussing the ongoing practice of butoh, she readily responded that its lessons could be forgotten as quickly as they were taught, unless efforts were made to maintain a consistent practice. In spite of the time limitation of the workshops, she acknowledged that in a relatively short period, their bodies seemed to grasp and convey abstract concepts in visceral ways. For me, there were long-term associations with butoh, noted in how they claimed to apply its principles in their various roles in the classical ballet, Camille, performed in the month subsequent to the workshop study. Above, I mentioned how Dianna altered her perception of her role as a prostitute. Ashley mentioned the workshops had helped him to change his reliance on the mirror as the judge of his technique, especially if a movement felt awkward. With no actual mirrors to check oneself in performance, he claimed that his confidence in building his character with his imagination grew. He stated that butoh taught him, "To see what you want to see instead of what is in front of you...it's that liberated feeling" (Ashley, Interview, Cape Town, 14 June, 2013). According to Ashley, this gave him the power to mentally transform his fellow dancers as well as himself into characters that would best suit his role. The butoh experience enabled him to deliver a more believable performance in Camille, and to "really fall in love [and be a] cocky, confident, sexy man" (Ibid.).

In the first two workshops, the dancers all seemed to follow and imitate each other's movements. It seems to me that the mental conditioning of corps de ballet may give rise to a loss of self and a readiness to regularly give oneself over to the demands of the ballet choreographer or teacher and becomes ingrained, more especially so when one has been doing this to one's body for over fifteen years. On the one hand, I acknowledge how this

sense of conformity and compliance to authority has contributed to the perpetuation of ballet across centuries and continents. On the other hand, I believe that the relative anonymity and stifling of the individuality of each dancer in the corps de ballet may have emphasized their single experiences in the workshops even more. In comparison to the West, the Japanese have a different perception of the importance of self. Japanese butohist Kasai Akira states, “community is more important than individualism” (Fraleigh & Nakamura, 2006:39). In the exploration of butoh, I suggest the Japanese perspective as a positive point of departure. At the risk of esotericism, perhaps the common intention of individual personalities within a group creates a greater collective impact, as an individual agenda then becomes insignificant allowing one’s focus to extend beyond the limitations of the self. For a ballet performer who may seldom be the centre of attention, this ability could be advantageous in butoh, broadening the dancer’s perspective to see beyond the needs or perceptions of self, and use self-exploration as a way to connect to the surrounding environment and community.

However, I think, if expressing imagination could be described as a process that is distinct to an individual, then it may be said that the lack of imagination is evident in how the sense of individuality is lost in a group. When given instructions, they would stand in one line, in the centre, with their bodies facing me squarely, and without my prompt, always return to a similar neutral position once the exercise was completed. It also became evident how particular approaches and ways of articulating movement were ingrained. I noted their struggle to balance on one leg when asked to focus on the position of their heart, as opposed to focusing on holding their core. However, I believe their short-lived struggle in their first attempt of this exercise once again demonstrated how closely they paid attention to my instruction and consequently, displayed openness to thinking about the body in alternate ways. They mentioned how the re-articulation of actions in introspective terms seemed to liberate their minds and thereby potentially increase their performance techniques. Another example was on the occasion of the third workshop when they performed an exercise that could be associated with a yoga meditation. They seemed to be uncomfortable with sitting with their legs folded and visualising the movement of a rose with their breath. Bearing in mind that ballet focuses on straightened legs and a rhythmic response in time to the beat of music, I put their discomfort and consequent ill concentration down to their not being accustomed with the details of my exercise. By the fourth day I noted how the group had shifted from what could be considered a balletic response, to what I describe as a more butoh exploration of the work. With this I mean that

each dancer had become more introspective and less concerned with ‘showing’ their investigation of the exercise in movements than they were used to. In the exercise that expressed the death of a flower on the fourth day, I noticed how they seemed to break the balletic convention of ‘controlling the centre’ (sic) of the body, and played with arching their lower backs as well as swaying and contracting their hips. By the last workshop I found they had abandoned their group behaviour described at the top of this paragraph, and instead of starting an exercise in the centre, they naturally separated themselves from each other and moved to the peripheries of the room, which I interpreted as their search for a more solitary space to match their introspection. Additionally, in their verbal and written responses, the dancers used similar words to express their thoughts. In spite of initially describing exercises that made them feel uncomfortable, such as walking with a deformed body, as ‘embarrassing’, ‘awkward’, ‘abnormal’ and ‘ugly’, they all used words like ‘positive’, ‘alive’, ‘free-er’ and ‘happy’ to describe their overall experience by the end.

In the light of the theories expounded by the French sociologist, Pierre Bourdieu (1986), that ‘cultural habitus’ or embodied thoughts and practices are unconsciously acquired through social conditioning and are resistant to change, I found it significant how butoh facilitated clear physical, emotional and mental shifts, stimulating the imagination to effect experiences unique to the individual. This is supported by the British scholar, Alistair Mutch, in his criticism of Bordieu’s fatalistic notion of change. Mutch argues that issues with change have to happen at an individual level (Mutch, 2003). I agree and believe that the sum of individual actions holds the capacity to effect socio-political change. With a sense of disenchantment regarding the performance processes of Cape Town City Ballet, Cindy referred to watching Brenda with admiration in one exercise and stated, “There’s so much more that could be accessed [...] it’s just not thought of here (she taps on her right temple) to ask” (Cindy, Interview, Cape Town, 13 June, 2013).

Review and Future Direction

One aim of butohists is to develop their own sense of butoh and not follow a prescribed movement pattern. Ohno Yoshito, son of butoh co-founder, Ohno Kazuo, constantly asked, “What is your butoh?” (Ohno, Workshops, Tokyo, 2003 - 2011). In other words, it is important to examine the origin and route of one’s movement, and then develop a personal signature that does not necessarily subscribe to an anatomically gendered stereotype. Another intention is to de-sexualise the body in butoh performances. To render the body neutral or neutered, male performers might tuck away their penises, or female performers

may bandage their breasts flat. Butohists could be covered in white make-up and have shaven heads, to present an asexual self. In the workshop study, the dancers demonstrated an 'other gendered' sense of their bodies when utilising their imagination and allowing it to inform the language of their movement. In this way, applying butoh principles resulted in subverted gendered responses from each of the dancers without heeding overt actions that could be considered as conventions in both butoh and ballet. I hold that butoh may be a valuable tool for ballet in South Africa to develop processes and performances that shift our external perceptions of each other in society.

In summary, the workshops emphasise several points that relate to how butoh can stimulate the imagination to shift the performance processes of ballet. Firstly, it pays lateral⁴ attention to the dancer's technique, which then contributes to approaching movements from alternative perspectives. In addition, the exercises demonstrate how a repetition of non-conventional methods, could be used to gradually break down entrenched habits and organically introduce another kind of physicality. There also seems to be a symbiotic relationship between stimulating the imagination and authentic movement, and how that movement then influences ones perception of performance. Butoh challenged the hegemony of ballet and the experiences of the dancers in the workshops demonstrated how it could compliment the building of characters in ballet performance. There was also evidence of development in self-awareness amongst the dancers as well as a willingness to explore the familiar and more difficult unfamiliar concepts of butoh. In addition, it highlights how the body and mindset of a ballet dancer in South Africa could be the site of meeting conventional and unconventional codes⁵. The experience of butoh gave the four ballet dancers an indication of their inherent potential as performers. Finally, imagination enables the dancers to embody animate and inanimate concepts, thereby tapping into their everyday emotions and deepening their sense of self and connections with their environment.

⁴I use the term 'lateral' to refer to dance methods as well as theorising about performance in ways that may be described as unorthodox, non-linear, imaginative and stemming from multiple sources.

⁵It needs noting that conventional codes in ballet may be relative to the culture. For example, it might be that ballet dancers in Japan have a different sense of their bodies due to cultural Zen-Buddhist beliefs, and that thinking of their bodies from more spiritual, immaterial or abstract points may be considered as a normal perspective. On the other hand, ballet dancers in South Africa may have more of a Western and Christian cultural association that leads to perceiving their bodies in more earthly, material and concrete terms.

If the intention was to re-think the staging of a ballet, one might, for example, imagine a Giselle performed with the male unable to deal with being a victim of deceit, falling into dementia and dying. With an invested butoh discipline, however, I imagine it might be possible to realise a dance performance where gendered anatomical descriptions are completely irrelevant, yet the narrative remains appropriate to the challenges, realities and hopes of individuals in South Africa. To borrow from Bharucha, “it is the substratum of life that gives meaning to dance, not the anatomy of the performer” (Bharucha, 1993:58). Butoh-Ballet could become integral to choreography and ‘other’ performance processes related to Dance. It is as if a seed of possibilities had been planted. In terms of ballet performance, I wonder how long it will take to germinate and what it will grow into? To adequately answer, future research awaits.

Works Cited

Artaud, A. 1938. Production and Metaphysics. In *The Theatre and its Double* Translated by V. Corti. 1970. Great Britain, Calder & Boyars Ltd.

Ashley. 2013. Butoh-Ballet. (j.job, Interviewer) Cape Town.

Bharucha, R. 2000. *The Politics of Cultural Practice*. London: The Athlone Press.

Bharucha, R. 1993. *Theatre and the World*. USA, Canada: Routledge.

Bourdieu, P. 1986. The forms of capital. In *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*. J.G. Richardson, Ed. NY, Green Wood Press.

Brenda. 2013. Butoh-Ballet. (j. job, Interviewer) Cape Town.

Butler, J. 1990. *Gender Trouble - Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York & London: Routledge.

Butler, J. 2004. *Undoing Gender*. Oxfordshire, New York, Great Britain, USA: Routledge.

Cindy. 2013. Butoh-Ballet. (j. job, Interviewer)

Denzin, N.K., & Lincoln, Y.S. Eds. 2011. *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research*. USA: Sage Publications.

Dianna. 2013 Butoh-Ballet. (j. job, Interviewer)

Fraleigh, S., & Nakamura, T. 2006. *Hijikata Tatsumi and Ohno Kazuo*. New York: Routledge.

Harding, J.M. Ed. 2011. The rise of performance studies: Rethinking Richard Schechner's broad spectrum. UK: Palgrave Macmillan.

Morton, S. 2003. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2004 ed.). London and New York: Routledge.

Mutch, A. 2003. Communities of Practice and Habitus: A Critique. *Organization Studies*.24(3):383-401.

Ohno, Y. 2003-2011. Butoh Workshops. (j. job, Interviewer) Japan.

Pather, J. 2006. A response: African contemporary dance? Questioning issues of a performance aesthetic for a developing continent. *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*.20(2):9-15.

Shusterman, R. 2005. The Silent, Limping Body of Philosophy. In *The Cambridge Companion to Merleau-Ponty*. M.B. Taylor Carman, Ed. USA: Cambridge University Press.

Sokolowski, R. 2000. *Introduction to Phenomenology*. USA: Cambridge University Press.

Triegaardt, E. 2012. Cape Town City Ballet: Conserving the Voice of Classical Ballet. In S. Friedman, Ed. *Post-Apartheid Dance: Many bodies Many Voices Many Stories* . UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 17-30.

Van Wyk, S. & Giesler, C. 2011. Ballet Blanc to Ballet Black? Unpacking Whiteness in South African Ballet. *Proceedings of Confluences 6. Physicality and Performance*.Cape Town: University of Cape Town School of Dance. July.

NEGOTIATING MOVEMENT BETWEEN 2 CULTURES: SOCIALLY AND POLITICALLY.

Jayesperi Moopen

Abstract

The paper examines ways in which dance performance signifies meanings in multicultural South Africa. What is significant therefore is not the fact that we initiated dialogue between African aesthetics and Indian Cultural traditions but in the qualitative nature of these dialogues and the new kinds of cultural meaning which they have enabled. It is therefore necessary to further explore the construction of African choreography as a new resource for social transformation and notions of development are constantly renegotiated. With this presentation my aim is to therefore examine and present Tribhangi's relationship with classical Indian Dance and contemporary African traditional dance that places it in the context of discourses on multiculturalism and globalisation. Within this we consciously investigate and unpack juxtaposing the African male dancer and the Indian female body when highlighting idioms to create significance within the South African context of locating "ethnic" movements and forms. Theories of diaspora and hybridity both emphasise the importance of culture in the formation of national and multicultural identities that has potential to bring about social and political transformations. This presentation includes information based on workshops and lec/dems done in the UK/Canada/Kenya and Jamaica and the questions raised from those sessions and working with dancers from two or more cultures that spans 20 years.

INTRODUCTION:

Germaine Acogny explains:

Our mission is to bring up African dancers, to save their traditions, their roots and to introduce them to other cultures...African dance is a constant dialogue with the cosmos, with nature. It is an anchor to the earth and a bridge to the sky. So this is the global context of African dance, the socio-cultural and national context...We should advance everything that our ancestors left to us so that young people can express with gestures their feelings of today (Wong, 2005).

Acogny believes that part of this advancement requires contact with other cultures in order to, "develop their own vocabulary of gestures." The construction of contemporary African choreography as a new resource for social transformation as well as its development are constantly renegotiated as a transcultural practice. The idea of location remains essential because it allows for distinctions between dances as collections of 'ethnic' movements and forms, culturally-cruising-choreographies and more densely embedded artistic expressions. The fluidity of African dance with complex rhythmic movements contrasts sharply with the structure form of Bharata Natyam evoking a synergetic relationship providing a freedom of expression that is quite liberating.

My aim in this paper is therefore to present a reading of Tribhangi's relationship with classical Indian dance and contemporary African traditional dance that places it in the context of discourses on multiculturalism and globalisation. It is however necessary to recognise how these shared histories have had effects which are still at work within current inequalities and racialised social relations of cultural identity. From a liberal point of view, cultural diversity is considered to be of positive value and to be in need of protection and maintenance.

Just as our understanding and interpretation of the past is fluid and changing, so notions of nationalism and national identity are not fixed but are ever evolving. What both dance performance and the performance of gendered and national identities have in common is that all involve the repetition of discourses that take on a unique significance within the context in which they are performed: within predetermined and regulated limits, these allow for varying possibilities of interpretation by the performers.

Those of us who work with classical Indian dance styles, face challenges as to how to use the aesthetic and expressive potential of these styles without being dismissed as old-fashioned and being considered to produce work that is marginal to contemporary concerns and experience. Some choreography, and particularly my work, is born out of the re-envisioning of traditions used to comment on contemporary life conditions giving a new lease on life to the creative development of African and Indian dance. Aesthetic, culture and politics informs all our work whether consciously or subconsciously and it needs to be seen in that context when viewing it. When working with the female body, particularly highlighting social issues, distant elements of dance idioms are juxtaposed to create a different significance; dance is often dropped away in preference for less stylized versions of movement.

Dance has a powerful capacity to reflect our social and cultural values and our search for identity. We are born into a society with many cultural influences which affect our perceptions and challenge conventions and artistic expressions. For me living in South Africa and living in a multicultural society, I realised that for the broader communities to appreciate Indian dance as a stand alone art form it had to be presented in a context that made it accessible. I believe that dance conversations that focus primarily on vocabulary are important but also that they are basic and entry level conversations, the first step in beginning to articulate what the eye and the mind recognises and understands as the various building blocks that make a dance. But perhaps a more meaningful conversation

would not be so singularly focused. In a broader sense there are many interpretations of multiculturalism – terms like social cohesion and nation building come to mind.

South Africa is a multicultural society where mutual respect and admiration of each other's culture and histories has become the ethos of building a new nation. These embedded cultures, histories and language systems create a multi-layered identity which enrich and complement each other. As artists who are trying to define and locate ourselves within this nation, we experiment and explore working towards an identity that is still in the making.

What the research has shown is that a concept of ethno-aesthetic is relevant for all dance genres; that each aesthetic represents the norms of the dance genre and that these are constantly being negotiated and re-negotiated by individual artists; and that it is important for assessors and critics alike to acquaint themselves better with the aesthetic underlying the genres they are writing about. The innovations are not perceived in terms of rupture, i.e. copy and paste, or as dismantling the classical canons but rather as continuous reinventions, without losing the traditional values. We are also aware of the fact that being in an urban environment brings to bear on our craft its own sensibilities and influences, where dances tend to become more stylised through communion with the styles of other communities and people or dances change their style and meaning in competitive festivals. Furthermore, traditional dances often do not appear in isolation but are parts of broader cultural activities.

Tradition evolves. Art does not remain static. It borrows. It is symbiotic and an experience of sharing. We are challenged and inspired by how issues of identity, sexuality, globalisation, political and economic issues change the narrative content-as also by what should be the “creative process” to help integrate movements, concepts, multimedia and other elements to give way to new directions. What happens, for example, when a ritual dance is taken on stage? We realise that when on stage, dance is no more a ritual but an art form with a different relationship between the performance and the performer producing a different experience for the audience. Our aim is that choreography becomes meaningful and escapes from the arbitrary. That it does not remain just a chance compilation of gestures. The journey is an important part for all of us.

References:

Byrd, D. 2010. Assessing Choreography. *Spectrum Dance Theatre – Donald Byrd Blog*. Available: <http://spectrumdance.org/2010/12/>

Burt, R. 2012 The East West binary and the burden of representation. Paper presented at *Gdansk Dance Conference, Asia and Europe – cross-cultural dialogues in theatre and dance*: June 18th.

Faist, T. & Sieveking, N. 2011. Unravelling Migrants as Transnational Agents of Development: Social Spaces in Between Ghana and Germany. LIT Verlag Münster.

Jason, S. 2013. Germaine Acogny: Dancing around Africa's bodied politics. Mail & Guardian online. Available. <http://mg.co.za/article/2013-08-22-her-dance-reports-on-africas-bodied-politics>

Katrak. K. 2011. *Contemporary Indian Dance - New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora*. Palgrave Macmillan

Shah, M. 2009. *Retracing Roots, Creating Identity*. Available:
<http://www.browntown.in/?tag=neera-kapur-dromson>

Wong. L.Y. 2005. Negotiating the Modern Space of African Dance. 2005
<http://www.thisbusinessofdanceandmusic.com/Article-NegotiatingtheSpace.html>
moopen@iburst.co.za

**BODY OF QUESTIONS: THE POLITICAL PROMISE OF CHOREOGRAPHY? REFLECTIONS ON
CURRENT SOUTH AFRICAN CHOREOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES FROM THE EASTERN CAPE
2009 - 2014.**

Juanita Finestone-Praeg

Associate Professor: Drama Department: Rhodes University

Abstract

Living with and embodying the political excesses and failures of a still revolting South Africa, I remain haunted by the relationship between politics and performance. Is an understanding of performance possible that not only refuses to reproduce the political but that actively undermines the categories of meaning upon which the political is premised? Baz Kershaw asks:

So how might we judge one aesthetic approach to be more politically promising than another? Is live art's deconstruction of the politics of representation, say, any more or less potent than community celebration's political reinforcement of collective identity (1999:17).

I argue that choreographic practice has the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the relationship between politics and performance, between the political (conventionally understood) and the performative as a space where identities are forged, interpreted and contested. I demonstrate my argument with reference to selected choreographic works by choreographers currently working within the Eastern Cape, Grahamstown. The interdisciplinary choreography of choreographers commissioned to make work for First Physical Theatre Company in 2014 will be reviewed as works which engage a "choreopolitics" (Lepecki: 2012:22). Case studies include Acty Tang's Hunger and Athina Vachla's Standing Taller than Liberty. Reference may be made to other works within the company's repertory including Juanita Finestone-Praeg's Inner Piece (2009), the collaboration Wreckage (2011) by Andrew Buckland and Athina Vahla and Nomcebisi Moyikwa's Inqindi (2015) and Waltz (2015). I hope to question the limits and/or potential of alternate representations of selected choreographic revolts for perceiving and expressing diversity and difference in South Africa. In what way can these alternative choreographies be said to perform difference, liberate difference and open up a space for difference to decolonise representations of racialized and gendered dancing bodies?

Introduction

Living with the political excesses and failures of a still revolting South Africa, I remain haunted by the relationship between politics and performance. Is an understanding of performance possible that not only refuses to reproduce the political but that actively undermines the categories of meaning upon which the political is premised? Baz Kershaw asks:

So how might we judge one aesthetic approach to be more politically promising than another? Is live art's deconstruction of the politics of representation, say, anymore or less potent than community celebration's political reinforcement of collective identity (1999:17).

I argue that choreographic practice has the potential to provoke a re-thinking of the relationship between politics and performance, between the political (conventionally understood) and the performative as a space where identities are forged, interpreted and contested. Questioning the use of art for politics, Lehmann and Primavesi argue that a "shift from the use of art for politics towards a political way of making art is particularly important for the role of dramaturgy in contemporary

theatre and performance" (2009:5). I argue here that Acty Tang's *hunger* (2014) and Athina Vahla's *Standing taller than liberty* (2014) are works that activate a personal choreopolitics that both perform and inform a 'political way of making art'. Both works define their own terms of political reference and the political promise of the performances reside in the way that they stage ambiguous dialogues which potentially open up a questioning rather than a set of ideologically prescriptive political statements as answers.

André Lepecki devotes section four of Documents of Contemporary Art to what he terms "Choreopolitics". He suggests that the term focuses on "the notion that choreographers and dancers articulate their own political concepts ... not as metaphors for politics but as concrete activations of political practice and thought" (Lepecki, 2012:22). This term holds resonance with Hans-Thies Lehmann's attempt to posit a space of positive articulation and autonomy for performance theory through his term the "postdramatic", a term and concept coined from within the discipline of performance studies, and which critiques a tradition of equating the dramatic and the theatrical with performance practice in all its myriad and manifest forms and expressions. As Lehmann posits in his prologue to Postdramatic Theatre,

I want to read the realised artistic constructions and forms of practice as answers to artistic questions, as manifest reactions to the representational problems faced by theatre. In this sense, the term 'postdramatic' – as opposed to the epochal category of the 'postmodern' – means a concrete problem of theatre aesthetics (Lehman, 2002:20: my emphasis).

Lehman's proposal embodies a core challenge to performance studies to understand its practice in and on its own terms. Lepecki's term "Choreopolitics" similarly offers a term and methodology for choreography to locate itself as both a "site and a method of study" which "inter-animate each other" (Stucky & Wimmer, 2002:12) – in short, the term offers the idea that choreography articulates a variety of pedagogical practices that embody its 'own way of knowing'. I commenced research for this paper with the intention of applying a postcolonial reading to selected dance works that I had viewed in 2014 in the Eastern Cape, Grahamstown, South Africa. I found my application increasingly constrained by the chosen postcolonial theoretical framing which began to feel somewhat 'outside' of the choreographic sites and methods suggested from the works themselves. In the same way that Lehman poses critical questions towards developing what he calls an "aesthetic logic of the new theatre" (2006:18), Lepecki's term seemed to offer a similar potential for reviewing the particular choreographic politics and vision that each of these works had animated.

I would like to propose that the idea of a choreopolitics resides precisely in the way its processes and products activate a radical alternative to the way the political is generally perceived and understood in choreography. The insistence of much current choreographic practice on experimenting with

traditional narrative structures and deconstructing known dance and theatrical codes/languages continues to question conventional perceptions of what constitutes the political in choreography. In this sense, the choreopolitics of these works could be seen to be continually rehearsing their freedom from conventional understandings of the political and the perceptual politics of traditional theatrical dance representations.

Proximities

In a few works I viewed in 2014, a significant image stands out: an iconic, hyper-raised figure using its commanding height to represent power and to speak back to power (see Appendix 1 for brief reflections on Mamela Nyamya's 19 born 76 rebels).



(Photograph by Val Adamson: JOMBA! 2014)

Image (i)

Vahla's *Standing taller than liberty* opens to a vision of two African women standing with mythic presence and height wielding long blades. The women are statuesquely poised and posed as they emerge as extensions of hyper-imposed structures or tall plinths near the front of the stage. They

command the stage space standing their own length plus 1.2 meters high. Their costumes are made of leather and the weight of the garments flaunt a gravitas that counterpoints their extended perspective or viewpoint of height. They start to turn slowly, like ballerinas in a music box, using exaggerated and stylized gestures of slicing and cutting, their mouths sometimes opened in immense silent screams or smiles. Designer, Illka Louw motivates her choice of leather, suggesting that

[...] the leather is like a skin of something ... it scars... and it extends the liveness of the performer by extending the skin over a structure ... they extend the performer's space and the costume becomes a body mask and the performance sits on the outside of that ... the headgear had stylized reference to Makoti– married Xhosa women covering the head - and it also extended the head and forehead of the women to make them statuesque ... how much taller can one get than Liberty? (Louw, 2015)

The women's actions hint at a duplicitous presence. Vahla explains that "the knife can be a cleansing object in a ritual but at the same time it can be used in an aggressive way ... there is something about the blade that is absolute" (Vahla, 2015). Furthermore, knives are domestic objects, used everyday in ordinary ways by ordinary women but here, their exaggerated presence through their precarious, unusual height display them as epic or mythic objects to be used for powerful ritual. Already in this opening image, Vahla stages an incongruous, ambiguous representation of the relation of gender to power. After initial performances of *Standing taller than liberty*, Vahla created *Deus Faber* which she argues would become a prelude to the work if she had time to reconstruct it. Vahla describes the choreography in *Deus Faber* as "focused on the ritualized manipulation of a 3-meter high armour dress to create an unsettling landscape of a cathonic opera" (<http://www.athinavahla.com/projects>). *Deus Faber* refers to and translates the idea of origins with God as craftsman or architect of the world. Here, the two female figures transform to "become mother ... as in motherland ... I am exploring the emergence of Liberty as a female icon inspired by the myths of Genesis ... who are these women before they became these monsters and who put them there? Maybe the stupid patriarchal system ... (laughs)" (Vahla, 2015). The dresses are amplified sonically by microphones and as they are gradually unfolded, manipulated and finally 'danced' in the space, they resonate a sonic landscape and aural presence that suggests the pre-verbal, instinct and intuition, but also the surfacing of the 'unvoiced' narratives of the female figures which in *Standing taller than liberty* have already been rendered mute through their association with dominant systems and representations of power.



(Photograph by Stefan de Klerk)

Image (ii)

In Tang's *hunger*, in *The Parade*, four caricatured politicians enter the performance space along a raised platform. We meet The President with his entourage of three political "henchmen" (Tang, 2015), the President's Singer (or Muse) who colludes with his political duplicity and The Interpreter, who attempts to translate The President's speech and whose translation ultimately ushers in resistance to the President's authority.



(Photograph by Stefan de Klerk)

Using rock, opera and gospel music (Serj Tankian's "Praise the lord and Pass the Ammunition" poignantly captures a brutal critique of political hypocrisy) to underscore and evoke an epic spectacle of power, these four figures promenade their influence through an excess of slow, hyper-extended and stylized gestures of waving and curtseys to the observing crowds (the proletariat in the shadows and the audience). As Tang suggests, the scene is reminiscent of both

the opening of parliament and the fashion parade ... the parliament is like a projection of power ... money power and cultural power ... another reference was the Mardi Gras in New Orleans ... the throwing of money ... iconographic references were signs of wealth and decadence like feathers ... that sense of representation. (Tang, 2105) **Staging Dialogues**

These processions of larger-than-life figures embody a choreographed response to the gravitas, height and effect of political power in South Africa. Like spectral premonitions foreshadowing the statue debacles in South Africa this year (especially the Cecil John Rhodes Must Fall campaign), these iconic images conjure a spectacle of political power made prescient and visceral. They both represent and speak back to the power of symbols/signs to create, transform or divest themselves of social identity and political meaning. Dr Awelani Moyo notes

an imperative of social and cultural institutions is often to create narratives of identity which function to structure our experience and render it knowable and coherent, and to resolve these tensions where possible. This is exemplified by various forms of nationalism and state political rhetoric which, although aiming to be inclusive in their constructions of national identity, also sublimate the counter narratives of dissenting critical voices and rebellious, homeless bodies ... ***The efficacy of performance relies on its ability to activate certain deeply held social meanings and/as archetypal symbols.*** The individual bodies of spectators become both the locus and the medium by which meaning is produced, and this foregrounding of the repertoires and incorporative processes of memory-making may potentially speak back to power, ***affectively allowing for the inclusion of what would otherwise be left out of the official archive of collective memory.*** (Moyo, 2013:239: emphasis added)

And perhaps herein lies the promise of the choreographic – its corporeal activation of both personal and social meanings to performatively archive intimate and public responses to power. Moyo describes the deconstructive project of current choreography as a “corporeal network” arguing that in the most basic sense, a “corporeal network specifically signals the array of accumulated discursive meanings and signs which bodies carry and convey to and through one another” (Moyo, 2013:192). In an analysis of a work choreographed by myself in 2009 entitled *Inner Piece*, she analyses my choreographic choice to reference events in Rwanda and Abu Ghraib (America) as instances of a global politics that utilize a ‘corporeal networking’ to activate a local South African political intention or resonance:

Inner Piece does not deal explicitly with the TRC or with the particular manifestations of violence and trauma in South Africa, whether during Apartheid or in more contemporary times. Rather, I think, the performance responds to/locates itself within the immediate realities and legacies of the South African context by way of engaging a dialogue between local and global histories, spaces/places and discourses. As such it functions at the level of corporeal networks. (Moyo, 2013:212)

I argue that both *Hunger* and *Standing taller than liberty* similarly conceive and infer a depth of political critique in the way meaning is **problematised** through a swaying proximity between local and global political affairs – revealing the complex connectedness between structural machinations of power and the accumulated corporeal networks that manifest in how our bodies say and mean. Tang’s choreopolitics structures this experience as a field of composition while Vahla’s choreopolitics plays itself out through a steam-of-consciousness collage of choreographic distillations which makes up her choreographic *agon*, speaking to conflict and catharsis.

Athina Vahla’s *Standing taller than liberty*

Athina Vahla’s choreopolitics can perhaps be characterized by a central thread in her choreographic oeuvre which she articulates as *The Agon: Conflict and Catharsis*. Referencing her Greek ancestry, the Agon captures this ancient tension and pulse of power relations. Possibly I could venture to say that

at the heart of her work lie rituals of conflict through the body, the way the body does its work in the world, and then how it does its work particularly in her choreography. As Vahla suggests, “the body has its own instinct and logic ... impulse is different to information” (Vahla, 2015). In this rendering of a bodily politics, the questions she poses are not only about liberty as political content, but liberty as politics of form. She explains that: “the work questions liberty on a wider socio-political level, but it is also about making this work ... it is an experiment of form and language” (Vahla, 2015). She describes her work as having a genesis in anger – not a personal anger, but a “humanitarian anger” that has always perceived artistic endeavor as a form of struggle itself – the innate struggle of the body in its striving to express freedom (catharsis) in relationship to the discipline (conflict) required to do its work – in dance, this is an immediate and present concern whenever the body is at work. In her programme note, Vahla calls the work

A homage to Vivaldi, the work is an exercise on movement form and shifts of language and meanings. It is an existential study of striving and becoming. *Standing taller than liberty* uses hyper-raised figures, a male pantsula dancer and physical theatre to challenge receptions of selfhood (Vahla, September 2014).

The work is constructed as a series or montage of visual and aural references to power that are hyper-iconic historical images – a “collage of global history” (Vahla, 2015) with music from different eras (baroque; classical; contemporary pop). Vahla suggests that

the structure is a string of images and situations and none of them go deep ... so there is a representational mode but the choices of form come from my questions of a performance language, a dance language – what language is this and whose language is this? (Vahla, 2105)

A variety of dance languages, styles and meanings support these visual and aural representations and in their repetitive layering and juxtaposition, they begin to perform a questioning of the identity politics embodied in the work. Film, devised spoken text and combinations of pantsula, contemporary and popular social dancing start to share a local and a global matrix of political symbols/images. A lone Pantsula dancer relentlessly beats out his steps and rhythms against the epic rush of a Vivaldi score – the resulting collision questions a subjectivity in relation to identity politics, the smallness of the individual microcosm of the Pantsula dancer (Pantsula emerged as a form of social commentary/protest in black townships during the Apartheid era) pitted against the epic expanse of the Western musical canon of classical music. And yet, as Vahla points out, in both worlds there is “a striving for perfection” which she describes in her programme note as existential. Vahla explains this as existential “in that it happens all the time in history ... there is a global consciousness that connects us as people” (Vahla, 2015).

Likhaya, a local Grahamstown Pantsula dancer spends an inordinately long time at the back of the stage space holding onto a chain or thread that seems to connect his slight gravity to a sacred height (already implicit in the opening image of female goddesses on the plinths). Vahla (2015) argues for a “sacred geometry” that manifests through an “austere use of space” - Likhaya is the “altar piece, while the women are the keepers of the space”. He is the “axis mundi” – that which connects us to heaven along the vertical plane. At a certain point, he gently releases his grip and the vertical connection is severed. As Vahla explains, at this point his movement shifts along the saggital axis as he starts to manifest his role as Fallen Angel. His Pantsula becomes more and more repetitive and relentless as he struggles to work into his body. He shouts to an absent God: “I’ll get you … come down …” while becoming more vocally incoherent. He stutters - “I am Likhaya … Lik … my name is Lik li li li berty … Berty … Liberty” – displaying his increasingly uncertain, unstable identity. His confusion and incoherence is grounded through the gravity of the lower body and feet working in the Pantsula and his persistence in repeating his movements quickly and relentlessly. Vahla describes this as being about striving – “its like the Flamenco, the footwork … its about work but also the refusal to die” (Vahla, 2015). These ideas are repeated in a number of images throughout the work – near the end of the performance, he is held in a Pieta –like gesture by one of the woman (like Madonna and child) at which point he relinquishes his exhaustion and allows himself the emotional and physical abandon of being held. The image is abruptly broken when the woman shakes him off her lap and shouts at him to “Get up! Get up! Come on now – get up”. The moment of reverie is lost, his rest is broken because, Vahla seems to suggest, life is not be passively experienced – art is struggle and struggle is work/dance.



(Photograph by Val Adamson: JOMBA! 2014)

Similarly, one of the female performers (Nomcebisi Moyikwa) plays the role of the impatient, expedient and predatory journalist, constantly barging into scenes to capture newsworthy action. Her conflict lies in her need to take photographs, to witness trauma or the world burning – filmic footage of the Enola Gay's historic flight to bomb Hiroshima is juxtaposed against one of the dancer's grooving to current popular dance/song - the mythic women masquerading their statuesque Liberty on hyper-raised plinths have lost their moorings and fallen to the ground. Vahla explains that this journalist is about a “global person ... this is about a global woman ... not about victimizing or glorifying a South African woman ... I tried to bring metaphors or images that don't take a localized stance” (Vahla, 2015).

This choreographic strategy of episodic collage/stream-of-consciousness via layering imagery is utilised by Vahla to disrupt the narrative, representational structure of the work. Her existential and political interest questions an ethics of responsibility – do these ideal representations or historical memories structure a relinquishing of our personal responsibility and agency to act in and on the world? What is the choreographer's responsibility to Liberty? Vahla's disruptive choreographic methodologies insist on questioning where responsibility for conflict/catharsis lies? Who or what is standing taller than Liberty? She clarifies:

As choreographer you don't go to solve the big problems ... you do this pulling up yourself and doing what you do best ... by asking, as performers, what are we meant to do ? ... what are we here to do now? ... is it by dancing Pantsula? ... our humanity has become so structured by greed, lack of privacy, violence – Liberty is a word that is ridiculous ... there is irony in this layering of images because things don't really matter... we try to separate things but histories and incidents are so predictably entwined ... the tragedy of our times is that there is no tragedy – there is drama but no tragedy ... respect is gone ... we lost so much ... everything became so commodified. (Vahla, 2015)

And yet, as her work insinuates, there is the human striving to survive – to hold onto and to share meaning. Vahla constructs a corporeal network that poses political questions in its crafting of incongruous proximities of image, movement and sound. *Standing taller than liberty* avoids a binary logic that locks us, the audience, into orthodoxies of knowing and rather invites, a becoming through difference, diversity and juxtaposition of embodied image. Through filigreed choreographic scoring and the interdisciplinarity of her choreography, Vahla undercuts crass, simplistic understandings of power relations and stages ambiguous dialogues.

Acty Tang's *hunger*

Tang's programme note says that *hunger* began in anger :

From the distance of living in Hong Kong, it was the news headlines that kept transporting me back to life here in South Africa: the Marikana strike and massacre, and the Nkandla scandal ... During rehearsals, a discussion led me to ask some of the performers: How does the South African state keep the populace in consent? And then I realized, this is not only about what's happening in South Africa. This choreography is borne out of my anger also against the Chinese state's buying of political consent through economic development ... And in different countries too, across old divides of East/West, developed/developing: where the promise of the good life no longer props up consent, and where people occupy spaces to constitute themselves as publics, force will be used (Tang, 2014).

As Tang suggests, these two incidents of outrage informed the idea that it is "not about assigning blame but how we are complicit in giving power to the President ... and also what it means to participate in a global market" (Tang, 2015). Tang's vision holds this sway between a local and global politics in a delicate immediacy throughout the work. In collaboration with production designer, Illka Louw, Tang conjures a world that displays and caricatures the political stereotypes of power while at the same time, complicating these stereotypes in order to construct a field of choreographic action/image that draws attention to relation and connection. The visual layering of movement action, score and image reveal a reading of political complexity that cannot simply be reduced to nasty political caricatures that wield power indiscriminately. Tang notes, for instance, that he might have called the work *Zuma's Song* but felt that would give the character of The President "too much power" (Tang, 2015). Influenced by Gertrude Stein's notion of the field, Tang's choreopolitics opens up a political questioning by crafting multiple viewpoints within a field of composition where the

entire choreographic text is devised with each element offering an equally valuable contribution to meaning. In this sense, the choreographer offers a subjective interpretation or relationship to the material but simultaneously offers multiple viewpoints. This creates crossings or dialogues which operate like Moyo's "corporeal networks" to activate an accumulated range of embodied, social meanings/signs and archetypal symbols that can displace the pretense of a "knowable and coherent" truth about power (Moyo, 2014). In this way, Tang unravels and deconstructs notions of ideological purity and political truths – by setting up the stereotypes and then complicating them, he starts to ask questions about the nature of power: who is complicit and how, in maintaining structures of political power? Tang's programme note articulates this clearly:

Hence, it's not just a story about corrupt individuals, although they are so readily caricatured, and so much fun to do! But if we invest our pleasures only in the drama of a few individuals in power, we lose our own power to imagine a different society. In this regard, I'm trying to draw focus on the Brechtian heritage of physical theatre, showing the person as a social being, and using visceral, embodied experiences to encourage questioning and yearning for change (Tang, 2014).

Moyo, in her PhD study, *Re-tracing invisible maps: landscape in and as performance in contemporary South Africa* contextualizes an understanding of the political in choreography in her analysis of my own choreography, *Inner Piece* (2009). She argues that

Dealing with questions of violence is only one sense in which *Inner Piece* attempts to 'theatricalise the unspeakable'. The performance in *Inner Piece* is certainly not political in the sense of agit-prop, protest or documentary theatre, but has its roots in the model of Physical Theatre in South Africa within which the performing body functions as the site of potential resistance (Moyo, 2013:212).

In *hunger*, the layered corporeal networking scores a choreopolitical field that locates images, musical scores and movement in incongruous relation in order to interrogate what we see and how it means to us as audience (often via Brechtian alienation techniques like episodic action and multiple viewpoints). The President is literally constructed as the 'big man' – his costume is devised from layers of China bags expanding around his body to create an armour of fullness which parodies his enigmatic presence of violent restraint and facade of suggested magnanimity. He poses as the benevolent dictator, bestowing kisses and offerings to the crowd while hiding behind his immense size and dark sunglasses. As designer Illka Louw offers, a "politics of production and ownership" is implied in the choice of material for his costume which questions "who owns what and where it is manufactured":

[...] so there are objects here that are identified as South African but they are actually not made here ... the material used was made from bags that people use to travel with in the Eastern Cape that are made in China ... so you have Chinese bags, a metonymic object quite often used in productions ... and here, The President had a Chinese Opera structure, a static

second skin, that looked at traditional parts of the body that are used and manipulated to create a certain status ... so when shoulders are expanded there is a militaristic element to that ... but it also creates a bigger male silhouette ... so structurally the waist was cinched, the shoulders were expanded, the head was framed with the headgear which is often a Chinese opera device which frames the focal point which is often eyes ... you couldn't see the soul of the man because he had sunglasses on that were reflective as well so not only were they two black pools, they were two reflective mirrors ... you couldn't see inside at all (Louw: 2015).

The President's costume operates like a mask or armour which captures his myopia and his inability to reveal himself in any other form than caricature and stereotype. Later when The President changes into a coat (made of shade cloth) it references a Mao or Mandarin collar belonging to the Chinese but its insignia is the NIKE sign, another reference to a consumer economy that has global political sway and significance – the iconography of capitalist consumerism. In The President's costuming, "this NIKE insignia becomes his uniform ... and if you repeat that it looks like a rib cage" (Louw, 2015).



(Photograph by Stefan de Klerk)

Ahead of The President, three of his political initiates prepare his entrance. Their costumes have a garish excess and are so overextended that the performers are forced to march at a measured, funereal pace. Designer, Illka Louw suggests that they were like three fashion figures, possibly oblique references to the glamour and prestige of parliamentarian events:

[...] they were paraded as a collection of everything that this particular society aspires to and its like the model vision of everything that the world of the production aspires to ... they are almost like billboards ... there is an overextension of their limbs ... there are elements that are recognisable pointers to a South African or African identity in that wigs were used in various ways ... wigs and extensions ... processes of Westernising their exterior (Louw, 2015).

All of the costumes had inserts of a blue camouflage material, "taking the idea of being a rebel in a colour that parodies itself ... I mean, what camouflages itself in blue?" and re-iterating the idea of they are "fighters in the name of consumerism" (Louw, 2015). One of the characters has 20 yellow dishwashing gloves sewn around the edge of her apron – she is, as Louw points out, an Afro-Maria figure:

[...] with blonde shoulder epaulettes ... a halo of hair ... the blonde housewife signaling a Westernisation of identity ... she is a Barbarella figure ... the apron is also a symbol of feminine domesticity but in this case the appliance makes it a decorative apron so it becomes more like a flag or an icon of which the President's face is quilted on with sunrays emanating from his head in an iconographic kind of pseudo religious image ... they also had sunglasses with false eyelashes on – as a further extension of removing the eyes ... so there is something that sits between you and this character ... the costume IS the character ... they become empty shells (Louw, 2015).



(Photograph by Stefan de Klerk)

All the costumes embody the social and political symbols and signs that Tang sets out to problematise. The politicians are received by The Singer or President's Muse, a woman that looks like Thuli Madonsela (or any powerful female politician like Winnie Mandela or parliamentarian) in a two-piece suit with a black wig of shiny straight hair and a grotesque corsage – “a parody of the trappings we add to our lives” (Louw, 2015). Her costume has elements of the President's China bags sewn into the sides of the suit to extend the suggestion of their complicity.

The work traverses a landscape of political machinations (the dance action obliquely references the political debacles surrounding Marikana, Nkandla, the farcical interpreter at Zuma's speech, and a host of other high powered political figures in South African politics) which move the action inexorably towards a final revolt or Revolution by shadowy proletarian figures constantly lurking in the background. Dressed in shades of grey, which becomes their uniform, and moving in unison, the amorphous group organically gathers at the start of the work in the first scene entitled The Premonition. Their movement is largely abstract and their focus of attention is “never direct” – as

Tang suggests, “sometimes you cannot look at a problem too directly” (Tang: 2015) – but their lurking menace sets up a foreboding presence which becomes more compulsive, menacing and ravenous as their ‘hunger’ grows throughout the work. Tang uses the idea of the zombie as “historical representation” (Tang: 2105) and uses these spectral figures as ciphers for a zombie spirit that constantly hungers – hungers for social and political change, hungers for a compulsive cultural consumerism, or for a ravenous emptiness that drives their actions to repeat and repeat in intensity. These zombies become Tang’s critique of political passivity (“I was crystallizing the idea of complicity in the Zombie”: 2014) and the consumerism that is generated by a global capitalist economy that hooks us all in, producing the silent complicity that paralyses the political will to act against corruption or injustice. The zombies become the catalyst for the Revolution introduced by the President’s Interpreter whose “gestural clarity helps to bring about the Revolution”(van der Walt, 2015) with the aid of the figure of The Bride who presents herself as a scapegoat, and referencing *The Rite of Spring*, finally dances herself to death. Her emotional energy and decadent, incomplete dress complete her “mythic form” (Tang, 2015) as the Bride who births the new nation.

In this research I have tried to argue for how the choreopolitics of these two choreographers promises a way to review fixed definitions of the relationship between politics and choreography: that the “concrete activations of political thought and practice” (Lepecki, 2012:22) of choreographic practice become the corporeal networks and counter narratives that hold a promise to question and to speak back to the rhetoric of political power embedded in social and political discourses – but also to speak back to choreographic discourses and the power relations embedded (often invisibly) in writing about choreography. The poet, Edmond Jabes says:

Writing is a wager of solitude, flux and reflux of anxiety. It is also the reflection of a reality reflected in its new origin, whose image we shape deep in our jumble of desires and doubts (Edmond Jabes’ *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion*).

Jabes’ suggestion that writing manifests a ‘new origin’ for an already reflected experience and that this may indeed produce an ‘unsuspected subversion’ resonates some of the spectral anxieties of negotiating performative writing and writing about performance/choreography. Performance studies theorist, Adrian Heathfield notes ‘how outside the writer’s language is in relation to the event’:

How lacking in that which would turn inside, make the thing flow and burn, touch and weigh again. How utterly significant, unique and unforgettable is the event. How lost it is now. All that one can do is proceed inside this tear; vibrate at the borders of memory (Heathfield, 1999: 179).

Restaging the residues of the choreographic event through writing becomes a play with the shape-shifting silhouettes of subjective and collective memory, local and global memory. Heathfield suggests that a 'recurrent trope of the event-text' is the interweaving of autobiographical writing with critical discourse through which 'a crossing': a dialogue' is staged, which brings writing into proximity with 'the now' (182). He asks:

[...] of what does the text speak when its writing subject is spoken rather than the text speaking of its object? ... Performative writing does not see cultural events or artworks as objects, but rather as situations, manifestations, articulations of ideas ... they are seen not just as representations but also as sayings ... to address such sayings in writing is to say back, to respond, to engage in a process relation that is corporeal, animate and transformative (Heathfield, 1999: 181 – 182).

Perhaps citing a 'choreopolitics' rather than a 'postcoloniality' has helped me to animate a corporeal, transformative speaking back to choreographic practice through which I can also begin to stage my own dialogue 'back to' theories of postcoloniality. Ato Sekyi-Oto, in his reading of the Algerian revolutionary Frantz Fanon, argues that

According to Fanon, then, the ultimate virtue of the revolution, the goal of historical action, is ***not the conquest of power but the resurrection of repressed questions and the disclosure of 'unexpressed values'***. In his approving depiction of such transformations, such a renewal of openness to untried possibilities, may be discerned in what he meant by 'true decolonization' ... Supposing decolonization, the post-apartheid, is first and foremost, a resumption of interrupted history. A resumption not indeed of some original purities and essences before the Fall, but of interrupted dramas, indigenous and universal dramas; above all a resumption of our dialogue with one another, with ourselves (Sekyi-Oto, 2003: 10-12: emphasis added).

Both works discussed here, through their choreopolitics, perform difference, liberate difference and open a dialogue which I argue holds the promise to decolonise traditional choreographic representations of political content and form.

References

Heathfield, A. 2006. Writing of the Event in Judie Christie, Richard Gough and Danile Watt: *Performance Cosmology: Testimony from the Future, Evidence from the Past*: Routledge.

Jabes, E. 1996. *The Little Book of Unsuspected Subversion*: Translated by Rosmarie Waldrop: Stanford University Press.

Kershaw, B. 1999. *The Radical In performance: from Brecht to Baudrillard*: Routledge.

Lehmann, H.-T. 2006. *Postdramatic Theatre*. London and New York: Routledge.

Lehmann, H-T. & Primavesi, P.2009. Dramaturgy on Shifting Grounds. *Performance Research: A Journal of the Performing Arts*. 14(3):3 – 6.

Lepecki, A. 2012. *Documents of Contemporary Art*: Whitechapel Gallery Ventures Limited.

Moyo, A. 2013. Re-tracing invisible maps: landscape in and as performance in contemporary South Africa. PhD thesis published by the University of Warwick. Repository: British Library. Available: <http://ethos.bl.uk.OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.589894>.

Sekyi-Oto, A. 2003. Fanon and the possibility of postcolonial critical imagination. Paper prepared for the *Codesria Symposium on Canonical Works and Continuing Innovations in African Arts and Humanities*. University of Ghana, Legon, Accra:17-19 September, 2003.

Stucky, N & Wimmer, C. 2002. *Teaching performance Studies*. Southern Illinois University Press.

Programme Notes

Tang, Acty. *hunger* : May 2014.

Vahla, Athina. *Standing taller than liberty*: September 2014.

Interviews

Louw, Illka. Room 206. Drama Department. Rhodes University. 26 May 2015.

Tang, Acty. Staff Seminar Room: Rhodes Drama Department. 22 May 2015.

Vahla, Athina. Room 206. Drama Department. Rhodes University. 22 May 2015.

Van der Walt, Ester . (Assistant choreographer to Acty Tang during the rehearsal process).

Staff Seminar Room: Rhodes Drama Department. 22 May 2015.

Photographs

Hunger photographs by Stefan de Klerk

Standing taller than liberty photographs by Val Adamson at JOMBA! Contemporary Dance Festival: September 2014

DVD Recording

Rehearsal footage of *Deus Faber*. December 2014.

APPENDIX 1

Two tall, imposing figures, dressed elegantly in elaborate dresses made up in the colours of apartheid South Africa (orange, white and blue) and the ANC (yellow, green and black) promenade slowly along a walkway towards each other. They perform a ceremonial of ritualized gestures (hand shakes, humble bowings and kowtowings) that reference the gestural displays of political negotiation between two state powers negotiating a political settlement. *19 born 76 rebels* (one of four choreographies in a 2014 National Arts Festival programme: *20/20 Visions*) was conceptualized and designed by Mamela Nyamza and performed by Nyamza and Faniswa Yisa. The dramatic, authoritative presence of these looming figures (the audience are seated on the ground in the centre of the passage of walkways) engaged a provocative dialogue with the implication of the programme's title: *20/20 Visions* – a term used to express the clarity and sharpness of normal visual acuity. The perspectival proximity between the seated audience, the expectation of normal-sized performers and the contrast with these immense, statuesque figures called into question the sincerity of the encounter being performed between these two icons of power. The status of these figures is later parodied when their height is disclosed to be nothing more than Ricoffy tins tied to their feet by strings - like the Roman *cothurni*, a high, ornate boot used by actors to indicate the status of their characters in Greek tragedies, or to play the elevated status of gods or heroes, these African cothurni similarly help to construct the representation of these figures as authoritative, foreboding presences.

j.praeg@ru.ac.za

NOW YOU SEE ME, NOW YOU DON'T: EXPLORING THE INCONGRUITIES OF DANCING SKIN

Kamogelo Molobye

Masters of Arts 1 student: Choreography

Rhodes University

Abstract

One cannot ignore the most potent signifier of a performer on stage: their body. The performing body brings with it, intended or not, loaded readings of a work's subject matter. Race is one such issue that is informed by the body and skin of a performer.

Skin informs the ways in which the body is observed and written about by virtue of the body's inherent presence on stage. The skin bears imprints, not only of race, but of social location, which, at times, informs the audiences' framing and interpretation of a work.

Bodies are embodied. Bodies are embodied differently. Skin, and by implication the body, is racial. This is to say that the body is not simply biological and natural, but also culturally defined. In 'A Widening Field: journeys in body and imagination' Tufnell and Crickmay state that "without stimulation of the skin, we lose an essential and present sense of connection, both to ourselves and to what is around us" (2004:23). It is because of this that dancing the skin transforms the body from being a neutral body (one that is empty of personal traits and idiosyncrasies) to one that is embodied (a body that is full of intended and unintended signifiers).

Introduction

"Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either"

- (Kristeva, 1982:2)

Skin is incongruent. To talk about skin is to talk about the complexities and inconsistencies of skin. But, before I discuss these complexities I think it important to place myself in this writing. I will locate *myself* in this writing by saying that I am a young black South African. I am a student, an artist/performer, a young emerging choreographer, and an aspiring writer seeking to contribute towards an academic body of work that responds to dance discourses in South Africa. In so locating myself, I am stating that I am, that my body is, a charged space of lived experiences and questionings particular to me. My body, therefore, serves the function of being a charged site of presentation and representation (especially on stage as a performing body).

To say that the body is a charged site of presentation and representation is to say that the body acts, intended or not, as a significant site of racial and cultural meanings when performing. It cannot be ignored that the body, along with the skin that it wears, serves as a signifier of the body's race, gender, and at times class and sexual orientation. Perception is culturally and/or socially mediated

by these very loaded signifiers that are attached to skin which become embodied practice. To say this is to ask myself: “regardless of the subject matter of a theatrical or choreographic production, how does my embodied practice of performing skin inform the context of its interpretation?”

In beginning this paper, I make use of Kristeva who writes, “... Not me. Not that. But not nothing, either” (1982:2). Here Kristeva speaks to the complexity of existence, the difficulties of speaking about oneself and one’s own identity. There exists a struggle in both recognising that what is at times attached to being a raced body is both true and false. That although there may be stereotypes about the raced body, they are usually incomplete or incorrect. In saying this, one recognises that there is a conflict of the ‘self’ from the ‘other’. The ‘self’ that you know true of you, and that is constantly changing and being rediscovered; and the ‘other’ that is someone outside from the self, someone unrecognisable, someone who is more often than not aligned with the abject and therefore distanced from the self.

To be clear, to talk about the body is to talk about race, and the socio-cultural and political implications of talking about skin. To talk about my body is to talk about how I find my place of being and belonging on stage, and whether or not I can creatively articulate and embody that through performance. As stated above, in placing *myself* in this writing I cannot assume to speak on behalf of all (South) Africans. In fact, even as a black South African I cannot assume to speak on behalf of black South Africans. I can, however, draw on my own lived experiences and observations to articulate the disparities in exploring the raced body on stage.

As a young South African, I constantly find myself in a state of enquiry about what it means to be in my skin, to be (South) African: the question of my culture and identity within the country that I dwell in, and how this makes me, and other South Africans, unique from the rest of the world. Furthermore, as a young black performer and emerging choreographer, I find myself asking questions such as: what kind of work and questions should I, along with other South African choreographers, be engaged in? Furthermore, how does the current state of art and dance in South Africa contribute towards the (re)shaping of images about (South) Africa? In attempting to discover my identity and creating work, I therefore have to embark on a journey. A journey that speaks to the values, attitudes and behavioural perceptions that are manifest in considering the implications of having a body that is loaded with raced signifiers.

This being said, I locate this paper within the field of performance studies, with a focus on choreographic discourses, particularly on South African dance discourse. The paper places a particular focus on the positioning of representations of a black South African identity, specifically in

areas of self-representation or autobiographic work. In so doing, the field of enquiry is extended to include political studies focused within the discipline of African Studies.

African Studies concerns itself with concepts such as colonialism and the process of decolonising the mind in order to find a discourse that speaks to an African identity that does not place Africa against the backdrop of impossibility. This is to say that Western discourse that exists on Africa continues to introduce fundamental contradictions about the identity of the continent, and the agency that Africans have, or do not have, to represent their own identity. Furthermore, it is to say that Africans themselves are constantly struggling to find a language, movement vocabulary, which clearly articulates their intentions without being misinterpreted through a Western lens. For example, one cannot ignore the labels that are then used to describe (South) African dance, primarily through the black performing body which is ethnocentrically bias. Labels such as 'afro-fusion', 'afro-jazz', 'black/native dance', 'African contemporary dance' have become common usage in the phenomena of attempting to define or classify an African dance form and identify it in juxtaposition to Western dance forms.

In making visible the symbolic violence that exists in speaking about self-representation and attempting to understand what it means to be embodied through using, and at times refuting Western discourse to liberate the performing body, one realises that there is a fundamental contradiction. The realisation lies in recognising that there is both a necessity for my freedom, and a threat to it when using Western choreographic discourses to define and articulate issues of my identity. In seeking to introduce new ways of self-representing the black body, and in seeking to introduce a new movement vocabulary within western spaces of performance, one is met with the distorted ideas and perceptions that the West has about black (South) African dance- such as the 'afros-' that continue to precede Western dance forms when performed by black South Africans.

Black (South) African dance forms are constantly placed within a form of racist categorisation of misinformed expectations in where "what is seen is not always what is there, but what is expected to be seen based on existing script" (Mills, 1997:143). This places (South) African dance outside the realm of an artistic expression and discipline that can be equally conceptualised in comparison to Western dance forms. It is through this understanding that Glendola Yhema Mills states that "the view that an African dance vocabulary can be used to reflect contemporary issues and concerns is outside the boundaries of Western conceptions of African dance (1997:150).

Taking into consideration the above paragraph, the research aims to problematise the ways in which the black body has been studied, and spoken of, while at the same time attempting to redefine what it means to be a raced body on stage without repeating and perpetuating the same discourses that

enforce prejudices on the identity of (South) Africans. This becomes the same way in which my interest in the identity of South African choreography lies: how do we create work that speaks to the complexities and contradictions of identity and culture, and what it means to be (South) African without falling into the trap of reinforcing the stereotypes that have been perpetuated by Western discourses? Finally, the writing will critically reflect on two choreographic productions: the first, *Lefetlho* (2014), choreographed by myself as part the Honours final year choreography practical work; and the second, *20/20 Vision* (2014) , choreographed and performed by various artists, including Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela, during the 2014 National Arts Festival.

The poetics of skin

Shedding Skin

Pulling out of the old scarred skin

(old rough thing I don't need now

I strip off

slip out of

leave behind)

I slough of deadscales

Flick skinflakes to the ground

Shedding toughness

peeling layers down

to vulnerable stuff

And I'm blinking off old eyelids

for a new way of seeing

By the rock I rub against

I'm going to be tender again

- Harryette Mullen, 1981

To speak about 'skin' is to speak about the being, and all that encompasses its being and its surroundings. It is to have a conversation that reveals oneself to others, exploring sensations such as

touch that invite one into the intimate space of the other. To speak about 'skin' is to allow one to connect, like in dance, through the surface of touch in order to provide a meeting place where two, or more bodies, can have an embodied conversation that reveals memories deeply embedded within the surface of the skin, including the lived experiences of the person wearing this skin.

Skin informs the ways in which the body is observed and written about because of the body's inherent presence on stage. The skin bears imprints, not only of race, but of social location which at times informs the audiences' framing and interpretation of a work. Bodies are embodied. Bodies are embodied differently. Skin, and by implication the body, is racial. This is to say that the body is not simply biological and natural, but also culturally defined.

In *A Widening Field: journeys in body and imagination* Tufnell and Crickmay state that "without stimulation of the skin, we lose an essential and present sense of connection, both to ourselves and to what is around us" (2004:123). It is because of this that dancing the skin transforms the body from being a neutral body (one that is empty of personal traits and idiosyncrasies) to one that is embodied (a body that is full of intended and unintended signifiers).

In writing about skin, Tufnell and Crickmay state that "through the surface of the skin the whole body listens and looks out" (2004:122). This is to say that the body is shaped by its lived experiences through touch and interactions with other bodies and the surrounding environment. The movement of the body is felt through space and time because what the skin and what the body feel are reciprocal flows of information and responses coming to and from the body. Without awareness of this reciprocal relationship, one cannot begin to speak and embody the self, and its environment from a space that is not caught within distance.

Skin forms the basis of human communication either through touch and/or noticing the race of someone due to the colour of their skin. It cannot be denied that "the skin plays a crucial role in keeping us informed of what is going on outside of us" (Tufnell & Crickmay, 2004:123). To be aware of this information is to know how to touch, to have an awareness of feeling pleasure, pain, and at times vibrations. These become the movements of the body, the impulses that allow one to move and respond.

In continuing to discuss skin, Tufnell and Crickmay further state that

without the protection and defence of the skin we die. And a sense of what is 'me' and 'not me' is crucial to our sense of identity and our capacity to interact with what is around us. Moment by moment the feel of our skin changes. At times we may feel all edges- prickly, brittle, hard- at other times we may feel we have no skin- exposed, fragile and raw (2004:138).

What Tufnell and Crickmay allude to is the potent fact that the aspects of one's identity cannot be removed from the movement of the body. In exploring a vocabulary that seeks to self-articulate, self-represent, and produce autobiographic work in order to (re)discover ways of speaking about race, one cannot ignore the lived experiences of the self. It is the lived and movement experiences of the raced body that leads one to a place of transformation and self-articulation.

To be on stage is to be vulnerable to the many readings that are attached to the body through its historical inheritance of the skin it bears. It cannot be ignored that people- or audiences- read other people, and subsequently performances, through the visible signs on the body, i.e., the colour of the skin, the sex of the being, and the gender performance of the person, among other things. These visible signifiers become what naturalise the racialised meaning making of audiences to theatrical/dance productions that is at times outside the scope of the production's subject matter or intention. The classification and inherited comparative analysis of bodies due to their race, physicality, and characteristics is what at times permits the body to have attached onto it an identity that threatens its presence and context on stage.

It is important to also note that being in a state of vulnerability forces one to be aware of spaces where they shed off their skin and wear a new one. This brings into question the ways in which one may augment who they are, and portray a different identity to others in relation to being in a different environment separate from their background. This is true in that there are spaces that people enter and they are reminded of their Blackness, or their Whiteness, due to tools such as 'othering'. They are reminded of their raced skin, and thrust into a space where they can either wear their skin; coil in and hide; or shed it in order to seek invisibility. Said differently, the performer can decide to dance their race and culture, or completely ignore that and conform to Western perceptions that homogenise, stereotype, and essentialise their raced body.

The politics of the poetics: the inharmonious perceptions of performing identity

As it has been established, to speak about the body is to speak about a charged site of representation. It is to speak about a body that has attached to it racial and cultural perceptions that mediate the ways in which the audience at times interpret its presence on stage. With the body functioning as a charged site of representation on stage, one has to find ways of speaking about the self, of performing autobiography, without the black body approached as a problem due to it being raced. It is to consider the ways in which one can speak about, speak to, and represent dance vocabulary, through a lens that liberates the black body from being subjected to cultural and racial perceptions.

The politics of being a black choreographer and performer is to constantly ask myself: how do I begin to speak about my blackness? Furthermore, can blackness be embodied without assuming oneness through representations that hold cultural, social and political implications that would continue to manipulate narratives of black bodies? To ask these questions is to investigate a form that one can utilise to self-represent. The difficulty arises in recognising that within a continent, a country, whose identity is constructed in the face of multiple identities, one cannot assume to speak of these identities with a homogenising voice.

To say that dancing the skin is incongruent is to ask: is there a way to speak about the black body without (a) referring to Western discourses that speak of the ways in which blackness is, and, perhaps, should be constructed; or (b) referring to all the other black bodies that are within the vicinity, in order to differentiate them from the white normative constructs of blackness. What one realises is that there exists a trap here, which can be articulated as follows: (1) colonialism is a moment in time and a construct which continues to view and speak of the black body in a particular way- a way that oppressed/s and subjected/s the black body to labels that homogenised/s its varied identities; (2) there exists a gaze that needs to be educated in order to find ways that liberate the body from further interpretations that are made up of narratives that either objectify, sentimentalise, homogenise and stereotype the black body, especially on stage.

The interrogating of self-representations of blackness in dance extends far beyond the varied identities of South African dance and choreography. It also delves into social categories of class, gender, power relations and so on. Questions such as “is ‘black dance’ the advent of black dancers performing on stage?; or is it dance work(s) choreographed by ‘black’ individuals?; is it a combination of black dancers performing work choreographed by black individuals?” (Craighead, 2006:19) continue to be posed when debating the ways in which artists can embody their skin--their raced body on stage. The interrogation, in itself, places the nature of the dance into a category of the ‘other’ because it politicises the works made and performed by black people.

Gregory Maqoma, a South African choreographer whose work has often been defined as African Contemporary, states that “in contemporary dance in Africa, the tension between individual freedom and collective norms is often studied, boundaries are explored and taboos are broken. It is in our art form that the traditional hierarchies are challenged, and cultural clashes and confrontations have become visible” (Maqoma, 2006:34-35). I would argue that the tensions that Maqoma speaks of are those located in the space in-between the questions that make it possible to interrogate and make visible the fundamental political and social historical residues which make it possible to ask questions such as “what is blackness?”.

Autobiographic choreography, or self-representation in dance, can be said to operate as a process of reterritorializing the ‘self’ in the structures that have been placed by Western forms and disciplines. This is to say that there is an exploration of the self that challenges the understanding of historical identity of culture as a homogenising or unifying force. These homogenising narratives have been authenticated by the past with the (re)discovery of an individual and collective identity in a world that is transforming, thus leading to more fluid identities and cultural expressions.

The individual and collective tensions that Maqoma speaks about are those that reveal the contradictions and complexities that arise when talking about the raced body. However, it is these contradictions that can serve as inspiration for creating work through responding to, challenging, questioning and seeking answers to them through the medium of dance, as opposed to simply submitting to them. While the world expects South Africans to create works that represent their geographical location, that of being in the primitive Africa continent, artists are creating works that seek to define their varied individual and collective identities of the country.

In talking about creating an African contemporary work that breaks the boundaries of cross-cultural communication Maqoma states that,

as artists we have created more demands of innovation and therefore we carry the responsibility of cultural translation. We are aware that in the process of mediation between these different cultures and languages, we are not completely swallowed and we do not reach a point of no return. We also have to be aware that there is always that threat of mistranslation, bewilderment, misplacement and distortion of our artistic standing and work (2006:36).

What Maqoma is saying resonates with the idea that identity is not fixed and is ever-changing. There can never be one representation of an identity due to intercultural and transcultural communications and interactions that are taking place. The works of South African choreographers can therefore break barriers and transcend cultural ideas of what it means to be a black (South) African, through the eyes of the West.

The reoccurring trend in the works of South African choreographers is the challenging of official cultural establishments that seek to create a national identity that speaks for and on behalf of Africa. The works seek to disturb the urgency for a unified, certain and neatly packaged definition that is representational of everything black and South African. Hayley Kodesh states that “contemporary choreographers in Africa challenge the idea that only one kind of essentialised version of Africa is the correct and real one” (2006:42). Evident in this statement is the idea that contemporary (South) African choreographers are engaged in an endeavour to transform views of a homogenous South Africa while dispelling myths that have been propagated about a (South) African identity.

Lefetlo and 20/20 Vision: reflecting on autobiographic choreographies

Audiences bring to theatre and performance their own subjectivities which inform the manner in which they will interpret the works they see. It is with this that it becomes difficult to control the audiences' response, interpretation and perceptions with regard to the dancing body. The audience either sees the whole person or their race. This way of observing theatre or dance begins to place the choreographer and performer in a position where they have to recondition the audiences opinion about identity issues—race, culture, gender and so on. In doing this, the artists allows for their marginalised voice to have resonance on stage in defying the stereotypes of its raced body.

The most potent way, and the greatest emerging discipline within South African choreography, is through autobiographic choreography and performance that deals with the lived and personal experiences of the choreographer/performer. In dealing with autobiography within my own work, I begin to ask myself questions such as: as a black person in South Africa how do I begin to define myself? Is blackness definable? How do I begin to source experiences for my artist inquiry that are outside, yet relevant, to my own lived experiences? These questions allow me to find a space where I can attempt to create an equilibrium between my lived experiences, without being theatrically or narrative bias and homogenising.

Autobiography has been defined as:

[...] a *self-portrait*. [With] each of those italicized words suggesting a double entity, expressed as a series of reciprocal transactions. The *self* thinks and acts; it knows that it exists alone and with others. A *portrait* is space and time, illusion and reality, painter and model- each element places a demand, yields a concession. (Howarth, 1974:364).

Another definition of autobiography states:

autobiography is an imaginative organisation of experiences for aesthetic and for various intellectual and moral purposes... Autobiography is a review of a life from a particular viewpoint in time- a review in which attention on the self as it interacts with the world... It is not a portrait of self but an interpretation of an evolution of self that is a shaping of the past through selection and emphasis (Shapiro, 1968:425).

What is clear from both definitions of autobiography is that it is a reflective process that considers the actual lived experiences of the being, and the evolution thereof, in order to suggest a viewpoint of considering the issues presented by the individual—choreographer/performer.

It is these ideas of self-representation, or autobiography, that both *Lefetlo* and *20/20 Vision* tackled. These choreographic works explored notions of, in varying ways, the lived experiences of community and the individual. The works looked to orientate the audience into a different way of

seeing performance, space and narrative outside of the traditional cultures of dealing with content in performance.

Lefetlho was a choreography production shown during the Theatre in Motion week as assessment for my final honours year practical project exploring movement and research. *20/20 Vision* was a repertoire work by four choreographers -- *19 born 76 rebels* by Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela (which will form the focus of my discussion from the four repertoire works); the second *Dark Cell* by Themba Mbali; followed by *Doors of Gold* by Tebogo Munyai; and finally *Inkukhu Ibeke Iqanda* (the chicken that laid the egg) by Chuma Sopotela. I find it important to note here that the difficulty in reflecting on these works is that there is a lack of published writings about them. The former, which was not publicly performed outside of the University environment, and unseen by numerous people, does not have critical sources or journals on it. Rather, the writing is based on reflections and feedback from the external examiner—Gerard Bester. The latter, although shown during the National Arts Festival, does not have academic sources or journals reflecting on it, but simply Cue Newspaper coverage and personal reflection.

What was similar with both *Lefetlho* and *19 born 76 rebel* is that they both dealt with issues of black identities and culture, and space, however, approached differently. *Lefetlho* explored the Sangoma dance style and ritual within a theatrical space, and whether or not the integrity of the ritual remains or is compromised within this space. Furthermore, it explored notions of the fluidity of identity and the challenge of articulating the complexities of culture and belonging. *20/20 Vision*, on the other hand, was deeply rooted in personal and collective reflections of South African history--interrogating the past and its implications to the present socio-political and cultural status quo. Taking its mandate from the National Arts Festival calls for proposals, which invited artists that “intended to create a programme that critiques and celebrates our humanity and stretches the boundaries of artistic practice” (National Arts Festival Programme, 2013:289), *20/20 Vision* gave audiences an opportunity to witness a communal narrative of black struggle, and how it has affected black South Africans.



Photo 1.1 1 Left: Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela in 19 born 76 rebels: 20/20 Vision (National Arts Festival 2014). Photo by Kamogelo Molobye; right: Lefetlho. Choreographed by Kamogelo Molobye (Theatre in Motion 2014). Photo by Mia van der Merwe

Both pieces dealt with re-imagining Western theatre spaces. *19 born 76 rebel* was a site specific work, while *Lefetlho* was performed inside a Western theatre space, but had a demarcated space in a form of a circle constructed from branches, and invited for an audience that would stand outside of the circle so as to take part. *19 Born 76 Rebels* was site specific, with the audience sitting down on the lawn as they watched the performance. The audience encounters Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela in a physical performance that finds its inspiration from the 1976 student uprisings against apartheid. In the programme Mamela writes that

the 1976-newborns were products of this period of violence, resistance, rebellion, protest and politically and physical activism. Their oppressed mothers were victims of the violent and inhuman suffering meted out by the government and its forces of oppression (National Arts Festival Programme, 2014:26).

The piece begins outside as the audience sits on the lawn watching Mamela Nyamza standing on a walkway paved with white paper as she eyes/sizes up the seated audience, while Chuma Sopotela sits at the end of the walkway, pulling a string from inside a coffee tin that makes a screeching like sound. Mamela Nyamza, is dressed in a sophisticated English style long dress that hides the coffee tins worn as shoes, and coat with a bowtie which is in the colours of the Tripartite Alliance- red, white, blue and orange. Chuma Sopotela is dressed in the same attire, although not as sophisticated, which is in the colours of the ANC party- green, black and yellow. The narrative in *20/20 Vision* approached physical performance through cleverly symbolic signifiers that were politically charged.



Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela Intrigue the audience in Nyamza's production 19 born 76 Rebels. Photo: CuePix/Stephanie Papini

Photo 1.1 2 Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela in 19 born 76 rebels: 20/20 Vision. Photo from CuePix

The movement vocabulary in the production resembled the discomfort during the state of negotiations which were, one could say, awkward and laced with resentment and a façade of walking towards a promised paradise for oppressed South Africans. Furthermore, the movement was satirical and comical through exaggerated gestures such as the awkwardly engagement of kissing on the cheeks which continued to indicate discomfort and difficulty between both parties.

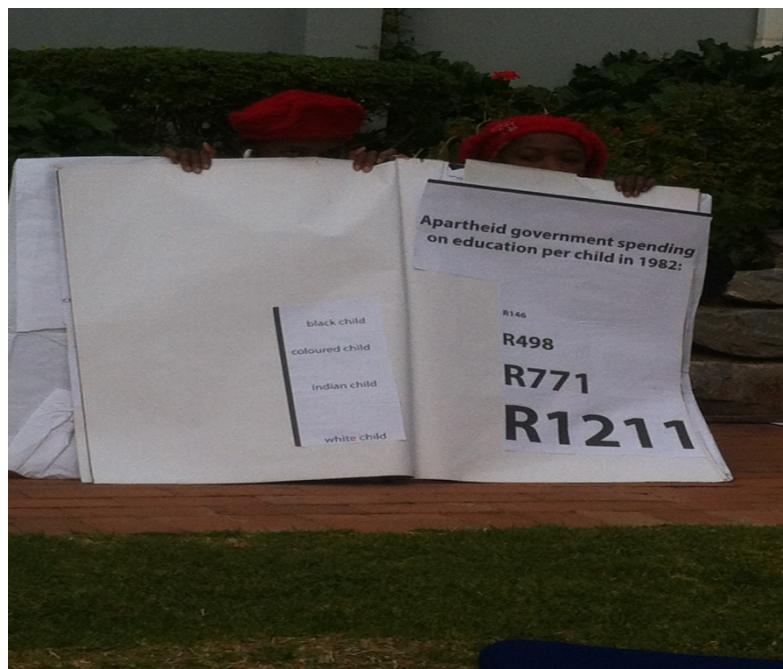


Photo 1.1 3Mamela Nyamza and Chuma Sopotela in 19 born 76 rebels: 20/20 Vision. Photo by Kamogelo Molobye

The use of symbols and physical performance in the piece highlighted the content of the subject matter as opposed to the spectacle of observing dance and choreography. Through using costumes that tell of the struggle between the ANC and Apartheid government, or retrieving a massive book that educated the audience on the state and inequality of education during the apartheid era, *19 born 76 rebel* took the personal into the political, and the political into the performative/embodied.

The piece was provocative and connected with the issues of education that were faced by students in 1976 that led to their resistance and violence against the apartheid government. The imagery and choreography of the piece revealed a confrontation with the government that undermined and oppressed black students through depriving them of education, a service that some areas in South Africa are still deprived of today. In placing this performance at close proximity with an uncomfortably seated audience, the performers allow for the audience to actively be part of the space, thus, implicated in the actions that take place.

Engagement from an audience is an aspect that *Lefet/ho* also attempted to achieve through audience participation. With ritual dance, within ritual and/or communal spaces, being charged with engagement from the audience participation, this aspect was important to the performance. In demarcating the performance space, and instructing that the audience be in the space, the aim was to invite the audience into a performance where they would not be comfortable seated and observing, but engaged, awake, and keenly taking part in the ritual of the performance. This interrogation of space and ritual was both successful and failed. In discussing the use of space, Gerard Bester states that

the sticks created a visual interest but also worked as a barrier between spectator and performer... The integration of combining text, operatic sounds, clapping and drumming was inventive but the rhythm and overall structure needed bigger contrasts and climaxes to be fully effective. There was a powerful moment when the audience was encouraged and drawn into the rhythmic build with clapping. Perhaps this was where the potential power of the work lay (Bester, Theatre in Motion, 2014).



Photo 1.1 4Smangaliso Ngwenya and Kamogelo Molobye in Lefetlho. Choreographed by Kamogelo Molobye (Theatre in Motion 2014). Photo by Mia van der Merwe

What was clear in this performance was that notions such as identity and culture can never be clearly articulated or embodied. They are as fluid as the specific environment in which they find themselves, or the subjectivities of an individual that informs the ways in which he/she engages with space and varying identities. Important in *Lefetlho* was the interrogation around the theatricalisation of ritual and whether or not compromises arises when displacing a dance form from its intended space into the arts. The challenge speaking about culture and identities is investigating ways in which group diversity of the choreographer and performers leads to a greater complexity of unpacking ideas of culture and belonging. The voice of the personal, the autobiographic voice, becomes negotiated in attempting to keep the integrity of the content, while taking into consideration the other raced and differently cultured bodies in the same space.

Conclusion

The body, especially the body on stage, and the ways in which it is viewed, exposes the racial vulnerabilities that the black body experiences on a daily basis, which are then translated onto stage through the audiences' interpretations and perceptions of the raced body in performance. Race has a very complex history, and this history continues to be reproduced through the continued inheritance of racial signifier and meanings that become attached to people of a particular race, and what that means, or out to mean.

It cannot be ignored that there exists a great tension when seeking to speak and embody a racial identity, in its varied forms and meanings, on stage. The shared labels that are attached to black bodies have grown to become the homogenising labels that continue to, in more ways than one, politicise bodies and bring a risk of racist responses. Identities are fluid, as such they are always shifting, and cannot continue to have attached to them inherited labels dating from colonialism and white supremacy.

Audiences need to be orientated into a different way of perceiving bodies, bodies in space, and the implications of perceiving the body in the manner that they do. In speaking about orientation of bodies and space, Sara Ahmed states that

space acquires the 'skin' of the bodies that inhabit them. What is important to note here is that it is not just bodies that are orientated. Spaces also take shape by being orientated around some bodies, more than others. We can also counter 'institutions' as orientation devices, which take the shape of 'what' resides within them (2007:157).

What Ahmed speak of are the tools that are needed in order to transform the ways in which audiences view the performing body. This is to say that spaces in to be disrupted, either through choreographic tools such as autobiographic work, or re-imagining the performing space to make your audience uncomfortable, or activity engaged and participatory in the performance, thus implicating them in the meaning making.

I concede that bodies are shaped by history, which is why the bodies continue to be raced, and still have attached to them meanings and perceptions that carry on from colonialism and white supremacy. These become the ways of thinking about the body. However, through the emergence of autobiographic choreography, one notices that there is a correction, a re-orientation and education of the multiplicity of the body, the fluidity and complexities of race, and the intricacies and contradictions of varied identities that become exposed within performance spaces. In seeking to discover truth, one must place oneself within their struggle. In seeking to educate, choreographer/performers challenge the narratives, and the spaces in which stories have been told.

Bibliography

Ahmed, S. 2007. A Phenomenology of Whiteness. *Feminist Theory*. 8(2):149-168. Sage Publications

Craighead, C. 2006 'Black Dance': Navigating the politics of 'black' in relation to 'the dance object' and the body as discourse. *Critical Arts: a Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):16-33: Routledge.

Howarth, W.L. 1974. 'Some Principles on Autobiography' in James Olney, 1980. *Autobiography: essays, theoretical and critical*. Princeton University Press: Princeton, New York.

Kodesh, H. 2006. Cultural Cocktails: The choreography of Gregory Maqoma. *Critical Arts: a Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2) 2006:39-60: Routledge.

Kristeva, J. 1982. *Powers of Horror: An essay on abjection*. Trans. Leon S. Roudiez. New York: Columbia University Press.

Maqoma, G. 2006 A response: Beyond ethnicity. *Critical Arts: a Journal of South-North Cultural and Media Studies*. 20(2):34-38: Routledge.

Mills, G.Y.1997. Is it or Is it Ain't: The Impact of Selective Perception on the Image Making of Traditional African Dance. *Journal of Black Studies*. 28(2). Sage Publications

Mullen, H. 1981. *Shedding Skin*. Blues Baby; Early Poems. Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press.

Shapiro, S. 1968. The Dark continent of literature: Autobiography. *Comparative Literature Studies*. 5(4):421-454.

Tufnell, M. & Crickmay, C. 2004. *A Widening Field: journeys in body and imagination*. Dance Publishings.

kamzmolobye@gmail.com

**COUNTERPOINT(E) AND RESURGENCE: RESURGENCE, HYBRIDITY AND TRANSMODERNISM:
SOUTH AFRICAN RE-IMAGININGS OF ICONIC BALLET**

Dr Kathrina Farrugia-Kriel
Faculty of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance (UK)

Introduction

To continue some of the epistemological strands offered in this two-part panel titled *Counterpoint(e) and Resurgence*, I will now address selected parameters on “contemporary” ballet in South Africa as well as position these markers against European and other global theories and contexts. My contribution offers three agendas: notably, the genre of “revisionism”, ballet in contemporary South Africa, and an application of transmodernism in dance. Drawing upon my doctoral thesis, I argue for the relevance of theoretical junctures within the “contemporary” moments of South African ballet. To bring these arguments to life, I have chosen case studies within the heritage of the iconic ballet titled *The Nutcracker* (1892), a work that was based on E.T.A. Hoffman’s narrative and first performed by the Imperial Ballet in St Petersburg and choreographed by Marius Petipa (1818 - 1910) and Lev Ivanov (1834 - 1901) to the music of Pyotr Tchaikovsky (1840 - 1893).¹ Several choreographers have revisited this work and the creative reconsiderations of the ballet including Mark Morris’ *The Hard Nut* (1991)², Matthew Bourne’s *Nutcracker!* (1992)³ and Maurice Béjart’s *Casse-Noisette* (2000).⁴ Through these productions, the choreographers offer a variety of readings including references to a Christmas party in the 1970s American suburbia, a journey from the dormitory of Dr Dross’ orphanage to the delights of Sweetieland (and the escapist dreams of Clara and Fritz), and autobiographic references and narrations of a life in ballet. In this presentation, I am particularly interested in two recent productions from 2013: *Baileys Christmas Nutcracker* (2013) and Joburg Ballet’s *Nutcracker Re-imagined* (2013).

The pursuit of tracing the ‘creative rethinkings’ of this iconic ballet offers insights into a distinct canon of work; a series of questions arise: How do works, such as the Baileys Christmas advert and *Nutcracker Re-Imagined*, live on in the “afterlife” of the iconic Imperial Ballet production? How do theories of ‘revisionism’ aide to help us understand the complexity of re-imagining such works? And, in the light of the ‘evidence’, how does the body of work reflect connections to issues of otherness, alterity and cultural hybridity? To address these questions, I will draw upon key theories, recordings and my application of new approaches to understanding dance in order to fulfill the scope of this

¹ For additional information on the ballet, see Roland John Wiley’s *A Century of Russian Ballet* (2000).

² Extracts can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rMNk6uOwLwl> (BAM promotional video)

³ Extracts can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXzVujXUjp8> (New Adventures’ Promo)

⁴ A complete version performed by Béjart Ballet Lausanne can be found at:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fXAHwXKZBw4>

second part of our trajectory. Through this act of viewing the dance(s), I offer connections between the genre of revisionism and newer theoretical offerings on transmodernism in dance.

From an “afterlife of performances” to the genre of revisionism/theoretical perspectives

For scholars, the rewriting or reinterpretation of performance texts implies that parts of the source undergo various changes and, as Amy Green suggests, these ‘texts’ offer as “rich a source of inspiration as constructivist aesthetics” (Green, 1994:22). The act of reworking or revising such sources can be viewed against a range of terms that describe the variations of levels of interpretation of artefacts appearing across the art forms of opera, musicals, theatre and dance. The terminology in this field is interchangeable and a clearer understanding of such terms will be useful to frame the issues at the centre of this scholarly contribution to the conference themes.

British opera director Sir Jonathan Miller claims that the possible changes to a production may include alterations to the physical effects of the staging, for example to a social setting which may change the life of a work of art. Miller associates this type of progression in the ensuing productions as “an afterlife” in the reinterpretation or rewriting of the performance text. Miller compares the legacies of performances of a production with a “phylogenetic history of an evolving organism” (Miller, 1986:29). For Miller, the act of preserving part of the performance text suggests a counter balance to the rewriting or reinterpretation of parts of a revised production and the “subsequent performances”. To elucidate this, in 1987 Miller restaged Gilbert and Sullivan’s *The Mikado* (1885) and set the operetta in an English seaside town in the 1930s. More recently, in 2009 he restaged Giacomo Puccini’s *La Bohème* (1896) in Paris in the 1930s.⁵ These examples highlight the alteration of the ‘location’ of the performance with little or no change in the operatic text, and reflect what Roger Parker refers to as the phenomenon of *Regieoper* as a late nineteenth-century German, and then subsequently international, preoccupation with “aggressively updating the visual embodiment of old works” (Parker, 2006:3). American theatre director Peter Sellars (b.1957) revisited Mozart’s operas and offered revisions of their physical setting: *Cosi fan tutte* (1986) was set in a diner in Cape Cod in the 1950s and *Le Nozze di Figaro* (1988) in Despina’s Diner as well as a launderette.⁶ In effect, what Miller, Parker and Sellars suggest involves the rethinking of only one aspect of the performance: the *mise-en-scène* (stage setting).

The **rewriting or re-interpretation** of a performance or historical source implies that parts of the artefact, such as the language and syntax within the text, undergo various changes in addition to making significant reference to the original source. Croatian literary analyst Darko Suvin (1988)

⁵Here a reference is made to the production by the English National Opera performed at the London Coliseum in 2010.

⁶Here a reference is made to the analyses provided by Amy S. Green (1992).

offers a framework which outlines three considerations when sources undergo some form of revision: variants, adaptations and rewrites. Variants suggest “central structural features of the text being interpreted” (Suvin in Midgelow, 2007:13). **Variants** of *The Nutcracker* include restagings of Petipa’s own work. Here I refer to the numerous (if not hundreds) of versions of Nutcrackers that are variants of the Petipa/Ivanov production that have been ‘adopted’ by so many companies as a result of Russian émigrés or those inspired by the work of those who left in 1917. **Adaptations** highlight significant changes alongside an inclusion of “some of the central invariants”, but these “are sufficient to establish its ‘family likeness’ to other members of that family” (*ibid*). Examples here include Morris’ *The Hard Nut* where the celebration of Christmas is still prevalent within the 1970s context and the snowstorm is largely prevalent as a likeness to the theme and structure of the 1892 production.⁷ Lastly, **rewrites** suggest that a work “is no longer, strictly speaking, an interpretation but a use of some elements from the anterior structure as a semi-finished product” (Suvin in Midgelow, 2007:13). Béjart’s Nutcracker rewrites the narrative against autobiographical narratives of self, his relationship with his mother and other characters including Felix the cat and “Marius Petipa” as his ballet/circus master. The ballet opens with a projected monologue by Béjart; “I will never forget Christmastime”. Act 1 is set in an abstracted space that renders itself as a ‘home’ from which he departs and a school that becomes his second home. The setting progresses to more abstracted spaces; bearded “ladies” and ballerinas dressed in red and gold sequined dresses replace the Christmas angels and the relationship between him and his mother mark the second scene (in the pine forest), traditionally referred to as the snow scene. Act 2 is set in a circus. The boy (Béjart), now dressed as the clown, moves in between hiding under his mother’s skirt and frolicking around the Spanish dancers, conjurers and Soviet ballet stars, including a Baryshnikov look-a-like male dancer. The musical score is evidently the driving point for connectivity to the 1892 production but the commonalities between the variants adaptations and rewrites are the complex and merit additional attention later on in this enquiry.

Perspectives from theatre studies outline other pathways for revising performance histories. Amy S. Green (1994) suggests three possible ways of revising a production. Firstly, Green outlines an alteration to the historical or geographical location in the designed production. In the second instance, there is a favouring of abstract settings that avoids realistic “trappings”. Thirdly, the work suggests an interpolation of recognisable references. To elucidate these points, an intertextual pastiche is created through the collage of a variety of texts, including Béjart’s perception of ballet, the autobiographical narrations from his recollections of his childhood in Marseilles in 1930s, the nineteenth-century *fin de siècle* choreographic genres as a *mise-en-scène* and the variety of

⁷ For further detail, view <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=drFs3cWP1uw>

historical and fictional characters that shape a cinematic tapestry of performances. Béjart's Nutcracker includes textual references to the *grands pas de deux* choreographed by Petipa. Prior to the start of the duet, "Petipa" walks onto stage and introduces the two dancers and credits the choreography to Mr Petipa).

In the field of dance scholarship, two strands of thinking offer methods for understanding theoretical stances through which to explore recent histories in choreographic revisionism. I am mindful that the term 'revisionist' is problematic to some cultures; my choice of this term is driven by a European context in terms of my scholarship on two European choreographers and their geographical location. As I outlined earlier, two scholars are central to the field of choreographic studies and reworkings/revisionism: Vida Midgelow (2007) and Giannandrea Poesio (in Lansdale, 2008). The conceptual premises of reworkings and revisions advocate the legacies of and challenges to historical artefacts, notably performance histories of iconic ballets suggesting the initiation of an "interpretive discourse – often wilfully reinterpreting or misinterpreting their sources" (Midgelow, 2007:11). Differences between the ontologies of both writers result from the differing etymological underpinning of terms such as 'reworking' and 'revisionist'. Midgelow's theoretical stance on 'reworking' embraces the postmodern condition of intertextuality imparted by Julia Kristeva (1980).⁸

As Midgelow argues:

reworkings can usefully be positioned as a particular type of intertextual practice. Reworkings involve liberal references to, and quotations from, their source text(s), and the choreographers of reworkings can be seen self-consciously to embed, cite and allude to other pre-texts in their dances (Midgelow, 2007:28).

To highlight her epistemological points, Midgelow analyses a series of reworkings of the iconic ballet *Swan Lake* (1895)⁹ through artistic re-conceptions by Swedish choreographer Mats Ek (1987) and British choreographer Matthew Bourne (1995), as well as her own choreographic practices. Her interpretations of these reworkings evolve into corporeal readings of race, gender and sexuality against the accumulations of and challenges to the established narratives of *Swan Lake*.

⁸ The concept of intertextuality, coined by Julia Kristeva in the late 1960s and translated into English in the 1980s, is described as "non-hierarchical and democratically inclusive notions of texts in a vast mosaic of other texts" (Orr, 2003:1).

⁹ The ballet is another of the iconic works from the nineteenth-century canon of the Imperial Russian heritage. In 1895, the production for the Imperial Ballet included collaborations with the 1876 score by Tchaikovsky, as well as choreography by Petipa and Ivanov. In his book titled *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernisation of Ballet*, Tim Scholl (1994) provides a detailed understanding of the aesthetic of ballet classicism at the height of the *fin de siècle* and into the twentieth century. For additional information see Wiley (2000).

Poesio's perspectives evolve from a theoretical model of 'decentring dance practices' and reside within a collection of essays published by Emeritus Professor Janet Lansdale in 2008.¹⁰ A European context is offered for revisionism; Poesio suggests that the first evidence of this term appeared in 1982, marking Andy Degroat's version of *Swan Lake* at the Festival of Aix-en-Provence.¹¹ Drawing from his analyses of revisions by Ek including *Giselle* (1982), *Swan Lake* (1987) and *Sleeping Beauty* (1996), Poesio's framework for defining revisionist practices is rendered through the consideration of three performance layers: the dramatic narrative, the musical narrative and the dance narrative. In this model, the distinction of revising these critical components of the performance traditions of a historical artefact becomes central to the emerging discourse in Poesio's writing. This challenges the overly superficial updates of a new staging, or new context for the *mise-en-scène*, of the performance where largely the choreographic narratives are only slightly altered if they do not remain the same. It is not to say that these components do not play an important part in the "afterlife" of an iconic work. The rethinking of the scenery, props and costumes of a performance may contribute significantly to the dramatic narratives within a revisionist production so long as these alterations are made in conjunction with radical changes to the choreographic idiom and, potentially, the adaptations of the musical narratives or the score. To bring this to life, I would like to spend a few minutes on retracing two case studies associated with *The Nutcracker*, largely through their connections with the dramatic and musical narratives and the positioning of the dance narratives.

At the intersection of histories, culture(s) and resurgence(s) in 2013: *Baileys Christmas Nutcracker* and *Nutcracker Re-Imagined*

Video 1: *Baileys Christmas Nutcracker* advertisement (2013)¹² and *The Making of Baileys Nutcracker*

Video 2: BloombergTV AFRICA - Joburg Ballet's *Nutcracker Re-Imagined* (2013)¹³

- Context(s) and culture(s): multifaceted narrative threads within the works
- Opportunity to consider ballet as global/mediatised art and collaborations (Millepied)
- From Sugar Plum Fairy to the Sangoma (Kitty Phetla as the sangoma): "South African art" (beyond Van Wyk's "canon of whiteness" (in Friedman 2012) and the invigoration of ballet within the complexity of the postcolonial/post democratic ballet cultures in South Africa)
- Contemporizing *The Nutcracker* and new theories of enquiry: evidently, ballet is not dead!

Rethinking ballets as "transmodern" affairs

Theories of transmodernism have been central to my scholarly trajectories over the course of the last decade. In 2005, my PhD proposal aimed to find connections between revisions of Russian

¹⁰In the context of poststructuralist theories, 'decentring' can be associated with difference and diversity. Lansdale's explanation of 'decentring' suggests the possibility that, within a dance work, "there are *many* centres or perhaps *none* at all" (Lansdale, 2008:3).

¹¹Poesio in Lansdale, 2008:73.

¹²Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w-1XB00Ss8I>

¹³Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F6CEO4T77gU>

choreographer Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Noces* (1923) and the body of work by Angelin Preljocaj and Mauro Bigonzetti. When I completed my doctoral studies in 2012, I discovered two other examined doctoral theses on transmodernism in the humanities, notably in film, literary and critical studies. Without going into too much depth into theories on transmodernism, I would like to share with you some insights into perspectives on the topic as well as make explicit connections to the re-imaginings of ballet as well as propose readings of *Nutcracker Re-Imagined* and its implications within a South African context.

So what is "transmodernism"? For Christopher Taggart Lewis, transmodernism is defined as "attempts to recover the centers of modernism and repudiate postmodernism's dismissal of meaning in a kind of "transversal unification" that effect a convergence without coincidence" (Lewis, 2012:20). Through his analyses of novels by Chico Buarque and Santiago Nazarian¹⁴, Lewis articulates transmodern thinking as a "shifting, ever-changing organism ... that bridges the gaps between the shards (of postmodernism), anchoring identity between multiplicity and (global) interconnectivity" (Lewis, 2012:iii). In appropriating Enrique Dussel's notion of alterity and *differènce*, Lewis' interpretations of the selected novels warrant that transmodernism "insists instead on the shattered human condition and providing alterity with a voice" (Lewis, 2012:iv). Theories of transmodernism in dance offer a new way of understanding recent dance histories and practices and further the opportunities for situating the work of recent choreographers and companies. The transference of theories from film and literature studies contributes new perspectives on recent choreographic practices that to date have had little or no direct consideration within the discourses on dance studies. Progressively, the liberating and forward-thinking qualities of such a theoretical positioning provides a means of reconciling what André Lepecki once suggested was "an epistemological crisis of writing in motion, writing as a body moving in the interstices of visibility, which is to say, writing in between the threads of the mnemonic/technological matrix" (Lepecki, 2004:5).

These speculations offer possible applications of transmodernism in order to make sense of multidimensional performances created as a result of choreographic exchanges and informed by notions of multidimensionality through alterity and border-crossing. My doctoral thesis proposed from the emergent features of the body of work created by the two specific European choreographers, notably Preljocaj and Bigonzetti, against their historical contexts and the artistic climates in France and Italy. I argued that these conditions gave rise to the shaping of their choreographic work, advocating the impact of an invasion of artistic 'alterity' and the multiple connotations of artistic otherness in their work. For my study, transmodern dance practices exhibit

¹⁴ The novels were published between 2003 and 2009.

an avoidance of centrality and cultivate the presence of cultures and influences rendered through the presences and traces of histories in the work of Preljocaj and Bigonzetti. Like these European artistic invasions, the context and histories of ballet in South Africa can be viewed in a similar light. To my mind, an examination of the contemporary South African context (against its historical past) elicits intriguing connections to the transmodern agenda and one that could be explored with further interest.

Transmodernism in dance offers a model that is timely and necessary. Within my theoretical paradigm, *Nutcracker Re-Imagined* encapsulates and epitomises the parameters of transmodernism in dance. The intricate weaving of shards or deposits of several layers of choreographic (or cultural) traces accumulates in *Nutcracker Re-Imagined* and several of the other “re-writes”. The associations between these re-imaginings, reworkings or revisions offer commonalities between revisionism as a genre and transmodernism as a new theoretical paradigm. At the intersections of transmodern and revisionist practices, *Nutcracker Re-Imagined* demonstrates labyrinthine connections through border-crossing, multidimensionality and alterity against past and recent dance practices, histories and artefacts, where the “Nutcracker” traditions overlap with these complex representations of South African art and culture. The heritage as well as the connections to the ‘local’ traditions and the utilisation of the rhythmic textures of Tchaikovsky’s compositional arrangements transform into a web of connections surrounding the iconic status of the 1892 ballet. As the interweaving of complex movement phrases, the props and the body unfold as structural and thematic tools, choreographic revisions heighten the multidimensional factors through the connecting and accumulating references to cultures and resurgences in ballet. The plethora of traces and dimensions replicates multi-levelled choreographic writing that is distinctive of transmodernism.

One of the benefits of the application of transmodern theories to dance is the prospect of critically revisiting and rethinking some historically-informed misconceptions. Jeremi Szaniawski responds to one such misconception in film studies by arguing that “unlike some observers, I do not believe that cinema is over” (Szaniawski, 2004:179). In the field of dance studies, the theorisation of transmodernism provides a unique opportunity to challenge some recent perspectives on the decline of ballet in the last few decades¹⁵ as well as address the alleged stagnation in contemporary dance practices at the turn of the twenty-first century. This transmodern model contributes to the field of dance studies by radically shifting into a new theoretical paradigm, in the same way that Sally Banes’ argument on postmodern dance altered perceptions of both theoretical applications and the

¹⁵ This is particularly directed towards a critique of Jennifer Homans’ theory on the death of ballet (Homans, 2010).

classification of western/American dance in the 1980s. Of course the main challenge of proposing such a theoretical framework is that it entails a radical rethinking of the modern/postmodern canon, most notably the body of work created between the 1960s and recent times. The implications of proposing a ‘transmodern’ narrative infer a revisiting of the continuum of theories and this is a trajectory that requires a furthering of the line of enquiry, one that I am shaping into a forthcoming article. A subsequent generation of choreographers, who were influenced by historic, artistic and cultural migrations, largely as a result of the activities in Europe (and now South Africa), offers a renewed interest in revisiting and analysing the “afterlives”, revisions and reworkings of *The Nutcracker* (1892) as well as the remnants of the intertextual artistic condition. This generation, in my view, can be described as the transmodern generation.

At the intersections of revisionist practices, transmodernism in dance implies border-crossing and the recognition of particular stances on ‘globality’, notably as alterity from other and past dance histories. As witnessed in *Nutcracker Re-Imagined* and the Bailey’s advert, transmodern dance practices respond to the values from the interstitial transference of migrated practices that find ways of reconnecting through a composite and non-linear scaffolded effect. Thus, the application of a theoretical construct of transmodernism in dance provides new trajectories for dance scholars and allows for a rethinking of the parameters of scholarly thinking in dance practices. In the aftermath of a “post post-structural” period (Schechner, 2000:7), this transmodern framework provides the beginnings of a theoretical paradigm that offers the facilitation of understanding such recent dance histories. I hope that this audacious endeavour to make scholarly connections to the contemporary South African context, across resurgence, revisions and artistic hybridity, is one that enriches the agenda for this conference. These are my hopes in concluding this presentation: that ballet can be viewed as a hybrid, yet still contemporary, art form that is laden with multifaceted threads; that ballet, in its apparent resurgence within this context, is acknowledged for its cultural hybridity; that the colour of ballet is emancipated as an acceptable form of appropriate, inclusive and diverse art form in the 21st Century.

Bibliography

Dussel, E. 2008. *Twenty Theses on Politics*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Farrugia, K. 2012. Transmodern Dance Practices: Angelin Preljocaj, Mauro Bigonzetti and revisions of *Les Noces* (1923). PhD. Thesis. London Metropolitan University.

Friedman, S. Ed. 2012. *Post-Apartheid Dance: Many Bodies, Many Voices, Many Stories*. Newcastle-upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Green, A.S. 1994. *The Revisionist Stage: American directors reinvent the classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lepecki, A. 2006. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the politics of movement*. London, New York: Routledge.

Lewis, C.T. 2011. When the glass slips: Building bridges to transmodern identity in the novels of Santiago Nazarian and Chico Buarque. PhD. thesis. Harvard University.

Midgelow, V. 2007 *Reworking the ballet: Counter-narratives and alternative bodies*. London; New York: Routledge.

Miller, J. 1986. *Subsequent Performances*. New York: Viking Penguin Inc.

Orr, M. 2003 *Intertextuality: Debates and Contexts*. Cambridge, Malden: Polity Press.

Parker, R. 2006 *Remaking the Song: Operatic Visions and Revisions from Handel to Berio*. Berkeley and London: University of California Press.

Poesio, G. 2008. Elusive Narratives: Mats Ek, in J. Lansdale, Ed. *Decentring Dancing Texts: The Challenge of Interpreting Dances*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan: 73–88.

Schechner, R. 2000. Post post-structuralism? *Tulane Drama Review*. 44(3):4–7.

Scholl, T. 1994. *From Petipa to Balanchine: Classical Revival and the Modernisation of Ballet*. London, New York: Routledge.

Szaniawski, J. 2004. Transmodernism or the resurgence of modernism in contemporary cinema and popular culture. *Belgian Journal of English Language and Literatures*: 167–183.

Wiley, R.J. 2000. *A Century of Russian Ballet*. London: Dance Books.

POLITICS OF PERFORMANCE: NEGOTIATING CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA FOR ADVOCACY OF MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES

Dr Ketu H. Katrak

Professor: Claire Trevor School of the Arts, University of California, Irvine

Abstract

Selected contemporary performances in South Africa address the marginalized in the post-apartheid era. In this new democracy (since 1994) that guarantees rights of sexual orientation and equal access to the physically challenged, the realities on the ground are strikingly different. I argue that African Contemporary Dance Theater provides effective and affective tools of advocacy for artists, choreographers and socially engaged scholars to challenge stereotypes of the disabled and the sexually “deviant.” Further, such representations participate in creating a socially just environment that recuperates the denuded humanity of marginalized groups and accepts them as artists. I discuss the work of selected “choreo-activists” as I call them, who address and challenge inequalities faced by the marginalized, such as Gerard Samuel’s work in the field of disability dance. In 2000, Samuel established a youth dance group entitled “LeftFeetFirst”. Now, as Head of the School of Dance at the University of Cape Town, he includes the topic of disability into the academic program of Dance. Liane Loots, Artistic Director of Flatfoot Dance Company in Durban, has taught Dance in Education courses since 1995 at the University of KwaZulu Natal, and since 2000 includes “disability arts”. I also discuss Mamela Nyamza’s collaboration with UK-based artist, Mojisola Debayo in I Stand Corrected that addresses the violence of homophobia and rape, and challenges the horrific phrase, “corrective rape” used to justify rape and murder of lesbians. Both Samuel and Nyamza use the multidisciplinary form of Contemporary African Dance Theater that brings together the verbal, kinetic, and aural in affective performances.

Introduction

The porous nature of the art form [i.e. Contemporary Dance] facilitates inclusion of a range of movement expressions and this adaptability and deconstruction of hegemonies comprise a fertile space for dancers and choreographers alike. . . Contemporary Dance theater as a form is] being altered by a growing presence of persons with disabilities who challenge not only their right of inclusion within dance as an art form but also the social construct of the ‘dancing body. . . In boldly arguing for dance to be performed by all persons/human beings much could be taught to a 21st century youth obsessed cultures and xenophobic societies.

Gerard Samuel¹

The construction of normative perfect moving bodies has been about excluding a body living with disability; now, critical contemporary dance has had to heed the agenda of

truly democratizing who can dance what a dancer should look like. Not all dance education is about creating theatre dancers but rather too, that the ability to dance and move can become one of the fundamental rights of freedom of expression that all learners should access.

Liane Loots²

Marginalized communities such as the disabled in post-apartheid South Africa use Contemporary Dance/ Creative Dance as a preferred form. In this essay, I discuss the potency of this form for the disabled, and the advocacy work of chore-activists as I term them. Although South Africa's young democracy (since 1994) guarantees rights of sexual orientation and equal access to the physically challenged, the realities on the ground are strikingly different. I argue that African Contemporary Dance Theater with its openness of movement vocabularies provides effective and affective tools of advocacy for artists, choreographers, and socially engaged scholars to challenge stereotypes of the disabled and the sexually "deviant" among LGBTQ communities (the acronym LGBTQ includes lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, and queer). Further, such representations participate in creating a socially just environment that recuperates the denuded humanity of marginalized groups and accepts them as artists.

Gerard Samuel's advocacy work in disability dance uses "creative dance as the methodology for disability dance ... Dance became a mediator where disabled dance and mainstream performance dance began to bump and intertwine" (Post-Apartheid). The emphasis is not on training and technique but rather on self-expression and communication of a myriad stories told from the point of view of the disabled. Award-winning black choreographer Mamela Nyamza advocates against violence directed at lesbians in a collaborative work, *I Stand Corrected* (with UK-based Mojisola Adebayo) that critiques homophobia and challenges the horrific phrase, "corrective rape" used to "justify" male violence in raping and murdering lesbians in order to "correct" them. Both Samuel and Nyamza use the multidisciplinary form of Contemporary African Dance Theater that brings together the verbal, kinetic, and aural in affective performances.

Gerard Samuel, a South African of Indian descent (of the 5th generation) who grew up outside Durban, has several "firsts" in his life and career. He was the first "colored" person within his Indian community to learn ballet, his passion, since he was a young boy during apartheid with its racial structure of white, black and the colored as the middle, buffer zone. Currently, he is the

first “colored” South African to be appointed Head of the School of Dance at the University of Cape Town (UCT) where he has augmented the curriculum to include disability dance studies.

Contemporary African Dance

Contemporary dance and within contemporary dance, the delineation of “Creative Dance” provides the space and freedom to explore the body’s movement potential, including its limits for different body types. Such an avenue is more open-ended than the strictures of any classical form such as ballet that has strict regimes of movement, not open to adaptation for differently able bodies. As Gerard Samuel remarks: “Disability dance has the unique power to reposition contemporary theatre dance notions. (“Undressing the (w)rapper: disability dance”)³

In the South African context, with its colonial and apartheid legacies, unconscious norms that still prefer the normative, thin ballet body prevail. As Juanita Finestone argues effectively in her MA mini-thesis entitled, “The Politics and Poetics of Choreography: The Dancing Body in South African Dance” (Rhodes University, 1995), postmodernism that favors multiplicity over unitary (such as a “common” identity in the “rainbow nation”), that fragments rather than unifies identities, that challenges debilitating binaries (inherited from Western epistemologies) of high/low art or to extend this into the able/disabled, are useful avenues for choreographers to explore. “Postmodern choreographic strategies” remarks Finestone, are useful “for formulating and articulating new dance directions in South Africa” (2). Contemporary Dance in this context welcomes a palimpsest of various vocabularies and welcomes different body types to experiment with movement and music. Finestone’s distinction between “the social body” and “the dancing body” is useful to discuss marginalized bodies--blacks, disabled, lesbians. As Finestone suggests, it is useful to “demystify and deconstruct previous official representations of the dancing body.”

Since marginalized communities—disabled and LGBTQ—favor Contemporary Dance in their work, it is important to discuss its history in the South African context, especially the Contemporary Dance Conference hosted by JOMBA! in August 2004 in Durban. What changes/continuities do we observe from 2004 to 2015? I am sorry to observe that key players at that historic gathering, Lliane Loots and Adrienne Sichel are not here. Lliane Loots, Senior Lecturer at the University of KwaZulu Natal, and Artistic Director of Flatfoot Dance Company, continues to be a powerful advocate for the marginalized in her spearheading training programs

for disadvantaged children and youth, and in her choreographic work for the Company. In speaking of Contemporary Dance, it is important as Loots argues in a recent 2015 article in *Agenda*, to seek alternatives to canonic and received notions of modern/contemporary dance from the global North following pioneers such as Graham, and Cunningham. Loots probes methodologies appropriate for the global South and the South African context, when even in post-apartheid times, class often supersedes race. It is crucial not to be “homogenized” in universal, i.e. Western notions of dance but to remain rooted in South African local issues such as poverty, HIV/AIDS, unequal gender norms under traditional patriarchy, and rigid roles for boys and girls.

In a useful article entitled, “Under Fire: Defining a contemporary African dance aesthetic—can it be done?” (about JOMBA 2004 conference) Gilbert Douglas, Adrienne Sichel, Adebayo Liadi, and others remark: “Practitioners from around Africa engaged powerfully” with this topic. “Their discussion revealed mostly divergent, occasionally intersecting and often heated opinions on the issue, clearly indicating that the notion of what constitutes an African contemporary dance aesthetic is highly contested.”⁴ Sichel quotes Gregory Maqoma’s remark that “each choreographer and artist has a responsibility of cultural translation to mediate but not be swallowed up.” Several participants spoke of researching their own indigenous traditions, creating “new body language”, even being open to borrowing/ appropriating styles from other places while keeping their own identity and integrity. Some speakers connected the word “contemporary” to our present technological age. While some embraced the word “African”, others wanted to be regarded as “artists” who could belong anywhere. There is an overt or unspoken expectation that even while doing “contemporary dance”, a dancer must show that s/he is influenced by “traditional dance.” Or else, one might be accused of trying to be a European. Augusto Cuvilas expressed discomfort with the designation, “African Dance” since which Africa and which Africans are included in that? Also in talking of Contemporary Dance, he asks if one “is talking of technique or style or aesthetics.”

Another conundrum was that if “contemporary dance” is associated with the West, and with modern dance, how could this be brought together with indigenous African traditional dance with its own technique? Would this endeavor end up as another form of colonization? If traditional and contemporary were “fused” would African identity of the dance be lost? Would

this only become another expression of what Zakhele Mhlongo describes as “conforming to the universal aesthetic of contemporary dance?” (Quoted in *Critical Arts*: 112)

In a review of Lliane Loots and Miranda Young-Jehangeer’s edited volume, *African Contemporary Dance? Questioning Issues of a performance aesthetic for a developing and independent continent*, Vasu Reddy astutely points out “the essential ambiguity” of the title.⁵ Does the title point to “a type of dance practice” or does it express “resistance . . . to any fixed, predetermined classification?” Does “African Contemporary Dance” point to “the ontology and epistemology” of this genre? Does the question mark after African Contemporary Dance register “possible fault lines”? Reddy points out that participants emphasize the interface between their contexts and their creative work, which share a symbiotic relationship.” In the myriad ways that African contemporary dance can be delineated, in its postcolonial context, this style is “characterized by hybridity (emphasis on appropriation, assimilation, synthesis and questioning).” While there can hardly be consensus on a single or even a set of definitions of African Contemporary dance, it is significant to continue critical reflection of both theory and practice that blends both personal experience and testimony with political and cultural analyses.” It is important as Reddy notes, to “rethink and conceptualize African contemporary dance in nonessentialist frameworks that open up stimulating interpretative modalities focused on a rich, engaging and creative performance project.”

I now turn to the use of Contemporary African Dance Theater by marginalized communities, disabled and LGBTQ who continue to face the harsh realities of race with attendant inhumane degradation faced particularly by blacks during and after apartheid. In South Africa’s young democracy (since 1994) the Constitution guarantees rights to all its citizens of diverse races, ethnic groups, sexual orientations, and physical abilities (categories that are not even mentioned in the Constitutions of other African nations). However, the road to full recognition and equal access for blacks, the disabled, and the LGBTQ communities is a long and difficult one even though the Department of Education’s White Paper (2001) states that “inclusive education” [or “integrated education”] for the “disabled and the able bodied is part of a human rights culture” in South Africa. As Gerard Samuel remarks, “In South Africa’s fledgling democracy, the reprioritizing of disability within the human rights debate meant that through Creative Dance, the voice of the disabled could be heard.”⁶ Similarly, Lliane Loots advocates in agreement with “radical education theorist Paula Freire (who) offers alternative ways of

imagining a localized education paradigm that allows for the agenda of growing people rather than . . . Northern-based economic and social agendas—and indeed, dance practices.”⁷ Further Loots points out that “in post-apartheid South African education divisions are no longer along race lines but still exist in terms of class and what school you are able to access or afford to attend. Often township schools (for example) are still beleaguered by poorly trained teachers and no cultural programmes due to funding cuts.” Above all, I agree with Loots that dance education is less about “a well-pointed foot” but about “this agenda of ‘growing people’; that education and pedagogy should be about [as Freire puts it] ‘becoming more fully human’ . . . Dance education can become a site of activism for rethinking who we are both locally and globally and what we are worth” (CORD, 2009:296).

Sexual Orientation: Marginalization and Violence against LGBTQ communities

Art has developed me, and opened a totally different book for me to explore the impossible, which is now possible... I love my art [dance] because we have this powerful tool that speaks to all without a word. Giving back to the community is helping those that come from where I come from [Gugulethu, Cape Town], and showing them that this art...can heal a lot of them that are born out of issues just like myself.

Mamela Nyamza⁸

Mamela Nyamza, winner of South Africa’s prestigious 2011 Standard Bank Young Artist Award Winner for Dance, grew up in the 1980s in Gugulethu, Cape Town. She was born on Sept 22, 1976 (the historic year of the Soweto student uprising), part of a large family, and connected with dance from a young age as a means to understand the world around her. At age 8, in 1984, as apartheid’s racist policies were being increasingly challenged, Nyamza started ballet classes at the Zama Dance School in Gugulethu with a white Jewish woman Arlene Westergaard. She then completed a National Diploma in Ballet at the Pretoria Technikon Dance Department in Pretoria.⁹ Like other black women aspiring to ballet, Nyamza also faced the usual prejudices of not having the thin body type, nearly a compulsory requirement for female ballet dancers. Nyamza’s yearlong fellowship at the Alvin Ailey Dance Company in New York City was significant in validating her black female body in the ballet studio.

Nyamza, like choreo-activist Gerard Samuel, is committed to community educational work through dance. She has been project coordinator for the University of Stellenbosch's Project

Move 1524, which uses dance movement therapy to educate and demonstrate on issues relating to HIV/Aids, domestic violence and drug abuse. She believes passionately in empowering youth through dance training, from teaching ballet in Mamelodi to doing volunteer work at Thembalethu Day School for the Disabled.

Nyamza's own mother was raped and killed, a horrifyingly scarring experience for the daughter. She began to use her autobiographical material as she developed her own strong, unique signature style. "After my mother died" remarks Nyamza, "I could feel her in my dreams telling me to use my dance to tell real stories. I also later came out_of the closet and I started experiencing discrimination in society and that's when I thought, 'you know, I'm an artist so let me be the voice that addresses all these issues.'" Nyamza remarks (in an interview in *Real Magazine*) that she had "forced" herself "to live the model life women are expected to have, that of getting married and having a child. But I realized I was not myself ... I came out as a lesbian and left my husband for a woman... Since then I blossomed into the artist I have always wanted to be."

Nyamza describes *I Stand Corrected* (her collaborative work with Modisola Adebayo)¹ as "dark strange, witty, and absurd." The piece evokes issues of homophobia and rape via layered movement, props, and symbolic gestures. Adrienne Sichel, prominent South African arts critic, in an essay entitled, "Legacies of Violence" comments on this work as "a passionate response to an epidemic of rape and murder in South Africa." A real event--the gruesome murder of a lesbian woman whose body was dumped into a garbage bin—provided urgency and inspiration for *I Stand Corrected*. Nyamza plays the murdered woman who returns to her female lover after her death to "correct herself." According to Sichel, "*I Stand Corrected* weaves a theatrical spell through a fractured, dramatic narrative which succinctly choreographs an epitaph for ordinary people textured with love, pain, loss, brutality and dignity . . . a landmark dance theatre work which marries the skills, experience, sensitivity, sensuality and artistry of two African artists—a theatre director, actor and playwright and an uncompromising dancer and choreographer. The final message is love is stronger than death." **Disability Dance**

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qMAwbAp6C1U/> further film clip showed in presentation can be found at "On Your Island Does the Night Fall Later?"
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8whTlQAh02s>

Let me begin this section with an example of how Contemporary Dance movement, its free and “porous” to use Samuel’s word quoted in the epigraph, along with its use of music and rhythm provides an artistic avenue for differently able dancing bodies to express themselves as dancers and as full human beings. As Coralie Valentyn remarked in her paper at CORD recently (June 2015), “Disability expands the possibilities of dance . . . Disability creates new possibilities in dance choreography [in which] the vocabulary of movement is radically expanded.” Further, Valentyn regards “integrated dance as making new meaning in South Africa where new identities can be imagined.” Disability dance enables viewers to challenge ideas around bodies and abilities, accepting the fact that not all bodies are perfect. It is equally a challenge for able-bodied dancers to learn how to work with the differently able. The able bodied dancers need training, flexibility, and reciprocity, not simply sympathy. They have to rethink what dance is, and to transform their normative aesthetic responses.

Also, at 2015 CORD, Professor Lisa Doolittle of the University of Alberta shared her experiences of running an “All Abilities” rather than a “Mixed Abilities Class.” Doolittle renamed the category of the “disabled” as dancers “with” and dancers “without”, in fact making the able-bodied carry the negative connotation rather than the ones “with”. Students “with and without” as Doolittle noted, omitting the word “disability”, created a work entitled, “Unlimited Party” inviting the audience to enter what Doolittle called “a new conceptual terrain” that created a sense of inclusion with 7 simple works, “May I please have this dance?” High-class ballroom dance expectations were deconstructed as differently able bodies moved on stage, “demonstrating their limitlessness.” This work activated empathy rather than sympathy in positively affective ways. Rather than a charity model, the audience was inspired to rediscover how social justice projects involve the whole community.

This is reminiscent of John Mthethwa’s “perseverance over a 20 year period” in using “ballroom dance arguably one of the most codified forms” as Gerard Samuel comments “to provide for the physical and social upliftment of the disabled in KwaMashu and Umlazi (the black townships which surround Durban)” (Samuel, in *Post-Apartheid Dance*) In Cape Town, Remix Dance Project (since 2000) has accomplished its mission of including differently able dancers in highly evocative Contemporary Dance choreographies. Loots describes Remix’s work with different bodies as “its impulse towards a type of visceral democracy that honours difference, be this racial, gendered, or disabled” (*Agenda*, 2015:4). Award-winning choreographers like Nicola

Visser and Malcolm Black of Remix “argue for legitimacy of the disabled as dancer and valued human being”, and assert the subversive quality of their work. As the first and one of the longest-standing integrated dance companies in the country, Remix seeks, through its work, to educate and challenge attitudes and policies that concern the disabled with programs of high artistic excellence. In particular, social and cultural attitudes towards dance, gender and disability within the dance world are tackled. Their mission is “to strive to create innovative dance theatre performance and education programmes that bring together people with different body histories, body types and abilities” (quoted in Loots, *Agenda*, 2015:4). Great emphasis is placed on audience development in the disabled communities where transport is difficult and where a culture of watching theatre and dance still need to be fostered in all South African sectors. Remix continues to pioneer innovative productions and collaborations.

Similar to Remix’s mission, UK-based Jasmine Pasch recognizes that teaching dance to the physically challenged is one task; equally important is “to open the minds of able bodied people to what (the disabled) are capable of” (quoted in Samuel, *Post-Apartheid Dance*, 132). Samuel remarks that “in 1996, Jasmine Pasch, a unique dance teacher working with disabled was arguably the first to encourage expression of the latent dance within disabled children that emerged on Durban’s opera stage” (132).

A film clip of “On Your Island Does the Night Fall Later?” with dancers Nicola Visser and Malcolm Black, the latter in a wheelchair is a good example of the work. This was presented in 2001 at the prestigious FNB Dance Umbrella in Johannesburg. When both dancers are on the floor there is a sense of equality between the two bodies differently able. The upper body of the male dancer in the wheelchair begins to imitate the standing female dancer. As the wheelchair spins there is a sense of motion as the able-bodied dancer runs around the wheelchair. At one point, the wheelchair tilts and is balanced at a diagonal. The shadows on the wall make both figures larger than life. The able bodied Nicola sits on top of the male body in the wheelchair. As the male in the chair gently pushes her off, he demonstrates physical strength and agency. She approaches him and drags him down to the floor and two bodies are on top of each other. Such creative expression makes audiences look at rather than look away as often happens when encountering someone in a wheelchair or with a visible disability. “Looking away from people who make us uncomfortable” remarks Rosemarie Garland-Thomson in her book, *Staring: How We Look*, “differs from granting them visual anonymity. Looking away is an active denial of

acknowledgment rather than the tacit tipping of one's hat to ordinary fellow citizens expressed in simply not noticing one another. Looking away is . . . a deliberate obliteration of personhood.”¹⁰

Similar to Remix's mission and values, Gerard Samuel advocates for able bodied and disabled dancers to work together. Samuel has worked with disabled children in Europe who receive more state funding than in South Africa. In Denmark, Samuel pioneered several integrated disability arts programs most notably, *Who says, The Ugly Duckling?* for three years in collaboration with educationist Lene Bang-Larsen of Klubvest, Albertslund, Denmark. *Who says, the Ugly Duckling* was created in an after-care center for the mentally handicapped from ages 13-20. Five episodes of *The Ugly Duckling* explored notions of the insider/outsider for the disabled using the popular Hans Christian Anderson stories for improvisation. “I have purposefully,” remarks Samuel, “set out to make works that are socially engaging—that do not ask for the sympathy vote nor are about insipid fairies dancing in the glen. These dances hopefully reposition a ‘black is beautiful’ and ‘the disabled is beautiful’ consciousness. As the voice of these dancers matured, these new dance (his)stories saw an increasing acceptance of these differently-abled/ otherly shaped bodies as out and proud dancers who had something of significance to say” (“Eclipsed...CORD 2009).

Speaking from the South African context, Samuel remarks that society views “a person with disabilities as deviant, separates ‘them’ from ‘our’ society (sic) and inflates the position of power and superiority for able bodied, white and female persons.” Additionally, South Africa’s apartheid system validated ballet as norm, and as performed by perfect, thin bodies. Samuel points out that disabled people face barriers to arts training, funding and “inclusion of disabled community’s contribution of artistic product as work” (quoted in Loots, *Agenda*, 2015).

Samuel’s significant advocacy as chore-activist and scholar for the disabled in South Africa includes his work (before he assumed his position as Head of the School of Dance at UCT) as Education Officer within communities and in schools around Durban always striving to integrate rather than segregate the disabled in “Special Needs” programs that though well meaning, perpetuate social stigma. As noted in *Durban Arts* (July 1998), “Teachers of the disabled have been involved in skills workshops and dance courses in creative developmental movement hosted by the Playhouse Company whose education and development dance coordinator Gerard Samuel has been working with 90 pupils from nine schools in the greater Durban area.

They will present their shared dance works" entitled, *Journeys in Dance*, and *Dance Dreams* at the Playhouse Theater in Durban.

Samuel has also written several important scholarly essays in this field such as 'Undressing the (w)rapper: Disability Dance" in which he asks **WHY disability dance is NOT considered dance**. How are dance forms judged consciously or subconsciously against the norm of the "perfect" ballet body to which several large black women and most disabled people cannot belong? How can negative stereotypes of differently able people as stupid, dunce, moron, retard—"corrosive labeling", profoundly damaging for anyone's self-respect be challenged? For the disabled, or the physically challenged, or the differently able—a "constant adaptation" of this category, remarks Samuel, is telling as struggle between negative and positive names, and worse negative attitudes continue ("Undressing the (W)rapper"). As Liane Loots asks, "Does the inclusion of the disabled body into dance result in a disruption of perceptions around who can dance or is the disabled body asked to 'transcend disability' to take on the hallowed title of 'dancer'?" Loots states that "what is at stake in the questions is not only audience expectations of a correct dancing body, but the very nature of dance as a form of social, sexual, political and cultural representation." As Ann Cooper Albright notes, "insertion of bodies with real physical challenges can be extremely disconcerting to . . . those who are committed to an aesthetic of ideal beauty" (quoted in Loots, *Agenda*, 2015)

Loots recognizes Gerard Samuel as

Beginning to profoundly challenge audience assumptions of what constitutes a dancing body. Dance as an art form defines itself on the use of fit, able performers and has often excluded the possibility of challenging the elitism of a dance world, which demands perfect bodies. (Liane Loots, 1998)¹¹

Loots, Artistic Director of Flatfoot Dance Company, Durban, also manages Samuel's Durban-based LeftFeetFirst Dance Company since Samuel now lives in Cape Town. The very names of these dance companies critique ballet norms such as arched feet, and the notion that many people cannot dance since they supposedly have "two left feet." As Professor Sarah Davies Cordova of the University of Wisconsin-Madison pointed out to me, the names of these companies are symbolic and resonant in advocating for the disabled. "Flatfoot Dance Company takes its name" as Loots states, "from a race legacy that has said many black dancers cannot do

certain types of dance forms due to a dropped arch and a ‘flat foot’” (2009 CORD Proceedings:294).

Social vs. Medical Prejudice

For the person who is defined as disabled, a constructed notion of her humanity has over many years been infested by various theoretical constructions including medical, historical, political, and I would even posit a cultural definition which could obscure her human presence as a complex dancing being.

Gerard Samuel, “Undressing the (w)rapper: disability dance”

In this final section, I draw attention to the **social** rather than the **medical** difficulties that visibly disabled individuals face in daily life so as to better understand the disabled dancers on stage. In an essay entitled, ““Dancing Wheelchairs: An Innovative Way to Teach Medical Students about Disability”, US-based medical practitioner, Johanna Shapiro notes the need to “challenge assumptions often made about individuals with disabilities, such as the inherent difficulty of their lives, their lack of sexuality, even their mobility restriction.”¹² Shapiro notes that “the **social construction of disability**” differs significantly from the medical one. The awkwardness of “staring at” a disabled person, socially, different from “a clinical gaze” embodies “how disability becomes a lens through which all aspects of a person are filtered . . . especially the visibly different other.” Shapiro also points out the “fear of contagion” as though disabled people carry infectious disease, hence must not be touched. Rather, disability dance ruptures such stereotypes by showing physical connections, caring gestures, and open empathy.

Shapiro, in response to a DVD entitled “Outside-In” made by the University of California, Los Angeles’ Professor Victoria Marks, that includes able bodied and disabled in a work by AXIS Dance company (Oakland, California based), points out an important response to judging disability dance, namely “the persistent seduction of triumphalism, the need to ‘defeat’ adversity.” Shapiro continues:

I am struck by how often students glorify the skills of the disabled dancers, speaking of them as ‘inspiring.’ While given the technical and artistic expertise of the performances, such approbation is not misplaced, it also enables a discussion of how excessive admiration of individuals with disabilities can restrict their full humanity as much as denigration and avoidance.

“People with visible impairments” as Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl remark in *Bodies in Commotion*, “almost always seem to ‘cause a commotion’ in public spaces.”¹³ Another scholar, Bree Hadley in *Disability, Public Space Performance and Spectatorship: Unconscious Performers* echoes this idea, namely that a disabled body on the street, or in a theater “becomes a spectacle.”¹⁴ It “becomes the focus” continues Hadley, “of more or less furtive stares of passers-by who try to make sense of its startling, unruly or strange corporeality . . . [This] makes the disabled body a source of curiosity, discomfort, sigma or pity” (Bree:2).

In conclusion, varieties of Afro-Contemporary dance used by choreo-activists such as Samuel and Nyamza are according to Samuel, “re-choreographing post-Apartheid society.”¹⁵ It is crucial to tell the stories that have yet to be told and also for those stories to be heard. For Samuel, Afro-Contemporary Dance Theater in South Africa is one significant tool to rupture power relationships in dance and to work fruitfully towards full access and inclusivity of differently able human beings in post-apartheid society.

End Notes

¹ Gerard M. Samuel, “Eclipsed on Centre Stage: The (Dis)Abled Body”, 2009 *CORD Proceedings*:1-5.

² Lliane Loots, “‘You don’t look like a dancer!’ Gender and disability politics in the arena of dance as performance and as a tool for leaning in South Africa”, *Agenda: Empowering Women for gender equity* (January 2015):1-11.

³ Gerard Samuel, “Undressing the (w)rapper: disability dance”, *PONTO DE VISTA*, Florianopolis, 9, 2007:131-143. Quotation on p. 139

⁴ Gilbert Douglas et al, “Under Fire: Defining a contemporary African dance aesthetic—can it be done?” *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies*, 20(2)(2006):102-115.

⁵ Vasu Reddy, “The Poetics and the Politics of African Contemporary Dance: Contesting the Visceral”, *Critical Arts: South-North Cultural and Media Studies* 20(2):116-120

⁶ Gerard Samuel, “Left Feet First: Dancing Disability”, *Post-Apartheid Dance*, Ed. Sharon Friedman, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012, 127-146. Quote on 139.

⁷ Lliane Loots, “Navigating African Identities, Otherness and the ‘Wild, Untamed Body’ in Dance Training and Pedagogy in South Africa: A Case Study of Flatfoot Dance Company’s Dance ‘Development Programmes”, *2009 CORD Proceedings*,

⁸ <http://www.southafrica.info/about/arts/mamelan-nyamza.htm#.VEG5KeeXszV> (Accessed Oct. 16, 2014)

⁹ I rely on prominent South African arts critic and journalist, Adrienne Sichel’s essay, “Legacies of Violence/Art Resolution: Mamela Nyamza and Fellow Trailblazers” for biographical details on Nyamza. I am grateful to Sichel for sharing a copy of her essay with me.

¹⁰ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How We Look*. Oxford: OUP, 2009, 83.

¹¹ Gerard M. Samuel, “Eclipsed on Centre Stage: The (Dis)Abled Body”, *2009 CORD Proceedings*, 1-5.

¹² Johanna Shapiro, “Dancing Wheelchairs: An Innovative Way to Teach Medical Students about Disability”, *American Journal of Medicine* (2011).

¹³ Philip Auslander and Carrie Sandahl, eds., *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004, 2.

¹⁴ Bree Hadley, *Disability, Public Space Performance and Spectatorship: Unconscious Performers*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, 2.

¹⁵ Gerard Samuel, “Shampoo Dancing and Scars—(Dis)embodiment in Afro-Contemporary Choreography in South Africa.” *2010 Proceedings of ASTR/CORD Joint Conference*. Seattle, Washington. I am grateful to Samuel for a copy of this essay.

khkatrak@uci.edu

BRINGING CONTEMPORARY DANCE INTO DRAMATIC THEATRE: A STUDY OF THE IMPACT ON AUDIENCE AND ACTORS

Mdu Kweyama

Abstract

*This paper will look at the function of contemporary dance in dramatic theatre. It will explore the ways in which dance and extended movement assist actors in accessing and expressing emotions in ways that differ from those that merely use text. The paper draws on data collected for a broader Masters study that aimed to understand in more detail what happens when dance is brought into the space of spoken text in theatre. For that study, I experimented in various ways with the combination of dance and text and I asked what happens to the words, to the body and to the story when dance is introduced. I investigated, through some audience research, how dance interrupts the intellectual experience of plays otherwise performed in a naturalistic way. I also explored the ways in which the actors experienced the dance and the accessing of emotions by means of a number of interviews. I argue that the presence of dance allows the audience to understand a play viscerally, rather than only intellectually. Furthermore, I find that adding the physicality of dance helps actors access also in a less intellectual, but a more embodied way. To support my argument I used two South African texts, a play by Mike van Graan *Brothers in Blood* and a novel, *Thirteen Cents* by K. Sello Duiker.*

Background

I was introduced to the performing arts industry as a contemporary dancer with the Jazzart Dance Theatre. At that time, my thinking about emotions was only through dance as in dance, most of the time, emotions are expressed through the body. Later, when I arrived at the University of Cape Town (UCT) to study acting, I was asked not to dance, but to talk. I was told to improvise not with the body but with speech, through talking. I found this difficult at first because I was being told to change the way of expressing myself that I had come to know best.

I completed my three-year training and went out into the 'big' world of acting. I was excited to both dance and act in various professional productions that combined these forms. However, I did not always find the experience entirely satisfying because I felt that dance and text were never really treated equally. There were plays that combined the two elements such as *As You Like It* (2009) directed by Geoff Hyland, *Karoo Moose* (2007) directed by Lara Foot, and *Altyd Jonker* (2006) directed by Jaco Bouwer. But all of these plays had one element dominating the other. I often felt that text was driving the story and dance was treated as a secondary element and as a performer in these productions, especially those productions where I was doing only the dancing, I felt that I was not carrying any of

the *meaning* of the play, but I was creating an aesthetic for the play. I felt the need to look for something more than just creating an aesthetic.

My return to academia at postgraduate level was motivated by my wish to learn how to combine these elements on stage in a more satisfying way. I wanted to experiment with ways in which dance could itself become ‘text’. I started by adapting an existing dramatic text, Mike van Graan’s *Brothers in Blood*, into a 20-minute performance as part of my Honours degree in 2012. It would later be extended into a full hour-long production, which became my M.A. minor project in 2013¹.

I am aware that all dramatic texts have some kind of physicalisation that occurs during the staging of the text, however, in this paper I attempt to explore what happens when dance specifically is introduced into the space of spoken text in theatre. I do so by reflecting on the process and performance of my minor and medium projects completed as part of my M.A. study², and on a number of the questions that arose as a result of these projects. In particular, I will focus on the following two questions: How does dance help actors access and express emotions? How does the audience relate to theatre that has dance inserted in it?

My reflections on these questions are based on my own experience as an observer, drawing from my own notes of over 20 viewings of both minor and medium projects. I also draw on the experience of the audience when watching the work, gleaned from the records of post-performance discussions and from a focus group exercise I engaged in after my medium project. The belief that dance and extended movement help actors to access and express emotions in a different way from when they only use text, heavily influences my thinking. I therefore also explore my actors’ experience of working with dance and text, drawing on rehearsal notes and written replies to questions that I handed to them after the minor project performance.

The audience experiences emotions that are expressed through dance on stage differently from when they are expressed through text alone. Dance makes sense differently from how the words alone make sense. Words make sense intellectually: the audience ‘ignore(s)’ the

¹This was also presented at the Setkani/Encounter International Festival of Theatre Schools at the Janacek Academy of Music and Performing Arts in Brno, Czech Republic in 2013.

² The two-year M.A. Theatre & Performance degree requires the completion of a number of practical projects of various scales (minor and medium being indicators of this) in preparation for the final thesis production.

phonetic elements of words' in favor of a primary concern with 'meaning and usage' (Machon, 2009:17). Adding dance to the text, however, allows for a more 'corporeal' experience because it ensures that 'the meaning of words is (also) reflected in the ... 'visual, tactile and haptic resonance they embody' (Machon, 2009:17). To develop this thinking I draw on the theories of 'kinesthetic empathy' by Matthew Reason and Dee Reynolds and 'visceral performance' by Josephine Machon.

Kinesthetic Empathy and Visceral Performance

My curiosity about using dance and text together was originally intended as a means for me to learn how to put these two elements on stage in a more satisfying way. As I experimented with the practice and was introduced to different theories, I realized that dance has a certain effect on the audience, which I had not consciously been aware of. It adds a more visceral experience to the work. Now, a challenge for me as director when I create a piece of theatre that consists of text and dance is 'to locate what actually is the "truth" of a scene that is brought about by language, but is not reliant on the signifying qualities of it, and how to structure this linguistic event in performance.' (Campbell, 2011:2)

Reason and Reynolds explain kinesthetic empathy as follows:

Spectators of dance experience kinesthetic empathy when, even while sitting, they feel they are participating in the movement they observe, and experience related feelings and ideas [...]. If the dance is there for us, we have lived the experience. (2010:2)

Reason and Reynolds suggest that the audience watching dance feel as if they too are dancing. Observing the movement of dance on stage, allows the audience to access, or empathise with, the emotions that are captured in a performance, in an embodied rather than an intellectual way. Choreographer Adesola Akinleye is quoted as saying:

There is an action of witnessing that I hope to stimulate the audience to engage in, and they may not all witness the same thing. The person who watches dancing does none of the physical work themselves but in perceiving the performance they experience the rhythm of it as though it were in their own body. When attention is bought to the line and curves of the physical environment through the choreography, the audience starts to experience a building with the same sense of the movement that they observe in dance. (Reason and Reynolds, 2010:3)

In relation to this kinesthetic empathy through observing dance on stage, Sheets Johnston (in Reason & Reynolds, 2010) talks about the difference between embodied understanding of lived experience and the conscious awareness of it. In my medium project, in which I adapted a South African novel *thirteen cents*, I played around with these ideas: in one scene I wanted to have these two elements (the bodily and the conscious aspect of experience) happening at the same time. This was to try to take the audience in and out of consciousness. For example, to see an old man taking a 12-year-old boy to his flat to have sex with him, all of this done through dance, and at the same time hearing them talking about sex, money, family and kids. The idea was that the audience could listen to the text and they could consciously judge the old man, yet at the same time the dance was there to strengthen the bodily experience of the situation. Through the flow of the dance, I wanted to evoke a feeling of empathy for the young man's situation - broke, having to sell himself for survival – other than the one people could intellectually engage with. Reynolds says that 'empathy is the ability to perceive and understand other people's emotions and to react appropriately' (Reynolds, 2012:125). I hoped that the dance would allow the audience to tap into emotions that at that point in time they maybe did not even consciously remember, but that would be awakened by the dance. I tried to choreograph in such a way that although the dance was close to the meaning of the text, the audience would not just understand the play but experience it physically. I aimed for a bodily understanding of the emotions. I later understood that this relates to 'kinesthetic empathy'. Guillemette Bolens talks about his experience of kinesthetic empathy while watching a performance. 'In an act of kinesthetic empathy, I may then internally simulate what these sensations may possibly feel like, via my own kinesthetic memory' (Bolens, 2012:145). In other words, a person who is watching feels like s/he is doing the physical action that s/he perceives. The body remembers the emotions related to that experience and will continue to do so beyond the performance. This is exactly the experience I am trying to get to when I choreograph.

The combination of different art forms and the effect that such a combination has on our understanding of a piece, is what Josephine Machon (2009) refers to as '(Syn)aesthetics': "[it is] the consolidation of a variety of artistic principles, forms and techniques, manipulated in such a way so as to fuse the somatic and the semantic in order to produce a visceral response in the audience" (2009:14).

When I create my work, I combine text, dance, images, and music to help the audience get to a more visceral experience. To add to this experience, it is one body that does the dancing, delivers text and also creates images. Bennett calls this the 'polyphonic body' (2010:1).

Machon talks about how the audience has no choice when it comes to the sensations that they experience while watching something that has dance in it. The body takes over from the semantic and forms its own reaction to what is happening. 'The body generates a wholly sensate form of expression, communicable in its own unique form' (Machon, 2009:22). Machon supports this statement by saying that, 'first, the sensations experienced are involuntary, they cannot be suppressed but are elicited, and the intensity can be influenced by the situation they occur in, usually with some emotional resonance' (Machon, 2009:16). During the rehearsal of my adaptation of *Thirteen Cents*, for example, I had to cut out a scene that was depicted through dance. This scene showed a boy having sex with an old man in the back of a car. As an audience member and a director, I felt I had no choice but to watch it, but I realised that I simply could not watch it every day for two weeks before we opened. No matter how hard I tried to be fine with the scene, it brought sadness and tears to my eyes every time I watched it. It was my choreography, I had 'carefully structured' (Foster, 2011:2) it that way, but it felt too invasive. However, my experience of my work on its own is not sufficient to substantiate my thinking around the audience experience of the work. which is why I conducted audience research, using scenes from both *Brothers In Blood* and *Thirteen Cents*

Actors accessing emotions through dance

Dance evokes emotions in the audience, but it also serves as a facilitator for the actors to access emotions. At UCT, as an acting student, I was taught to access emotions through different means, such as visualising my past experience, or thinking about what the character needs. I was taught to break a text into beats so that I could access different emotions. By breaking the text into beats you find shifts in arguments within the script; those shifts are usually related to emotions. During the early stages of his work, Konstantin Stanislavsky noted that, 'actors work individually by visualising distinct moments from their characters' lives, thus imaginatively empathizing with them (visualisations trigger emotional, hence "affective" response)' (Carnicke, 2000:23).

After my adaptation of *Brothers in Blood*, I asked my actors if it was easy to access the emotions through dance. In a written reply, one of them said: "Dance definitely helped clarify the emotional territory of the scenes and often the dance assisted in accessing those emotions on stage quite effectively. The dance really assisted me in attaining images, which placed me immediately in the mindset of the character" (Wyngaard, 2013, about her role as Leila).

In addition, I relate to what one of Meyerhold's actors said: 'If the physical form is correct, the basis of the part, the speech intonations and the emotions, will be as well, because they are determined by the position of the body' (Hodge, 2000:40). In the play, *Brothers in Blood*, Rev. Fredericks has suppressed and uncomfortable emotions that he does not want to talk about. In order to evoke these emotions through dance, the actor performs a slow choreography that ends up in a frozen position that is so uncomfortable for the body of the actor to maintain. This gives him no alternative but to engage with the emotions of the scene.

Reactions from the interviews

Earlier I wrote about how I experienced my process and my productions as a director and 'first audience member'. However, that on its own does not qualify me to declare that my work promotes kinesthetic empathy or that my work is visceral. In order to deal with this challenge, I showcased four scenes from my two works, *Brothers in Blood* and a novel, *Thirteen Cents*, for an invited audience who had agreed to participate in my research: three scenes from my minor and one from my medium project. I chose scenes that used dance and text differently. All the scenes that I chose included dance, but the dance had different functions in each scene. The first scene was a monologue that was used as music for the dance. I made my actors do the second scene twice, first in a realistic style with the actors sitting across the table from each other talking without any dance and then the same scene with dance. The third scene was only dance. The fourth scene was dance and dialogue happening at the same time.

For the purpose of this experiment, I invited a mixed audience. I had people who understand drama and dance really well. I also had people who came from the art department, who are not familiar with performing arts such as theatre and dance. Lastly there were people that had no connection with any kind of arts at all. This method of research is not new.

Willmar Sauter, for example, describes his audience research in terms of holding a series of 'theatre talks' where the aim was that the 'interview situation' should not be too different from what theatregoers normally would do. [...] It's a conversation amongst friends and acquaintances over tea and coffee. (Reason & Reynolds, 2010:4).

The audience participation in my research was more direct and formal compared to Sauter's approach. In my research, I asked the audience to give their thoughts after every scene. I did this so that they could talk about something that was still fresh in their minds. Before the showcase began, I briefly told the audience about my research. This was so that I would not have to ask leading questions for every scene. I wanted them to talk amongst themselves as if I was not there. I mainly posed the very broad question: 'What do you think about what you just watched?' When I encountered a silence, for example after the third scene that consisted of dance only, I prompted with 'what are your thoughts about the dance?'

In the first scene, a Christian priest is preaching and two Muslim characters are dancing. The dance is contemporary mixed with gestures from the Muslim religion. After I showed the first scene and opened up the conversation, there was no problem with response. Everyone wanted to say something. I had directorial feedback, people disagreeing about how I should have staged the scene. Some of the responses are quoted below:

We're seeing two worlds here, there was clear separation of the two worlds, the two religions (Personal interview, April 2014).

The dance and text existed in one place telling the same story at the same time. The priest is preaching at the altar whilst the Muslim prayer is happening next to him. Theatrically these could have collided but according to the audience members' responses, they did not and instead they worked side by side. The combination of dance and text did show the tension that exists between the two religions, as one audience member said:

There is that tension, between the two religions, from the text that really comes out. There was that real subtlety and beauty between the father and the daughter [that came through the dance (Personal interview, April 2014).

The dance here was choreographed in such a way that it depicted the love between father and daughter, the memories they share together, the respect for each other. The dance was there to portray all these issues. I wanted the text to frame the dance and the dance to use the text as music. The dance and text were therefore at some places intentionally synchronised and in some places not. The responses of the audience make it clear that the

dance 'elevates' the feelings expressed in the text. It 'heightens' the tension between the religions and their juxtaposition:

I thought what was happening in the movement underlined the tension of what was said in the monologue like an implied tension, because Daniel and Tarryn [actors in the play who were dancing] felt like it was meant to be synchronised what they were doing. The synchronized movements – weren't synchronised. It underlined what Matthew [the actor who played the priest] was saying, that there was a tension there – it elevated that feeling (Personal interview, April 2014).

I agree, I do not have a problem with the staging at all because Matthew's voice is powerful, it feels like he's giving a sermon in the distance, the way that he speaks heightens the dance for me, it heightens the meaning and conflict of what he sees as Christians against the world, conflict between Christians and Muslim and Muslim community against the world. What the dance did for the text was to highlight the juxtaposition of these two religions on stage. It has a certain aesthetic that I like, it was visually pleasing (Personal interview, April 2014).

The second scene is a scene between a Christian priest and his Muslim worker. I showed this scene twice. First it was performed in a realistic style, which means I directed this scene as intended by the author so that the two characters were portraying real life. In the second version, in line with my research, the text was mixed with dance. In the latter version one of the actors holds himself in an upside down position for a long time while delivering a speech. These scenes were performed one after the other. Some of the responses here were:

The obscurity of the movement was endearing. (Personal interview, April 2014)

When I saw this for the first time I was very moved. I couldn't help but swallow a few tears, and I think that is because I could see the physical struggle of Matthew's character...the physical struggle of not being able to do anything about the problem that took his son away from him, the emotional struggle of trying to deal with that loss. The upside down holding of his arms, really heightened that for me, the emotional struggle, the physical pain. I like that the dance makes the audience aware that the two men are going through the same kind of feelings though they are in different sides of the city. The first scene did nothing for me. (Personal interview, April 2014)

The first one was a little didactic. When you play it in realism it becomes a little bit tiring to watch. I agree with the previous speaker, that there is obscurity, which makes the emotions more interesting and raw. With the dance the emotions feel a little bit more illusive but also present (Personal interview, April 2014).

For me the first one was like a high school play, the second made me think deeper. The dance brings it up for me. (Personal interview, April 2014)

All of these responses refer to the way in which the dance heightens or intensifies the experiences of the characters for the audience. It draws out the audience's experience of the performance as visceral, rather than merely intellectual or cerebral. The dance allows the audience to almost experience the 'physical pain' and 'emotional struggle' themselves. This relates to what Machon writes: 'the individual holds on to the moment they have experienced and remembers this feeling corporeally in any subsequent interpretation of the work' (Machon, 2009: 21). By watching dance they feel emotions physically in their own bodies and that feeling stays in their bodies in a kind of corporeal memory.

The images that were on stage, dance combined with the text, for me as an audience member helped me to refer back to the instances where I might have seen those kind of images that triggered the response as an audience member (Personal interview, April 2014).

This latter response seems to be in line with Machon's own findings: 'From this research it is possible to infer that there is the potential for each of us to retain a synaesthetic memory and an ability to relocate this fused perceptual awareness with a given trigger, such as that offered by a certain type of artwork' (2009:16).

The third scene I showed was a contemporary dance piece that combined gestures from different religions: Islam, Judaism and Christianity. After this scene was shown, there was silence in the room, no one knew what to say. I eventually asked: 'What did the dance make you feel? According to Reason, 'there is a particular difficulty in communicating non-linguistic experiences, such as the experience of watching dance through the medium of language' (Reason & Reynolds, 2010:4). Some of the responses I did eventually receive were:

When they were together, and using breath I felt like moving along with them, I am not sure whether that was because of the breath. When they were not together it was a different kind of feeling but still interesting. (Personal interview, April 2014)

I felt less tethered from this scene because it was without text not because I can't watch dance, maybe because scenes that had text preceded it. I found myself less able to zone it (Personal interview, April 2014).

This statement relates to audience research conducted by both Meekums and Barker. For Barker, 'Being an audience for anything is never a simple or singular process. It is a process that begins in advance of the actual encounter, as people build expectations. In other words, audiences bring their social and personal histories with them' (Barker quoted in Reason & Reynolds, 2010:2). Meekums comments that, 'the fact that audience actively seek out and engage with dance suggests that there is some communication power inherent in it that must link with the prior experience' (Meekums, 2012:54).

Other responses I received were:

I think what the dance did for me. It shows the amount of ridiculousness of the separation of religion because every religion that I know they kneel when they pray. They use the same dance and gestures to pray. It reiterates that message in the play how unfounded discrimination actually is (Personal interview, April 2014.).

I like the simplicity of the dance, the repetition; it spoke clearly about what it has to say. The message was very clear (Personal interview, April 2014).

Sometimes we separate, there is text and there is dance. As much as the text is very clear. Sometimes we forget the power of the body. There was much text in that dance without verbal text. We felt the text being said in the dance. It plays a lot with my palette, with my tastes (Personal interview, April 2014).

The body becomes the text and then the music the subtext. When you play with unison that also gives the audience a very specific message. (Personal interview, April 2014.)

Bonnie Meekums talks about the complexity of metaphors that choreographers use by turning 'the cultural norms on their heads in order to challenge the audience' (2012:54). When I choreographed the scene/dance that consisted of gestures from different religions, I wanted to take forward the themes of understanding each other, living together in this culturally diverse, post-apartheid, supposedly non-racial society, and working together. I also always hope that all these cultures are represented in the audience during the performances so that a dialogue can continue beyond the performance. The audience's reactions demonstrate that the dance indeed managed to bring this message across, without having to verbally and explicitly explain it. There was a bodily understanding of 'the ridiculousness of the separation', as one audience member put it.

The fourth scene was an encounter between a twelve-year old homeless boy and an old man. The boy sells himself for sex so he can survive, and the old man continues to buy sex from him knowing well how old the boy is. The encounter starts on the bench at the beach and it ends at the old man's flat. Some of the responses received here were:

I've watched some terrible plays in my life. Where they show rape or molestation that looks really real. Where directors try to be very explicit. Insinuation is often stronger to me than being explicit. It doesn't make it less terrible but you also have to use your mind a little bit. You can think about the repercussion. With the text I would have felt harassed and violated. Sometimes I feel like I have to take a shower when I get home (Personal interview, April 2014).

It seems then, that the dance made the story more easily accessible to the audience; insinuating the rape through dance rather than depicting it explicitly allowed the audience to understand what was happening without feeling violated themselves. 'The (Syn)aesthetic performance style can make the intangible tangible' (Machon, 2009:20). The dance also worked as a device to suggest time passing or time travelling, as one audience member said,

I'm fascinated by travel, with time travel. And locating us, you see the street and the home as well' (Personal interview, April 2014).

Conclusion

In this paper I have looked at what happens when dance is introduced into the space of the spoken word in theatre. I have argued that the dance helps actors to access the various emotions captured in the script in ways that are different from when they are only working with text. As an observer in the audience, I also experienced the dance as evoking powerful feelings that brought me closer to the characters, allowed me to empathies with them. I held audience interviews to learn how a wider audience experienced my productions. I presented scenes from both productions and found that most audience members shared my experience of the plays. I used kinesthetic and visceral performance theory to substantiate my argument around audience experience.

The material of my research, presented in this paper, indicates that the combination of dance and text indeed allows the audience to experience the story-line of the play itself, as well as the emotions and experiences of the characters in a more visceral, embodied way than when a play is staged using only text.

The texts that I used in creating the two productions that I referred to in this paper, were South African texts. The issues that these two productions dealt with were universal issues, not specifically *African*. The dance that I used stems from those texts. When I create work, the actors' improvisation originates from the text. There was not much in both of the texts that would have led the improvisation towards African Dance or the combination of both African and contemporary dance. The only way I could have done that would have been by imposing those dance styles. By doing that, I would not have been true to the texts. I believe, however, that the dance styles that were used in, for example, *Brothers in Blood*, talk to the multi-cultural nature of our South African society.

References

Bennett, S. 2010. *(Syn)Aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance* (review). Available: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/tj/summary/v062/62.2.bennett.html> [May 2010].

Bolens, G. 2012. Kinesthetic Empathy in Charlie Chaplin's Silent Films. In Reynolds, D. & Reason, M. Eds. *Kinesthetic Empathy In Creative And Cultural Practice*. London: Intellect: 143-156.

Campbell, A. *Adapting musicology's use of affect theories to contemporary theatremaking: directing Martin Crimp's Attempts on Her Life*. <http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/intellect/>

jafp/2011/00000004/00000003/art00007 [December 2011]

Carnicke, S. 2000. Michael Chekhov on the technique of acting:
"Was Don Quixote true to life?". In A Hodge, Ed. *Twentieth Century Actor Training*. London: Routledge: 11-29.

Duiker, S. 2000. Thirteen Cents. Cape Town: David Philip Publishers.

Foster, L. 2011. *Choreographing Empathy*. London: Routledge.

Machon, J. 2009. *(Syn)aesthetics: Redefining Visceral Performance*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Meekums. B. 2012. Kinesthetic Empathy and Movement Metaphor in Dance Movement Psychotherapy. In, Reynolds, D. & Reason, M. Eds. *Kinesthetic Empathy In Creative And Cultural Practice*. London: Intellect: 51-65.

Reynolds, D. & Reason, M. 2010. Kinesthesia, Empathy, and Related Pleasures: An Inquiry into Audience Experience of Watching Dance. *Dance Research Journal*. 42(2):49-75.

Reynolds, D. 2012. Kinesthetic Empathy and the Dance's Body: From Emotion to Affect. In Reynolds, D. and Reason, M. Eds. *Kinesthetic Empathy In Creative And Cultural Practice*. London: Intellect: 121-136.

Van Graan, M. 2012. Brothers In Blood. Cape Town: Junkets Publisher.

mdu.kweyama@gmail.com

GRIEVING UNGRIEVEABLE LIVES: MAMELA NYAMZA'S SHIFT AND BLACK QUEER MEMORY.

Mlondolozi Zondi
Northwestern University, USA.

Abstract:

Black studies scholar, Sharon P. Holland, in her essay titled "Bill T. Jones, Tupac Shakur, and the (Queer) Art of Death" asserts "some black performers have embraced the culture of death as a way to move their bodies out of space and into time. [They] have challenged death, often mining its culture, sometimes playing the role of the dead" (Holland 348). This paper adopts Holland's analytic to discuss how choreographer Mamela Nyamza's piece SHIFT (2009) memorializes both social and corporeal black queer death. Nyamza does this by positioning the performing body as a site in which to address issues of queer-antagonism as well as intersecting issues such as race and class in post-1994 South Africa. The paper contemplates the stakes of a black queer choreographer using the theme of death to confront structures of oppression, create public consciousness, and inspire social action. I address the following questions: how can performance be used to stage, and thus critically interrogate, the repudiated rituals of mourning, healing, and memorialization of both social and material black death? Can a dancing body create alternative memories that refuse that death? Can performance disrupt or put to death the selective memory that serves the power interests of the state? As a transnational black female dance figure, Nyamza's theatrical work converges the personal and the (inter)national and she queers conventional conceptions of space and time. I argue that performance can raise awareness, historicize, memorialize, and mourn "unlivable" and "ungrievable" lives. Through Nyamza's work, the dead are given an opportunity to speak and enter the collective memory of the nation.

Dance and other arts forms in South Africa have always been shaped by—and responded to—colonialism and apartheid. Contemporary artists such as Mamela Nyamza are still engaging in dance that challenges state power as well as racial and gender oppression in the post-apartheid moment. The “post-apartheid” period in South Africa marks the transition to democracy from de jure segregation that began in 1948 and existed for most of the 20th century. A much longer history of British and Dutch colonial rule in South Africa predates apartheid. All these regimes contributed to the discipline of “unmanageable” black bodies—“unmanageable” because their race as well as gender did not conform to European Christian tenets. This paper discusses how choreographer Mamela Nyamza's piece SHIFT (2009) memorializes both social and corporeal black queer death. I contemplate the stakes of a black queer choreographer using the theme of death to confront structures of oppression, create public consciousness, and inspire social

action. I address the following questions: how can performance be used to stage, and thus critically interrogate, the repudiated rituals of mourning, healing, and memorialization of both social and material black death? Can a dancing body create alternative memories that refuse that death? Can performance disrupt or put to death the selective memory that serves the power interests of the state? As a transnational black female dance figure, Nyamza's theatrical work converges the personal and the (inter)national and she queers conventional conceptions of space and time. I argue that performance can raise awareness, historicize, memorialize, and mourn "unlivable" and "ungrievable" lives. Through Nyamza's work, the dead are given an opportunity to speak and enter the collective memory of the nation.

Dance, for black females is a site that makes it possible to participate in decolonization and African queer activism. I read the choreographic work of Mamela Nyamza to unpack various choreographic and staging choices she employs in her attempt to critically interrogate the social conditions of black queer South Africans. Performance theorists such as Diana Taylor are emphasizing the idea of embodied performance as "an episteme, a way of knowing, not simply an object of analysis" (Taylor xvi). I approach Mamela Nyamza's Shift not only as a performance object that can be analyzed, but I contend that the performance object itself also does its own analyzing. It theorizes and makes sense of the world using an anti-colonial aesthetic framework.

In this paper, I use the word "queer" with caution. I do not use the word in ways that it has sometimes been used in the West to sideline certain gender non-conforming populations. My use of the word is also not limited to ideas of same-gender love. I expand its definition to represent those who do not conform to hegemonic heterosexual norms and those who exist outside of normative family formations. This is inspired by the work of Black Queer Studies or Queer Studies scholars such as E. Patrick Johnson and Cathy Cohen, who are interested in expanding the meaning of queerness to include experiences of black people, and also to dismantle the dichotomy that exists between queer and straight. I am also taking extra care not to present the problem of homophobia and transphobia as an intrinsically and exclusively black/African problem.

Mamela Nyamza's work fits into South Africa's long tradition of using theater for social protest. Her corpus of work posits a reading of the "post- apartheid" moment as that which positions Black South Africans in a liminal place between freedom and oppression. The leaders of the South African "democratic" state champion racial and gender equality but they also publicly

make homophobic statements. The South African media constantly reports news of what is problematically termed “corrective rape”—a phenomenon that Vasu Reddy, a South African gender scholar describes in *From Social Silence to Social Science* as “the deliberate and premeditated rape of Black lesbians by men who want to ‘discipline’ and ‘punish’ women who they believe to be nonconforming and unwomanly, so they are to be made ‘straight’” (Reddy et. al.:xv). There are various other reports of gang rapes, torture, and beatings inflicted upon Black queer men and transgender people in order to coerce them to becoming “real” men or women.

In the world of dance, dance technique and training often collude with forces such as sexism, homophobia, and racism to discipline black dancing bodies, by “instilling and universalizing archaic and heteropatriarchal codes of gender, race, and culture on the body (Loots, 2010:111). Some traditional African and Western classical dance forms and techniques train the male body to be strong and in charge and they train the female body to be light, subservient, and always ready to please and satisfy a heterosexual male sexual gaze. Some dancers accept and internalize these ideas as truth. Some recognize these firmly built power structures and ideologies as oppressive and inhibiting, and they take steps towards fragmenting them, although it is impossible to escape them completely. Mamela Nyamza and other black queer choreographers are putting their dancing bodies at the center of attempting decolonization and they invoke narratives of the dead as a way to contest ideas of democracy and citizenship. These artists position their bodies at the center of re-reading and deconstructing misconceptions of gender, and there achieve this restructuring through radical queer performance that “fucks with gender” (anonymous quoted in Johnson, 2005:37). They also engage in strategic public visibility by performing work with a strong political statement in public spaces. Strategic visibility is effective when it exposes the public to images that they usually render immoral and perverse, images they wish they could erase from society. However, visibility can also pose a danger to Black queers, making them susceptible to violent attacks that may lead to death.

Mamela Nyamza’s Shift

I move on to discuss Nyamza’s work titled Shift created in 2009. I focus on some of the aesthetic tactics and choreographic choices in her work that address and resist unquestioned heteronormativity and violence against black queers in South Africa. I also include material from a conversation I had with Mamela in 2013. Mamela Nyamza’s Shift is about women who embody an identity that challenges heteronormativity. It is also a response to the abuse of

women, specifically the rape of Black lesbian women with the intention to “cure” them of their sexual orientation. These are pertinent issues in South Africa as the country has one of the highest rates of sexual assault. South African under-resourced Black lesbians are some of the most vulnerable women in the country. This is due to the fact that they mostly reside in township spaces passed on from the apartheid period, and these spaces catalyze premature black death in general. The township produces black lives that are regarded as having no value, lives that are akin to what Judith Butler in *Remarks on Queer Bonds* frames as “ungrievable lives”, “lives that are not quite lives”, “destructible”, “lose-able,” and “can be forfeited, precisely because they are framed as being already lost or forfeited” (Butler, 2011:383).

Nyamza created Shift after previous works that dealt with themes of women abuse. With Shift, she took an angle of celebrating and commemorating strong women, especially women in sport who do not conform to normative or prescribed feminine modes of embodiment. These sports personalities include Eudy Simelane (soccer), Caster Semenya (athletics), Laila Ali (boxing), Venus and Serena Williams (tennis), Zola Budd (marathon), and Penny Heyns (swimming). Performance studies scholar Tavia Nyong’o, in his essay titled “The Unforgivable Transgression of Being Caster Semenya” has commented on the unsettling nature of virtuosic performances by black women in sport with a strong muscular physique:

World-class female athletes have long made people anxious, particularly gorgeously muscle-bound black ones. The splendor of their world, which a bystander like myself can only imagine, must be one in which conventional barriers of the body are left behind in the dust in the name of protecting African femininity from a western, scientific gaze. Semenya’s defenders also disguise their own patriarchal investment in naming and controlling this gender excess. But as her career already already illustrates, such gender excess is hard to control (Nyong’o, 2010:97).

Shift invokes these ideas of gender excess and female masculinity in nuanced ways that meditate on racialized homophobia that forces black lesbians to live as though they were dead. The piece is set in a room-sized white box structure furnished with domestic materials such as a fridge, kitchen floor mat, bananas, oranges, balls, and a tennis racquet. This set establishes the domesticity and locality of the issues that she is tackling in this piece. The stage is dominated by hanging white balls and some are on the floor. These white balls, according to Mamela Nyamza, “represent men’s balls”, or men’s testicles (Nyamza). They become a symbol of masculinity and their ubiquity in the performance space is a metaphor for the complete colonization of space by

dominant masculinity. The color of the balls could also signal a particularity of the race of men she is indicting as colonizers. She juxtaposes the kitchen—a space usually associated with subservient femininity, with a performance that includes gestures and images of women in sport that she describes in our interview as “women who are traditionally physically strong, winners, and possess powerful influence.”

At a later stage during the piece she is standing on a platform and she asks a male audience member to help her down. The “brother” helps her down by letting her wrap her arms around his neck and Mamela announces to the audience, “this is the part we call the pas de deux, ababini abadansayo, a duet.” This form of audience participation redefines the performer-audience conventions of a proscenium arch set-up. She improvises with the male audience member and they dance together in a pas de deux. She trusts this “brother” to help support her weight and get her down safely. In our interview, Mamela shared that she invoked this choreographic device of trust and weight support between two people to reveal that men who rape are those that are usually women’s support systems such as brothers, fathers, friends, and neighbors. As the man puts her down they complete the pas de deux. Mamela then proceeds to distribute twenty-seven white balls to the audience and she requests that the audience throw the white balls at her. This staging choice breaks the fourth wall, as the audience members become performers and active participants in the piece. She wears a white dress and the number “27” is attached to the dress in a style similar to that of beauty pageant contestants, but the number 27 has another significance. It symbolizes the story of the late Eudy Simelane, who was a captain of the South African national women’s soccer team. Eudy Simelane was a black lesbian woman who was “correctively” gang-raped and stabbed to death twenty seven times in 2008 because she was “acting like a man” (Carter, 2013). In this moment, the dancer reenacts the story of Eudy Simelane by inviting audience members to throw 27 balls at her in exchange for an entertaining sensual dance. The audience, unaware of Eudy’s story and excited to consume this sensual dance, start to throw the 27 balls. Mamela, however, does not give them a sensual dance but she responds by moving in grotesque and sharp movement configurations, making her body retreat, twitch, and contract as if she is in pain. She dodges the balls, shifting her weight from side to side, shoulders and arms retreating. She gives the impression of someone being beaten up by a mob. The number 27 attached to Mamela’s dress, and the twenty-seven white balls represent Eudy’s twenty-seven stab wounds. Nyamza uses this motif because she is not interested in mimicking and repeating the initial scene of Eudy’s

brutalization¹. Instead, she uses signs and abstract movement gestures that commemorate that scene. Queer theorist Sharon P. Holland comments on black queer artists' invocation of death as "unleashing the potential of black subjectivity to speak from the dead, [as this] exposes the endpoint of governmental policies and programs which materially and psychically "kill" the nation's black subjects" (Holland, 2000:385). For Holland, the space of death is marked by blackness and is therefore always already queer" (Holland, 2000:392). Mamela Nyamza invokes the dead to comment on the living; to critique unflinchingly those who grant themselves the power and right to decide who may live or die².

She includes the device of active participation to ensure that the audience does not watch comfortably from their seats. She involves them and lets them take part in their own education. She hopes to make them realize their own complicity in violating black female queer bodies, their complicity in standing by and not acting while these brutalizations take place. This choreographic tactic is intended to inspire the audience to shift their perspectives and understand the need for this kind of activism. Participating in Shift has the potential to remind them that they can also get up and act against abuse.

Shift rejects stereotypical physical gesture that associates femininity with weakness. Mamela presents herself as powerful and strong, and then she shifts to a sensual and gentle movement repertoire. This makes a statement that narrow and fixed modes of expression do not define womanhood. Mamela's gender blurring performance takes into consideration other intersecting forms of bodily discipline that are motivated by racism and colonialism. This is most apparent in her choice to reject her classical ballet training as well as other codified Western dance techniques.

In conclusion, Nyamza's Shift plays a significant role in black queer politics and it contributes to contemporary conversations about decolonization and black African queer bodies. She acknowledges colonialism, racism, patriarchy, and homophobia as forces that collude to oppress Black queer women. The performance piece focuses on the practice of disciplining black queer bodies through quotidian acts of violence, as well as through spectacular violent acts such as "corrective" rape and brutal dismemberment. It reveals how black queer bodies also serve a

¹ In *Scenes of Subjection* (1997) Saidiya Hartman discusses the problematic nature of repeating and reproducing scenes of violence.

² See Achille Mbembe's "Necropolitics" (2003)

fungible function for the state to build a “progressive” national image upon, a practice similar to what queer theorist Jasbir Puar describes as “pinkwashing” in Terrorist Assemblages. The piece is both a mourning and celebration of black queers who experience both social and material death. It is a remembering of violent bodily discipline in the former as well as current states of apartheid. She creates a dialogic relationship between the African queer activism project and the greater decolonization project, and this expands the scope of the field of African decolonization that generally elevates the work of male African decolonialists. Nyamza questions religion, traditional culture, and traditional women’s roles. She advocates for dance’s ability and responsibility to participate in the discourse of gender activism. Her work reveals that dance cannot and does not claim to change the structures of oppression that have existed for thousands of years, but what dance seeks to do is to destabilize those structures and make them unsteady. Dance attempts to confront them, create public consciousness, initiate dialog, and inspire action.

Works Cited

Butler, J. 2011. Remarks On "Queer Bonds". *Glq-A Journal Of Lesbian And Gay Studies* 2(3):381-87. Print.

Carter, C. 2013. *The Brutality of 'Corrective Rape'*. *New York Times*. 27 July 2013.

Hartman, S.V. 1997. *Scenes of Subjection : Terror, Slavery, and Self-making in Nineteenth-century America / Saidiya V. Hartman*. New York: Oxford UP. Print.

Holland, S.P. 2000. Bill T. Jones, Tupac Shakur and the (Queer) Art of Death. *Callaloo* 23(1):384-93. Web.

Johnson, E P, and Henderson, M. 2005. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Print.

Livermon, X. 2013. Soweto Nights: Making Black Queer Space in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *Gender, Place & Culture: A Journal of Feminist Geography*. October:1-18.

Livermon, X. 2012. Queer(y)ing Freedom: Black Queer Visibilities in Post-Apartheid South Africa. *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*. 18(2-3):297-323 . Print.

Johnson, E.P. & Henderson, M. 2005. *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. Print.

Loots, L. 2010 The Body as History and Memory: a Gendered Reflection on the Choreographic 'embodiment' of Creating on the Socially Constructed Text of the South African Body.

Satj: South African Theatre Journal: Movement and Physical Theatre in South Africa: Special Edition. 24:05-124. Print.

Mbembé, J.A. & Meintjes, L. 2003 Necropolitics. *Public Culture*. 15(1):11-40. Web.

Mngxitama, A. 2013. Decolonizing the Queer African Movement. *Mail and Guardian Online*, 11 August.

Nyamza, M. Personal interview. 12 November 2013.

Nyong'o, T. 2010. The Unforgivable Transgression of Being Caster Semenya. *Women & Performance: A Journal of Feminist Theory*. 20(1):95-100. Web.

Patterson, O. 1982. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press. Print.

Puar, J. 2007. *Terrorist Assemblages : Homonationalism in queer times / Jasbir K. Puar*. (Next wave). Durham: Duke University Press.

Reddy, V., Sandfort, T. & Rispel, L.C.C. 2009. *From Social Silence to Social Science: Same-sex Sexuality, HIV & Aids and Gender in South Africa: Conference Proceedings*. Cape Town, South Africa: HSRC Press, 2009. Print.

Spier Contemporary Mamela Nyamza. 2010. Web. 13 February 2014.

Taylor, D. 2003. *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas*. Durham: Duke University Press. Print.

Tucker, A. 2009. *Queer Visibilities: Space, Identity and Interaction in Cape Town*. Chichester, U.K: Wiley-Blackwell. Print

mlondizondi@gmail.com

THE BOUNDARIES OF DANCE: DANCING AND PUPPETS IN CONTEMPORARY SOUTH AFRICAN THEATRE AND THE ILLUSIONS OF LIFE.

Dr Petrus du Preez
Associate Professor: Drama Department, Stellenbosch University

Abstract:

Movement is the most important sign vehicle in dance and in puppetry. In puppetry, movement is the primary means through which 'life' is seemingly created in the inanimate object. The puppet as an object on stage struggles to survive. The imagination of the audience is key to imbuing the object with life. Yet we, as audience members, are aware of the fact that the object that is on stage is not alive. This process is called double vision. But what if the human body is seen as an object on stage? We cannot 'delete' the life from a living body.

What happens when the live body and the 'dead' puppet negotiate the same space? What does such a conversation reveal about sources of movement, the imagination of the audience and how the body is viewed in a contemporary dance theatre context? How do we as choreographers/theatre makers translate 'life' on stage? I propose that whilst viewing a production, and when we view the body and the puppet on stage simultaneously, the audience has to oscillate between processes of sustaining double vision, and reversed double vision. Eventually the audience's imagination is the only boundary between puppetry and contemporary dance.

The paper investigates these performance questions and attempts to find common ground between the puppet as object, the body as object and the audience's imaginary world as the landscape in which puppets and humans dance. It looks at the production process of Ontwrig, and investigates the tendencies of dance/physicality in contemporary theatre.

Introduction

The title of this paper "The boundaries of dance" implies that we are dealing with definitions, attempts at classification, and interrogating the nature of dance and puppetry. In contemporary theatre, where the boundaries between forms, genres and even modes of representation have become so porous, any attempt at categorizing the various elements might seem like a futile exercise. But questioning the various boundaries can assist us to reinvestigate the elements in theatre that have been flung together in the contemporary (dare we say postmodern and post-dramatic?) theatre in order to trace new views, permutations and functions in these hybrid forms of performance that grace our stages. This form of theoretical exploration also investigates the new types of relationships which develop between elements, objects and the inherent liveness of a theatrical performance.

The puppet has a long history as a performative object in the theatre. Proschan, in the first article of a special edition of *Semiotica*, the journal of which he was the editor, speculates on why the puppet is so important in the cultural life of humans:

Among the most ancient and widespread of cultural traditions is the use of material objects in narrative or dramatic performance. Yet puppets are not the only objects we invest with the power to speak or to move. Dancers who wear masks, bards who use scroll-paintings or dolls to illustrate their narrations, children who create dramatic scenes in dollplay, worshippers who bear icons in a religious procession, [...] all manifest the urge to give life to non-living things, as they animate objects in dramatic performances and use material images as surrogates for human actors. Whether the dramatic actor is a miniaturized wood-and-cloth puppet or a gigantic, extra-human phantasm, and whether the performance context is one of secular entertainment or sacred ritual, the creative energy that animates the images is the same – the impulse to create objects to act in our stead. Objects through which we can project intensified, artistic and often holy speech and action (1983:6).¹

The two important aspects that we can take from this quote are: 1) the need of humans to animate (dead) objects, and 2) the fact that these objects have to substitute for human life. And herein lies some of the central aspects that I want to explore in this paper, namely movement (since animation is essentially movement) and absence (since substitution implies that someone, or something, is not present). It is also within this realm where the puppet and the dancer fuse. In situations where the dancer and the puppet share the same stage, we also have to ask how aspects such as liveness, presence and the meaning in movement interact with the audience's imagination and modes of perception.

Apart from the traditional source studies and literature review, I also base this paper on the findings that I have arrived at through the creative and performative processes of the performance as research production *Ontwrig*. This production is a devised dance theatre production that incorporates puppets, performing objects, stop motion animation and video footage as modes of representation. Estelle Olivier and I acted as facilitators, choreographer, performers and directors in this process where we worked with performance students from the Drama Department. In this production we investigated the effects of trauma and identity in post-apartheid South Africa.

¹ His views must be seen through the semiotic lens he used for this particular journal. I would not like to get bogged down in the realm of semiotics, although it is unlikely that one can escape this particular theoretical approach in creating and analysing theatre.

This volume has also become a seminal work in puppet theatre theory. The article by Green and Pepicello (1983:147 – 161), in combination with the work of Tillis (1992), has been the foundation for the approach I have taken in this paper.

The puppet and the performing object: an unnecessary division?

In the literature on puppetry, puppets and performing object are often mentioned in the same breath. Jurkowski defines puppetry and puppet theatre as:

The puppet theatre is a theatre art: the main and basic feature that differentiates it from the live theatre is that the speaking and performing object makes temporal use of the physical sources of its vocal and driving powers, which are present beyond the object. The relationship between the object (the puppet) and the power sources changes all the time, and these variations are of great semiological and aesthetic significance (1988:31).

This is of course just one definition of what a puppet is. Baird (1965:7) states: “A puppet is an inanimate figure made to move by human effort before an audience. It is the sum of these qualities that uniquely define the puppet”.

Various authors emphasize different elements of the object which is manipulated as a puppet in a performance. Dagan (1990:38) also includes the notion that that object is an anthropomorphic or zoomorphic image. With these aspects incorporated in a definition, it is clear that the puppet resembles something that is familiar to an audience. Green and Pepicello (1983:151) indicate that specific features of the puppet are emphasized or “intensified to help clarify the role of the puppet in a performance.”

At this stage I would like to suggest a (possibly artificial) distinction between the object, the puppet and the performing object. All puppets are objects. But not all objects are puppets. The objects on stage, for the purpose of this paper, can be divided into three different categories (i.e. different objects serve different functions – not a case of one object fitting the three categories – though that is also possible, I am sure). The first one is the prop. The prop is merely an object that the actor uses as part of the performance. No special attention or focus is necessarily given to the prop. The next category would be the (performing) object. Here the object takes a more active role in the performance and the way that the audience constructs meaning during the performance. The interaction between the performer and the object and the type of movement that is played out on stage is more important than in the case with an object that is merely used as a prop.² In this category the audience’s main focus is still on the performers and not necessarily on the object, although the importance of the object for that part of the performance is more than just a prop. The

² The focus of the object within the performance helps to categorize the performance. Richard Schechner elaborates: “The ‘other-worldliness’ of play, sports, games, theatre and ritual is enhanced by the extreme disparity between the value of the objects outside the activity when compared to their value as foci of the activity” (1988:9). I have expanded elsewhere (2007) on the concept of the object in performance to indicate how the object can achieve special value through performance. There is unfortunately not enough space to elaborate on this issue in this paper.

object as metaphor could be an example of this. The puppet is the last category. The movement of the object is integral to creating an illusion of life in the object. The audience's attention is focused primarily on the object as puppet. Sometimes the source of the movement (the manipulation of the puppet) is not even seen by the audience, only the movement itself. In cases where the object draws the main focus of the audience, the object transcends its normal function and becomes a puppet.

Another difference between the puppet and the performing object (such as a mask, for example) can be found in the different time and space occupied by the various objects.

Dagan notes:

While most puppeteers and their puppets each occupy their own space and move in their own time, thereby giving an effect of **double space and double time**, most **dancers** and their **masks** move in **single space and single time** (1990:62 – emphasis in original).

Here the mask would be seen as the performing object, working in conjunction with the performer and the performer being the main point of focus of the audience members. There is no separation between object and performer. This, however, does not imply that the performer becomes the object. This type of distinction between performing object and performer, and then between puppet and performer, became evident in our exploration of the object in the production *Ontwrig* (2015).

The bottle as puppet and object

During the development of the multimodal, devised theatre production *Ontwrig*, the production entailed an exploration using empty wine bottles as objects in order to create a physical vocabulary and to create a space where we could improvise with the body as means of expression as well as with objects. The original idea behind using bottles was to use the bottle as a metaphor for travel. Or perhaps we could fill the bottle with beach sand, where the bottle might be the vessel that holds the sands of time. These were all connotative aspects called up by the physical object itself. We played around with the idea of messages in bottles which are found on the beach, that the bottle might hold stories or personal narratives of the performers.

The ideas surrounding the bottle eventually developed into one of the beginning sequences where the bottle, which is lifted from a white dough basin, becomes a ship laden with slaves, on route to South Africa (see Image 1). The bottle is no longer just a bottle. Although the object does not resemble a ship, it becomes a ship a ship in the imagination of the audience.

The bottle moves in front of the projected images of the sea, and later, in front of a stop-motion animation sequence of a ship in a bottle that travels on a sea of sand in the same basin from which the bottle appeared (see Image 2).



Image 1 – above - The bottle as ship, travelling to South Africa.

Image 2 – below - The ship in a bottle stop-motion animation.



Later on in the show the bottles make another appearance. This time they are balanced on the heads of the dancers (Image 3) whilst the dancers slowly but surely move from upstage to downstage, telling a story of the residence social evenings, highlighting the residual racial

tensions on campus.³ The balancing act of the bottle on the head, and the racial balancing act in linked. The bottles act as performative objects, since the main focus of the audience is still on the performer. The objects merely emphasize the main concept which is communicated. They are not the main channel for the creation of theatrical meaning. The body of the dancers and the text still remain the main focus. When the song *Pata Pata* starts to play, the bottles oscillate between functioning as props, when they are just used as bottles of wine at a party, to being performative objects where they are balanced on the heads of the performers (Image 4). How these puppets are read, how their function is understood by the audience is determined by what is called “double vision” (Tillis, 1992:59).⁴



Image 3 – above – The bottles precariously balanced on the heads of the dancers. The bottles as performative objects function as visual metaphors.

Double vision in puppetry and the problem of the present body in dance

The puppet as object has no life of its own. “The specific signs that constitute the puppet are related to signs that are generally recognized as signs of life; that is, as signs one associates with the presence of life” (Tillis, 1992:7). The audience members shift between looking at the puppet and the method of control, or between the puppet and the setting. The audience member has to oscillate between the belief and disbelief that the object is alive.

³ *Skakels* is an event during the orientation process of the residences on campus. The women residences would go to the male residences to *Skakel*, to make contact. This could entail anything from dances, speed dating or other activities to force contact between the two residences that are paired up for the night. In this particular sequence in *Ontwrig*, the hidden racism on campus was highlighted by the dancers who tell stories of how they became aware of their own race by being marginalized at these events. The superficial racial balance in the town was illustrated by the bottles that were balanced on the heads of the dancers at the beginning of the sequence (Image 3).

⁴ Francis (2012:22) notes that the term *double vision* has other labels as well, including ‘opalization effect’, while Green and Pepicello (1983:157) speak of ‘oscillation’.



Image 4 – below – The bottles functioning as props (when they are placed on the floor) and as performative objects (when they are balanced on the heads of the performers).

The changing focus is evidence of an alternating belief and unbelief in the puppet's autonomous existence. (...) We imbue the puppets with our imagination and experience a deceptive empathy, deceptive because empathy assumes feeling in the recipient. The puppet only mimics feeling through attitude and movement (Francis, 2012:22 - 23).

Posner (In Romanska, 2015 :338) expands on this concept:

As puppeteers and spectators together create and sustain this life from the moment a puppet first begins to move, they also create and sustain something else: a fragile thread of conscious belief. (...) This belief is (...) also a fundamental part of the theatrical experience, where the fantasy of the audience is similarly conceived, birthed, and nurtured.

This double vision of the audience is in operation in pure puppet theatre, where the manipulator might be seen or might be hidden from view. The audience's focus and imagination are aimed at the puppet. Jones (2009:255) states: "A puppet is by its very nature dead, whereas an actor is by her very nature alive. The puppet's work, then (...) is to strive toward life. This struggle (...) is literally in the hands of the puppeteer and need have no connection to the scriptwriter or director."⁵ The dance of the puppet, the movement is the main focus. This movement has to indicate life first and only then can it attempt to communicate meaning or stir emotions.

I want to expand on this concept by stating that, for the duration of a performance, the audience's imagination does not only accept life in an inanimate object; the audience's

⁵ Jones also speaks of the ur-narrative of the puppet, i.e. the struggle of the object not to die and how this struggle resonates in the audience which "ignites a smouldering coal of ancient belief in us – that there is life in stones, in rivers, in objects, in wood" (2009:254.)

imagination also deletes aspects of a performance. Where the puppet manipulators are visible to an audience, the imagination deletes, or omits, the presence of a manipulator. I shall call this process of deletion “reversed double vision”. If you as a manipulator or dancer are not the main focus or the main medium of communication, you are deleted from the performance.⁶ If the manipulator or dancer becomes more present than the puppet, the puppet dies in the imagination of the audience and also on stage. No movement can bring life back to it. It is reduced to a dysfunctional prop. The performer has to surrender his or her ego to an inanimate object and in that process breathe life into that object with focus and movement. The surrendering of the ego implies focus on the object, the deletion of the presence of the self as performer, and imbuing the puppet with breath for the duration of the performance.

But what happens when puppets, manipulators and dancers interact, where there is co-presence on stage of live dancers and ‘dead’ puppets? The living dancer does not have a problem making us believe that he is alive. We as audience members do not have to oscillate between belief and disbelief when we are looking at a dancer. In dancing, the focus is on the movement, not as a sign of life, but in viewing the movement for its beauty and the emotional responses that it might stimulate.

The body as object: “When does it move you and when do you move it?”

It is when we as audience view the dead object and its struggle to be alive that the body as object also becomes emphasized. No longer is it just the dancing body, the movement is suspended for a moment during which the object-ness of the body becomes present.

During the audition process for *Ontwrig*, as well as during Estelle and my prior experimentation with the body and puppets/objects, we developed an improvisation for the students to test their susceptibility and sensitivity to object work. The improvisation was built on the concept that you had to balance an object on your body and then start to move, trying to maintain the balance of the object whilst moving. The dancer then had to become aware of the object and his/her relationship with that object, and this did become a mantra during the devising and rehearsal process of *Ontwrig*, “When does it move you and when do you move it?” In those moments where you try and achieve a balance with the object on your body, the object forces the movement. The dead object starts to manipulate the living

⁶ This type of ‘omission’ by an audience is also found in the traditional Japanese theatre forms such as Bunraku and Kabuki, where the stage attendants, all dressed in black and sometimes even hooded, are ‘not seen’. The convention in the theatre is that the black clothing they wear make these stage hands ‘invisible’.

dancer. This type of exploration also started to examine the sources of movement. In the physical theatre and dance theatre traditions, the process of creating work very often entails “inside-out” processes where the personal aspects of the performer are used to instigate and develop dance vocabulary. This type of improvisation looks at a source from the outside - a source that is inanimate as well. If a dead object can, through contact with a dancer, instigate movement where the movement of the object is secondary to that of the living body, what else can it do? And the answer to this question also came to us in a process of improvisational explorations we conducted with pairs of army boots.

Movement and the absence of the live body on stage

Ontwrig deals with, amongst other themes, trauma in post-apartheid South Africa. The apartheid history of South Africa was addressed in several sequences. One of these sequences interrogated the effects of forced conscription and the Border war on the individual, and the residual effects of the trauma of the war on contemporary South African society. The army boots therefore functioned on a synecdochal level and so became the metaphors for the war itself.

The boots, as performing objects, were worn on the hands of the dancers (see Image 5). During the developing processes of the production, the emotive landscapes of war were explored with the boots as principal means of that exploration. None of our performers took part in the border war. We do not have first-hand experience of that time or that place. The boots are remnants of that time and place.



Image 5 – above - The boots on our hands, walking towards war.

It was through these objects that we accessed emotive experiences that we could shape into dance, using the boots as performative objects. The men have the boots on their hands, marching and firing guns and running away. The women go into a sequence of seemingly domestic activities, with the help of their paper aprons. As the scene develops, the men get shot down. We die. It is only the boots that were placed on the soles of Andrico's feet that kept on walking (Image 6). The absent body of the soldier is indicated by the movement of the boots in the air.



Image 6 – above – the dead soldiers at the feet of the women hanging their aprons out to dry and the absent soldier keeps on walking.

It was only after we started exploring issues or concepts of “what is not there” that a theoretical question came to mind. This image, apart from the obvious way in which the audience can read the basic visual narrative which is told by the events, also created another possible reading. This reading does not look at the present bodies on stage, or the performing objects themselves. The objects, through the movement that they have in the dance, also indicate an absence of a body. As the boots walk without a body to inhabit it, the objects place the focus on the absence of the body that one expects to fill that space, to fill the boots.

The objects also indicate the lack of liveness that we see because of the body which is not there. In this situation the audience does not go through a process of reversed double vision in trying to create meaning in that sequence of the performance. The audience does not even have to use double vision to look at these events. By focusing the attention on the performing object, the audience becomes aware of the dead-ness of the object and that it is

'kept alive' by human agency. This artifice is emphasized. It is also through this artificial movement that the performing object delivers its message. The absent body is the playground where the illusion of life is created.

This type of reading, the understanding of the absent, is also indicative of the boundaries of dance. We see here not just the movement of the dancer and the performing objects, we also witness the movement of the absent body. The exploration of presenting the absent, especially by using objects to indicate the absent body, can be explored even further. I am not saying that dance always tries to show the present body, but I think that in contemporary South African theatre, where various forms of theatre practice collide and co-inhabit the same stage, the questions and various issues related to the different forms of representation are pushed forward in the process of making this type of dance theatre, as well as in the way in which we as audience members create meaning from those types of performances. As Fleishman stated:

It is in the space between dance and theatre that I believe performance should be located. (...) In our pluralistic and diversified culture there can be no autonomous forms; no pure genres, only transformations, mutations and contaminations. Both forms, dance and theatre, have in common the presence of the physical body in front of the audience and it is the physical body that should be the canvas on which new images are created; the physical body as metaphor for the social body we are in the process of creating with its multilingual and multicultural characteristics (1997:209).

I would like to add here that the absent body also becomes a canvas where the audience must create their own images, their own meanings.

Conclusion

In multimodal productions such as *Ontwrig*, where the puppet, objects, live human bodies and the projected image co-inhabit the stage in order to communicate meaning, it seems that the audience's perceptions and imagination are the only barriers that can divide, that can create the boundaries to say that the puppet is not dancing, or the performer is not present. Dance, as well as puppetry, has to move beyond the restrictions of movement of the body to include the movement of the mind, the imagination. This is not a new concept in Africa, since the gods have danced through masks and puppets for ages in many of Africa's traditional performance forms. Perhaps it is only now that we have come to truly appreciate their presence in contemporary African theatre.

Reference List

Baird, B. 1965. *The art of the Puppet*. New York: Macmillan.

Dagan, E.A. 1990. *Emotions in Motion: Theatrical puppets and Masks from Black Africa. La Magie de l'Imaginaire. Marionnettes et masques théâtraux d'Afrique Noire*. Montreal: galerie Amrad African Arts.

Du Preez, P. 2007. *Ikoen en Medium: die toneelpop, masker en akteur-manipuleerde in Afrika-performance*. Unpublished DPhil-dissertation. Stellenbosch University.

Fleishman, M. 1997. Physical images in the South African Theatre. *South African Theatre Journal*. 11(1-2).

Francis, P. 2012. *Puppetry. A reader in theatre practice*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Green, T.A. & Pepicello, W.J. 1983. Semiotic interrelationships in the puppet play. *Semiotica*. 47(1 – 4):147 – 161.

Jones, B. 2009. Puppetry and Authorship. In J.Taylor, *Handspring Puppet Company*. Johannesburg: Dawid Krut.

Jurkowski, H. 1988: *Aspects of puppet theatre*. London: Puppet Centre Trust.

Ontwrig. 2015. Directed by Petrus du Preez & Estelle Olivier. Woordfees, Stellenbosch.

Posner, D.N. 2015. The dramaturg(ies) of puppetry and visual theatre. In M. Romanska, Ed. 2015. *The Routledge companion to Dramaturgy*. Oxon, New York: Taylor and Francis Books.

Proschan, F. 1983. The semiotics study of puppets, masks, and performing object. *Semiotica*. 47(1 – 4):3 – 44.

Romanska, M. Ed. 2015. *The Routledge companion to Dramaturgy*. Oxon, New York: Taylor and Francis Books.

Schechner, R. 1988. *Performance theory*. New York, London: Routledge.

Taylor, J. 2009. *Handspring Puppet Company*. Johannesburg: Dawid Krut.

Tillis, S. 1992. *Towards an Aesthetic of the Puppet*. New York, Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press.

THE TOYI-TOYING BODY: IDENTITY POLITICS IN CONTEMPORARY DANCE IN SOUTH AFRICA.

Dr Sarahleigh Castelyn

University of East London (UK)



Women Toyi-Toying in South Africa (Date and Source Unknown)

Abstract

*ToyiToying is a South African dance form that occurs at various protests or marches and is a vigorous and powerful piece of choreography that creates a charged atmosphere. Drawing on the Arts journalist Adrienne Sichel's comment on how the origins of 'South African contemporary dance has been, to a large extent, a political act of defiance and activism' (2012:108), this paper explores when, how, and to what effect, the body in contemporary dance in PostApartheid South Africa is a toyitoying body. I ask how South African contemporary dance choreographers make visible the complex, fluid, multiple, and contradictory nature of South African identity politics, and how this matters to the very real experience of those dancing bodies. If dance is able to portray the fluidity of identities and offer resistant readings of gender, sexuality, race, and nation, then I argue that South African contemporary dance and its toyi-toying essence is exceptionally well suited to this task - this is especially important in the South African context due to the legacy of the legislative choreography of Apartheid. In this paper, I examine an extract from Flatfoot Dance Company's *Transmission: Mother to Child* (2005) and Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre's *Home* (2003) in order to develop an understanding of the body's political and social meanings in those performances and in the broader context of South African society; how is the dancing body in South African contemporary dance toyi-toying?*

Introduction

In 1994, I began my first year at university in Pietermaritzburg and my dance lecturer was Paul Datlen. I had been training in ballet since the age of 4, and the opportunity to study dance at university level was so inspiring. I loved how we danced barefoot, or how I could wear my doc martens as part of my costume when performing, and, I cannot describe my joy when I could go against the perpendicular nature of ballet and get horizontal on the floor! In 1994, I was also dancing at student rallies. My version of the toyi-toyi wasn't half bad for a tall white girl who had grown up in the midlands. I had been working on my toyi-toyi

when I started to get involved in local protests, such as supporting the opening-up of my previous whites-only government school and the end-conscription campaign. In 1994, I was too young to vote in the first democratic national elections, and the only way to show my support for the arrival of a 'New South Africa' was to dance, which I did both on the stage and in the streets.

Two years later, 1996, I was standing in the corner of the university dance studio in Durban where I was now focusing on dance as one of my specialisms as part of my final year in my BA in Drama and Performance studies. Liane Loots led our dance class and we were busy exploring partner-work. I was taking a breather – I am 6 foot tall and my Dutch genes make me an excellent climbing post for other dancers...I was watching two dancers, of different genders and races and sexualities, moving through a sequence that had them interchanging roles in their partner-work. I had, what I suppose is an epiphany, where my practice of dance and my study of the theory of dance connected, a moment that I hope for my students, and a moment that I am sure my lecturers wanted for me – I did spend a good part of my university studies trying to test out the philosophy of 'work hard and party harder' so I do owe my lecturers an apology...on a side note, I am heartened that popular and social dances are increasingly being studied in university dance programmes, and this does allow me to rationalise my weekends dancing in nightclubs as being 'educational.'...

Anyway back to the humid dance studio with its uncooperative ceiling fans... There I was watching my peers dancing and my moment of enlightenment happened. In front of me I both witnessed and fully realised that this partner-work sequence was deconstructing gender discourse moving against the norms of gender roles; that the dancers' close contact would have subverted the racist laws of the Apartheid regime and would still challenge a number of South Africans then and today unfortunately... that their bodies were signifying what bell hook's terms the interconnectedness of gender and race (1991); and now I truly understood what Liane Loots (1999:106) had stated in class previously; how the body was a site of struggle, how the dancers' movements made visible the fractures, or what I would learn later to be termed 'slippages' (Albright, 1997:xxiii), that occur amongst the numerous formations of the dancing body's cultural identities and its somatic or physical identity.

Many years later, after studying for a PhD focusing on South African dance, I now, with hindsight – such a wonderful thing, – can further unpack this moment of illumination accessing Adrienne Sichel's comment on how the origins of "South African contemporary dance has been, to a large extent, a political act of defiance and activism" (2012:108). And, I propose that the body in South African contemporary dance is a *toyi-toyi* body. This is a body that protests, subverts, or resists oppressive forces of power; those dancing bodies in the studio moving through various partner-work motifs were *toyi-toyi* bodies...So, for those that are not familiar with the *toyi-toyi*, it is a South African dance form that occurs at various protests or marches. *Toyi-toying* is a vigorous and powerful piece of choreography that creates a charged atmosphere.

The dancer moves forward, by going side-to-side, changing the weighting emphasis from foot-to-foot. At times, there might be a leader who uses call-and-response to encourage the protesters. Fists are sometimes clenched in salute. Chanting of slogans or songs accompanies the movement. I adopt the metaphor of the *toyi-toying* body when analysing contemporary dance in South Africa as it makes apparent the relationship between political action and the dancing body. This symbol of the *toyi-toying* body historically represents the body dancing in resistance. This *toyi-toying* body is moreover a body that is not only visible but audible too, and has a relationship to other bodies and objects as it dances. There is no monolithic or homogenous version of this *toyi-toying* body, rather the *toyi-toying* body is a mass of different bodies each dancing from side to side shouting and disrupting the status quo and exposing the discourses of power in operation.

Kariamu Welsh-Asante, although referring to Zimbabwean dance, states that “Zimbabwe dance, like most African dance, is multi-dimensional, it is necessary in this study to locate the music and general culture” (2000:ix). Likewise, South African contemporary dance is multi-dimensional, and I focus not only on the body dancing, but also what it is dancing to, how it is dancing, where it is dancing, and why. Therefore, I focus on the visual, audible, and mediated dancing body in contemporary dance on the South African stage; how it is choreographed, what meanings lie behind the movements it makes in space; what effect these movements might have; how and why it is costumed; what text it speaks and what this might mean; its relationship to its setting and space and what this location suggests; and what it shares with or how it differs from other bodies in the dance, and why this might be of interest to the viewer. The dancing body interrupts the representations of gender, sexuality, race, and nation and makes visible the on-going state of identity construction because of its movement and the possibility of movement that is always present in dance performance and in bodies in political contexts, such as the *toyi-toying* body. This “is an art form which locates its practice in the moving body” (Loots, 2012:56). It is due to the complexity and fluidity and hybridity of contemporary dance in South Africa, as well as its deliberate staging of bodies, that South African contemporary dance is well suited to exploring the multiple and complex intersections of the South African body with the various discourses of gender, sexuality, race, and nation in South Africa. Ann Cooper Albright highlights that “[a]s a representational system concentrated in the live body, contemporary dance can help us trace this interconnectedness of bodies and identities by foregrounding the cultural significance of somatic experience” (1997:5). Therefore, I ask how South African contemporary dance choreographers makes visible the complex, fluid, multiple, and contradictory nature of South African identity politics and how this matters to the very real experience of those dancing bodies.

If dance is able to portray the fluidity of identities and offer resistant readings of gender, sexuality, race, and nation, then I argue that South African contemporary dance is exceptionally well suited to this task and that this is especially important in a South African context due to the history of Apartheid which might be thought of as a legislative choreography. Randy Martin’s claim that “dance displays, in the very ways that

bodies are placed in motion, traces of the forces of contestation that can be found in society at large" (1998:6) is remarkably relevant for studying the body in contemporary dance in South Africa, where bodies historically have had their movement curtailed because of Apartheid's legislation of segregation. My paper demonstrates how South African contemporary dance reflects Martin's claim and thus the body's value in Apartheid and post-Apartheid South African society. Foucault's notion that "[w]here there is power, there is resistance" (1981:95) is key to this paper's argument that the body in South African contemporary dance is able to expose the "network of power relations" (Foucault, 1981:96) and offer "a 'reverse' discourse" (1981:101).

Therefore, in this paper, with a primary focus on the dancing body as a toyi-toying body, I examine two sections from South African contemporary dance pieces in order to demonstrate how I develop an understanding of the body's political and social meanings in that performance and in the broader context of South African society illustrating how the toyi-toying body is at the core of contemporary dance in South Africa and is an apt example of André Lepecki's positing of the dancing body as possessing the "potential for energetic social action" (2004:7). The two selected contemporary dance works I have chosen as examples highlight social issues that have greatly affected contemporary South African society, and have led to many South Africans dancing the toyi-toyi in protest. Furthermore, the toyi-toying body as a site of struggle cannot, nor does not, ignore the very real threat of violence as it is foremost a physical body. It is an "articulate" (Foster, 2003:395) body and an apt example of what Susan Leigh Foster refers to in her article 'Choreographies of Protest' as a "perceptive and responsive physicality" (2003:412).



Transmission: Mother to Child: Flatfoot Dance Company (2005). Photograph by Val Adamson.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic has had a negative impact on all South Africans. The pandemic has had a devastating effect on women and children due to the societal stigma attached to the disease and the social and biological manner in which the disease is transmitted, and my study of Flatfoot Dance Company's

Transmission: Mother to Child (2005) illustrates this social issue. Throughout Transmission: Mother to Child, Lenin Shabalala and Sizwe Zulu, two male dancers with strong physical appearances, perform a choreography of strong and gentle movement qualities moving their arms slowly and lightly through the space surrounding their bodies. Here the dancing bodies of these two performers expose the dominant stereotypical discourse of black African masculinity as solely aggressive and show that black South African men are also tender and flexible as demonstrated by the manner in which Shabalala and Zulu move their arms through the space. My appropriation of the dancing body as responsive acknowledges how some South African choreographers are aware of this double moment of representation and thus choreograph to question, resist, and offer other representations of the body in society, thus reiterating the claim by Jay Pather of Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre that South African dance is “responsive” (Young-Jahangeer et.al. 2004 19). The representations of gender, race and nation - being black, male and South African – are questioned because the movement of their dancing bodies - their muscular arms moving slowly and lightly thorough the space surrounding them - makes visible the on-going state of identity construction and reveals moments of fracture between the dancing body’s cultural identity and its somatic or physical identity. They are culturally positioned to perform a movement that is aggressive and instead perform a movement motif of strong and gentle qualities thereby offering an alternative representation of what it is to be a man in South Africa. Shabalala and Zulu are toyi-toying contemporary dance bodies.

When Shabalala and Zulu, dance shirtless in white pantaloons and then don domestic worker uniforms, the male dancers physically embody the call for responsibility and accountability of South African men in the current context of HIV/AIDS by for instance, moving with qualities associated with motherhood, or by wearing the work costumes of female domestic carers in the concluding moments of the piece. Another example is when the dancers perform a motif that references indlamu (traditional South African dance associated with Zulu warriors), except this motif is performed with gentle movement qualities instead of the virile and athletic connotations normally associated with it. Shabalala and Zulu shift their weight gradually to their left side, bending and lifting their right legs whilst maintaining contact with the floor as long as possible through their right foot. Both male dancers bring their right feet slowly off the floor, and then suddenly, with their right feet, hit the floor flat. As they do this, their arms softly mimic the journey over their right feet, cursorily flicking the air with their wrists and palms upwards, as they shift their weight smoothly over to the right hand side. Although both dancers are performing a similar motif that references indlamu, I am aware of the slippage between cultural identity and somatic identity between multiple bodies, and in this example, between Shabalala and Zulu, and how the process of identity construction is on-going; the body is the site of struggle for identity construction in South African contemporary dance.



Home: Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre (2003). Photograph by Val Adamson.

Despite the South African constitution's stress on gender equality and non-racialism, South Africa remains a country where there are severe imbalances amongst the diverse racial and gender groups. Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre's *Home* (2003) addresses the poor living conditions of hostel dwellers and the uneasy relationships between men and women in the home. In the section of *Home* entitled 'Kitchen', gender relationships are visible. A female performer – Nelisiwa Rushualang – takes out from her basket an enamel bowl and lights the imphopho in it. The herb's powerful smell anoints the space and she calls on the ancestors. Her body becomes a vessel for the ancestors to address the household, and to speak in the home, as the dancer's torso flicks from side to side and her mouth sneers. She pins paper money to a make-do sash and begins to move around the kitchen space. She moves through a movement motif that references indlamu stamping her feet with great force on the performance floor. Although empowering, her performance of a motif that is usually associated with men illustrates how she has to be on the defence for any threat outside and inside the home. She adopts the performance of a brittle masculinity in the face of the violence ever present in her everyday life. Whilst the female performer anoints the home space and convenes with the ancestors, the male performer, Siyanda Duma, dances armed with a knobkerrie – a traditional crafted walking stick that, if need be, is a weapon. He jerks, calls out in fear and in anger, waves his knobkerrie, and threatens an imaginary foe. However, he appears to be losing control, and is off-balance. The movement pathway of his limbs is unstructured, chaotic and free-ranging. Rushualang begins to go through the cupboards and these are, empty except for two lines of pilchard tins. Opening and closing the cupboard doors, she works herself up into a frenzy, with the cupboard doors being worked so hard that they begin to fall off.

There is no physical contact between Rushualang and Duma until close to the finale of the 'Kitchen' section, when they dance together. This concluding duet is choreographed so that Rushualang performs the supporting and lifting movements that are typically associated with male performers in partnership motifs. Rushualang is technically skilful and demonstrates great strength and ease. Duma is denied the opportunity to share these movements and is instead lifted and displayed appearing helpless. Despite this visual appearance, the mechanics of dance practice require that both partners labour even when it visually appears that one dancer is spending more effort. This inversion of the traditional pas de deux is powerful. It provides Rushualang with a strong position of authority and Duma appears as if he has no authority. Although Duma in traditional South African culture may be socially constructed as the head of the home, without Rushualang's labour Duma is not able to protect himself from negative outside forces. It is literally Rushualang that supports Duma.

My paper is a political and social response to the particular urgency of the body in South Africa, as illustrated by the subject matter in South African contemporary dance, by the very real power these subject matters have on the bodies and lives of many South Africans, and how contemporary dance offers resistant readings of the dominant discourses in South African society. I echo Jane C. Desmond's call for all forms of dance and 'bodily texts' to be examined so that "we can further our understandings of how social identities are signalled, formed and negotiated through bodily movement" (1997:29). Mark Fleishman states that the physical body of the South African performer functions as a "metaphor for the social body we are in the process of creating with its multilingual and multicultural characteristics" (1997:2009). I too, am acutely aware, that the South African performer is an embodiment of the social body, and how South African contemporary dance functions as a metonym for the South African social body. This cultural practice clearly reveals its origins as an activist art form (Sichel: 2012:108). Returning to the metaphor of the toyi-toying body, Sylvia 'Magogo' Glasser wrote in 1991 in her article 'Is Dance Political Movement?' that "[a]s the country and its politics become normalised, one would expect dance to become de-politicised" (120). At its core, contemporary dance in South Africa remains concerned with the political and social issues in South African society; it continues to dance populated with toyi-toying bodies and is a political movement, in the full sense of the term.

Bibliography

Albright, Ann Cooper (1997) *Choreographing Difference: The Body and Identity in Contemporary Dance*. Hanover and London: University Press of New England and Wesleyan University Press.

Desmond, Jane C. 1997 *Embodying Difference: Issues in Dance and Cultural Studies*. In Jane, C. Desmond, Ed. *Meaning in Motion: New Cultural Studies of Dance*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997: 29 – 54.

Fleishman, Mark. 1997 *Physical Images in the South African Theatre*. *South African Theatre Journal* 11(1 & 2) May/September: 19 – 214

Foster, Susan Leigh. 2003 *Choreographies of Protest*. *Theatre Journal* 55:395 – 412.

Foucault, Michel. 1977 *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. by Alan Sheridan. London: Penguin Books.

Foucault, Michel. 1981 *The History of Sexuality, Vol. One. An Introduction*, trans. by Robert Hurley. London: Penguin Books.

Glasser, Sylvia. 1991 Is Dance Political Movement? *Journal for the Anthropological Study of Human Movement*. 6(3):112 – 122.

hooks, bell. 1991. *Yearning: Race, Gender, and Cultural Politics*. London: Turnaround.

Lepecki, André. 2004 Introduction: Presence and Body in Dance and Performance Theory. In Andre Lepecki, Ed. *Of the Presence of the Body: Essays on Dance and Performance Theory*. Middletown, Connecticut: Wesleyan University Press: 1 – 9.

Loots, Liane. 1999. Articulating the Unspoken – Gender and Race (and Cultural) Constructions of the Moving Body in Contemporary Dance Theatre in South Africa (with Specific Reference to the Kwa-Zulu Natal Context. *Confluences 2: Articulating the Unspoken*. 14 – 17 July 1999, University of Cape Town, South Africa:105 – 115.

Loots, Liane. 2012. Voicing the Unspoken: Culturally Connecting Race, Gender and Nation in Women's Choreographic and Dance Practices in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In Sharon Friedman, Ed. *Post-Apartheid Dance: Many Bodies Many Voices Many Stories*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 51 – 71.

Martin, Randy. 1998 *Critical Moves: Dance Studies in Theory and Politics*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Sichel, Adrienne. 2012 Gate-Crashing Prejudices and Perceptions: The Enduring Legacy of Arts and Dance Festivals in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In Sharon Friedman, Ed. *Post-Apartheid Dance: Many Bodies Many Voices Many Stories*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing: 107 – 125.

Walker, Liz., Reid, Graeme. & Morna Cornell, Morna. 2004 *Waiting to Happen: HIV/AIDS in South Africa*. Boulder and London: Lynne Reiner Publishers; Cape Town: Double Storey Books.

Welsh-Asante, Kariamu. 2000. *Zimbabwe Dance: Rhythmic Forces, Ancestral Voices, an Aesthetic Analysis*. Trenton, New Jersey and London: Africa World Press.

Young, Iris Marion. 2005. *On Female Body Experience: “Throwing like a Girl” and Other Essays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Young-Jahangeer, Miranda., Loots, Llian., Rorvik, Peter., Oosthuysen, Chantel & Rorvik, Monica. Eds. 2004. *African Contemporary Dance? Questioning Issues of a Performance Aesthetic for a Developing and Independent Continent*. Durban: University of KwaZulu-Natal and Artworks Communication.

THINKING THROUGH DANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF NICOLA ELLIOTT'S *BRUISING* (2014)

Dr Sonja Smit

Rhodes University

Abstract:

*This paper focuses on the notion of performance as a form of knowledge (philosophy) and seeks to interrogate the necessity of challenging pre-conceived ideas of what exactly constitutes contemporary dance in South Africa. I argue that contemporary dance, albeit a language composed of physical gestures and movements, is a valid mode of thinking (a philosophy) which can be used to challenge the status quo. This paper investigates dance's relationship with time, paying specific attention to André Lepecki's theory of a slow ontology which can create modes of interruption, clearing space for perceptual shifts (2006, p. 64). Peter Sloterdijk observes that the contemporary demand for speed and sheer mobility is a form of "kinetic complicity with the movement of the world processes" (2008, p. 11). Sloterdijk argues for slowness and silence as modes of interruption, "for beings who are through-and-through condemned to act" (2009, p. 12). This enquiry focuses on Nicola Elliott's *Bruising* (2014) first performed at the National Arts Festival. The analysis of *Bruising* centres on the creation of "living meaning" or affect (Diprose and Reynold, 2008, p. 171) and investigates how the work challenges "kinetic complicity" and habitual ways of knowing. The experiential aspect of viewership informs the observations and conclusions drawn from this research. Alongside this interpretative research methodology is a qualitative engagement with theories related to performance and choreography.*

Introduction: Performance Thinks

We have to be convinced that theatre and performance are doing something for the thinking and to the thinker; that it is through theatre, and indeed through *this particular aspect* of theatre alone, that this thought has emerged (Cull, 2012: 23).

According to Laura Cull (2012: 23) performance reveals a way of thinking which may enact more than a "demonstration of existing ideas". As such, she considers performance as a form of philosophy. This idea does not solely relate to how the application of philosophical concepts can be useful to performance studies, but how the practice of performance itself produces its own philosophies. To consider performance as knowledge is specifically valuable for performance practitioners in South Africa as the validity of the arts is so often underemphasised. Liane Loots (2001:9), for instance, has noted how an assumed binary between "soft" (feminine: culture, arts) and "hard" (masculine: politics and economics) issues has some detrimental consequences for cultural production in South Africa.

To acknowledge performance as a valid form of knowledge is to recognise its impact before its dissemination through analysis. Cull argues that: "the ephemeral, material work of performance does not need an interpreting, anthropocentric subject standing outside it in order for it to have 'meaning'" (2012:21). The knowledge produced through performance is different to the knowledge

gained through writing. Since performance is not a static object one can say that it produces “living meaning” (affect) for an audience during the course of the performance. In fact, the theatre philosopher, Antonin Artaud rages against the production of theatre which is confined to the “domain of what daily thought can reach” and argues that this approach must be: “destroyed with diligence and malice on every level and at every point where it prevents the free exercise of thought” (1958:47). Artaud shows a particular interest in how the stimulation of the senses can inform and stir the audience’s perceptive abilities. Dance can be particularly affective as it does not necessarily contain clearly defined meanings and can affect an audience on more than a purely cognitive level. A movement performed on stage can be host to a multitude of meanings which are arrived at differently by each member of the audience. In the moment of performance, dance’s meaning is in a process of becoming. Rather than supply absolute meaning, dance is particularly well-suited to imparting its information in a way that values the interpretation of the spectator. This also means that dance can remind one of the limitations of logocentric knowledge and can thus be a significant medium with which to challenge perception.

To challenge an audience member’s perception is not necessarily to dictate a certain ideology (although this is unavoidable) but to engage in strategies whereby the viewer is afforded the opportunity to embark on a journey of discovery. One way to question perception is to remind the audience of their own prescribed ways of understanding a certain concept or function and perhaps to reveal that ideology as a construct. For instance, one’s understanding of dance may be tied to certain ideological assumptions of what is characteristically defined as dance. The belief that choreography is only a “series of steps”, and the choreographer as the dominant author of these steps, has been dismantled with a plethora of experimental practices occurring in dance in the last sixty years. Experiments in contemporary dance are often not only concerned with making dance, but with questioning what exactly constitutes dance.

In Andrè Lepecki’s introduction to *Exhausting Dance* (2006), in a chapter befittingly entitled “The Political Ontology of Movement”, he theorises the value of interrupting flow in contemporary dance. Lepecki supplies a rationale for the rejection of flow in the work of choreographers such as, William Forsythe and Jerome Bel, which he argues is a political and artistic imperative which performs: “a critical act of deep ontological impact” (2006:1). Lepecki highlights the movement of dance from a theatrical to a performance paradigm in which dance is no longer exclusively attached to the demands of virtuosity or flow (2004:172). Lepecki’s observations here are in dialogue with the contemporary philosopher, Peter Sloterdijk who argues that

modern life demands speed and sheer mobility: 'The categorical impulse of modernity is: in order to be continuously active as progressive beings, man should overcome all the conditions where his movement is reduced, where he has come to a halt, where he has lost his freedom and where he is pitifully fixed (2009:5).

Sloterdijk argues that this mobilised conception of modernity is a form of "kinetic complicity with the movement of the world processes" (2009:11). Lepecki reiterates this, observing that:

The kinetic spectacle of modernity erases from the picture of movement all the ecological catastrophes, personal tragedies, and communal disruptions brought about by the colonial plundering of resources, bodies, and subjectivities that are needed in order to keep modernity's "most real" reality in place: its kinetic being (2007:14).

He thus argues for slowness and silence as modes of interruption, "for beings who are through-and-through condemned to act" (Lepecki, 2007:12). In the field of dance and choreography this applies to "beings who are through-and-through condemned" to dance. According to Lepecki, the "still act" is dance's resistance to the kinetic complicity and this resistance destabilises the notion of what constitutes dance and the role of the dancer.

Bruising as an example of thinking

Bruising choreographed by Nicola Elliott was first performed at the National Arts Festival in 2014 when she was awarded the Standard Bank Young Artist for Dance. In this paper I investigate how this particular dance imparts knowledge and can be understood as a product of knowledge – a philosophy found through flesh and movement – a way of thinking through dance. This investigation is focused specifically on how *Bruising* can be said to challenge habitual ways of encountering and experiencing dance. This is not to posit that this particular work is *the example* of a dance which thinks, but rather because it engages so carefully with the notion of meaning as active: a process of discovery. This includes an analysis of Elliott's approach to the notion of love through the bodies of her four performers and her use of the stage space and properties, as accompanying agents of motion and producers of meaning within the performance.

In *Bruising* the pressure to keep up with the "speed" of contemporary life is resisted which allows for different experience of time. Firstly this is achieved by releasing one from the habit of experiencing time in a chronological manner since the performance does not attempt to tell one a story. In her programme note, Elliott invites the audience to view the work without seeking an answer/solution or conclusion: "Accept that not knowing is a necessary part of the process of knowing...Don't try to find a key to unlock it all – you make the key and you make the lock" (2014a). She discourages the audience from trying to find definite meaning, in fact, asks her audience to go on a subjective journey of discovery. One is also forewarned that the pleasure of this work is not in its outcomes,

but through the experience of the event. This advice is also closely related to how the concept of love emerges within the work as a “bruising”. Before the work has even started, the choreographer makes the audience member aware of the fragility of knowing and encourages the audience to be vulnerable in how they relate to the work. The state of being vulnerable is closely tied to the experience of love and she endeavours to instil a sense of shared vulnerability with the audience.

The title of the work *Bruising*, read in relation to the blurb in the National Arts Festival booking kit, also supplies a glimpse the concepts investigated in the work:

In *Bruising* she explores the dichotomy of tensions that exist between the inner and outer worlds in our individual notions of love. Using love as a cornerstone of the work, *Bruising* reflects on how the body is the medium of experience and how its reality can seem unendurable (Elliott, 2014b:19).

The title *Bruising* is thus closely related to the concept of love as the “cornerstone” of the work. A bruise is the consequence of impact on the surface of the body. A bruise can be painful or at least remind one of some pain experienced in the past. For instance, a bruised fruit is no longer the same as it was before; its very shape has been altered by impact. To be bruised is also a sign of being transformed by pain. Although the object of affection may be lost the one who loves does not cease loving that which is gone. So to, live performance is a lot like love in that its affect lingers after its disappearance. The experience of “bruising” may be likened to the experience of live performance as something which may have a deep impact and which is subject to disappearance: that cannot be captured and reduced. Perhaps very significantly, a bruise can heal, so the allusion is not as fatalistic as is the notion of love “breaking one’s heart” or as “falling in love”. While pain is implicated in the title, it also signifies transformation and the ability to heal.

How *Bruising* Thinks: Approaches to Concepts and Style

Bruising is a deconstruction of dance and also of feelings: the performance reveals a search, a process, into the mystery of love and the bruises it may bestow on one. Love is not interpreted through a conventional lens; instead Elliott uses the bodies of her performers and props to express the impossibility of representing the complexities of love. She accomplishes this by focusing on the “theatrical medium itself” in this way deconstructing traditional ways of interpreting love through the medium of dance. The concept of love, particularly romantic love, has been a prominent theme in the Western dance canon. The most famous ballets; *Swan Lake*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Giselle* deal with the quest for romantic love. In *Bruising* love is not depicted as the desire of one person for another and the obstacles that may stand in the way. Rather, love is seen as a mystery that cannot be solved, but which one is irrevocably drawn into. Moving away from spectacle and narrative, *Bruising* approaches the concept of love through the body. What I mean by this is that rather than

imposing a specific narrative, Elliott approaches her subject matter through the bodies of her performers, focusing on task-based movement rather than “steps”.

Her programme note testifies that the content of her work is sourced from the performers, meaning that the creativity of each performer is taken into account in the process of choreography. The performer becomes a co-creator of the work through a process which is facilitated by the choreographer (Elliott, 2013). The movement arising from this creative interaction is not from the body of the choreographer, but arises from the dancer’s interpretation of a task set by the choreographer. This destabilises the notion of the choreographer as the dominant author of movement and allows for the creativity of the dancer. Perhaps, more significantly, the subjectivity of each performer is taken into account during the rehearsal process. The performers are more than what they represent through their race, gender, body type or level of dance experience. Rather than attempt a universal representation of human experience, Elliott’s choreography investigates and embraces the singularity of experience. This approach is particularly useful within the South African context with its long legacy of inequality based on race, gender and political affiliation.

Bruising is permeated by moments of stillness: the performance does not begin with a bang, but with an atmosphere of meditative contemplation as four performers enter the space and conscientiously remove their shoes and socks. They each sit around a heap of red felt positioned in the centre of the stage, contemplating the material, each on their own “island”. After what seems like some careful consideration the performers engage with the material, each creating images within it, while the other performers cover the sensory organs of the dancer inside the felt. This moment clearly dissembles an expectation of a representation of flow and rhythm right at the beginning of the performance. Here in the first scene of the performance, *Bruising* begins its process of questioning; as the four performers investigate the possibilities of this “raw” material: felt/love, and are simultaneously blinded and deafened by it. Yet, this felt, an ambiguous signifier can also be seen as the clay/paint or the possibilities that a choreographer has at their disposal. This scene contains multiple interpretations: it about love, loss and the choreographic process. The ambiguity of the signifying process is achieved by using formalist, rather than through narrative, devices.

Elliott employs formalist devices but without trying to erase the subjectivity of her performers. She observes the inherent freedom in a formalist approach which as Roger Copeland identifies has the ability: “to free us from the tyranny of ourselves” (1990:39). Since formalism does not usually attempt to represent something outside of dance, it allows the spectator to experience the body of the dancer in the “here and now” of performance and in this way, perhaps frees the audience of the habit of prescribed meaning. For instance, in *Bruising*, the performers remove their shoes which can

be read as a signifier that they are dancers and are not attempting to represent something outside themselves. The removal of the shoes can be interpreted as part of a ritual for the contemporary dancer before the commencement of rehearsal or training in the studio. Instead of starting to “dance”, however, the performers sit down and observe a heap of red felt. One is reminded that they are not only dancers, but thinking bodies. Furthermore, the choreographer highlights what may seem like a mundane aspect of the dancer’s existence: the process of preparing for performance or rehearsal. In some dance contexts shoes are removed to protect the wooden floor of the dance studio while in certain cultural contexts the removal of shoes also implies the entry into a more intimate or sacred space, such as a home or a temple. In this scene the seemingly mundane and the sacred exist in the same space. One is made aware of the construct of the performance and simultaneously (and ironically) drawn into the performance because a certain kind of intimacy is made possible by exposing the performance as a construct.

By focusing on task-based movement, the performers are focused on the present, so too, the audience may be drawn into the “here and now” of the performance. Emlyn Claid (2006:92) refers to this effect as a “reversal of seduction”. This occurs when the audience member is not required to be seduced by an “illusion” or a fabricated world of the dancer, but the reverse:

The performer’s denial of illusion becomes the seductive strategy in reverse for the spectator. No longer searching for the real body through the illusion, the spectator searches for illusions (meanings/images) through the real body (2006:99).

This is also achieved by the attitude of the performer towards their task which is characterised by a somewhat detached form of presence. The results of this focus on task as a source for movement in *Bruising* can be described as a pedestrian, idiosyncratic in its playfulness, but not overtly expressive dance language. By being drawn into the present moment of the performance through this “reversal of seduction” the audience engages with time in a different way.

Meaning as Searching: Undoing the Dance Floor

After the encounter with the red felt, the performers urgently unfold the red felt in what seems like a cooperative tug of war. Placing it upstage by the stage curtain, the performers engage in a new search of the space and lifting a square piece off the floor discover that the dance floor mat can be undone. A stage light focused on the square on the stage floor, marks the beginning of the process of “undoing” and deconstruction. In relation to the concept, the image of the dance floor being deconstructed becomes an image of how love or loss can destabilise one’s grounding: when one has lost one’s grounding. The dance floor mats are also an indicator of the “basic needs” of dancers: as the surface upon which one performs movement. The deconstruction of the floor is also an image of

the deconstruction of thought – *the process of processing*. In this scene, the dance floor becomes another performer, another aspect of the thinking that encompasses the dance. Cull insists that the non-human aspects of performance are also examples of thinking: “*everything* thinks” (2012:25). The existence of the floor is the result of thought and the engagement of the performers with the floor as a prop introduces multiple meanings.

The performers dismantle and eventually recreate the dance floor. The four performers are immersed in this process which creates a particular kind of performance style as they do not “show” or perform a persona, but become embodiments of the task they are executing. The underside of the floor pieces have a reflective surface which casts distorted mirror images of the performers (and at times, the audience) making both a comment on the endless process of identification and the impossibility of representation to fully express the human condition. Here movement’s ability to reveal a process is accentuated: meaning is never absolute, but defined by the process of making meaning. The images created with these square pieces of flooring indicate that art does not merely reflect life, and that by reflecting on its own processes, choreography may reveal a myriad of possibilities for interpretation. The reflective squares also reference the dance studio in which dancers are confronted with the image of their bodies: the tools of their craft. Sometimes it seems that the performers are overwhelmed by their reflection. At one point in the relentless deconstruction of the floor, the performers buckle two large squares at the audience catching and reflecting light back unto the viewers. The deconstruction of the floor is not without humour as the performers create images; hiding behind and framing their bodies with the reflective squares.

After the floor remaking process, the performers erect four boxes with the floor squares and each performer enters their own box. The space quietens down and backstage curtains are pulled down to reveal the entire space. Stage curtains function to hide the backstage area so that audiences are not reminded of the technical aspects of the performance. The framing of a performance space and blacking out of the technical aspects serves as a strategy to create an illusion for the audience to aid in the “suspension of disbelief”. The backstage area is thus also an area where the performers are not exposed to the gaze of the audience. By removing the curtain, the performers reveal what goes on behind the scenes. The carefully constructed and sacred space is ripped open to reveal the “decor” of the Alec Mullins hall as it is: a gymnasium in which people train their bodies. The revelation of this space marks the end of the performance and in the final scene; the four performers do exercise in front of a large mirror on the back wall. They return to their bodies, as Yvonne Rainer states; “my body remains the enduring reality” (quoted in Lambert, 1999:89).

One of the most thoughtfully provocative images in *Bruising* occurs in the last moments of the performance, as two of the performers mime the act of throwing a ball into a basketball hoop. Parallel to the basketball hoop is large opaque ball which could not possibly fit through the tiny hoop on the left. Similarly, the attempt to represent love (or loss) is like trying to squeeze a very big ball through the small hoop: to reify or reduce the concept to mere representation. The scene gives a valid reason for the *Bruising*'s resistance to clear representation. Rather, one is reminded of the limitations of representation (and performance) to articulate (or supply an image) a concept (be it love or dance) which is bound to the idiosyncrasies of singular experience and individual interpretation.

References:

Artaud, A. 1958. *Theater and its Double*. New York: Grove Press.

Claid, E. 2006. *Yes? No! Maybe... Seductive Ambiguity in Dance*. USA & Canada: Routledge

Copeland, R. 1990. In Defence of Formalism: The Politics of Disinterestedness. *Dance Theatre Journal*. 7(4):4–39.

Cull, L. 2012. Performance as Philosophy: Responding to the Problem of Application. *Theatre Research International*. 37(1):20-27.

Diprose, R & Reynolds, J. 2008. *Merleau-Ponty: Key Concepts*. Stocksfield: Acumen.

Elliott, N. 2013. Choreographing the performer-creator: A discussion about the role of the performer in a creative choreographic process. *Proceedings of Confluences 7: Dance, Religion and Spirituality*, University of Cape Town School of Dance July 2013. Retrieved from: http://www.dance.uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/image_tool/images/96/confluences7_0.pdf

Elliott, N. 2014a. *Bruising*. [Programme note]

Elliott, N. 2014b. *Bruising*. *National Arts Festival Programme*.

Lambert, C. 1999. Moving Still: Meditating Yvonne Rainer's *Trio A*. *October*. 89: 87-112.

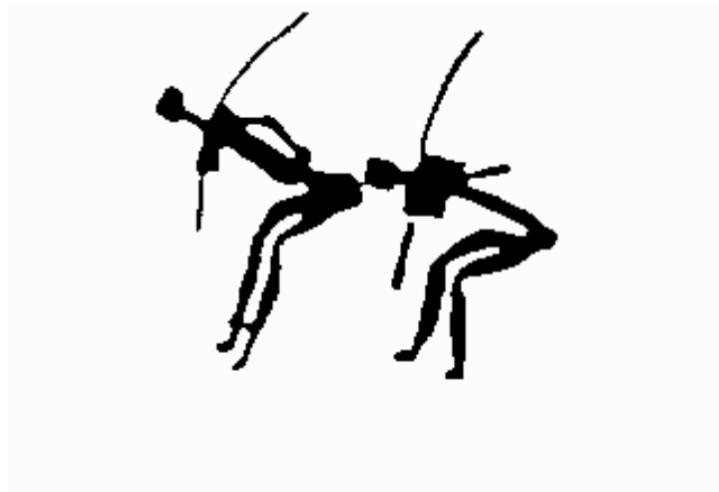
Lepecki, A. 2004. Concept and Presence. In A.Carter. *Rethinking Dance History*. New York: Routledge.

Lepecki, A. 2006. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. New York: Routledge

Loots, L. 2001. Introduction: Resituating Culture in the Body Politic. *Agenda*. 49. Culture: Transgressing Boundaries:9-14.

Sloterdijk, P. Mobilisation of the Planet. In A Lepecki & J. Joy, Eds. 2008. *Planes of Composition: Dance, Theory and the Global*. London and New York: Seagull.

twiggysmit@gmail.com



Part III – Poster Presentation

Bernice Valentine & Stanley Ndinga: Poster Presentation: Shifting Community Dance in Cape Town

Community dance in Cape Town/ South Africa has undergone transformation since the shift from Apartheid South Africa to Post- Apartheid South Africa. This poster presentation discusses the way in which Dance For All (DFA), a community outreach dance programme in Cape Town, is winning the struggle against Apartheid and its principles. It will examine how DFA has moved beyond the critique of Apartheid to emancipate the black dancing body. It will highlight some new directions and current developments in this dance organisation.



Part IV – Workshops

Alan Parker: Performing the Archive

This interactive workshop explores the body and the memory as two potential sites of archival practice. Through a guided process of remembering, translating, embodying and performing, participants will explore various choreographic strategies aimed at accessing and engaging memory as a source in the creation of a living and corporeal archive.

Jayesperi Moopen: Indo-African fusing and musing

The practical workshop will work with the participants to introduce the processes I use when putting pieces together using the vocabulary of Indian Classical and Afro-fusion/Traditional African styles. I will also show clips of the pieces and, if time permits, discuss some of the pieces.

Lisa Wilson: Afro-Caribbean Dance Narratives

Africans and their culture, largely from the western regions, were transported to the Caribbean via the infamous 16th-19th century transatlantic slave trade. Still, today, in this part of the Diaspora, despite many not having firsthand experience of African culture, there continues to be a strong celebration and preservation of the African cultural heritage among new generations. Many artists negotiate their artistic expressions and identities through the painful history of slavery and European colonization, which attempted to silence the African body and voice. As such, contemporary dance, a western dance form, can be a highly contested space in the Caribbean. In this workshop participants will explore songs and movements of the Caribbean, and experience the nostalgic sense in which Africa is sometimes negotiated and narrated in contemporary dance in this part of the African Diaspora.

Sifiso Kweyama: Experiments in Afro contemporary dance

Dance is a language which is understood by all human beings. Some prefer to watch, some prefer to feel it, some prefer to dance, and some prefer to create (choreograph) it on other bodies in a form of directing their creativity. In this workshop I will explore the idea of collaborative choreography through the theme of **“Negotiating your path through space (studio) in Africa”**. The participants will be given an opportunity to improvise their path for 5 minutes. As the choreographer, my job is to look at the interesting movements, articulation of the movements, rhythm, space used and the dancer's personality that best depicts the stimulus and shape a choreographic sequence. This method of choreographing gives a dancer confidence as the movement comes from him or her, my job is to direct their movements. Participants will use their bodies to translate their feelings as well as the language their bodies speak.

Silumko Koyana: Experiencing Traditional Africa-Zulu

African dance is about “telling stories on the body, of dance in all its traditional and contemporary splendour” (Liane Loots, 2004). In other words African dance is tradition, culture, identity and life generally translated into movement accompanied by the music that helps to bring about the rich aesthetics. In this workshop, participants will experience traditional Zulu dance from South Africa. For an African dancer, tradition is the basis from which everything evolves and therefore traditional Zulu dance is a valuable place from which to explore where contemporary dance can go. As individuals in Africa, our traditions form part of our identity and should therefore play a vital role in determining the direction of contemporary dance in Africa. After all, contemporary only exist in relation to tradition, and this workshop aims to engage participants with one of Africa’s richest traditions, the cultural stories, rhythms and aesthetics of the Zulus.



Part V – Panel Discussion

At the Negotiating Table: African Narratives in Contemporary Dance

Africa is a heterogeneous and political place with diverse peoples, cultural traditions and expressions. Contemporary dance created by Africans in Africa taps into the continent's diverse cultural traditions, urban energies, and its social politics, producing innovative bodies of choreographic works that push boundaries and break taboos. Added to this complex yet exciting interplay are diverse voices: dancers; choreographers; administrators; festival directors; local and international audiences and local and international funders with multiple, and at times opposing, perspectives with regards to the directions and aesthetic expectations of contemporary dance in Africa. This panel, by inviting some of these diverse voices to sit together and dialogue with each other, aims to unpack some of the issues and solutions related to this complex process of narrating Africa in contemporary dance.



Part VI – Performances: Programme Notes



www.oscaroryan.com

Cape Dance Company: FADEOUT. FIVE

Choreography: Belinda Nusser

This contemporary choreographic work looks at the personal experiences of five people whose stories were explored over a three week period: the encounter, the effects, the exchanges and the outcome. Using light and patterns in space as a starting point, the composition developed bringing dancers in and out of the space. The stories were heard and woven into the movement language. As the stories blend, we see the influence and effects of individual backgrounds. In a featured solo we hear and feel the experience of an individual leading into a cohesive resolution – however, one is left having her story untold.

haley.capa@mweb.co.za



Drama Department: University of Stellenbosch

Choreography/dramaturgy: Estelle Olivier, Petrus Du Preez.

Ontwrig is a devised theatre production, including the dancing-speaking body and theatre puppet as primary means of expression on stage and screen. The combination of the body, the projected image and the puppet as expressive medium is foregrounded in this production in order to investigate problems surrounding trauma, disruption and the absence of the body in Post-Apartheid South Africa. Issues surrounding Trauma in the South-African context are often associated with the remnants of Apartheid. The workshop production investigates personal narratives from a varied group of performers/creators and on an aesthetic creation level poses various questions. *Ontwrig* interrogates current and historic political issues, and is inclusive of different performance aesthetics. The production aims to include voices of a new generation – the Born Frees. Is the baggage from the previous generation still visible in the bodies of this new generation?

annalise@sun.ac.za (Morning-hours)



Garage Productions: Seep

Choreography: Alfred Hinkel

SEEP is the third in a trilogy of works created by Alfred Hinkel since his return to O'is kiep in the Northern Cape PADONBEKEND, Dansmettieduiwels and now SEEP all tell stories of the region and its peoples in a bid to work towards expression and healing in the process of telling their stories, confronting their lives, the communities that gave birth to them, the country they live in, and bringing that very community and country into the process as a participant rather than only a spectator. **SEEP** is a production with Byron Klassen and his grandmother. The people of the Namaqualand region in the Northern Cape are of very mixed origin and can count amongst their ancestry Khoi-Khoi, Nama, San, Boer, Baster, European, St Helenas, South West Africans, Malawians, Transkeians and more. Ouma Magrieta Mouton is of an older generation that refused to reveal her ancestry to her offspring, resulting in her grandson Byron Klassen growing up as a so called coloured. SEEP takes 21 year old Byron and eighty year old Ouma Magrieta on a journey of self-discovery. This 45 min production will be danced by Byron Klassen and will include story telling and film.

alfred.hinkel@gmail.com

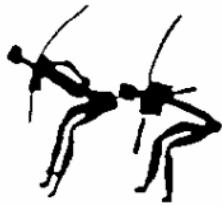


Underground Dance Theatre: BOK

Choreography: Kristina Johnstone, Cilna Katzke & Steven van Wyk. Dramaturgy: Thalia Laric

BOK is a present day re-imagining of Vaslav Nijinsky's iconic ballet The Afternoon of a Faun (1912). This infamous ballet that shocked its first audiences with its erotic subtext is revisited through the lens of contemporary South Africa. Set in a mythical, dream-like world, BOK explores the fluidity between primitive and civilised, human and animal. Images, emotions and memories flow into one another as forms shift and masculinities unravel.

undergrounddancetheatre@gmail.com



h †@ Biographies

Featured Speakers

Georgina Thomson trained as a dancer from the age of seven and then proceeded to work in the industry mostly in Europe for a few years. Since 1984 she has worked as an arts administrator starting at the former, PACOFS (Performing Arts Council Free State) in Bloemfontein as company manager for the Drama Dept. She then moved to Durban to The Natal Playhouse Company to the Marketing Department where she worked from 1985 to 1991 training in arts administration. From 1991 to 1993, Georgina worked at the Wits Performing Arts Administration as the Marketing Manager before returning to Durban for another year with the Playhouse Dance Company as Company Manager in 1994. Georgina returned to Johannesburg in 1995 and joined VitaPromotions as a project coordinator. Vita Promotions was a private company that managed arts projects that included both regional and national dance festivals and awards, regional and national theatre awards, community theatre festivals, craft and fine art exhibitions and awards. These projects were fully funded by the private sector and in the time Georgina worked for Vita, FNB (First National Bank) was the main sponsor of all the projects. It was here that Georgina started working for the Dance Umbrella, initially as an assistant to Nicola Danby who then was the programme manager, to finally taking over as Artistic Director in 1998. She has worked on Dance Umbrella since then. In January 2003, Georgina opened her own company, Dance Forum and continues to work as the Artistic Director of the Dance Umbrella and as an Arts Administrator/project manager and consultant. Dance Forum is based in the Dance Space in Newtown where residency and workshop programmes are the focus. She was winner of the Arts & Culture Trust Award: Arts Administrator of the Year, in 2001 and 2007.



Kristina Johnstone holds a Masters degree in Dance from the University of Cape Town. (2010). She was a part-time lecturer at the UCT School of Dance from 2009-2012 and artistic director of Wilvan School of Dance, a community-based dance school in Cape Town, in 2010 and 2011. She is currently based as a freelance artist in Kampala, Uganda working at Makerere University. She is a founding member of the Cape Town-based Underground Dance Theatre and she continues to create dance works both in South Africa and Uganda. Her Masters research topic focused on community dance practice and performance in African contexts, looking specifically at the case studies of collaborative dance projects between New York University and Makerere University and the Eoan Group and the UCT School of Dance in Cape Town, South Africa. Besides teaching and choreographing, Kristina continues to research and write about dance. Kristina is a co-author of *Post-Apartheid Dance many bodies many voices many stories* (2012).



Presenters

Alan Parker is a Cape Town-based independent artist and academic. He holds a Masters Degree in Drama (specialising in Choreography) from Rhodes University, where he also lectured before relocating to Cape Town in 2013. Alan is currently a part-time lecturer at the University of Cape Town's School of Dance where he teaches Contemporary Dance, Choreographic Studies and Western Dance History. Alan is also an ad hoc lecturer at AFDA Cape Town where he teaches movement for the actor and theatre-making.



Alude Mahali is a Postdoctoral fellow at the Human Sciences Research Council in the Human and Social Development Program. She holds a PhD in Cultural/Performance Studies from the University of Cape Town. Alude has most recently taught at the Edna Manley College of Visual and Performing Arts in Kingston, Jamaica. In 2012 she convened an international conference on African Theatre and Performance and has presented at numerous international conferences in Spain, Wales and Japan. She has published several book chapters on her research interests which include identity, migration, blackness, language, gender and sexuality, youth empowerment and intersectionality. Alude is also an ardent performer and spent 2013 touring with Handspring Puppet Company's production, *Oroboros*. Alude is currently the project manager and team member of a Centre for Critical Research in Race and Identity (CCRRI) funded project titled *Race, Education and Emancipation (REE): a five-year longitudinal, qualitative study of agency and impasses to success amongst higher education students in a sample of South African universities*.



Amy Swanson is a PhD student in the Interdisciplinary PhD in Theatre and Drama program at Northwestern University. Her research interests include contemporary dance in West Africa, postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and critical performance ethnography. She presented her research at the African Studies Association Annual Meeting in 2014 and the Afrisem Graduate Student Conference at Northwestern University in 2015. Amy is also a dancer and choreographer, having most recently choreographed for Danceworks 2015: *Ties That Bind* at Northwestern University. She holds a BFA in dance from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and has trained with Andréya Ouamba, Fatou Cissé, and others in Dakar, Senegal. Swanson lives in Chicago where she dances on and off with several independent choreographers.



Bernice Valentine is an educator in Dance Studies currently managing the Dance department at Brackenfell High School. Her eight years of education has significantly contributed to the development of many young dancers and students in Western Cape. She is currently embarking on her Master's degree in Dance studies at the University of Cape Town.



Charles Ratladi Maema holds a Masters in African Studies [Art and Archeology] from the University of London (SOAS-London), a BMus degree in African Dance Studies (UCT-Cape Town) and a Teachers Diploma in Dance (UCT-Cape Town), Diploma in Community Dance teaching (Moving Into Dance Mophatong). He taught African dance, Creative dance, Contemporary dance and Edu- dance and choreography at various companies including at Jazzart Dance Theatre. In 2004 New Africa Theatre Academy (NATA) appointed him as African dance Studies lecturer, a position he held for eight years. He also became actively involved with the Western Cape Education Department (WCED) as a Dance Educator at Primary, Secondary and Arts and Culture Focus Schools. His contribution to the development of African dance teaching in the Western Cape, won him a WCED commission to be part of a consortium of writers for Dance History Resources Pack Handbooks. He also produced an indigenous dance study material DVD for Further Education Training (FET) educators and learners. In 2008 he was appointed a lecture in African and Caribbean dance at Kingston University in London, a position he held for six years. He was a visiting lecture at Surrey University, City and Islington Collage (Irie Dance Theatre) and Edna Manley School of the Visual and Performing Arts. Charles is currently holding the position of Principal Cultural Office at the Department of Cultural affairs and Sport [Western Cape Provincial Government].



Coralie Valentyn is a second year Anthropology Masters student at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa, with a concentration in dance and disability. She is interested in ethnographically exploring the possibilities that disability offers dance. More specifically, her work advocates more inclusive and theoretically compelling approaches for understanding movement and the body in dance. She plans to pursue a second Masters at Plymouth University under the mentorship of Adam Benjamin, examining the impact of integrated dance on nation building and reconciliation.



Estelle Olivier is currently a fulltime lecturer in Movement and Physical Theatre at Stellenbosch University Drama Department. She holds a BMus in Dance degree (UCT) and a Masters in Drama focussing on physical Theatre(US). She also works as a freelance performer and choreographer and has choreographic experience in various genres ranging from Children's, Musical, Community, Dramatic and Physical Theatre. Her latest choreographic work include award winning *macbeth. slapeloos* (2013, 2014 & 2015) directed by Marthinus Basson. Her primary research focus is on developing methods and mechanisms of choreography for performers without formal dance training.



Ester van der Walt is a performer, choreographer, researcher and teacher. She is currently completing her Masters degree at Rhodes University, specialising in choreography. She completed her undergraduate- and honours degrees at the same institution. Her research has dealt predominantly with performative writing, the post choreographic, archiving, and historical recreations of art. Van der Walt has performed in a number of productions at Rhodes University's drama department, and has worked with Andrew Buckland, as a performer and assistant, on the annual production *The Amazing Other Show* (2011-2013), and served as the Company Manager for production in 2015. Van der Walt worked with choreographer Acty Tang as an assistant director for his production *Hunger* (2014). She has performed at the National Arts Festival in works such as Jen Schneeberger's *Antigone* (2011) and Maude Sandham's *Wat die Hart* (2013). She is the proud creator of strange and humorous works such as *Last Breath of Swan*; *Déjà vu*; *Déjà Vu Déjà vu*; and the *Useless Artist Collective*, and will debut her solo work *Transparent* at the National Arts Festival this year.



Gerard M. Samuel is the Director of the School of Dance at the University of Cape Town, a position he has held since May 2008. He holds a Diploma in Ballet from the School of Dance which he completed in 1984. He obtained a Master of Arts degree from the University KwaZulu-Natal in 2002. Gerard was a professional dancer with NAPAC Ballet Company and The Playhouse Company Dance Company in the 1980s and 1990s. His career move to arts administration for The Playhouse Company sharpened his skills and he was promoted to the senior position in Dance and Drama, and later Arts, Education and Development Manager, a position he held until 2006. He is a pioneer of disability arts and integrated arts projects in Durban, South Africa and in Copenhagen, Denmark with his LeftefeetFIRST Dance theatre group. He has worked at tertiary institutions; UKZN and Durban University of Technology, and with some of South Africa's leading Contemporary Dance companies including Siwela Sonke Dance Theatre, The Fantastic Flying Fish and Flatfoot Dance Company. His choreographies include *Prabhati*, *Milky Tears* and *Awaiting Islands* and in musical theatre work, *The Sound of Music*. His dramaturgy includes the Indian dance dramas *Chalo Cinema*, *Taal* with the Nateswar Dance Company; *The Coolie Odyssey* with RASA Productions and *West Side Story* (2011) with Univ of Texas and UKZN. He was the Artistic Director of several Gala concerts for the African Renaissance Trust & Office of the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, the Traditional arts festival and the historic South African Women's Arts Festivals. Gerard is a recipient of the GIPCA Creative Arts Award in 2010 for which he produced and directed "Place of Grace," a made for dance film. He has published numerous articles in journals and presented papers at conferences both locally and abroad. He is Editor of the South African Dance Journal, a peer reviewed, scholarly, bi-annual publication. He is Chair of Confluence – the International dance conference based at UCT. As a PhD candidate since 2013 he is researching contemporary dance by older dancers.



Heather Parker Lewis trained as a social worker at the University of Cape Town; she worked mainly in the field of child care and then taught in the School of Social Work for fifteen years; she also managed a shelter for drug-addicted street youth in the suburbs of Cape Town. She relinquished her post-graduate studies (and an academic career) to learn Bharata Natyam. She qualified in her mid-thirties (having performed arangetram in full costume on stage under Guru Savitri Ganger Naidoo) and was, in the 1980s, the first woman outside of the Indian community in South Africa, to embark on this lengthy journey. She has danced for the last 'thirty plus' years but not with the intention of performing in public; she began a study of Odissi three years ago at the age of 65. She continues to dance for love of the art despite some nasty accidents followed by major surgery and physicians informing her that she would never dance again. She is the author of several books on a variety of topics (including South African prison gangs, marginalized street youth and the womanly biography of Olive Schreiner). In 2012 she published the first comprehensive book on Indian dance to be written from the African continent *Dance of Bliss – the Sacred Dance of India – a journey of discovery*. Her second book *The space between the notes* (an exploration of Natya Sastra and the text Nartananirnaya) will be published in India in 2016. She is currently exploring the idea of writing a book on the devadasis. Dance and writing are her two passions.



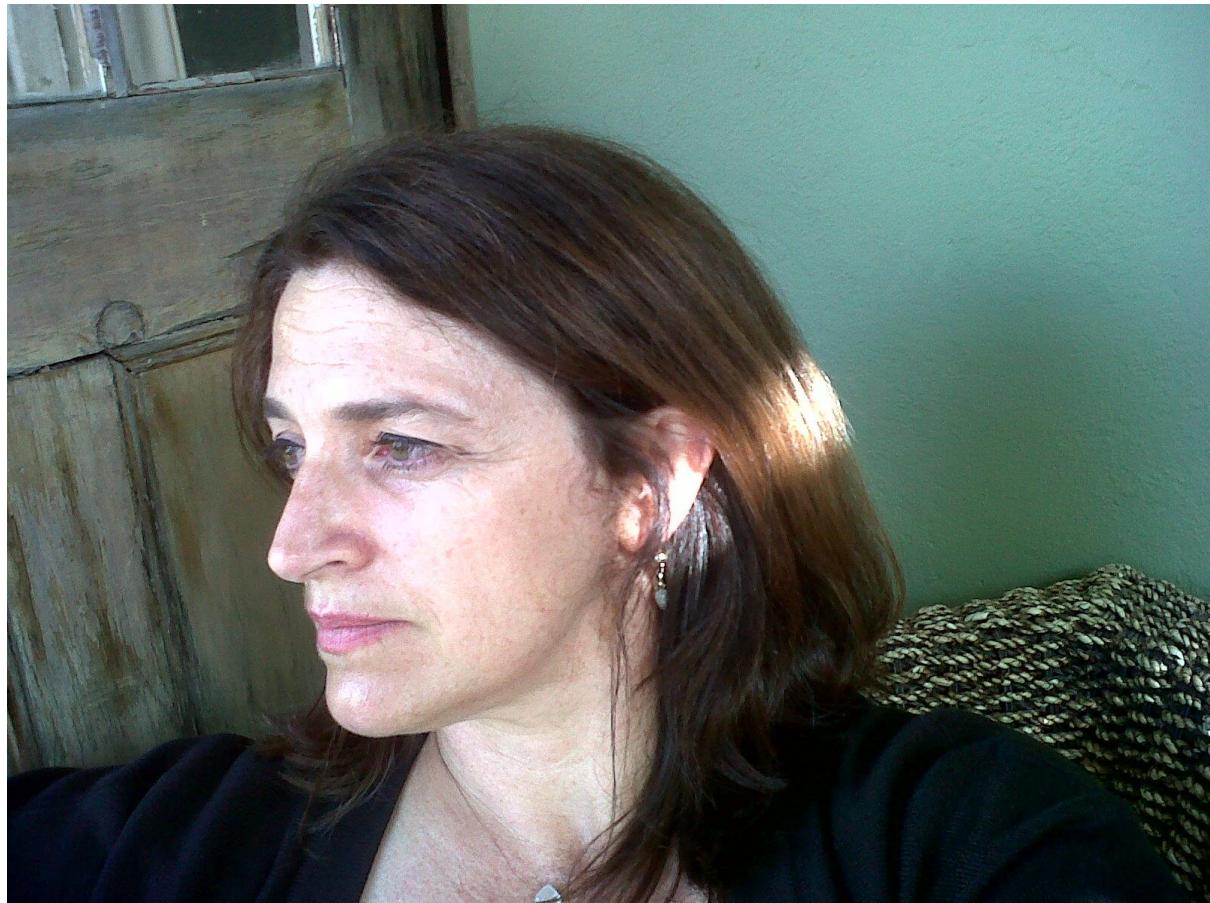
jacki Job's independent, professional dance career began in 1994. Since then she has conceived more than 60 original works, with performances in Africa, Asia and Europe. Job lived in Tokyo from 2003-2011. During this time she engaged in dynamic collaborations with an array of eclectic artists and taught at several universities across Japan. The Japanese contemporary dance form, Butoh, greatly informs her teaching and solo performance work. Since her return to South Africa in 2011, she has been commissioned to perform within various local and international cultural and academic contexts. Her career highlights include a solo performance for Nelson Mandela and the Dutch Royal family (2002), dancing the lead at Tokyo Disney's New Year Eve's concert (2010) and receiving a standing ovation at the Berlin Philharmonie as the director and choreographer of the opera concert, *African Angels* (2015). She completed her MA in dance research in 2014, and in 2015, will be developing her practice and deepening her research at PhD level. Job is committed to exploring lateral ways of embodying elements of love and life in her work. She intends to still be dancing and spiritedly engaged with the Arts at 90.



Jayesperi Moopen is the Artistic Director of the Tribhangi Dance Theatre and current Executive Director. She has earned recognition in the dance world in South Africa for her pioneering efforts of juxtaposing and bringing together of dance to bridge the great cultural divide that is prevalent in South Africa and most countries today. Although her chosen vocabulary of dance is South African Classical Dance (Bharatha Natyam), her knowledge, understanding and sensitivity of other styles of dance like traditional African, Afro-fusion, Contemporary and Ballet makes her a versatile artist who is willing to work in a challenging environment. She was responsible for writing the Syllabus for Indian Dance for the Gauteng Education Department. She sits on the Standards Generating Body for Dance in South Africa. She holds a Graduate Diploma and Post Graduate Diploma in Dance from the Kalakshetra College of Fine Arts, India and an Arts Management Diploma from Wits University. As a noted choreographer she has produced work that has been invited to perform in Botswana, Burundi (Department of Arts and Culture), India (Invited by the Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Department of Trade and Industry), Sri Lanka, Germany, Mauritius, England, Canada, Sri Lanka, China, and Egypt (sponsored by Department of Arts and Culture) UK (Sampad, Birmingham) Jamaica (Accompanied Minister Mashatile) and Moscow (Provincial Government Event). She is currently on the Board of Trustees of the Arts and Culture Trust. Is a past board member of the Joburg Theatre, Sibikwa Community Theatre and The Dance Forum and has been the Festival Director of one of Johannesburg's flagship events the Diwali Festival in Newtown from 2009.



Juanita Finestone-Praeg is an Associate Professor in Performance Studies and Choreography at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, South Africa. She has extensive experience as a performer, choreographer, educator and researcher, having worked in the academy and the performing arts profession for over 30 years. Her interest in teaching is to engage critically and creatively with performance studies as a vital discourse and practice within the South African context. She has accumulated her teaching experience within selected tertiary educational structures as well as working within project-based professional theatre and community contexts. Juanita holds a Masters Degree (Cum Laude) in Choreography and Theatre Studies and is currently working towards her PhD. Ms Praeg, the longest standing member of the First Physical Theatre Company, has contributed to the company's vision and been actively involved in all its research, educational, community, performance and choreographic programmes over the past twenty three years. She was Artistic Director for the company from 2010 - 2015 and has an active practice-as-research profile. In 2011, she was a recipient of the Vice Chancellor's Distinguished Teaching Award at Rhodes University and in August 2011 performed a public lecture which spoke to her teaching pedagogy and professional experience of the performing arts in the context of development challenges. She was appointed Head of the Drama Department at Rhodes University from 2013 – 2015.



Kamogelo Molobye graduated with a BA undergraduate degree in Drama, Politics and Industrial Sociology, and continued studying to obtain an Honours degree in Choreography and Physical Theatre. He is currently an MA 1 candidate at Rhodes University specialising in Choreography and Movement Research. His professional dance career dates from 2010 when he performed at the National Arts Festival and to date has performed for numerous choreographers such as Gavin Krastin, Tristan Jacobs and Sonja Smit. He has also worked with Liz Mills, Acty Tang, Gary Gordon and the First Physical Theatre Company. Recently he has been working with Masidlale Productions on a Hanamich tour throughout South Africa, and trained and performed with Forgotten Angle Theatre Collaborative in 'Siyaba'. Furthermore, he recently co-choreographed and performed alongside Maipelo Gabang in a physical theatre performance titled '*Encounters*' during the Detours Dance Festival 2015 in Johannesburg- Wits University.



Dr Kathrina Farrugia-Kriel is Senior Lecturer in Dance Studies at the Faculty of Education at the Royal Academy of Dance in London. Her scholarship on Transmodern Dance Practices is articulated through the contemporary ballets of Angelin Preljocaj, Mauro Bigonzetti and their re-imaginings of Bronislava Nijinska's *Les Noces* (1923). She sits on the Executive Board of the Society of Dance History Scholars (2012-2015) and chaired the Selma Jean Cohen Award committee for 2015 SDHS Awards. Together with Dr Jill Nunes Jensen, she is co-editor of the forthcoming publication *Network of Pointes*, published by SDHS. An article on Yvonne Mounsey has been recently published in the *South African Dance Journal*. Dr. Farrugia-Kriel has presented at several international conferences within North America, Europe and South Africa. She is the co-chair of a forthcoming conference, *Contemporary Ballet: Exchanges, Connections and Directions*, at NYU's Center for Ballet and the Arts (May 20-21, 2016).



Dr Ketu Katrak was born in Bombay, India, is Professor in the Drama Department, University of California, Irvine. Katrak specializes in Dance, African Drama, Postcolonial Literature, Performance and Feminist Theory. She is the author of *Contemporary Indian Dance: New Creative Choreography in India and the Diaspora* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, paperback, 2014), and *Politics of the Female Body: Postcolonial Women Writers* (Rutgers UP, 2006). Katrak is the recipient of a Fulbright Research Award to India, Bunting Fellowship, and is currently on the Fulbright Senior Specialist roster.



Lisa Wilson is a dance advocate, performer, choreographer and academic at the School of Dance, University of Cape Town. She convenes studies in contemporary dance, dance education, and western dance history, and is a mentor and supervisor to undergraduate and postgraduate student teachers apprenticing in Western Cape schools and studios. Wilson holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Management and Economics from the University of the West Indies, Jamaica, a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Wesley Institute in Sydney, Australia, and a Master of Education in dance and the creative arts from the University of Exeter, UK. She is a multi-faceted dance artist, whose multi-disciplinary creative works have been staged at arts festivals locally and abroad. Her creative and published research explores both the pedagogical and artistic connections between Africa and its Diaspora, primarily within the contexts of higher education dance and African contemporary dance respectively. She has written publications in the Caribbean Journal of Education, South African Dance Journal, Dance Current Selected Research and in several conference proceedings: National Dance Education (NDEO), Dance and the Child International (daCi), and Congress on Research in Dance (CORD).



Mdu Kweyama graduated with a Performance Diploma in Theatre at UCT in 2004. Prior to that, he trained as a contemporary dancer at Jazzart Dance Theatre. Over the last 10 years, he has gained much theatre and dance experience, with performances ranging from Shakespearean plays such as Macbeth and Hamlet, contemporary theatre like Verkeer and Altyd Jonker, to Physical Theatre productions such as Karoo Moose and Onnest'Bo. In 2004, he was awarded the Best Student in Movement Recognition at UCT and in 2006, was nominated for the Best Newcomer in Dance and Acting at the KKNK Festival. In 2007, he began his TV career with the new eTV series Shooting Stars, SABC Stokvel and Montana. In 2008 he was awarded the Best Actor in a lead role and Best Original Choreography Naledi Award for his work in Karoo Moose. He was awarded an Honours Degree in Directing and Education at UCT in 2012. In 2014 he directed Mike Van Graan's Return of The Ancestors for Grahamstown Festival, Vryfees in Bloemfontein and Artscape, Cape Town. He graduated with a Masters degree in Directing at UCT in 2014. Mdu's interest lies in the combination of dance and text on the theatre stage. This interest won him the award for Best Director at the 2013 Setkani Festival in the Czech Republic for his adaptation of Mike Van Graan's Brothers in Blood. In 2015 he directed Woza Albert for Little Theatre and The Most Honest Man for the Baxter Theatre Center.



Mlondolozi 'Mlondi' Zondi is a first year PhD student in Performance Studies at Northwestern University, USA. He received his MFA in dance studies as a Fulbright scholar at the University of California, Irvine (2014). Prior to that he studied at the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (PMB) where he obtained a BA Honours (cum laude) with a concentration in Drama and Performance Studies as well as Media and Cultural Studies (2008). Mlondi is also a practitioner and has performed with Flatfoot Dance Company as well as The Playhouse Company in Durban. He has also worked with theatre directors such as Malcolm Purkey and Neil Coppen. His current research is at the intersections of performance studies, black queer and feminist theory, and black political thought. He is specifically interested in performance art and dance performances that memorialize black social and corporeal death.



Dr Petrus du Preez graduated from University of the Free State where he studied Communication Science. He received his doctorate at Stellenbosch University where he focused on puppetry, masking and performance in liminal and liminoid African forms. He is currently an associate professor at the Drama Department of Stellenbosch University and the co-editor of the *South African Theatre Journal*. Petrus is involved in theatre making as an actor, director and author. He has performed extensively on the arts festival circuit in South Africa. His work has also been seen on international stages. His recent practical research focuses on puppetry and youth theatre in South Africa, as well as Afrikaans theatre. He regularly performs in radio dramas and serials. In the past year he has also expanded his practical work to include some television and film performances.



Dr Sarahleigh Castelyn is a performer, choreographer, and researcher (dance nerd), and is based at the School of Arts and Digital Industries, University of East London (U.K.) where she teaches on the undergraduate BA (Hons) Dance: Urban Practice programme, and on postgraduate and research programmes. She has completed an Arts and Humanities Research Council (U.K.) funded practice-based doctoral research project into South African Dance Theatre at Queen Mary, University of London. Her dance research focuses on race, gender, sexuality, and nation in Apartheid and post-Apartheid South Africa. Sarahleigh has both performed in and choreographed dance works in the United Kingdom and South Africa, for instance at Siobhan Davies Dance Studio (London) and The Playhouse (Durban), and she has published and presented her work in a number of academic journals and dance magazines, such as *Dance Theatre Journal* and *Animated*. She serves on a number of editorial and organisation boards, for example The African Theatre Association and *South African Dance Journal*.



Sifiso E. Kweyama spent 10 years in Johannesburg where he established himself as a well-respected teacher and choreographer. He has worked with tertiary institutions such as the Tshwane University of Technology, University of Pretoria as an African dance and contemporary dance lecture respectively. His contribution to the arts has seen Kweyama being invited by the two US institutions to lecture on dance and to choreograph for the University of South Florida and University of Southern California in America. Because of his knowledge of African dance, Sifiso has been invited as an external examiner by the University of Cape Town, Zululand University (Ongoye), National School of the Arts in Braamfontein and the East Rand in Johannesburg. His dance career has seen him travel to countries such as Morocco, America, Germany, Abidjan, Angola and China just to mention a few. He has choreographed numerous works with various companies both in South Africa and abroad with companies such as Moving into Dance, Ballet Theatre Afrikan, Flatfoot Dance Company, Jazzart Dance Theatre, First Physical Theatre, Remix Dance Company, and Repertory Dance Company (USA). He is currently the Artistic Director of Jazzart Dance Theatre.



Silumko Koyana began dancing in 1996 in the Zolani community centre by getting involved with a project called Foreshore Arts Project which was established by Bheki Ndlovu and Maxwell Xolani Rani in Nyanga. His experience led him to pursue dance as a career at the UCT School of Dance. While he was studying he had the opportunity of performing and touring China with the Cape Town City Ballet company in productions like Don Quixote and Fire Bird. After graduating, he performed in Germany and Bangkok for the South African embassy in its celebration of 10 years with Bangkok. He also worked with the Free Flight dance company under Adele Blank in collaboration with the Cape Town Opera. Silumko's teaching experience began in the African Dance evening classes at UCT and he also taught at Pinelands High School and Rondebosch Girls Junior. Working with Jikeleza dance project, he developed a firm understanding of teaching and working with children. In addition he worked with the Nyanga Arts Development Centre (N.A.D.C) using this as an opportunity to give back to his community by teaching, choreographing and performing as well as sharing his experience with the youth that still needs to be developed and nurtured in Nyanga and the surrounding communities. He currently teaches part time at the UCT School of Dance.



Dr Sonja Smit recently completed a year of post-doctoral research at Rhodes University. She also lectures at the Rhodes Drama Department, and has choreographed, designed and performed for the First Physical Theatre Company and independently, since 2009.



Stanley Shingai Ndinga-Kanga is a B(Mus) Hons Dance student at the University of Cape Town. He has graduated with a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Dance and French with African Dance History as a focus. His interests involved problematising the long held disposition of African Dance.

